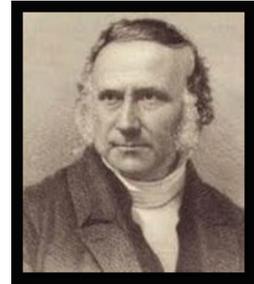


The Young Irishman



On a very hot day in July, a boy called at my house with a gentleman's card, saying that a lady had sent him to request me to visit a young man, who was sick. Both the lady and the young man were strangers to me. I had never heard of either of them. They resided more than three miles from me, in another city; and as I understood, the lady was an attendant upon the ministry of another clergyman who was absent from home. I could not learn from the boy, why she should have sent for me. I was very much occupied, the day was intensely hot, the place was distant, many other clergymen were more convenient to it; and I felt disposed, for these reasons, to excuse myself from going. As I was considering the matter, the boy, as if reading my thoughts, spoke out earnestly, "She said you must come."

I went, though I felt it to be a hardship. Finding the street and the number of the house, by the card which was sent to me; I rang the bell, and inquired for the young man, whose name was on the card. I was shown to his room. He was seated in an easy chair, with a book in his hand, and appeared somewhat pale and feeble, but not very sick. He rose to receive me. I told him who I was, and that the boy who brought me his card, said he was sick, and would be glad to see me. He made no reply, except to offer me his hand and ask me to be seated. We had some general conversation, in which he took the lead. But he said nothing about his sending for me. Aside from his paleness and an occasional cough, I saw nothing in him to indicate the presence of any disease. He

told me something of his history. He was a young Irishman about twenty-six years of age, was educated in one of the European Colleges, had studied law in Ireland, and designing to enter the legal profession in this country, had been engaged in its studies here about two years. He was a man of dignified appearance, of very handsome address, fluent in conversation, perfectly easy in his manners, and evidently of a vivid mind. He had seen much of the world, and told me he was fond of society. But for the last six months, since his health began to decline, he had been very much secluded, according to the advice of his physician. Said he, "I have been obliged to exchange the society of living men for the society of dead men, and was just amusing myself with reading Tacitus' *De Moribus Germanorum*, when you came in." He manifested no disposition to advert to the subject of my visit. On the contrary, he seemed to avoid it. He so often changed the subject of conversation, when I attempted to introduce it, that I was compelled to ask him plainly, if he desired to see me for any particular reason. He was silent for a moment, apparently lost in thought, and then replied:

"It would certainly seem very impolite in me, to say I did not wish to see you, since you have taken pains to come so far through the dust and heat; but I think it would be really impolite in me, not to tell you exactly the truth. I have an old aunt, who is a very religious woman; and she has been urging me to send for you, almost ever since I have been secluded here. She thinks I am not to live long, and has talked to me often on the subject of religion. But as she and I could not think alike, she insisted that I ought to converse with some minister of the gospel, and finally became so urgent, that I reluctantly consented. But you will allow me to say, that I should have had no reluctance at all, at all, if I had supposed she was going to lead me to form so agreeable an acquaintance."

"I am happy to know you," said I, "and am glad it was in my power to obey your call."

“It was she that called,” said he. “When I consented to see a clergyman, I left the selection and all the preliminaries entirely to her, and she selected yourself. I told her the selection lay in her line, as she was religious and I was not; and that I should judge of religion, very much by the specimen of a minister she sent to me.”

I answered, “I must take care, then, how I demean myself, if you are going to rest your opinion of religion on that ground. And I suppose, in equity, you will allow me to judge of the science of Law in the same manner.”

“Ah!” said he, “I shall be obliged to fling in a demurrer on that point. I should be sorry to have you form your opinion of the law, by such a specimen of the legal profession as myself.”

“Your demurrer certainly cannot avail anything in your favor,” said I. “If it can come in at all, it will be easy to turn it against you. For, since religion is a much higher matter than law, it is not to be demanded, that a man should be as good a representative of it, as a man should be of law; and if you demur at my forming an opinion of law by the impression I have about one of its disciples, much more, may I demur at your forming an opinion of religion on that ground.”

“Well, indeed,” said he, “I cannot respond to that. You have floored me, the first onset. But are you not a lawyer? Your pleading indicates as much.”

“Not at all. I am only a very ordinary minister.—But since your aunt has done me the honor to send for me, I should be happy to form her acquaintance. Does she reside here?”

“No. She lives a little distance off: I must tell you, she is very retiring, and lives very much secluded, though she spends much of her

time with me; and I doubt whether she will allow you to see her at all. She is not so young as she used to be. She has been a beautiful woman—an elegant woman; and I tell her, that her pride keeps her away from society now, because she is not so handsome as she was once. But she seems to think that idea a reflection upon her religion; and wonders that I can think of such a thing, and cannot have sense and sobriety enough to rise above such trifling thoughts.”

“Wherein do she and you differ on the subject of religion?”

“Really, sir, I can scarcely answer that question. We never differ, only in a friendly way. But, though she is a woman of very fine mind, in my opinion, yet her notions are too rigid for me.”

“Perhaps she has examined the subject of religion more than you have.”

“I have no doubt,” said he “that she has spent more time over it. But my mind is not so formed as to take things upon trust. I want knowledge. I am not prepared to yield to assumption and dogmatism.”

“I am very glad to hear you say that,” said I; “but perhaps you and I should not agree, in respect to your aunt’s yielding to assumption and dogmatism. We are not accustomed to do that in religion. I venture to affirm, that your aunt is not guilty of it. And I do this, because I know, that we who espouse the cause of religion are not credulous, assuming, or dogmatic; and on the contrary, the rejecters of religion are themselves the most credulous, assuming, and dogmatic people amongst us.”

“Well, indeed, said he, “you have fairly flung down the gauntlet to me.”

“Not at all. You flung it down at the name of your aunt; and I, as

her champion, take it up. I am prepared for the contest, the very moment you will name any definite matter of disagreement betwixt yourself and her.”

“I must give you the credit for no small gallantry,” said he. “Your chivalry is of high bearing indeed, if you will so readily espouse the part of a lady entirely a stranger to you, and are prepared to defend her opinions, when you do not even know them.”

“I risk nothing, however,” said I. “And I am prepared to contest the point you named, or any other point. You mentioned her taking things upon trust—her yielding to dogmatism and assumption.”

“Yes, I did. But I did not mean her in particular. I mean religionists in general.”

“So I supposed. And I now ask you what it is, that we take upon trust, or assume, or wherein we dogmatize, any more than you lawyers dogmatize.”

“Well, to tell you the truth, I had reference to “What my aunt is constantly saying about God. She seems to me to assume his existence, and character, and government over us. I tell her, that I want knowledge.”

“Very well,” said I; “that is a definite point. Let us get it fixed clearly in mind, and then bring it before the bar of our reason. The question is this:—Is the existence, is the character, is the government of God known to us? are these things matters of knowledge? I affirm, (in your aunt’s behalf,) they are. You deny it.”

“Right,” said he. “That is the question. And as you are the plaintiff, you must open the case. Yours is the affirmative. Bring on your witnesses. I have only to deny, and to show that your proofs are insufficient.”

“Very well,” said I. “We are agreed so far. I commence the argument.—The matter before us regards knowledge.—I have, therefore, a preliminary question to settle first; and I think it may be settled amicably betwixt us, without any debate. I now put the question to you—What is knowledge?”

. “You have taken me by surprise,” said he, (a little confused, and hesitating.)

“Certainly,” said I, “the question is a fair one; and it belongs to you to answer it. It is you who complain of your aunt, that she has not knowledge, on a particular subject, to which she urges you to attend. We are to examine the question; and therefore,—we ought to know what we are talking about, so as to understand one another. You say, you ‘want knowledge;’ and I ask, what do you mean by knowledge? I only give you a fair opportunity to explain your own word.”

“Why, sir,” said he, (with a forced smile,) “I venture to say, that you and I employ that very common word, in the same sense.”

“I beg pardon,” said I. “In our profession we do not allow any assumptions: we take nothing upon trust: we never dogmatize.”

He laughed quite heartily at this; and replied, “I believe I have been away from court too long. My wit is not keen enough for this contest just now. You have floored me again.”

“Oh,” said I, “your wit is not at fault, but your assumption, your taking things upon trust, your dogmatism.”

“Well,” said he, “since I own up on this point, you will do me the favor to answer the question yourself. I will assent to the answer, if I can without injuring my cause.”

“Most willingly,” said I. “But this is a serious and momentous subject. It is the most momentous of anything on this side of death. Let us then deal with it, in a careful and candid manner.”

“I will,” said he, “most certainly.”

Said I, “Knowledge is founded on certainty. Something must be certain, or it cannot be known. Knowledge is the cognizance, which the mind has of realities, of facts, of some certainty or truth. It exists in the mind. The realities may exist outside of the mind, or inside of it. But they exist first; and when the mind makes an ascertainment of them, it gains knowledge. That ascertainment is made, by what we call proofs or evidences. And these evidences will vary, as the subjects of knowledge or the certainties vary. There is one sort of proofs for mathematical knowledge, and another sort for legal knowledge and another for historic knowledge; but each is good in its place, and sufficient. You would not expect me to prove a truth in morals or history, by mathematical demonstration;—or a truth about the soul, by the evidences of eyes which cannot see it;—or a truth about the invisible God, by the authority of a law-book, such as Blackstone, or Starkie, or Vattel. But whatever evidences or proofs do, fitly, justly, convince a reasonable understanding; furnish that understanding with knowledge; because they enable it to ascertain a reality, a certainty, so that the conviction of the mind accords with the fact.—That is what I call knowledge. Do you assent to the explanation?”

He replied, “I have no fault to find with it. And if the whole of religion was as clear and certain as that, I should not reject it.”

“The whole of it is as clear and certain as that, whatever you may think about it.”

“But,” said he, “how do you apply your explanation to the existence of God? What are the evidences of his existence?”

“There are numerous evidences, sir, and fit ones. Your own existence is one of them, and not a minor one. You are an effect. There is a cause somewhere, adequate to the production of such an effect. That cause, whatever it be, is God. You did not make yourself. Your parents, your ancestors, however far back you trace them, were not self-created. Your own mind assigns a cause somewhere, an original cause, and that cause is God. And you are just as certain, that there is such a God, as you are, that you are yourself an effect. You know it just as well; not in the same way; but yet, just as certainly. And you know you are an effect of an intelligent cause. Your common sense will not allow you to believe, that you and all your ancestors sprang from accident, from chance. You do not find chance operating in such a way. You do not fling dust in the air, and find it come down, a man or a monkey. If you should find anywhere a machine, a living or dead one, which had in it a tenth part as many manifestations of intention, and power, and skill, as your own mortal body; you could not avoid believing, that some mind had contrived it, and some power beyond itself had brought it into existence. You would know it, as well as you know anything. The perfect proof is before you. And your own living body and thinking mind are perfect proofs of the existence, power and wisdom, of God.—There is no assumption or dogmatism in this. It is only cool and certain reasoning, which conducts to an inevitable conclusion, and the conclusion is knowledge.

“On the same principle, the whole universe and its living inhabitants, rational and irrational—its suns and comets, its whales and butterflies, its motes and mountains, are proofs of the existence and power of God. And every change, every motion in the universe is an evidence which speaks for him. Our reason tells us, they are not uncaused. The cause is God.”

To all this, the young man listened with the most fixed attention. He seemed to drink in every word. I thought his attention had fatigued him; but he said, not at all, he loved to think. "But," said he, "you have led me into a new world of thinking. Your positions are very bold; and before I come to any conclusion, I must review the matter in my own mind."

"Shall I call on you to-morrow?" said I.

He answered, "I can scarcely ask it or expect it of you; but if it is not too much trouble, I should like to see you again. You need not be afraid of wearying me. I can study or talk all day."

The next day I called again. He appeared glad to see me, and immediately began to speak of our interview the day before. Said he, "Your bold position yesterday startled me. I have been thinking of your argument ever since. I cannot overthrow it. That idea about a change or a motion being an effect, and the human mind assigning a cause to it, and our having knowledge on that ground, was new to me. But I find much that men call knowledge rests precisely on that ground. And yet, I am not fully satisfied. I have been accustomed to think, that the existence of God was at least doubtful, that the proofs of it were very obscure, and when you brought up my own existence as a proof, it startled me. I have often said to my aunt, that we know very little about spirit,—that we can understand matter, but spirit lies very much beyond our knowledge; it is all a mystery to us. And now, though I dare not assail your position, or your arguments, still it does seem to me, that I have a degree of knowledge and certainty about bodies, that I cannot have about spirit; and I should like to hear what you can say on that point."

"I say that it is a mere impression," said I; "a common one indeed, but an erroneous one. There may be some faint apology for it. The most, if not all, of our primary ideas reach our mind through the inlet of the

senses; and therefore, when such an idea as that of spirit is presented to us,—spirit, a thing which we cannot see, cannot hear, cannot touch, cannot bring within the immediate cognizance of any of our bodily senses; the idea appears to lie beyond the grasp of the mind, hung round with a deep, and misty, and mysterious obscurity. If eyes could see it, or hands could handle it, men would have none of this seeming uncertainty, and doubt. But since they cannot, and since the idea of spirit must come to them through some other channel, for example, by comparison, by reasoning, by tracing effect to cause, or some such device; the whole doctrine of spirit assumes to them a kind of dim and misty significance, too much like an airy fancy, or unsubstantial dream. That is just the state of your mind at the present moment. The seeming uncertainty is not a real uncertainty, it is only an impression; and that is the reason why you dare not assail my argument of yesterday. Your reason perceives its truth, but your impression and your prejudice are against it.

“And since I am on this point now, I will pursue it, if you please, a little farther.—From the necessity of our nature, while here in the body, the most of us are more conversant with sensible objects, than spiritual ones. We employ, from morning till night, our sensitive organism in our ordinary occupation. We gain most of our knowledge itself in that mode; and hence, when we turn to ideas of immateriality, we come into a new field, where we are almost strangers, and cannot therefore feel, as if we were among the familiar and well known realities and certainties of home.”

He replied to this, “Do you mean to affirm, then, that human knowledge in respect to spirit is as clear and certain, as in respect to material things?”

“Certainly, sir; I mean to affirm just that; and I maintain, that the idea of the imperfection of our knowledge about spirit is all a mere impression and mere prejudice. The mind has taken an untenable

position, and has espoused a falsehood, when men declare, ‘we know little about spirit,—we can understand what matter is, but spirit is beyond our comprehension.’”

“Have you been talking with my aunt!” says he.

“No, sir; I have not seen her; though ‘I should like to, very much.’”

“I thought you had,” says he; “for I have made that affirmation, (which you just condemned,) to her a thousand times; and I thought she had told you.”

“I cannot help it,” said I. “My position is taken, and I cannot retract. Unless you will retract your affirmation, I shall be compelled to show its falsity.”

“I am not prepared to retract it at all,” said he; “and if you have boldness enough to attempt to show its falsity, I am sure you do not lack courage; and if I am not asking too much of you, I assure you I should be greatly pleased to hear what you have to say.”

“Well, then,” said I, “we are at issue, and I have much to say, perhaps more than you have strength to hear.”
Said he, “I am not wearied at all. You need have no fear. I told you I love to think, and you delight me by setting me to thinking.”

“Then,” said I, “I will enter upon the matter.—And in the outset, I admit, that our knowledge about matter comes in such a mode, that that knowledge has a vividness, and often an impressiveness, which belongs to no knowledge gained in another way. We have a sensible organism, which brings us into contact with matter. Our nerves are affected by it. And through that machinery, sensitive as it is inexplicable, we have impressions as well as knowledge, and have all instant certainty, which

requires no slow and cool processes of reflection, or examination of evidences. We see the sun; and that is enough: the moment we have the sight, we have the knowledge. We hear the thunder; and that is enough: the moment we hear, that moment we have the knowledge. We need not any other examination.

“Now this sensitive machinery, and the instant rapidity and suddenness with which it acts, give to the knowledge which we gain in this way, a vividness, an impressiveness and force. But is not that all? Have we any greater certainty about things seen, and things heard, and things handled, than we have about things reasoned and demonstrated? How is this? Can we trust the mechanism of our nerves, any better than we can trust the multiplication table, or the mathematical processes of astronomy and the counting-house? any easier than we can trust the deep philosophy of law? Indeed, is it not more probable, that some derangement should come in, among the mechanism of the senses, and make us see wrong, or hear wrong, or taste wrong, than that the sure processes of mathematical calculation should deceive us? In our knowledge derived through the senses, we can employ only our own processes: nobody else can use our nerves of sight, or hearing, or taste. But in our knowledge derived through mathematics, and in some other modes, we employ the same processes which others have employed before us, and are employing all around us; and we can therefore fortify our own conclusions by theirs, and substantiate our certainty in knowledge, (if need be,) by a comparison of calculations. Their processes, by which they obtained their knowledge, their certainty, we can make our processes; but we cannot use another man’s eyes or ears, or the nervous mechanism by which they act. All we can do, is to take the testimony of the men who do use them; and then, our knowledge rests only on testimony, not on the senses. And because we are confined to our own machinery of sense, and cannot employ another man’s machine; we have not, herein, one of the advantages for certainty, which attend knowledge in mathematics, and all other matters of reasoning. We can employ for our assurance, another man’s reasoning

powers, but his eyes are his own, and we cannot use them. We can add the testimony of one man to that of another man, and then add another, and make them all auxiliary to our own, for heightening our assurance and certainty in knowledge; but we can do nothing of this in the knowledge derived from the senses—we cannot borrow another man’s nerves. And it follows from all this surely, that, instead of there being more ground of certainty in knowledge derived directly through the senses, there is less certainty than in knowledge that comes in some other modes.”

“Why,” said he, interrupting me, “you do not intend to say that our knowledge is doubtful, when we see and hear?”

“Not exactly that,” said I. “But I am comparing different grounds of knowledge. And I admit, that sensible knowledge is the more impressive, by reason, first, of its nervous machinery, and second, of its instant suddenness. It comes to the mind at once. It makes its impression at a dash. We have no time to get cool, or keep cool, as we have in the slower business of reasoning out our knowledge. But if this superior impressiveness is not all—if it is thought, that there is really any superior certainty attending what is known by the senses, let any man attempt to tell what that certainty is, or where it lies. He can not tell. He can tell nothing about it. Indeed, he can conceive nothing about it. The thing defies conjecture.—I can tell, why I believe my eyes, sooner than I believe the testimony of an unknown witness before me. I have known men testify falsely, oftener than I have known my eyes testify falsely; and therefore, I have the more certainty about my eyes. And I would not have the more certainty, if I could not tell why. And if my neighbor cannot tell why his knowledge derived through the senses has more certainty about it, than knowledge coming in some other way, though he believes it has, then I must beg leave to think him a very imperfect man; and though I might trust his eyes, I would not trust his powers of reasoning. The truth is, it is a mere prejudice, when men think, that they can know by the

senses any more certainly, than in other ways. There is a vividness and impressiveness in knowledge gained through the senses, and this freshness and strength is mistaken for an additional degree of certainty. The idea, then, so common among men, that the senses are the surest means of certainty, is all false. We can be equally certain on other grounds. It is not true, that while we have clear knowledge of matter, we have only doubtful knowledge of spirit, because spirit does not come within the cognizance of the senses. That notion has just mistaken vividness of impression for strength of proof; and ‘assumes’ what is not true, that other kinds of evidence are not equal to the evidence of the senses—that we cannot know, because we have not seen.”

“Why,” said he, “if my aunt were here now, she would rejoice over me. I have silenced her many a time by saying to her, if I could see God I would believe in him.”

“You are not alone in that,” I answered. “Many have said it. But if it means anything, it is only a miserable assumption, a pitiful dogmatism. It assumes, that there is a just suspicion resting upon all evidence, except that of sense. It assumes too much. How far does this doubt about spirit intend to go? what is precisely its ground? If its ground is at all definable it is this, namely, that a degree of uncertainty attaches to all matters not evinced to us by our own senses. This is implied in the very language which men employ. They say, ‘if my eyes could see it, if my hands could handle it, I should know. But I cannot see or touch spirit.’ Well now, if we can know nothing but sensible objects, our knowledge will be extremely limited. Does this man know that he has got a soul? He never saw it—he never handled it—he cannot taste it. Does he know that he has reason, or the power of reasoning, or any mind at all? He cannot see his mind, or touch it. How, then, on his own principles, can he certainly know that he has got any? Where will his doubting end? He is bound to doubt whether he has a soul,—whether he has an imagination, a memory, a faculty of reason. Indeed, he is bound to doubt whether he has the

power of doubting; because, he never saw it, or touched it, tasted it, or heard it speak. So that his principle of doubting about spirit, if he will only be self-consistent, will cut him off from all that he calls certain knowledge, except merely on the field of matter, and indeed that part of the field, which lies within the reach of his fingers, his ears, or his eyes. On his own principles, he cannot certainly know anything more.—Just in this absurdity lies every man who exclaims, ‘we cannot know much about spirit,—we are certain about matter, because our senses can reach it.’” My young friend appeared to be surprised. Said he, “You seem to be fond of turning the tables upon me. You make out, that the sin of assumption is more mine, than my aunt’s.”

“So it is,” said I.

“Well,” said he, (very thoughtfully and gravely,) “I believe it is, after all! I think I shall have to go to her to confession.”

“I hope you will confess to God, also,” said I: “for your sin of assumption was more odious to him than to her.”

“But I have not done with the charge. There is another item in this count. There is another false assumption in the notion which I am combating. Your notion is, that we can have a certainty of knowledge about matter, such as we cannot have about spirit; because our senses furnish evidence of matter, but not of spirit. This is a mere assumption, and a falsehood. Have you no sensible evidences of spirit? When you move your tongue, and utter your arguments, are not the motion and the arguments any evidences of an unseen mind? They are sensible evidences of something to me; for I see the motion, and I hear the arguments. And will you, tell me, that the matter of the tongue, the mere material of it, moves of its own accord, and weaves the arguments by its own power? If not, then the motion I see, and the arguments I hear, are sensible evidences of the existence of an unseen spirit, which prompts the motion

and weaves the arguments. Though my senses do not directly reach the spirit itself, yet they do reach the effects of that spirit, (—the motion of the tongue and the audible arguments,) which come from the unseen mind. And thus my very senses do furnish me with an evidence of the existence of that mind, as clear and certain as if my eyes could behold it. They do behold the effects of it—the traces of it—the signals of it, as clearly as they behold anything. The signals, the traces, the effects, cannot come from any other quarter. They must come from mind. A reasonable argument must be a production of reason. And just as certainly as I hear it coming from human lips, just so certainly I have the evidence of two of my senses, that a mind exists somewhere, a spirit which has moved the lips, and contrived the argument.—It is, therefore, an assumption and a falsehood, when one says he has no sensible evidences of spirit, and hence cannot know much about it.”

The attention of my Irish friend was intently fixed on every word I had uttered. And when I paused, he remained silent for some minutes. At length he said to me:

“You have convinced me of one thing, at least. I perceive that I have often taken false ground. And yet, though I am not prepared to controvert your position, and it seems to me that your argument is unassailable; still, the manner in which you reason from effect to cause may have some error in it. At least, it is so new to me, that I am at a loss, though it all seems perfectly clear. Are we certain, after all, about causes and effects.”

“Yes; just as certain as we are of anything. There may be unfathomable mysteries somewhere in the subject, just as there are in every other subject; but I have had nothing to do with them. I have only employed the plain principle of common sense,—that effects, changes, motions, must have some cause. Did your question mean to inquire whether that principle is certain?”

He sat in, silence for a long time. I did not think it best to interfere with his thoughts. I took up one of his books, and retired to the window, to await the result of his cogitations. He paced the floor, back and forth, for a full half hour, manifestly in profound meditation. Finally, stopping before me, he said:

“What is a cause?”

“That which produces the effect,” said I; “an antecedent, without which the effect would not exist.”

“Is it certain,” said he, “that there is a fixed connection betwixt the two?”

“Yes: you are certain of it, or you would not ask that question, or any other. You speak to me to produce an effect; and speaking, you know, you are the designing cause. You employ this principle in every action of your life. You cannot act without it. You never did, and you never will. You cannot utter a word, or make a motion on any other principle, if you try.”

He made another long pause. And as he walked the room, I went on reading my book. But finally, I laid aside the book, and took my hat, to depart, saying to him, that I would not have made my visit so long, if his residence had been more convenient for me to reach.

“I must see you again,” said he. “Can you give your company an hour or two to-morrow?”

“Not to-morrow,” said I; “but I will see you the next day, if you please.”

“Well, now do not disappoint me,” said he. “I am sorry to trouble you, and I feel more grateful to you than I can express; but I cannot rest our subject here, and I am afraid I could not manage it alone. I have been a sceptic on religion for eight years; and if left alone, I am afraid my old sceptical notions would return upon me.”

As I called upon him two days after, he immediately told me, that there were two points which he wanted cleared up. He had been studying the subject ever since I left him; and acknowledged, that his mind was convinced, as far as I had gone. He “believed all my positions were impregnable.”

“But,” said he, “your affair of cause and effect which you brought to bear upon me, like a battery—wherein does the efficient power of the cause lie?”

“In the will that wields it, sir.”

“What! in the will?”

“Yes, sir, just in the will.”

“I am confounded! What will come next?”

“Your own conviction of truth, sir, will come very soon; and the entire abandonment of your sceptical infidelity.”

“I believe it,” said he, very solemnly. “But you surprise me by saying, that power lies in will.”

“Just in will, sir,” said I; “nowhere else. This presides over the whole field of causes and effects. It belongs to the very nature of the human mind, to attribute any change which we behold, to something. That

something we denominate the cause. It may not be itself the cause, only instrumentally, unless it is the will; and when it is not the will, then we must trace our way back through the instruments, till we reach the real seat of power; and we shall always find that to be the will. My motions, my speech, my walking, are changes, and no sane man supposes them to be uncaused. Everybody supposes them, knows them, to proceed from some cause adequate to the production of the changes. This is common sense; and on this principle every language on earth is formed. The principle is interwoven with the structure of the Greek, the Latin, the French, the Chinese, with every tongue. No man's mind rejects this principle. If anybody thinks changes to be uncaused, he is a madman or a fool. Common sense always knows, that changes are the effects of some cause, which holds power over them. That cause, in respect to my motions, is my spirit. My motions are an effect. My spirit is the cause. The cause of all the changes in the universe is God. All these changes are effects coming from something, and that something (whatever it be,) is God. He is the great first cause of all things. But he has delegated to me a little power, (for a time,) over a few particles of matter, which I call my body; and by the exercise of that power, I can move. My agency is only a subordinate agency, limited, and not lasting. It may last till I die, but no longer; and then I must account for my stewardship. It extends only to my own flesh. I cannot make a stone or a clod of earth move, by my willing it, as I can move my material frame. And, dependent creature that I am, I cannot move my material frame, except by the mysterious power of my spirit, which wills it,—a power not my own, in the sense of independency, but only in the sense of subordination. But in this subordinate sense, I am the cause of my own actions, and accountable for them,—sometimes to men, and always to God.

“Now, just on this ground of common sense, my motions are all evidences of the existence of my spirit, which has power over them; and the great motions of the universe are all evidences of an unseen Spirit, which has power over them. That unseen Spirit is God. These changes of

the universe are visible. Our senses take note of them; and therefore our senses, though they cannot directly reach the Divine Being, can reach, and reach everywhere, those changes which are his effects, and demonstrations of his existence and mighty power.—This argument is rock. There is no getting away from it. These changes of the universe are effects, by the common consent of all mankind. Being so, they must have a cause: they demonstrate the existence of a cause. And whatever that cause be, it is God. Our senses come in contact with the effects;—and now, who shall maintain, that we have not as good evidences about God, as if our eyes could behold him? It may be less sudden, less startling, and hence less impressive evidence; but is it not as good? May I not be as certain as if I saw him? Do not I know, that a cause of visible changes is operating, just as well as I know the effects which I behold. If there is any uncertainty about my knowledge of God in this way of knowing, let any man attempt to tell where it lies. He cannot tell.—The changes? my eyes see them. I therefore know them by evidences of sense. They are effects. I know this by my common sense, and the common sense of every man around me. And the cause of these effects, you must either allow to be the Deity, or you must maintain, that dumb matter, mere dirt and rock, has reason, and will, and power of motion, of its own.—And coming in contact with these effects constantly, as I do, I certainly am unable to perceive, why I do not positively know there is a God, as well as I know there is a sun that moves, or a drop of rain that falls. My knowledge may not be impressive and startling; but is it not real—certain—founded on good and legitimate evidences?

“And now, what is power? or, where does it lie? or, what wields it? Where is its seat? Its home? Where does power originate? There is something which men call power—something which is capable of effecting some change; and the question you put to me is, what is it? or, where is the seat of it? And the answer is, power lies in the spirit—not in matter, but in spirit. The power by which all changes in matter are effected, resides immediately in spirit, in mind. The power by which I move a

muscle does not belong to the muscle itself. The muscle is only an instrument which obeys that act of my spirit, which I call my will. My will is that mysterious thing with which my Maker has invested me, and by which I can move. The will is the power. We cannot move a single atom of matter in the universe without it. It has a direct power over our bodies in health, and till we die; and an indirect power over a little other matter. Acting indirectly, our will can bring our bodies, or some portion of our material frame, into contact with other matter; and thus we can effect some changes in that other. The stones we lift, the mountains we level, the ships we build, are all lifted, and leveled, and built, by the power of our will. Power resides nowhere but in spirit. You speak of the mechanical powers, and I am not going to find fault with your language. But let not the imperfection of language mislead your understanding,—as it certainly does, if you suppose these mechanical powers have an item of power of their own. They have none. The power exists only in your will. You use them. You bring your hands, or feet, or some other portion of your body into contact with some other matter, the lever, the screw, the pulley; and thus you willingly employ these contrivances to do what you could not do without them. But the lever, the screw, the wedge, the pulley, have not an item of power in themselves. Nobody ever saw them doing anything alone. It is will, it is spirit, which employs them. The will first formed the contrivances themselves; and could not form them so as to invest them with power to work alone. And the will, in every instance of their operation since they are formed, must come along with its continued power, or they will do nothing,—can do nothing. They have no power, because they have no will.—You have, then, this great, universal lesson, Power resides only in mind: all power exists in spirit, and in spirit only. “God’s will is his power. He employs his power directly or indirectly, as he pleases. He can use instruments, or do without them. He has no need of them, as you have. The direct power of your own spirit is limited—it is limited, as I said, to the few particles of matter which make up your mortal body; and if you would move or change anything beyond that, you must contrive some mode to bring your material body into contact or

some connection with it. But God, the unseen, eternal Spirit, is able to bring the power of his will to bear directly upon all things,—as directly as the power of your will bears upon the body it moves. He has only to will it, and any conceivable change will instantly take place. The power all lies in the Infinite Spirit. God is Spirit. His will is the effect. Nothing intervenes between his volition and the change which follows it, to give any power to the volition itself. The mere volition is all his power.—Awful God! Tremendous Deity! On his simple volition hangs this mighty universe of being! Earth, heaven, hell depend upon it! If he should will it, there would not be an angel in heaven, or a devil in hell! existence would cease! this universe would become a blank! and nothing would be, except ‘that high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity!’—Oh! who would not have this God for his friend? Oh! who could endure to have him his enemy?—Enemy? sooner, come annihilation! Let me perish—let my spirit die let all these thinking faculties, my soul, go out in eternal. night, sooner than have this awful God against me!—It need not be. That God who ‘spake and it was done,’ who ‘commanded and it stood fast,’ who said, ‘let there be light and there was light,’—this God. is love. I hear a voice coming from resurrection lips, ‘all power in heaven and earth is given unto me; go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. He that believeth shall be saved—though he were dead, yet he shall live again.’ Blessed words! blessed Saviour! Open your heart, sir, to this message. Take this offer. Poor sinner as you are—weak mortal—being of a day, and soon to lie in the dust; cast your immortal soul upon the power of this Christ, to save you from eternal death, and give you life evermore !”

As I uttered this exhortation with all the force I could give to it, my young friend sunk back upon his chair, with his eyes fixed immovably upon me; and held his breath, in a sort of agony of attention. He turned more pale than I had ever seen him. And when I stopped, he drew a long breath, his eyelids dropped over his eyeballs, and he looked like a corpse.

“I beg your pardon,” said I. “I have talked too long. I have wearied

your strength.”

“Not at all,” said he; “but you have conquered me. I see I have been wrong.—But I must think of this more.”

I replied, “I hope you will. And I will see you again in a few days.” As he had not fixed any time for another visit, and as I wished to leave him some time for reflection, I did not call on him again for two days. As I then entered his room, he said to me:—

“I am glad to see you. And I am glad you have come so early in the morning. You will be able to make me a long visit, I hope. I should have sent for you, but I know I am taking up too much of your time.”

“Oh, no; not at all,” said I. “But have you not gained the victory over your doubts?”

“Partly. I will tell you how it is with me. You recollect I told you about my difficulty. I thought, that nothing about spirit was really certain, as we are certain about material things. And still, some of the same difficulty occurs to me, and often tempts me and troubles me; though I believe all you have said about God’s existence and will, and about cause and effect. When I attempt to pray, the idea will come up to me, that I have not such a certain knowledge about God, and about my own spirit, as I have about objects of sense. My knowledge about spirit seems to me to be inferior. Can you relieve me from this trouble?”

“Probably not,” said I. “This matter is not a truth, but what you have just called it, a temptation. And I cannot chain the devil, or check the evil suggestions of your own heart. What I have already said to you, I did suppose to be sufficient on that point, so far as the mind is concerned. If you are tempted, your hope lies in prayer.”

“But yet,” said he, “I do think, that material objects assail the mind, as mental or spiritual ideas do not; and I think that we have a more extensive knowledge of matter, than we can have of spirit. And hence, I feel that I am not on as sure ground in the abstract and spiritual matters of religion, as I wish to be.”

“We are at issue again,” said I, “if that is the case.”

He replied, “I know that very well. And I half know that I am wrong. But I cannot get my mind clear, on these points.”

“I think you can,” said I. “And at the risk of some little repetition, (which indeed seems to be needful to you,) I join issue with you again. “You speak of knowledge. And you want to be as sure in religious knowledge, as you feel that you are in other matters; and you want your knowledge to be as extensive. You affirm, that there is, after all, a deficiency on these points. I affirm there is not.”

“Exactly that,” he replied.

“Then,” said I, “let us attempt to examine these questions.”

“What is it to know? Where does knowledge lie? What is that kind of operation, exercise, or experience, which men call knowledge? We want no school metaphysics on this point. Metaphysical fog is not equal to the noon-day clearness of common sense.”

“Knowledge is the ascertainment which the mind has of some certainty or reality. It does not make the certainty. That exists before. It is only a recognition of it. That recognition, or sure perception of mind, (call it what you will,) is knowledge.—Knowledge, then, exists in the mind: not in matter, but in mind: not in the matter of your bones, or blood, or muscles, of your eyes that see, or your ears that hear. Knowledge exists

only in mind. The mind has a sure perception of some reality, and that is knowledge.”

“Yes,” said he, emphatically.

“This perception,” I continued; “comes indeed in different ways. I perceive some truths by my eyes; as when I behold the sun, or admire a rosebud. I perceive other truths by my ears; as when I leap at the sound of music, or tremble at the thunder. I perceive other truths by my reason; as when I know that the half of any substance is not as much as the whole, or that two men are stronger than one, if all three are equals. But in all cases, the perception is in the mind: the ascertainment of the certainty, the knowledge exists in the mind, and nowhere else.”

“Yes,” said he.

“Now, therefore, if any man knows he has knowledge, he knows he has mind. And he knows another thing about it,—he knows it is a knowing mind, a spirit capable of knowing, of perceiving truth. And what, then, does the man mean, when he pretends he knows little about mind? about spirit? He cannot know anything about matter, without knowing something about spirit. It is his spirit only that knows. He does not know with his hands, or his feet, or his eyes. He knows only with his mind. And if he knows that rock is hard, or night dark, or water fluid, he equally knows, that he himself possesses a perceiving, knowing mind—a reasonable spirit within him; capable of being affected by a reality.”

“Yes,” said he, (as if he would fix it in mind.)

“But he is certain of these things. He says he is. He feels the hard rock—he sees water run—his eyes tell him it is dark in the night. But where lies his certainty? Why, he is just certain of his own mind,—that is all. He is just certain, that he has got a mind to be certain—that he has a

perceiving spirit within him, capable of knowing things without him; knowing, that rock is hard, and water fluid, and night dark. He is therefore reduced just to this,—he cannot be certain of anything .at all, without being certain of mind—certain that he possesses a spirit capable of perceiving and bowing.”

“That is true,” said he, most emphatically.

“Does he not, then, learn to know spirit as fast as he learns to know matter? Can he stretch out his fingers anywhere upon a tangible universe, and take a lesson upon it; and not therewith, take a lesson upon the spirit, which alone perceives its tangibility? Can he open his eyes, amid the flowers of his beautiful garden, and admire the sweet pencillings which delight him, and not, at the same moment, just as well know, that he himself has a spirit capable of admiration and delight, as he knows the hues of beauty which are blending into one another? Can he listen to the wild-bird’s song, and the forest-echo which repeats it, and not just as well know, that he himself has a spirit within him susceptible of the sweets of music and the soothing of its melting echoes, as he knows, that his feathered friend upon the wing has a mellow throat and an exultant song? This man, this very man, who deploras his uncertainty about spirit, cannot himself take a single step in the knowledge of matter, without, at the same moment, taking a step in the knowledge of spirit. Every new lesson he learns about material things which affect his senses, is a new lesson about the immaterial spirit which learns it. He cannot know a single quality in matter, without knowing a quality in spirit; for mind only has knowledge. He knows with his spirit. And if he is sure of anything, he must be sure of the spirit which has the surety.”

“Yes,” said he. “I now admit all that. I confess that I cannot have any certainty about matter, unattended by an equal certainty about mind. But here is my trouble:—the surety in reference to matter comes into the mind through the channel of the senses. The organic structure is

affected—the nerves of seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, or smelling. And therefore, is not the knowledge about spirit inferior to this; because it is a kind of knowledge, that does not affect this organic structure?”

“How can it be inferior?” said I. “Knowledge exists in mind. Is it any matter how it got there? If it is there, and is knowledge, what matter is it, whether it got in by one channel or another? If our houses are light, is not the light which comes through the open doors as trustworthy a reality, as that which is transmitted through the glass of the windows? Knowledge is knowledge, no matter how it comes. Certainty is certainty. If it comes through our sensitive organism, it is knowledge. If it comes by consciousness or reason, it is knowledge. And the idea, that all knowledge which comes through our sensitive organism is genuine and sure, while all other must lie under a suspicion of being counterfeit or unsafe; is an idea which would overthrow more than half the science, and more than half the jurisprudence of all mankind. Nobody acts upon it. Nobody ever did, or ever will, except simply in the matter of religion, when depraved men wish to cast off its obligations. There is not a human being to be found, who ever resorts to this idea of the inferiority of all but sensible knowledge, except when error suits his heart better than truth—when he is blinded by the love of sin—when he dislikes the duties of the gospel, such as prayer, and preparation for a future life.

But more. You spake of the organic structure, and the nerves, and the channel of the senses, as if one could be more sure when his material body is affected, and he learns anything in that way.”

Said he, “That is the very point. Speak to that.”

“Then think a little farther,” said I. “Two of our most important senses seem very much like an exception, usually. In our seeing and in our hearing, the organ that sees and the organ that hears are seldom touched so rudely, as to make us sensible at all, that anything has touched it. And

yet, this seeing and this hearing, the very senses which come nearest to spirituality, the very senses whose organism is seldom sensible to matter at all;—these are the very senses in which every man has most confidence, and most employs. Every man seems himself to be assured most, when in his bodily organs sensibility of impression is least.

“But beyond this, and beyond the fact, that it is the mind which sees and feels, and not the mere organs, (which can do nothing alone,) it is not true, that matter alone can affect our material organism, and thus give us more surety about itself. Thought, pure thought, affects it also. You may find a merchant, whose mere contemplation of his embarrassed affairs makes him tremble like an aspen leaf. His mind affects his material body, and his mind alone. He is not in jail. The sheriff has not seized him. He is not turned out of his house. His eyes have not seen his ships sink, or his goods burn. But he trembles, and turns pale, and loses his appetite, and grows lean; and all this, from the mere knowledge he has, that he is an irretrievable bankrupt.—And what will you say to him? Will you bring him your sweet doctrine of uncertainties to comfort him? and cheerily assure him, that he may be altogether mistaken, that he cannot be quite sure, because he has not seen his gold sink, or his goods burn, or his debtors run away?—You may find a culprit, whose crimes are known only to himself,—you. lawyers know nothing about them,—and yet, under a sense of his guilt he is shaken, as a reed in the wind. His knowledge affects his nerves. ‘A dreadful sound is in his ears.’ He turns pale, and trembles. ‘The sound of the shaken leaf shall chase him.’—And what will you say of such examples? This knowledge—a knowledge apart from the senses—a knowledge existing only in mind, by reflection and consciousness, as really and powerfully affects the material body itself, as any sensible knowledge can do. Yea, more so. ‘The spirit of a man sustaineth his infirmity; but a wounded spirit, who can bear?’ And what will you say now, about the uncertainty of knowledge which does not come by what you called ‘the channel of the senses,’ when these men find their nerves shattered, their muscles trembling, the circulation of their

blood deranged, and their whole material frame under the dreadful sway of a thought within them—just a thought? If you cannot believe in the reality and sureness of knowledge, which does not come by matter; you must at least believe in the reality of a knowledge, which makes the whole matter of a man's frame tremble, as if it would shake to pieces. Look at him, and answer;—have you certainty only about matter? have you not equal certainty about mind? Do you not know, that it possesses a dreadful power? that it has capabilities of thought, of apprehension, of agony and torture inconceivable? Do you not know, that these are the realities, the certainties, compared with which, all the certainties about matter are a mere dream?”

“Yes,” said he; (springing upon his feet, like a well man,) “I do know it. I shall never call that in question again.”

With a contemplative air, he walked a few times across the floor, and then turning suddenly to me, exclaimed very earnestly:—

“But the extent of knowledge, sir, the extent of knowledge! Our knowledge of spirit is limited! We know many things about matter, and only a few about spirit! The essence of spirit is unknown to us! We cannot tell what spirit is, sir!”

“I venture to affirm you can tell what spirit is, just as well as you can tell what matter is. You know just as much about the essence of the one, as you do about the essence of the other.—Be so good as to make a little comparison. Take any example you will. Here is a rock. It is matter, not spirit. Well, what do you know about it? You know it is hard and heavy, and has figure or shape, and has some kind of color, and it may be, some sort of odor. But what of all that? We are asking about the essence of matter, and take the rock for an example. What is the essence of it? It has weight. Is its weight the essence? It has shape. Is its shape the essence? It has color. Is its color the essence? It has hardness. Is its hardness the

essence of matter? Everybody says, no, no! Then, what is its essence? what is that something, that substratum, that real existence, in which all these qualities of color, and figure, and weight, and solidity exist?—No man can tell!

“Turn then to a spirit. Here, for example, is your own soul—the thing which now attends to my ideas. What is the essence of it? It is spirit—no matter at all, about it. Well, what do you know of it? You know, it perceives, it thinks, it remembers, it reasons, it imagines, it fears, it hopes, it resents, it has joy sometimes, and sometimes sorrow. But is joy its essence? or sorrow? or hope? or memory? or hate? or love? or judgment? or thinking? Everybody says, no, no! Then, what is its essence? what is that something, that substratum, that real existence, in which all these qualities of thought and feeling exist?—No man can tell!

“Sum up the whole rock, then, and the whole soul, and just confess, sir, that you know as much about the essence of the one, as you do about the essence of the other. Your knowledge about the essence of matter is just equal to your knowledge about the essence of mind.—What do you mean, then, when you say you know something surely about matter, but you know little about spirit? You know, indeed, some qualities of both; and beyond that your knowledge does not extend.”

My young friend had become by this time exceedingly excited. His excitement, which seemed to have been growing upon him for half an hour, had risen, as it seemed, to the highest pitch. His cheek was flushed, his eye sparkled, his frame rose erect, and he paced the room, more with the firm tread of a soldier, than the feeble step of a sick man. Fearing his excitement might do him an injury, I proposed to leave him, and allow him to rest.

“No, sir!” said he, (with an accent as if he was angry,) “no, sir, you are not to leave me yet! You have asked me to confess! And I do confess! I

yield this point! Your argument is unanswerable! But, sir, the victory has been all on one side, ever since we commenced these conversations; and I am chagrined, I am deeply mortified at my defeat! My blood boils in my veins, and all the life there is left in me is aroused, when I perceive you are pushing me farther and farther in the position of a sinner against God, with all my eternity to cry out against me! Do not mistake me, sir. My excitement is not against you; it is against myself! And I have an inch or two of ground left yet. I say, that you have not answered all my objections. I affirmed, that we have a more sure knowledge of material things, than we have of our spirits or any spirit; because we have a more extensive knowledge. Our knowledge of spirit is limited.—What do you say to that? —”

“I say, that our knowledge of matter is limited also, and the more limited of the two. I say, that we have more extensive knowledge of spirit, than we have of matter.”

“Is it possible!” said he. “Go on then. Show it to be so. I will sit down and listen.”

“Another time perhaps you—”

“Do not mention another time,” said he, interrupting me. “I may be a dead man, before I see you again! Tell me now! Take away, if you can, the last inch of ground I have left; and show me to be without excuse in the sight of that God, in whom you have compelled me to believe, and before whom I must soon stand! I am a dying man. I have no time to lose.”

“Since you desire it,” said I, “let me prove to you, that we know more things about spirit, than we do about matter. We know a few qualities in each. Compare them with one another. Make two chapters;—one for the known properties of matter, the other for the known

properties of spirit; and then, compare the chapters, and see, of which your knowledge is the most extensive, matter or spirit:

“First chapter: On Matter. You know it has the following qualities, to wit;—weight, color, (sometimes,) figure, inactivity, hardness, smell, (sometimes,) and it is movable. This is about all you know. All else you can say of it, is included in these properties, or results from them.

“Second chapter: On Spirit. You know it has the following properties, to wit;—it perceives, it compares, it judges, it reasons, it remembers, it wills, it fancies, it has conscience, it has imagination, it has consciousness or perception of its own acts, it is capable of pain and pleasure. That is enough. You need go no farther. Cut the chapter short. You have more knowledge about spirit, than you have about matter—more extensive knowledge. You can tell of more properties of spirit, than of matter. Your spirit chapter is longer than your matter chapter. In one word, you do positively know a great deal more about spirit, than you do about matter. Your knowledge of matter is confine to just a few qualities; but your knowledge of spirit is far more extensive, embracing all kinds of operation, all kinds of thought, all kinds of emotions and passions.”

“All true!” said he. “I confess it. But spirit may have other faculties or properties which we know nothing about.”

“So may matter,” said I. “So may matter. But that is an idea addressed to our ignorance. We are talking about knowledge. What we do not know, about spirit or about matter, has nothing to do with our subject, or with our duty. We want knowledge to act upon and to die upon. A mere perhaps, about something else, does not weigh a feather against known truth. A perhaps is bad foothold for a dying man. You would be ashamed of this kind of suggestion in court. Matter and spirit both may have a thousand qualities, which we know nothing about. But we act like fools, if we will not breathe the air, because it may have some

unknown properties;—and we act just as much like fools, if we will not repent and believe in Christ, because our immortal soul may have some unknown properties. Religion asks us to act upon knowledge, upon certainty. Infidelity must always act upon ignorance, if it acts at all. And for that reason, I affirmed to you, the first time I saw you, that infidels are the most credulous, assuming and dogmatic men in the world.”

“That is true,” said he, (rising suddenly from his seat,) “that is all true.—I have done. I have no more to say. I have been a fool, and have groped in the dark all my days! I have spent my life in conjecturing what might be, and neglecting what is, and what I now know is.”

Being quite certain that he was exhausting his strength too much, I entreated him to rest, proposing to call on him again, at any time he should choose.

“Have you seen my aunt to-day?” said he, suddenly.

“No; I have not had that pleasure; but I begin to think I have a kind of right to see her.”

“I thought you had seen her. You talk just as she does about my exhausting my strength; and I thought she might have given you a little blarney, to have me receive it second-hand, since I refused it from her.”

“No, I have never seen her.”

“She ought to see you. She is a noble woman. You would like her. Her beauty has bidden her good night, long, long ago, but her heart is as green as a shamrock. I love her. My heart will warm towards her, after its blood shall be too stiff to move at anything but the thought of her. She has a true Irish heart. There is no English blood in her.”

“Perhaps,” said I, “some of her excellencies which you admire, may be owing quite as much to Palestine as to Ireland. I can very honestly assure you of my high admiration of the Irish character. When I once heard one of the Judges of the Supreme Court warmly affirm, ‘the most noble living creature in the world is a well-educated Irishman,’ my whole heart accorded with the declaration of that great man, with no other reserve than the idea, that religion is the crowning excellence of men, after all. But I suppose he had no reference to religion, and I therefore adopted the sentiment as my own.—But now I wish to ask you to discriminate a little, betwixt your aunt’s qualities as an Irish woman, (which I have no doubt are great,) and her qualities as a Christian woman. In my opinion, her Christian excellencies, you call Irish excellencies, and, what in her, helps to bind your heart to the Emerald Isle, ought to bind it also to the Saviour she adores. Indeed, I have no hesitation in expressing the opinion, that however admirable she may be as an Irish woman, she is far more admirable as a Christian woman. You ought to do justice to her religion, and feel the force of her character and example. I will venture to affirm for her, that she herself, much as she loves Ireland, will tell you, that she is indebted to the rose of Sharon, more than to the green of the Shamrock. Love Ireland, sir, as much as you will. I have no quarrel with you on that ground. But do justice, in your estimations, to a heavenly religion, and to what lies nearest to your aunt’s own heart. She, I venture to affirm, will lay down all the honors you can heap upon her, at the foot of the cross. It will grieve her, to have you honor her country, and not honor her Christ.”

Springing suddenly upon his feet, with a look of astonishment and indignation, he stood before me, bending almost over me:—

“You have seen her,” said he, with an accent of resentment.

“I have not,” said I, firmly.

“Do you speak true?” said he.

“Sir,” said I, “my word must not be called in question, anywhere.”

Said he, “I beg your pardon. Excuse me: I was wrong. But it suddenly occurred to me, that you and my aunt were playing a game with me. I thought she had been telling you all about me.”

“What gave you such a suspicion?”

“Because you employed one of her own thoughts;—that I honored her country and her blood, when I ought to have given the honor to her Redeemer. She has said it to me, the day, sir, and often in past time. But do not look so stern upon me. I thought she had been telling you. I take back what I said. I beg your pardon. I am incapable of offering you an insult.”

“Let that pass,” said I; “I play no games upon anybody. I only desire your good.”

“I know it. And I thank you for every word you have said to me. I could have no claim upon you for so much kindness. You have given me much of your time. Your patience has not been worn out with me. You have done what few men could do; you have seen the heart of me rightly, and have indulged me in having my own strange way in talking about religion, as I believe few ministers would have done. And if there is a God in heaven, he will reward you,—I know he will reward you.”

The tears gushed from his eyes; and pulling his handkerchief from his pocket, he turned away from me, to the window, and wept convulsively. After a moment, turning suddenly to me, with a manifest effort to control his emotions, he said:

“I am too apt to lead you off from our subject. I am sorry for it. But you have prevailed by yielding to me.—I want you to stay a little longer to-day, if you can. I have not long to live. This cough and these night-sweats will soon wear me out. I should be an idiot to hope to get well. I have no company now, except yours and my aunt’s. Conversation does not hurt me; and it would be no matter, you know, if it did. I am soon to go. Earth has done with me. The grave lifts up her voice to claim me. I am preparing to say, yes, I come. But one thing troubles me. My heart is, to tell you that difficulty. It is not easy for me to keep clear from my old infidel thoughts, and I want to tell you how I was led on to be an infidel”

“I should like to hear that very much,” said I “And as to your amount of strength, I leave you to judge of it. I will go or stay, just as you desire, only tell me frankly what your desire is.”

“I thank you,” said he; (his eyes filling with tears,) “I am unable to tell you how much my very heart thanks you. I know there is little value in the thanks of a dying man; but they are all I have to give, and my heart forces them to my tongue.”

“I ought to thank you,” said I, “for these interviews. They gratify me much, and I assure you they profit me too.” After a short pause, and subduing his emotions, he continued:

“For some time I have been astonished at myself. My thoughts are full of evil. The old follies will come over me. They torment my mind; and I know they offend God. My infidelity had become interwoven with my strongest feelings. Though I have been led to know its deceptions, its old lies still haunt me, as if a host of infernal spirits were sent to thrust them back into my heart This troubles me. I am vexed with myself, because I have not vigor of mind to stand to the truth, since I have been convinced of it. My wickedness within is too mighty for me. Satan tempts me with his lies. It is Satan. He comes to me suddenly. He comes at

midnight sometimes, when I would pray, if I could; and the horrible idea darts like an arrow, into my mind, 'religion is all a delusion.' I have said that to my aunt very often; and now Satan says it to me. I know it is a lie; but the thought torments my very soul."

"You need not be troubled about it," said I. "If you hunted up the idea yourself, or, if you welcomed it, when it comes, you would have some cause for trouble and alarm. It is not temptation that can injure us, or prove our insincerity. The treatment we give to temptation is the thing to be looked at. Since the temptation comes to you without your bidding, and since you do not welcome it, but reject it, and aim to dismiss it, as a temptation; the treatment you give it accords with the will of God, and shows that you desire and intend to obey him."

"So I do, sir; but my wicked heart is overflowing with evil. I wanted to tell you how my unbelief became blended with my blood. I am an Irishman. "Early in life my country's wrongs lay on my heart, like a burden. My blood burns at this moment, to think of the oppressions of England! Before the suns of a dozen summers had shone upon me, I had learnt to say, 'the English are tyrants and hypocrites. They profess to be a Christian people. But they wrong my country!' As I grew older I read history. I read the court trials, which grew out of what they called 'the Irish rebellion of ninety-eight.' I read of Emmet, and other men like him, led to a disgraceful execution, when they deserved the plaudits of all mankind! I read Curran's Speeches. I read of the infamous informers hired by the government to swear to anything, in order to get the blood of an Irishman! The English have oppressed us, sir! They have ruined Ireland by the most cruel and heartless injustice! by their tyranny and taxation! and then to crown their barbarity, they call us low, and stupid, and incapable of improvement, sir! and all this, though their victories have been bought with Irish blood, and no small part of the eloquence of their Parliament itself was the eloquence of Irish men."

He was becoming so much excited, that I thought it best to interpose, for the purpose of quieting his feelings, and leading his thoughts into another channel. I said to him:

“The things, you complain of, were acts of the Government, not of the people. Many of the people did not approve of them. None of the Christian people approved of any injustice. It was not religion, but irreligion, which led to any oppression; and you ought not to lay down at the door of Christianity the blame which belongs to her enemies. You attribute to religion, what you ought to attribute to the want of it. If all the people and the government had been controlled by the principles of Christianity, there would have been none of those wrongs which so much excite you.”

“I know it, sir. I am sure of it,” said he. “But I was telling you how I was made an infidel. The English boast of their magnanimity. They talk loftily of ‘English honor,’ and of their ‘religion.’ And only a few days since—let me see—it was this day eight-days, as I was reading an old paper, I came upon the place where one of your own statesmen calls England, ‘the bulwark of our holy religion.’ It is too much, sir! Oppression, heartless and unrelenting oppression carried on through ages, cannot be justified! There is no apology for it. And after all this; for the English to speak of their Christianity, and call themselves ‘the most religious nation on earth,’ and make other people believe it—sir, there never was any impudence equal to this! Look at India, sir! The English have made her red with the blood of her innocent children! They have made themselves rich with the gold, of which they have robbed her! They have butchered the half-civilized people by the thousands and hundreds of thousands! with no decent argument of justice, and for no other reason, than to gratify their own lordly pride and get riches by the right of their cannon! And when the news of a new victory over the feeble reaches ‘brave England;’ they call themselves a religious people, and give thanks to God in their churches for success on another field of butchery! This completes

the farce; till the very next year brings round a like occasion! All this is true, sir. You cannot dispute it. It is history. And when I began in early life, to learn such transactions, I could not respect a religion, that would allow them. I disbelieved in such a religion. I became an infidel. The true history of England is enough to make a world full of infidels! Ireland and India tell tales of blood about the religion of England. I can respect Mahometanism. It acts according to its principles. I can respect Popery and her Inquisition, for the same reason. But Protestant England, as she calls herself, I despise for her mean hypocrisy! Her religion is described in three words,—pride, avarice, and oppression. All this became stamped into my heart, as I was growing up towards manhood. I knew that the established church of England was nothing but a part of her governmental hypocrisy. I knew that her Protestantism was only a political pretence. I felt for my country's wrongs; and I rejected religion, because of the example that I studied so constantly. The example never appeared more base to me, than it does this moment. And I am troubled now because my old system of thought will come back upon me, like a torrent, and tempt me to disbelieve in Christianity, as often as I think of the wrongs of my country.”

Said I, “In my opinion, you can easily get over all that difficulty. You have only to think of that which you know to be true, that is, that Christianity never sanctioned any of the pride, avarice and oppression you complain of; but that it was abusively made a cloak to cover such sins. In that nation it became linked with the government,—(which union I dislike as much as you do,—) and because of that union it became corrupted. As you took the government and its actions for an example of the influence of religion, or, for a test of its truth, you looked in the wrong direction. You should rather have looked at the pious in private life. You should have looked where there was some influence of Christianity,—not where there was none. You should have looked at the Bible Society, the Missionary Society, the Sunday Schools and Orphan Asylums, and attempts to relieve the oppressed and downtrodden. There

was religion in fact, not in mere name. And now, when you perceive that you erred, in taking what men falsely called religion, as an example of it, surely you need not be troubled with your old infidelity.”

“So it seems to me,” said he. “But Satan tempts me, as if I was now embracing a religion which has crushed my country.”

“It never crushed your country. You know it never did. It was a spirit directly the opposite of Christianity, which perpetrated the sins you complain of Christianity would have saved your country. And you ought to welcome it to your heart, for your eternal salvation, more eagerly than you would ever have welcomed a deliverer to your native land.”

“So I do,” said he. “So I will. I believe in Christianity. I know I need it. I believe Jesus Christ came to save sinners. I trust him to save me. I rely on the Holy Spirit to aid me against the temptations of Satan and the sinfulness of my own heart. You spoke of examples of religion in private life. Let me tell you, the example of my old aunt has been a demonstration to me. Satan cannot shake it.”

I again proposed to leave him for the present, and call at another time, lest so long a conversation should injure him.

“Another time!” said he, “another time! You astonish me, sir! I am a dying man! I stand on the verge of time now! I feel that the grave-digger is at the side of me! You may talk of time. With your health and prospects, it is not unnatural. But if I should be talking of time, death would laugh at me, and call me fool and liar!”—And then, turning to me, and fixing his keen eyes upon my face, as he stood before me:—“Tell me what to do, to be ready to die.”

Said I, “You believe in God, the Infinite, Eternal Spirit.”

“I do,” said he.

“Then pray to him,” said I.

“I have, and I will,” said he.

“You believe you are a sinner?” said I.

“I know I am,” said he.

“Then repent, and trust in Christ for pardon.”

“Will repentance save me?”

“No,” said I; “Christ Jesus saves sinners. You must not trust to your repentance and faith to save you. That would be self-righteousness. Trust only in the crucified Son of God, your proposed surety.”—(After a pause—)

“What must be done first, before I trust in him.”

“Nothing. Just nothing.”

“How? Is there no preparation to make?”

“No; none at all.”

“But, holiness—” said he.

“Results from faith in Christ,” said I.

“And the Holy Spirit—” said he.

“Is your only hope,” said I. “Without his aid you will neither repent

nor believe. It is his office to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us.”

“Will you pray with me?” said he.

We fell on our knees. I offered a short prayer, and left him.—I never saw him afterwards.

I called to see him the next day, but his friends would not allow it, because he was so much exhausted. I understood from his nurse, that immediately after I left him the day before, he sent for his aunt, told her that he renounced all his infidelity, that he had not a doubt the Bible was from God, and that the atonement of Jesus Christ was all-sufficient for a dying sinner. He continued his conversation and prayer with her, till he fainted; and she was obliged to call for aid, to lift him from the floor, and lay him upon his bed.

I made another attempt to see him, but his aunt sent word to me at the door, that she was very grateful for my attentions to him and thanked me much; but she begged me not to come in, for he was not able to see me. He had not strength to utter a sentence.

Just at this time, I left home, and on my return after an absence of three weeks, I learned that he was buried the week before my return. I could not find his aunt. I have never seen her, and know not the reason why she sent for me, only as I understand from the lady at whose house he died, that she had at some time heard me preach. This same lady told me, that the young man died in peace, with praises for the atonement of Jesus Christ on his lips.”

I have never had my feelings more deeply interested, than they were in this young Irishman. He was a man of uncommon talents. He was frank and candid. He was full of enthusiasm. It is impossible to convey in

writing any just idea of the ardor and eloquence with which he spoke, when he became excited. There was a sort of romance, too, in the mystery in which his aunt so constantly shrouded herself. He was an avowed infidel. And what, in my opinion, is a very uncommon thing, he was an honest infidel. The arguments, by which he attempted to sustain his infidelity, were peculiar. He was evidently in the last stages of life, the subject of a hasty consumption, of which nobody could be more sensible than himself. He was open to conviction. And it was very evident, that he entertained a most profound respect for his pious aunt, who had induced him to send for me.

I think it likely that that woman was the real means of his conversion and salvation. She was an example of practical piety, which his infidelity could not refute, which his conscience could not but honor. He evidently did not say to me all that he felt on that subject. Whenever he alluded to her, after a few words, he would seem to check himself, and soon change the subject. But, occasionally, when he became excited, some expression would come out, which showed how powerful her influence had been over him. I can never forget the ardor and depth of emotion, with which he uttered the expression:—"You spoke of examples of religion in private life. Let me tell you, the example of my old aunt has been a demonstration to me. Satan cannot shake it."

It is true that infidelity cannot withstand the force of reason and argument; but true godly example can come nearer the life-spot of religion. It knocks at the door of the heart. If the truths of Christianity were seconded by the devoted and pious lives of all her professed disciples, the unbelief of the world would soon cease. Private example of godliness is what the world most needs.

All men will not think alike in reference to the mode in which this young Irishman was led into infidelity. Perhaps he too much blamed the government of England. Perhaps, also, his feelings towards the people

were governed by a very natural prejudice. But it is much to be deplored, that the governments of nations professing to be Christian, have been so unjust, so ready for war and conquest; and that the Christian people of such nations have so often sunk their principles amid the waves of some exciting popularity, and have shouted over a victory in war, when they ought to have shed tears of bitterness over its injustice and cruelty. They little reflect how much their conformity to the world hinders the triumphs of religion. War and conquest, too, may sometimes be inevitable perhaps. The general injustice of mankind may sometimes make deadly conflict necessary for the defense of the good against the wicked. But Christians and Christian nations have much to answer for, on account of such things as this young Irishman complained of. Too much of our religion is stained with the pride, and politics, and avarice of the world. "Come out of her, my people."

I have some reason to believe, that no small blame was imputed to me, for remaining so long at a time, with a sick man, and hastening, (as they said,) his death, by my exhausting conversation. But he never blamed me. I venture to affirm his aunt never blamed me. They were quite as good judges of propriety, as those who were half-strangers to him in a boarding-house. More over, it would have been heartless to leave him, and would have tended to make him call in question my sense of the importance and reality of the religion I urged upon him, when he used such language as I have here recorded. "No, sir; you are not to leave me yet. Conversation does not hurt me; and it would be no matter, you know, if it did. I am a dying man. I stand on the verge of time now. I feel that the grave-digger is at the side of me.—Another time! sir; another time! You astonish me! You may talk of time. But if I should be talking of time, death would laugh at me, and call me fool and liar. Earth has done with me. The grave lifts up her voice to claim me. I am preparing to say, yes, I come."—Some men perhaps might have left a man who talked thus. I could not. I am sure, if any wise man had been in my place, and known him as I did, he would have done as I did.