

7. Eternity, O vast sublime!
 How many moments of our time
 Are in thy length?
 "Beyond all count are they."
 Praised be the Holy Sacrament as many times a day!
Translated from the German, by M. R., in the "Irish Monthly."

SECTION XIV.

I.

57. BETTER MOMENTS.

- M**Y mother's voice! how often creep
 Its accents on my lonely hours!
 Like healing sent on wings of sleep,
 Or dew to the unconscious flowers.
 I can forget her melting prayer
 While leaping pulses madly fly,
 But in the still, unbroken air,
 Her gentle tone comes stealing by—
 And years, and sin, and manhood flee,
 And leave me at my mother's knee.
2. The book of nature, and the print
 Of beauty on the whispering sea
 Give eye to me some lineament
 Of what I have been taught to be.
 My heart is harder, and perhaps
 My manliness hath drunk up tears;
 And there's a mildew in the lapse
 Of a few miserable years—
 But nature's book is even yet
 With all my mother's lessons writ.
3. I have been out at eventide
 Beneath a moonlight sky of spring,
 When earth was garnished like a bride,
 And night had on her silver wing—

- When bursting leaves, and diamond grass,
 And waters leaping to the light,
 And all that make the pulses pass
 With wilder fleetness, thronged the night—
 When all was beauty—then have I
 With friends on whom my love is flung
 Like myrrh on wings of Ar'aby,
 Gazed up where evening's lamp is hung;
4. And when the beautiful spirit there
 Flung over me its golden chain,
 My mother's voice came on the air
 Like the light dropping of the rain—
 And resting on some silver star
 The spirit of a bended knee,
 I've poured out low and fervent prayer
 That our eternity might be
 To rise in heaven, like stars at night,
 And tread a living path of light.
5. I have been on the dewy hills,
 When night was stealing from the dawn,
 And mist was on the waking rills,
 And tints were delicately drawn
 In the gray East—when birds were waking,
 With a low murmur in the trees,
 And melody by fits was breaking
 Upon the whisper of the breeze,
 And this when I was forth, perchance,
 As a worn reveler from the dance—
 And when the sun sprang gloriously
 And freely up, and hill and river
 Were catching upon wave and tree
 The arrows from his subtle quiver—
3. I say a voice has thrilled me then,
 Heard on the still and rushing light,
 Or, creeping from the silent glen,
 Like words from the departing night,
 Hath stricken me, and I have pressed

On the wet grass my fevered brow,
 And pōuring fōrth the earliēst
 First prayer, with which I learned to bow,
 Have felt my mother's spirit rush
 Upon me as in by-past years,
 And, yielding to the blessed gush
 Of my ungovernable tears,
 Have risen up—the gay, the wild—
 As humble as a vėry child.

WILLIS.

NATHANIEL PARKER WILLIS, an American poet, essayist, and journalist, was born in Portland, Me., Jan. 20, 1807, and died at Idlewild, near Newburgh on the Hudson, Jan. 20, 1867.

II.

58. ABOUT IMPARTIALITY.

PART FIRST.

IMPARTIALITY is one of those cold-blooded virtues the exercise of which seems to give unlimited satisfaction to hard-hearted people. The mere profession of impartiality gives a man a sort of claim to the judicial ermine;¹ and when he improvises² a tribūnal, and brings some social delinquent to the bar, scārcely any one is bold enough to question his right to the seat of judgment. But virtues, in proportion as they are admirable and admired, present temptations to the counterfeiter and the cheat; and the man who, in any department of human things, lays claim to the rare merit of impartiality, need not feel himself insulted if his claim be subjected to the most rigid scrūtiny.

2. As there is a spurious prudence which, when analyzed, is merely a scientific culture of selfishness; as there is a spurious fortitude that bears with great equanimity the calamities of others; as there is a spurious temperance that condemns all intemperance except intemperance of condemnation; as there

¹ Er'mine, a small animal found in northern climates, whose white fur, being used to line the state robes of magistrates, became em-

blematic of the justice and purity which should characterize their official actions.

² Im pro vis'es, forms suddenly.

is a spurious justice that concerns itself only with the debts due to it, without any regard to the debts it owes; so of impartiality, which, indeed, is a branch of justice, there is a spurious sort that *ōften* imposes itself upon uncritical people as the gėnuīne article.

3. Every man, in his dealings with men, ought to aim at impartiality. But the aim is so difficult of attainment that the impartial men, like the wise man of the Stoics,¹ has hitherto remained, and shall probably remain, among the unrealized ideals of human aspiration. Perfect impartiality would not, I imagine, tend to increase the personal popularity of the man who happened to possess it. Even the imperfect attainment of it, that is, happily, possible, has usually resulted in pleasing nobody.

4. There is, to begin with, a certain exasperation² that is excited by the exhibition of it. Most men do not even profess to be impartial. They are unmistakable partisans, keenly eager, and undisguisedly biased on the side of their own personal interests. Indeed, they come to think that such a bias is among the normal accomplishments of right reason; and when some one makes pretension of not having it, society is apt to rise against him as one of those mis'chievous beings who initiate any possible amount of wrōngdoing by setting up to be better than his neighbors.

5. What can you expect of a man who professes that the merits of a case have for him a fascination that overrides the fascination of his personal interest in its being decided one way rather than another? The world refuses to believe in such profession, and not unnaturally, for the state is abnormal,³ and abnormal phenomena need better proof than mere words. If, indeed, a man *act* impartially, the world will give him credit for it, even though in doing so, it compassionately classes him with that not very numerous band who are said to be "too good for the world they live in."

¹ Stō'ics, an ancient sect, founded by the Grecian philosopher Zeno, which held that men should free themselves from the dominion of their passions, remain unmoved alike by grief or joy, and submit

without complaint to whatever befall them.

² Ex as'per ā'tion, irritation.

³ Ab nor'mal, not conformed to rule; contrary to any law or system; irregular.

6. There is, however, something to be said for the popular instinct that rather dislikes an obtrusive impartiality. High virtues are not to be had without a struggle, and that struggle is *often* like an incursion into an enemy's country, to make which a man is often tempted to leave his own fireside unguarded. When he returns victorious, he may find seated by his own hearth certain undesirable guests who will insist on marching with him in his triumph to the capitol. These guests may be called little unamiabilities that sometimes accompany great merits.

7. Or, to illustrate in another way: when weeds have got into the field of life, the pulling up of them is not effected without a displacement of good soil, and a certain consequent disfigurement, more or less temporary. If you have ever known a thorough convert, a man who, having been bad, was striving with all his might to be good, you will know how unintentionally trying and how unconsciously disagreeable, he may occasionally make himself even to sympathetic bystanders.

8. This is the case even when the virtues are real. How much more is it the case when they are only more or less successful imitations? When a man affects a special virtue, he is in danger of making a hobby of it, and hobbies are generally ridden to death, or at any rate are ridden, without any regard to the law of trespass, over the fields of our neighbors. The virtue begins to be a taste, and our tastes very easily come to be tyrants both to ourselves and to others.

9. It is so easy to overstep the limit that fences us from an extreme, that men often overpass it long before they think they have reached it. How many unvirtuous things have been done in the name of virtue! How often has even genuine virtue been carried out of the medium that was its natural home into an extreme that stamped on it the lin'eaments of vice to the eyes of every one except of him who still ruthlessly¹ inflicted it upon the world. These dangers that I have hinted at are at the bottom of the suspicion, not to say the dislike, that ordinary people have for some unquestionably great virtues.

10. The cardinal virtues themselves would scarcely secure full appreciation from a mob. Prudence, justice, fortitude,

¹ Ruth'less ly, without pity.

temperance, exact in their exercise such exemptions from the passions by which average men are swayed, that average men come to believe that those who practice them must be altogether passionless; and the mob feels, and in this feels justly, that the thoroughly passionless man is a moral monster, a sort of solvent acid, poured upon all the bonds that keep men together, hand in hand and heart to heart. Poor mob, having experience only of the petty objects that are whirled like straws, and as valueless as straws, in the gusts of its own petty passions, has no notion of the passion for heroic virtue that carries poor human nature to the flood-tide of purpose and achievement.

III.

59. ABOUT IMPARTIALITY.

PART SECOND.

BUT, in truth, most of the impartiality that one sees is of the spurious sort, and it will be to good purpose to examine some specimens both of impartiality and its opposite, that will let in some light on the great root motives.

2. There is, then, the intellectual impartiality that I have sometimes met amongst men intellectually clever, but not intellectually great. They are so impartial that they never decide. Keen enough, and glistening, they are blades that lend themselves to other hands for good or evil, and need other hands to find a use for them. They seem to see every side of every question, every weak place in every argument. The drawback is that there is no argument, *pro* or *con*, without its weak place. A hundred roads to the desired goal stretch out before them; but every road is lined with enemies, which duller-sighted men would not have seen, and more courageous men would have despised. They sink into mere expositors, whose sole function it becomes to state a question they can not or dare not answer, for those who are able and not afraid to answer it. These latter suck them like an orange, and throw them aside like the rind.

3. I dare say the life of such an intellectual fribble¹ is not without its pleasures. The office of critical expositor of other people's plans has delights of its own. It is amusing, if nothing higher, to have, as by universal consent, a free pass from one camp to another, half busybody, half peacemaker. Only, the disadvantage is, that when real fighting begins, they are hustled aside as useless or obstructive; and no matter which side wins the battle, there is for them no laurel wreath, for there is no side of which they did not partly prophesy the failure.

4. Another drawback is that with a wealth of endowment, that to a superficial observer would have given certain earnest² of great achievement, they never achieve anything. Intellectually impotent, they leave behind them no intellectual children for the use or solace of mankind. It is no wonder that such impartiality is not popular. Men have a passion for doing something or seeing something done. Many a folly and many a fault will they forgive to a real worker who has helped on a cause ever so little; but the man who weighs and balances, throws up objection and answer as a juggler throws up balls, such a one the world knows will never make men his debtors for a stroke of real work.

5. Just as little wonder that this manner of impartiality should soon cease to be respectable. In most cases it springs rather from a defect of nature than from fulness of intellectual light. It is usually the attribute of men who, having a great deal of what the world calls "head," have, withal, very little "heart," and whose courage is of the sort that "oozes out at the fingers' ends." They can not give a decision on any side because they do not care enough about any side to think it worth while to risk a decision in its favor.

6. It is very much the same in the domain of morals. But impartiality in moral judgments often deserves rather the name of indifference. This indifference is of two sorts—the indifference of easy-going, good-natured people, who tolerate every one and every thing, so long as toleration does not involve any degree of self-sacrifice; and the indifference of the man of

¹ **Frib'ble**, a frivolous, trifling, contemptible person. token of earnest or serious purpose to fulfil a promise or discharge an obligation.

² **Ear'nest**, a pledge given as a

acid nature and bilious temperament, who, in every difference between men, has a keen eye for the faults that are proverbially declared to be discoverable on both sides of every dispute. The former praise every one all round; the latter censure all sides indifferently.

7. But, besides, there are two classes of good people, the negatively good and the positively good. There are those who are so scrupulously afraid of doing wrong that they seldom venture to do anything, and those who are never satisfied except when engaged in action. The former, disliking intensely to commit themselves, will present at first sight a greater appearance of impartiality than the others; but second sight may not tend to confirm such a conclusion. The others have to live in a keener air and to deal with rougher elements. The roughness gets into their tongues and into their temper, and their moral judgments rarely fail in decisiveness, or lack the definite outline which incisive¹ speech can impart to the raw material of human judgments.

8. The hardest work in the world is done by men whose brains are constructed on so simple a plan that they can house only one idē'a at a time. They are unembarrassed by those large intellectual possessions that in crises² of action often turn into incumbrances. Whatever may be said of a long campaign, it is certain that in a riot those are apt to be boldest who have little or nothing to lose. Property of all sorts is everywhere prone to timidity. These men of whom I speak have not the slightest hesitation in running their heads against stone walls, logical or other; and the marvel is their heads are so thick that they never seem to feel the shock of the collision. Inconsistency, that is the bugbear of sensitive people, gives them no trouble, for however largely it may appear in their conduct or their opinions, they are quite unaware of its existence.

9. They live in the present, and have very little care and very little memory for what they said or thought yesterday or the day before. And as the world's memory is almost equally short, their vehemence about anything this week is not discountenanced by their equal vehemence the week before about

¹ **In cī'sive**, sharp; sarcastic; ² **Crises** (krī'sēz), decisive moments; turning points.

something not only different, but incompatible. Assuredly, these men are not impartial, except, perhaps, in the long run. They are always vehement partisans¹ of their own present views. But I say "in the long run," because in the summing up of their career, it may be found that practically they have earned a claim to impartiality from the fact that there was scarcely any party to which, at any rate constructively,² they did not, from time to time, give their support.

10. Another class, far removed from impartiality, is made up of the hot-headed, who make a personal matter of their opinions. Their opinions are themselves, and these selves they long to impose upon a submissive world, of course for the world's own good. But the world is not submissive, and, their counsels rejected, they lose patience, and pull down the barriers of bitter speech. They are almost invariably well-meaning, but it is by well-meaning men that a great deal of hardship has been inflicted upon their neighbors.

11. Let a man mean well for himself by all means. I for one shall never quarrel with him. But when he begins to mean well for *me*, and to fit, and, if it will not fit, as usually it will not, to force his meaning on my life, then I should wish to get as quickly as possible out of the sphere of his good intentions. Such a man has constant hope of making earth a paradise, and a sort of sub-hope, which he would scarcely acknowledge, that in the middle of that paradise will be erected a huge trophy bearing the name and keeping the fame of him—the reformer. But he finds that after all his efforts things go on very much the same. Earth refuses to become a paradise, men remain men—not angels yet—and our friend, having lost his pains, loses his temper. His whole mental history has been told in the jingle—"little pot, soon hot."

12. I think it is a bad thing when impartiality hardens into a state. True impartiality is shown in single instances and individual judgments; but when the instance has been reviewed, and the judgment formed, a man must cease to be impartial. How can he be impartial with regard to the stan-

¹ Par'ti san, one unreasonably devoted to his own party or individual interest. ² Con strūc'tive ly, by way of construction or interpretation; by fair inference.

dard of his judgment without forfeiting his self-respect and the respect of others? There is a right and wrong in everything, and an ascertainable¹ right and wrong in most things, and once having ascertained, impartiality—the refusing to take a side—is either indifference or cowardice.

13. I find that impartiality is apt to harden into a state amongst a class of men for whom the world has great respect and for whom most people have nothing but good words—I mean "the moderate men." A moderate man is constitutionally timid, and consequently looks on conservatism² as an essential feature in the right order of things. He will not willingly leave the old paths; but if a truculent³ passer-by threatens to push him into the gutter, he will not fight even for the old path he loves so well. I suppose this timidity is one of those admirable devices by which nature hinders even the most inveterate⁴ conservatism from being utterly destructive of progress.

14. The moderate man has no strong opinions, except, indeed (and the exception is an important one), a strong opinion that all other strong opinions are dangerous to the peace of the world; something like moral dynamite, that is, highly undesirable, especially in one's immediate neighborhood. He is usually kind-hearted, for kindness is easier than severity, and benevolence is oil on troubled waters. But in difficult circumstances he fails to exhibit the courage of his friendships. He will not fight for any one. Somehow I think these moderate men are less frequently happy than the world imagines. It is the old story of the old man and his ass. A moderate man finds, after a long lifetime of striving to please everybody, that nobody is in the least pleased, and that the utmost he has to expect, even from his best wishers, is the "charity of silence." Besides, his peace is broken in another way, without mention of which this slight sketch of him would be incomplete. I never met a moderate man who did not seem perpetually

¹ As cer tāin' a ble, capable of being known with certainty. ³ Tru'cu lent, of fierce, ferocious aspect.

² Con serv'a tism, the disposition to preserve what is established; opposition to change. ⁴ In vēt'e rate, firmly established by long continuance.

arraigning himself, as it were, before an imaginary tribunal, much more concerned about the justification of his acts than about their quality or consequences. His epitaph may be written by a variation of that witty one of Rochester on Charles the Second: "*Here lies our moderate man, who never did anything foolish, nor anything great.*"

From "*Lectures by a Certain Professor.*"

IV.

60. KING ROBERT OF SICILY.

ROBERT of Sicily, brother of Pope Urbane
And Valmond, Emperor of Allemaine,
Appareled in magnificent attire,
With retinue of many a knight and squire,
On St. John's eve, at Vespers proudly sat,
And heard the priests chant the Magnificat.
And as he listened, o'er and o'er again,
Repeated, like a burden or refrain,
He caught the words, "*Deposuit potentes
De sede, et exaltavit humiles;*"
And slowly lifting up his kingly head,
He to a learnèd clerk beside him said,
"What mean these words?" The clerk made answer meet,
"He has put down the mighty from their seat,
And has exalted them of low degree."
Thereat King Robert muttered scornfully,
"Tis well that such seditious words are sung
Only by priests and in the Latin tongue;
For unto priests and people be it known,
There is no power can push me from my throne!"
And leaning back, he yawned and fell asleep,
Lulled by the chant monotonous and deep.

2. When he awoke, it was already night;
The church was empty, and there was no light,
Save where the lamps, that glimmered few and faint,
Lighted a little space before some saint.
He started from his seat and gazed around,
But saw no living thing and heard no sound.

He groped toward the door, but it was locked;
He cried aloud, and listened, and then knocked,
And uttered awful threatenings and complaints,
And imprecations upon men and saints.
The sounds re-echoed from the roof and walls
As if dead priests were laughing in their stalls.
At length the sexton, hearing from without
The tumult of the knocking and the shout,
And thinking thieves were in the house of prayer,
Came with his lantern, asking, "Who is there?"
Half choked with rage, King Robert fiercely said,
"Open: 'tis I, the king! Art thou afraid?"
The frightened sexton, muttering with a curse,
"This is some drunken vagabond, or worse!"
Turned the great key and flung the portal wide;
A man rushed by him at a single stride,
Haggard, half naked, without hat or cloak,
Who neither turned, nor looked at him, nor spoke,
But leaped into the blackness of the night,
And vanished like a spectre from his sight.

3. Robert of Sicily, brother of Pope Urbane
And Valmond, Emperor of Allemaine,
Despoiled of his magnificent attire,
Bareheaded, breathless, and besprent with mire,
With sense of wrong, and outrage desperate,
Strode on, and thundered at the palace gate:
Rushed through the court-yard, thrusting in his rage
To right and left each seneschal¹ and page,
And hurried up the broad and sounding stair,
His white face ghastly in the torches' glare;
From hall to hall he passed with breathless speed.
Voices and cries he heard, but did not heed;
Until at last he reached the banquet-room,
Blazing with light and breathing with perfume.
4. There on the dais sat another king,
Wearing his robes, his crown, his signet-ring,

¹ Sen'eschal, an officer in the who has the superintendence of houses of princes and dignitaries, feasts and domestic ceremonies.