# PHASES OF THOUGHT AND CRITICISM

## CHAPTER I.

### FOURFOLD ACTIVITY OF THE SOUL.

1. The human soul is the informing principle of the human body; it is one and simple — a monad without quantity or extension — as all spiritual substances are one, simple and unextended; incomplete in itself, inasmuch as it must needs be united to the body in order that it may fully exercise many of its functions; immaterial, and therefore void of inertness; active in its operations from the first moment of its existence. According to the mode of the soul's action do we speak of it as having this faculty or that corresponding to the function which it performs. Some faculties are intrinsic to the soul itself, as reason; others, as the imagination, are dependent upon the union of soul and body.

2. Although the essence of the soul is not the immediate principle of its operations, and although its faculties are distinct from its essence, being in themselves certain properties thereof, it is still the same soul, one and undivided, that thinks and

feels, that wills and moves and is moved. It is still the same conscious personality, that amid ever-shifting changes can always recognize its own identity in the formula *I am I*. When we say that the soul has certain faculties, we simply mean that it exercises certain modes of action by placing itself in certain definite relations with certain objects of thought.

3. Faculties of the soul are therefore the soul itself operating upon particular lines of action, and each faculty becomes more or less developed in proportion to the degree of activity exercised by the soul in some one or other direction. Let us consider some of the soul's activities. Now it is the soul analyzing, comparing, inferring, coördinating, passing from known principles to the discovery of unknown truths; viewed in this relation, the soul is called Reason, and, under certain aspects, the Illative Sense.[1] Now it is the soul deciding this to be a good act, and feeling bound to perform it, or thinking that other to be bad, and feeling bound to avoid it; so acting, it is called the Moral Sense. Again, it is the soul moved to pity by the pathos of a scene painted on the canvas or described in the poem; as the subject of this emotion it is called the Æsthetic Sense. Finally, it is the soul leaving the noise and distraction of the outside world, entering into itself and realizing

[1] "This power of judging about truth and error in concrete matters, I call the Illative Sense." . . . "The Illative Sense has its exercise in the starting-points as well as in the final results of thought." Cardinal Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, chap. ix. This chapter is an important contribution to the philosophy of thought.



its own misery and weakness, and seeking the help and strength which it finds not in itself, where alone help and strength are to be found, in the God from whom it comes and on whom it depends; in this highest and noblest action it is called the Spiritual Sense.

4. The Reason is nourished by intellectual truth; the Moral Sense is strengthened by the continuous choosing of right-doing over wrong-doing; the Æsthetic Sense is cultivated by the correcting and refining of taste for things beautiful and sublime; the Spiritual Sense is fostered by the spirit of piety and devotion. This fourfold activity of the soul may be said to cover the whole of the soul's operations. Over all, and the root and principle of all, giving life and being, weight and measure and moral worth to all, is the soul's own determining power, which we call the Will.

5. In the harmonious development of all four activities is the complete culture of the soul to be effected. The exclusive exercise of any one activity is detrimental to the rest. The exclusive exercise of the Reason dwarfs the other functions of the soul. It dries up all taste for art and letters and starves out the spirit of piety and devotion. In the constant development of the Æsthetic Sense, one may refine the organs of sense and cultivate taste and sensibility, but if it is done to the exclusion of rigid reasoning and the superior emotions of the soul, it degenerates into sentimentalism and corruption of heart. So also with exclusive Pietism; it narrows the

range of thought, fosters the spirit of bigotry and dogmatism, and makes man either an extravagant dreamer or an extreme fanatic. Only when truth and goodness walk hand in hand, and the heart grows apace with the intellect, does the soul develop into strong healthy action.

6. Again, truth is the object of Reason; goodness, the object of the Moral Sense; beauty, whether in the physical, moral, or intellectual order, the object of the Æsthetic Sense. Herein I include as a truth knowable by the light of reason, the fact first and supreme above all other facts, that there is a God.[1] Now, the Spiritual Sense takes in all the truth, goodness, and beauty of both the natural and revealed orders, and views them in the light of Faith. The same intellectual light still glows, but added thereto is, so to speak, the splendor of God's countenance.[2]

7. This fourfold activity of the soul does not correspond to any four special faculties. It represents rather four distinct fields upon which all the faculties operate. But we are not here concerned with the intrinsic nature of our respective faculties. We leave that to the psychologist. We will consider those faculties rather in their operations and in their practical applications. And first, let us study that process of the mind in which the Illative Sense is included, and which is commonly called thinking.

[1] *Constitutio Dogmatica de Fide Catholica*, can. ii. 1.

[2] Illuminet vultum suum super nos. Psalm lxvi. 2.

## CHAPTER II.

### ON THINKING.

#### I.

1. We read, we converse, we write, we argue, we discuss men and measures; but not to the same extent do we think aright. Let us then seek to determine what is right thinking. It is in the workings of daily life to still the voices of reverie and sentiment and the inclinations of nature, and listen to the language of reason; it is to analyze and discriminate; it is to ask the why and wherefore of things, to estimate them at their real worth, and to give them their proper names; it is to distinguish between what is of opinion and what of speculation — what of reason and inference, and what of fancy and imagination — how much is to be considered certain and how much merely probable; it is to give the true and the false their real values; it is to lay down a clearly defined line between what is of true science and what of surmise and conjecture; it is to know where one's knowledge ends and where one's ignorance begins; above all, it is to arrive at that condition of mind in which one can determine how and when to express what one knows, and in which one performs the more difficult feat of abstaining from speaking about

that of which one knows nothing. This it is to think. Need one be any longer surprised that it is an unknown science to all but the few thoughtful, well-disciplined minds that may be called the educators of the world?

2. Withal, Thought is a most important element in our acting. Weigh its importance for a moment. There is no life without action. Now the soul's activity consists in, and is determined by, its thought. We first feel and think; afterwards we will; then follow action and expression, which are the outward evidence of our inmost living. So that our expressions, our actions, our very lives are ours in proportion as they are the outcome of our own thinking and our own resolve, and not of the thinking and the resolve of others. Not indeed that we all are not in some sense the creatures of circumstance. But though influenced by the external world — though the thoughts and actions of others necessarily condition our own thinking and acting — still, as the plant transforms into its sap the food it draws from the earth in which it is rooted, even thus should the thought we acquire, the action we imitate, the impulse we receive, be so assimilated into our own nature and personality that they become bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of our thinking soul and our moral character.

## II.

1. It follows that our duties as thinking, rational beings are not compatible with that mental lethargy



in which we all of us are disposed to live. It is so much easier for us to remember and repeat than to think, that the large majority of us leave the thinking to a few and abide by the word of the hour they choose to give us. We are living in an atmosphere of routine knowledge and of a routine manner of imparting that knowledge; and both the knowledge and the manner are not infrequently accepted without questioning their intrinsic worth, or their correctness, or their fitness for time and place. The professor is under the influence of this spirit. In the lecture-room he is often content with retailing to his class some view of his subject which he adopts from a certain book without taking pains to inquire into its correctness; the author of that book may have taken it on the same credit from some prior work, and thus the opinion passes down from generation to generation — unsuspected, unchallenged. Does it follow that the opinion is correct? By no means. An inquiring mind may one morning awaken to the absurdity of what generations have handed down as a truth not to be gainsaid. Witness the exploded theories still to be found in text-books on chemistry and physics; or see the hold that erroneously constructed grammars of the English language continue to have upon our educational prejudices; or in history, note the gravity with which our manuals repeat the myths of Semiramis and Ninias, of Romulus and Remus, of Hengist and Horsa.

2. Passing beyond the class-room to the various phases of thought among the reading public, we

find the same spirit. Every school of philosophy has its disciples who repeat the sayings of their master with implicit confidence, without ever stopping to question the principles from which those sayings arise or the results to which they lead. Which of them possesses the truth? Is it Hegel or is it Schopenhauer? Is it Herbert Spencer or is it Mill? If we are to believe their respective admirers, each of them holds the secret of all things in heaven and on earth — the clue to all difficulties — the solution to the world-riddle. But when we place their principles side by side we find in them contradiction enough to create a chaos, and we are led to conclude that in many instances these systems are accepted not so much for truth's sake as because they are the intellectual fashions of the day. So it is with schools of criticism in art and literature. Ruskin has talked thousands into a factitious taste that pretends to admire beauties to be found nowhere outside of the glamour his fervid imagination has thrown around objects of art. Paint a daub and call it a Turner and forthwith these critics will trace in it strokes of genius. Think you they understand the real principles of art-criticism? And fares it any better with the Wordsworthian who finds praise for Wordsworth's baldest and prosiest lines, or with the Shelleyite who sees a mystic meaning in Shelley's most meaningless rhapsodies, or with the Browningite who persists in finding in Browning's poems meanings that the poet himself never put into them, and which he even disavowed? The



education of all such schools, when made exclusive, is one-sided, narrow, content with no other proof than a prejudice. True criticism, be it that of literature or of art, is all-embracing.

3. Turning to politics, we find that same groove-spirit. Men repeat the cant of the hour glibly, smoothly, often eloquently, as innocent of what it all means as the child not yet arrived at the use of reason. They have no further cause for belonging to one party rather than to another than that they happen to find themselves there. It was the party to which their fathers belonged, and is therefore good enough for them. But as to seeking the rational grounds on which their political creed is constructed, or the principles that give existence to their party, such things never occurred to them. Grounds and principles were not included in the shibboleth of the hour that they took up and repeated. And so they go on, year after year, in a well-worn routine of political thought, till a crisis comes upon them, and they are led to think, and mayhap they find that they have been half their lives — and all from want of real thought — advocating a policy unsound in its nature, disastrous in its results, and opposed to their own inner convictions. That man has yet to learn the use of his reason, who, in all matters based upon individual opinion, whether they be of politics or religion, has never challenged and weighed and measured the principles upon which his opinions are based.

4. The uneducated classes cannot make use of their reason in this searching manner; it may be

as well for them that it is so; but the educated man owes it to the reason with which he has been endowed — to his friends and neighbors who look to him for a guiding word — as a sacred duty for which he will have to render an account to his Maker, so to train and discipline his thoughts that he shall acquire a habit of thinking and judging with discrimination. When a young man has been so favored by Providence as to be enabled to spend several years in acquiring a thorough education, surrounded by everything calculated to inspire him with a love for study and a thoughtful habit of mind, breathing an intellectual atmosphere that becomes an essential part of his thinking, he thereby assumes a great responsibility. If he has been so privileged, it is in view of his making use of the opportunities placed at his disposal, not for himself alone, but for his less fortunate neighbor as well. If he has been favored with a more brilliant light, it is with intent to illumine the dark places around. If education has been freely lavished upon him, it is in order that in turn he may freely lavish it upon the wide circle over which he is destined to have influence. Therefore it cannot be too solemnly impressed upon those enjoying this privilege to fit themselves in all earnestness, both morally and intellectually, to do the good that it is given them to do. It is well that we all of us hold an exalted opinion of the real dignity of our respective positions in life. To the student whom these pages reach I would say: Gather up with care the treasures of knowledge and wisdom that lie strewn about



you. Guard them with a jealous eye. See that they be not sullied either by the daubing of error or the turpitude of vice. Cherish them as a heaven-sent patrimony by the right use and investment of which you are to purchase your title to eternal glory. All else may pass away, but the wisdom of well-digested knowledge and methodical thought remains through sunshine and storm, making the sunshine more beautiful and the storm less severe.

5. There is some truth in these remarks of the eccentric Thoreau: "It is foolish for a man to accumulate material wealth chiefly, houses and lands. Our stock in life, our real estate, is that amount of thought which we have had, which we have thought out. The ground we have thus created is forever pasturage for our thoughts. I fall back on to visions which I have had. What else adds to my possessions and makes me rich in all lands? If you have ever done any work with those finest tools, the Imagination and Fancy and Reason, it is a new creation, independent of the world, and a possession forever. You have laid up something against a rainy day. You have to that extent cleared the wilderness."[1] But I would have you enjoy all this intellectual wealth, not simply for its own sake and in a spirit of self-sufficiency and self-contentment, as the New England hermit teaches. Thoreau is only a human mole. He lives in the earth, and his thoughts and aspirations are of the earth, earthy. He ignores the clear sky of a spiritual world and the brilliant sunshine of a divine

[1] *Journal*, May 1, 1857.

revelation. It is under this sky and in this sunlight I would have you learn how to think. Confine not your thoughts in the narrow cell of a petty prejudice, or the slough of indolence, or the contracted limits of comfort and ease, when you can roam through the free air of the Infinite. Therefore, discipline your minds. Be not too credulous. There is a wise as well as a foolish skepticism. Science has her superstitions, and her romancings are as unreal and shadowy as those of the most ephemeral literature. Accustom yourselves to the habit of weighing carefully all you read or hear. Be not carried away by every novelty. Learn to sift the chaff from the grain. Remember that he is not the most learned man who has read the greatest number of books. Only in proportion as you digest and assimilate to your own thoughts what you read do you acquire genuine knowledge. Out of the world's thousand ideas make a single one your own, and I assure you that you will have made more intellectual progress than if you were able to repeat Homer or Milton from memory.

## CHAPTER III.

### EMERSON AND NEWMAN AS TYPES.

### I.

1. THAT we may all the better understand the nature and scope of sound thinking, let us consider two typical thinkers of recent days, dwelling in different hemispheres of our globe, standing at opposite poles of human thought, and at the same time recognized masters of their own language. They both possessed this in common, that each was retiring, sensitive, shrinking from mere notoriety, not over-anxious to speak, and speaking only when each had something to say. They were loved in life, and in death their memories are revered by all who knew them; they are still admired by thousands and still misunderstood by thousands more.

2. One of these thinkers is Ralph Waldo Emerson. His was a mind like the Æolian harp. It was awake to the most delicate impressions, and at every breath of thought it gave out a music all its own. His sympathies with Nature were so strong, so intense, so real, that they seemed to take root with the plant, to infuse themselves into the brute creation, and to think and act with his fellow-man. His reading was broad. From the East and from