Though Cobbett was regarded by many in his life-time as a coarse, hard, practical man, full of prejudices, there was yet a strong undercurrent of poetry in his nature; and, while he declaimed against sentiment, there were few men more thoroughly imbued with sentiment of the best kind. He had the tenderest regard for the character of woman. He respected her purity and her virtue, and in his " Advice to Young Men " he has painted the true womanly woman— the helpful, cheerful, affectionate wife — with a vividness and brightness, and, at the same time, a force of good sense, that has never been surpassed by any English writer. Cobbett was any thing but refined, in the conventional sense of the word; but he was pure, temperate, self-denying, industrious, vigorous, and energetic, in an eminent degree. Many of his views were, no doubt, wrong, but they were his own, for he insisted on thinking for himself in every thing. Though few men took a firmer grasp of the real than he did, perhaps still fewer were more swayed by the ideal. In word-pictures of his own emotions he is unsurpassed. Indeed, Cobbett might almost be regarded as one of the greatest prose poets of English real life.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DISCIPLINE OF EXPERIENCE.

"I would the great would grow like thee
Who grewest not alone in power
And knowledge, but by year and hour
In reverence and in charity."—TENNYSON.

"Not to be unhappy is unhappinesse,
And misery not t' have known miserie;
For the best way unto discretion is
The way that leades us by adversitie;
And men are better shew'd what is amisse,
By th' expert finger of calamitie,
Than they can be with all that fortune brings,
Who never shewes them the true face of things."
DANIEL.

"A lump of woe affliction is,
Yet thence I borrow lumps of bliss;
Though few can see a blessing in 't,
It is my furnace and my mint."
ERSKINE'S *Gospel Sonnets.*

"Crosses grow anchors, bear as thou shouldst so
Thy cross, and that cross grows an anchor too."
DONNE.

"Be the day weary, or be the day long,
At length it ringeth to Evensong."—*Ancient Couplet.*

PRACTICAL wisdom is only to be learned in the school of experience. Precepts and instructions are useful so far as they go, but without the discipline of real life, they remain of the nature of theory only. The hard facts of ex-

istence have to be faced, to give that touch of truth to character which can never be imparted by reading or tuition, but only by contact with the broad instincts of common men and women.

To be worth any thing, character must be capable of standing firm upon its feet in the world of daily work, temptation, and trial; and able to bear the wear-and-tear of actual life. Cloistered virtues do not count for much. The life that rejoices in solitude may be only rejoicing in selfishness. Seclusion may indicate contempt for others; though more usually it means indolence, cowardice, or self indulgence. To every human being belongs his fair share of manful toil and human duty; and it can not be shirked without loss to the individual himself as well as to the community to which he belongs. It is only by mixing in the daily life of the world, and taking part in its affairs, that practical knowledge can be acquired and wisdom learned. It is there that we find our chief sphere of duty, that we learn the discipline of work, and that we educate ourselves in that patience, diligence, and endurance which shape and consolidate the character. There we encounter the difficulties, trials, and temptations which, according as we deal with them, give a color to our entire after-life; and there, too, we become subject to the great discipline of suffering, from which we learn far more than from the safe seclusion of the study or the cloister.

Contact with others is also requisite to enable a man to know himself. It is only by mixing freely in the world that one can form a proper estimate of his own capacity. Without such experience, one is apt to become conceited, puffed up, and arrogant; at all events, he will remain ignorant of himself, though he may heretofore have enjoyed no other company.

Swift once said: "It is an uncontroverted truth, that no man ever made an ill-figure who understood his own talents, nor a good one who mistook them." Many persons, however, are readier to take measure of the capacity of others than of themselves. "Bring him to me," said a certain Dr. Tronchin, of Geneva, speaking of Rosseau—"bring him to me that I may see whether he has got any thing in him!"—the probability being that Rousseau, who knew himself better, was much more likely to take measure of Tronchin than Tronchin was to take measure of him.

A due amount of self-knowledge is, therefore, necessary for those who would *be* any thing or *do* any thing in the world. It is also one of the first essentials to the formation of distinct personal convictions. Frederick Perthes once said to a young friend, "You know only too well what you *can* do; but till you have learned what you *can not* do, you will neither accomplish any thing of moment nor know inward peace."

Any one who would profit by experience will never be above asking help. He who thinks himself already too wise to learn of others, will never succeed in doing any thing either good or great. We have to keep our minds and hearts open, and never be ashamed to learn, with the assistance of those who are wiser and more experienced than ourselves.

The man made wise by experience endeavors to judge correctly of the things which come under his observation, and form the subject of his daily life. What we call common sense is, for the most part, but the result of common experience wisely improved. Nor is great ability necessary to acquire it, so much as patience, accuracy, and watchfulness. Hazlitt thought the most sensible people to be met

with are intelligent men of business and of the world, who argue from what they see and know, instead of spinning cobweb distinctions of what things ought to be.

For the same reason, women often display more good sense than men, having fewer pretensions, and judging of things naturally, by the involuntary impression they make on the mind. Their intuitive powers are quicker, their perceptions more acute, their sympathies more lively, and their manners more adaptive to particular ends. Hence their greater tact as displayed in the management of others, women of apparently slender intellectual powers often contriving to control and regulate the conduct of men of even the most impracticable nature. Pope paid a high compliment to the tact and good sense of Mary, Queen of William III., when he described her as possessing, not a science, but (what was worth all else) prudence.

The whole of life may be regarded as a great school of experience, in which men and women are the pupils. As in a school, many of the lessons learned there must needs be taken on trust. We may not understand them, and may possibly think it hard that we have to learn them, especially where the teachers are trials, sorrows, temptations, and difficulties; and yet we must not only accept their lessons, but recognize them as being divinely appointed.

To what extent have the pupils profited by their experience in the school of life? What advantage have they taken of their opportunities for learning? What have they gained in discipline of heart and mind?—how much in growth of wisdom, courage, self-control? Have they preserved their integrity amidst prosperity, and enjoyed life in temperance and moderation? or, has life been with them a mere feast of selfishness, without care or thought for others?

What have they learned from trial and adversity? Have they learned patience, submission, and trust in God? or have they learned nothing but impatience, querulousness, and discontent?

The results of experience are, of course, only to be achieved by living; and living is a question of time. The man of experience learns to rely upon Time as his helper. "Time and I against any two," was a maxim of Cardinal Mazarin. Time has been described as a beautifier and as a consoler; but it is also a teacher. It is the food of experience, the soil of wisdom. It may be the friend or the enemy of youth; and Time will sit beside the old as a consoler or as a tormentor, according as it has been used or misused, and the past life has been well or ill spent.

"Time," says George Herbert, "is the rider that breaks youth." To the young, how bright the new world looks! —how full of novelty, of enjoyment, of pleasure! But as years pass, we find the world to be a place of sorrow as well as of joy. As we proceed through life, many dark vistas open upon us—of toil, suffering, difficulty, perhaps misfortune and failure. Happy they who can pass through and amidst such trials with a firm mind and pure heart, encountering trials with cheerfulness, and standing erect beneath even the heaviest burden!

A little youthful ardor is a great help in life, and is useful as an energetic motive-power. It is gradually cooled down by Time, no matter how glowing it has been, while it is trained and subdued by experience. But it is a healthy and hopeful indication of character—to be encouraged in a right direction, and not to be sneered down and repressed. It is a sign of a vigorous, unselfish nature, as egotism is of a narrow and selfish one; and to begin life with egotism and

self-sufficiency is fatal to all breadth and vigor of character. Life, in such a case, would be like a year in which there was no spring. Without a generous seed-time, there will be an unflowering summer and an unproductive harvest. And youth is the spring-time of life, in which, if there be not a fair share of enthusiasm, little will be attempted, and still less done. It also considerably helps the working quality, inspiring confidence and hope, and carrying one through the dry details of business and duty with cheerfulness and joy.

"It is the due admixture of romance and reality," said Sir Henry Lawrence, "that best carries a man through life. . . . The quality of romance or enthusiasm is to be valued as an energy imparted to the human mind to prompt and sustain its noblest efforts." Sir Henry always urged upon young men, not that they should repress enthusiasm, but sedulously cultivate and direct the feeling, as one implanted for wise and noble purposes. "When the two faculties of romance and reality," he said, "are duly blended, reality pursues a straight, rough path to a desirable and practicable result; while romance beguiles the road by pointing out its beauties—by bestowing a deep and practical conviction that, even in this dark and material existence, there may be found a joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not—a light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."*

It was characteristic of Joseph Lancaster, when a boy of only fourteen years of age, after reading "Clarkson on the Slave-Trade," to form the resolution of leaving his home and going out to the West Indies to teach the poor blacks

* "Calcutta Review," article on "Romance and Reality of Indian Life."

to read the Bible. And he actually set out with a Bible and "Pilgrim's Progress" in his bundle, and only a few shillings in his purse. He even succeeded in reaching the West Indies, doubtless very much at a loss how to set about his proposed work; but in the mean time his distressed parents, having discovered whither he had gone, had him speedily brought back, yet with his enthusiasm unabated; and from that time forward he unceasingly devoted himself to the truly philanthropic work of educating the destitute poor.*

There needs all the force that enthusiasm can give to enable a man to succeed in any great enterprise of life. Without it, the obstruction and difficulty he has to encounter on every side might compel him to succumb; but with courage and perseverance, inspired by enthusiasm, a man feels strong enough to face any danger, to grapple with any difficulty. What an enthusiasm was that of Columbus, who, believing in the existence of a new world, braved the dangers of unknown seas; and when those about him despaired and rose up against him, threatening to cast him into the sea, still stood firm upon his hope and courage until the great new world at length rose upon the horizon!

*Joseph Lancaster was only twenty years of age when (in 1798) he opened his first school in a spare room in his father's house, which was soon filled with the destitute children of the neighborhood. The room was shortly found too small for the numbers seeking admission, and one place after another was hired, until at length Lancaster had a special building erected, capable of accommodating a thousand pupils, outside of which was placed the following notice: "All that will, may send their children here and have them educated freely; and those that do not wish to have education for nothing, may pay for it, if they please." Thus Joseph Lancaster was the precursor of our present system of National Education.

The brave man will not be baffled, but tries and tries again until he succeeds. The tree does not fall at the first stroke, but only by repeated strokes and after great labor. We may see the visible success at which a man has arrived, but forget the toil and suffering and peril through which it has been achieved. When a friend of Marshal Lefevre was complimenting him on his possessions and good-fortune, the marshal said: "You envy me, do you? Well, you shall have these things at a better bargain than I had. Come into the court: I'll fire at you with a gun twenty times at thirty paces, and if I don't kill you, all shall be your own. What! you won't! Very well; recollect, then, that I have been shot at more than a thousand times, and much nearer, before I arrived at the state in which you now find me!"

The apprenticeship of difficulty is one which the greatest of men have had to serve. It is usually the best stimulus and discipline of character. It often evokes powers of action that, but for it, would have remained dormant. As comets are sometimes revealed by eclipses, so heroes are brought to light by sudden calamity. It seems as if, in certain cases, genius, like iron struck by the flint, needed the sharp and sudden blow of adversity to bring out the divine spark. There are natures which blossom and ripen amidst trials, which would only wither and decay in an atmosphere of ease and comfort.

Thus it is good for men to be roused into action and stiffened into self-reliance by difficulty, rather than to slumber away their lives in useless apathy and indolence.* It is the struggle that is the condition of victory. If there were no difficulties, there would be no need of efforts; if there were no temptations, there would be no training in self-control, and but little merit in virtue; if there were no trial and suffering, there would be no education in patience and resignation. Thus difficulty, adversity and suffering are not all evil, but often the best source of strength, discipline, and virtue.

* A great musician once said of a promising but passionless cantatrice, "She sings well, but she wants something, and in that something every thing. If I were single, I would court her; I would marry her; I would maltreat her; I would break her heart; and in six months she would be the greatest singer in Europe!"—*Blackwood's Magazine.*

For the same reason, it is often of advantage for a man to be under the necessity of having to struggle with poverty and conquer it. "He who has battled," says Carlyle, "were it only with poverty and hard toil, will be found stronger and more expert than he who could stay at home from the battle, concealed among the provision wagons, or even rest unwatchfully 'abiding by the stuff.'"

Scholars have found poverty tolerable compared with the privation of intellectual food. Riches weigh much more heavily upon the mind. "I can not but choose say to Poverty," said Richter, "Be welcome! so that thou come not too late in life." Poverty, Horace tells us, drove him to poetry, and poetry introduced him to Varus and Virgil and Mæcenas. "Obstacles," says Michelet, "are great incentives. I lived for whole years upon a Virgil, and found myself well off. An odd volume of Racine, purchased by chance at a stall on the quay, created the poet of Toulon."

The Spaniards are even said to have meanly rejoiced in the poverty of Cervantes, but for which they supposed the production of his great works might have been prevented. When the Archbishop of Toledo visited the French ambassador at Madrid, the gentlemen in the suite of the latter expressed their high admiration of the writings of the author of "Don Quixote," and intimated their desire of becoming

acquainted with one who had given them so much pleasure. The answer they received was, that Cervantes had borne arms in the service of his country, and was now old and poor. "What!" exclaimed one of the Frenchmen, "is not Senor Cervantes in good circumstances? Why is he not maintained, then, out of the public treasury?" "Heaven forbid!" was the reply, "that his necessities should be ever relieved, if it is those which make him write; since it is his poverty that makes the world rich!"*

It is not prosperity so much as adversity, not wealth so much as poverty, that stimulates the perseverance of strong and healthy natures, rouses their energy and developes their character. Burke said of himself: "I was not rocked and swaddled and dandled into a legislator. '*Nitor in adversum*' is the motto for a man like you." Some men only require a great difficulty set in their way to exhibit the force of their character and genius; and that difficulty once conquered, becomes one of the greatest incentives to their farther progress.

It is a mistake to suppose that men succeed through success; they much oftener succeed through failure. By far the best experience of men is made up of their remembered failures in dealing with others in the affairs of life. Such failures, in sensible men, incite to better self-management, and greater tact and self-control, as a means of avoiding them in the future. Ask the diplomatist, and he will tell you that he has learned his art through being baffled, defeated, thwarted and circumvented, far more than from having succeeded. Precept, study, advice, and example could never have taught them so well as failure has done. It has disciplined them experimentally, and taught them

* Prescott's "Essays," art. Cervantes.

what to do, as well as what *not* to do—which is often still more important in diplomacy.

Many have to make up their minds to encounter failure again and again before they succeed; but if they have pluck, the failure will only serve to rouse their courage, and stimulate them to renewed efforts. Talma, the greatest of actors, was hissed off the stage when he first appeared on it. Lacordaire, one of the greatest preachers of modern times, only acquired celebrity after repeated failures. Montalembert said of his first public appearance in the Church of St. Roch: He failed completely, and, on coming out, every one said, 'Though he may be a man of talent, he will never be a preacher.'" Again and again he tried, until he succeeded; and only two years after his *debut*, Lacordaire was preaching in Notre Dame, to audiences such as few French orators have addressed since the time of Bossuet and Massillon.

When Mr. Cobden first appeared as a speaker, at a public meeting in Manchester, he completely broke down, and the chairman apologized for his failure. Sir James Graham and Mr. Disraeli failed and were derided at first, and only succeeded by dint of great labor and application. At one time Sir James Graham had almost given up public speaking in despair. He said to his friend Sir Francis Baring: "I have tried it every way—extempore, from notes, and committing all to memory—and I can't do it. I don't know why it is, but I am afraid I shall never succeed." Yet, by dint of perseverance, Graham, like Disraeli, lived to become one of the most effective and impressive of parliamentary speakers.

Failures in one direction have sometimes had the effect of forcing the far-seeing student to apply himself in another. Thus Prideaux's failure as a candidate for the post of parish-