

Proverbs and Their Lessons

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PREFACE
TO
THE FIRST EDITION.

THE Lectures here published were never delivered as a complete course, but only one here and two there, as little by little the materials grew under my hands; yet so that very much the larger part of what is contained in this volume has been at one time or another actually delivered. I publish them, because no one of the works on Proverbs which I know is exactly that book for all readers which I could have wished to see. Either they include matter which cannot be fitly placed before all—or they address themselves to the scholar alone, or if not so, are at any rate inaccessible to the mere English reader—or they contain bare lists of proverbs, with no endeavour to compare, illustrate, and explain them—or if they seek to

explain, yet they do it without attempting to sound the depths, or measure the real significance, of that they undertake to unfold. From these or other causes it has come to pass, that with a multitude of books, many of them admirable, on a subject so popular, there is no single one which is frequent in the hands of men. I will not deny that, with all the slightness and shortcomings of my own, I have still hoped to supply, at least for the present, this deficiency.

ITCHENSTOKE: December 13, 1857.

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PROVERBS AND THEIR LESSONS

LECTURE I.

THE FORM AND DEFINITION OF A PROVERB.

IT may very well be that proverbs have never attracted from us the notice they deserve; and thus it may easily come to pass that, when invited to bestow even a brief attention on them, we are in doubt whether they will repay our pains. We think of them but as sayings on the lips of the multitude; not a few of them have been familiar to us as far back as we can remember; they have been often employed by ourselves, or in our hearing, on slight and trivial occasions: and thus, however one or another may have taken our fancy, we yet have remained blind in the main to the wit, wisdom, and imagination, of which they are full; and very little aware of the amusement, instruction, insight into matters the most important, which they are capable of yielding. Unless too we have devoted a certain attention to the subject, we shall be utterly unconscious how little those more familiar ones, which are frequent on the lips of men,

2 Form and Definition of a Proverb, LECT.

exhaust the treasure of our native proverbs; how many and what excellent ones remain behind, having now for the most part fallen out of use and of sight; or what riches in like kind other nations possess, and are prepared to contribute to the common stock. We shall not so much as suspect the manifold points of interest from which our own by themselves, and our own brought into comparison with those of other nations, may be regarded.

And yet there is much to induce us to reconsider our judgment, should we be, thus tempted to slight them, and to count them not merely trite, but trivial and unworthy of a serious regard. The fact that they please the people, and have pleased them for ages,—that they possess so vigorous a principle of life, as to have maintained, many of them, their ground, ever-new and ever young, through all the centuries of a nation's existence,—nay, that proverbs not a few have pleased not one nation only, but many, so that they have made themselves a home in lands the most different,—and further, that they have, not a few of them, come down to us from remotest antiquity; borne safely upon the waters of that great stream of, time, which has swallowed so much beneath its waves,—all this, I think, may well make us pause, should we be disposed to turn away from them with indifference or disdain.

And then further, there is this to be considered, that some of the greatest poets, the profoundest philosophers, the most learned scholars, the most genial writers in every kind, have delighted in them, have made large and frequent use of them, have bestowed infinite labour on the gathering and eluci-

dating of them. In a fastidious age, indeed, and one of false refinement, they may go nearly or quite out of use among the so-called upper classes. 'No gentleman,' says Lord Chesterfield, or 'no man of fashion,' as I think is his exact phrase, 'ever uses a proverb.'¹ And with, how fine a touch of nature Shakespeare makes Coriolanus, the man who, with all his greatness, is entirely devoid of all sympathy for the people, to utter his scorn of them in scorn of their proverbs, and their frequent employment of these:

'Hang 'em!

They said they were an hungry, sighed forth proverbs;—
That, *hunger broke stone walls*: that, *dogs must eat*;
That, *meat was made for mouths*; that, *the gods sent not
Corn for the rich men only*;--with these shreds
They vented their complainings.'²

But that they have been always dear to the true intellectual aristocracy of a nation, there is abundant evidence to prove. Take but these three lames in evidence, which though few, are in themselves a host. Aristotle made a collection of proverbs; nor did he count that he was herein doing aught unworthy of his high reputation, howsoever some of his adversaries may afterwards have made of this fact an imputation against him. He is said to have been the first collector of them, though many afterwards followed in the same path.³ Shakespeare loves them so well,

¹ A similar contempt of them speaks out in the antithesis of the French Jesuit, Bouhours: Les proverbes sont les sentences du peuple, et les sentences sont les proverbes des honnetes gens.

² *Coriolanus*, Act I. Sc. I.

³ Nopitsch, in his *Literature of Proverbs*, Nuremberg, 1833,

that besides often citing them, and scattering innumerable covert allusions, rapid side glances at them, which we are in much danger of missing unless at home in the proverbs of England, several of his plays, as *Measure for Measure*, *All's well that ends well*, have popular proverbs for their titles. And Cervantes, a name only inferior to Shakespeare, has made very plain the affection with which he regarded them. Every reader of *Don Quixote* will remember his squire, who can hardly open his mouth but there drop from it almost as many proverbs as phrases. I might name others who have held the proverb in honour—men who though they may not attain to these first three, are yet deservedly accounted great; as Plautus, the most genial of Latin poets, Rabelais and Montaigne, the two most original of French authors while Chaucer literally swarms with allusions, nearer or more remote, to the proverbs current in his day. How often too Fuller, whom Coleridge has styled the wittiest of writers, justifies this praise in his witty employment of some old proverb: and no reader can thoroughly understand and enjoy *Hudibras*, none but will miss a multitude of its keenest allusions, who is not thoroughly familiar with the proverbial literature of England.

Nor is this all; we may with reverence adduce quite another name than any of these, the Lord Himself, as condescending to employ such proverbs as He found current among his people. Thus, on the occasion of his first open appearance in the syna-

enumerates nearly two thousand collections, small and great, of these, which have been published.

gogue of Nazareth, He refers to the proverb, *Physician, heal thyself* (Luke iv. 23), as one which his hearers will perhaps bring forward against Himself; and again presently to another, *A prophet is not without honour but in his own country*, as attested in his own history; and at the well of Sychar He declares, 'Herein is that saying,' or that proverb, 'true, *One soweth and another reapeth*' (John iv. 37). But he is much more than an employer of other men's proverbs; He is a maker of his own. As all forms of human composition find their archetypes and their highest realization in Scripture, as there is no tragedy like Job, no pastoral like Ruth, no lyric melodies like the Psalms, so we should affirm no proverbs like those of Solomon, were it not that 'a greater than Solomon' has drawn out of the rich treasure-house of the Eternal Wisdom a series of proverbs more costly still. For indeed how much of our Lord's teaching, especially as recorded in the three earlier Evangelists, is thrown into this form; and how many of his words have in this shape passed over as 'faithful sayings' to live upon the lips of men; and so doing, have fulfilled a necessary condition of the proverb, whereof there will be presently occasion to speak. But I urge this testimony no further,--a testimony too august to be lightly used, or employed merely to swell the testimonies of men; least of all where they are men of such 'uncircumcised lips' as, with all their genius, were more than one of those just named. Proofs enough there are everywhere that here is a subject, which men whose examples should go far, whose judgments must weigh much with us, have counted worthy of their most serious attention.

And we too ourselves, as I doubt not, after a little acquaintance with the literature of proverbs, shall be ready to set our own seal to the conclusions of wiser men that have preceded us here. For, indeed, what a body of popular good sense and good feeling is contained in the better, which is also the more numerous, class of proverbs. What a sense of natural equity, what a spirit of kindness breathes out from many of them; what prudent rules for the management of life, what shrewd wisdom which though not of this world, is most truly for it; what frugality, what patience, what perseverance, what manly independence, are continually inculcated by them. How fine a knowledge of the human heart do many of them display; what useful, and not always obvious, hints do they offer on many most important points, as on the choice of companions, the bringing up of children, the bearing of prosperity and adversity, the restraint of immoderate desires. And they take a yet higher range than this; they have their ethics, their theology; they contemplate man in his highest relations of all, as man with his fellow man, and man with his Maker. Let their utterances on these points be correct or not, and I am very far from affirming that they are always correct, the student of humanity, he who being a man, counts nothing human to be alien to him, can never, without wilfully foregoing an important document, and one which would have helped him often in his studies, altogether neglect or pass them by.

But what, it may be asked before we proceed further, is a proverb? Few things are harder than a definition. While on the one hand there is gene-

rally no easier task than to detect a fault or flaw in the definitions of those who have gone before us, nothing on the other is more difficult than to propose one of our own, which shall not also present a vulnerable side. Some one has said that these three things go to the constituting of a proverb, *shortness*, *sense*, and *salt*. In brief pointed utterances like this which I have just cited, the second of the qualities enumerated, namely *sense*, is sometimes sacrificed to alliteration. I would not affirm that it is so here: for the words are not ill spoken, though they are very far from satisfying the rigorous requirements of a definition, as will be seen when we have considered what the writer intended by his three *esses*, which it is not hard to understand. The proverb, he says, must have *shortness*; it must be succinct, utterable in a breath. It must have *sense*, not being, that is, the mere small talk of conversation, slight and trivial, which deserves to perish, and which does perish as soon as born, no one taking the trouble to keep it alive. It must have *salt*, that is, besides its good sense, it must have point and pungency, and, so to say, a barb which shall not suffer it to drop lightly from the memory.¹ Yet, regarded as a definition, this of the triple *s* fails; it errs alike in defect and in excess.

¹ Compare with this Martial's happy epigram upon epigrams, in which everything runs exactly parallel to that which has been said above :

'Omne epigramma sit instar apis; sit aculeus illi,
Sint sua mella, sit et corporis exigui;'

which may be indifferently rendered thus:

'Three things must epigrams, like bees, have all—
Its sting, its honey, and its body small.'

Thus, in demanding shortness, it errs in excess. It is indeed quite certain that a good proverb will be short, as short, that is, as compatible with the full and forcible conveying of that which it intends. Brevity, 'the soul of wit,' will be eminently the soul of a proverb's wit; it will contain, according to Fuller's definition, 'much matter decocted into few words.' Oftentimes it will consist of two, three, or four, and these sometimes monosyllabic, words. Thus *Extremes meet*;—*Right wrongs no man*;—*Wrong never comes right*;—*Old sins breed new sores*;—*Forewarned, forearmed*;—with a thousand more.¹ But still shortness is only a relative term, and it would be more accurate to say that a proverb must be concise, cut down, that is, to the fewest possible words; condensed, quintessential wisdom.² But that, if only it fulfil this condition of being as short as possible, it need not be absolutely very short, there are sufficient examples to prove. Thus Freytag has admitted the following, which indeed hovers on the confines of the fable, into his great collection of Arabic proverbs: *They said to the camel-bird, [i.e., the ostrich,] 'Carry;' it answered, 'I cannot, for I am a bird.'* *They said,*

¹ The shortest proverb which I know in the world is this German: *Voll, toll*; which sets out very well the connexion between fulness and folly, pride and abundance of bread. In that seeking of extreme brevity noted above, they sometimes become exceedingly elliptical (although this is the case more with the ancient than with the modern), so much so as to omit even the vital element of the sentence, the verb. Thus: *Χρήματα ἄνηρ*;—*Sus Minervam*;—*Fures clamorem*;—*Meretrix pudicam*;—*Amantes amentes*.

² This is what Aristotle means ascribing *συντομία*—which in another place he opposes to the *ὄγκος λέξεως*—to it.

'Fly;' it answered, 'I cannot, for I am a camel.' This could not be shorter, yet, as compared with the greater number of proverbs, is not short.¹ Even so the sense and the salt, which are ascribed to the proverb as other necessary conditions, can hardly be said to be such; seeing that flat, saltless proverbs, though comparatively rare, there certainly are in abundance; while yet, be it remembered, we are not considering now what are the ornaments of a good proverb, but the essential marks of all.

And then moreover the definition just given errs in defect; for it has plainly omitted one quality of the proverb, and that the most essential of all, and indeed almost the only essential—I mean *popularity*, acceptance and adoption on the part of the people. Without this popularity, without these suffrages and this consent of the many, no saying, however brief, however wise, however seasoned with salt, however worthy on all these accounts to have become a proverb, however fulfilling, all other its conditions, can yet be esteemed as such. This popularity, omitted in that enumeration of the essential notes of the proverb, is yet the only note whose presence is absolutely necessary, whose absence is fatal to the claims of any saying to be regarded as such.

Those, however, who have occupied themselves

¹ Let serve for further proof this eminently witty old German proverb, which, despite its apparent length, has not forfeited its character as such. I shall prefer to leave it in the original; Man spricht, an viererlei Leuten ist Mangel auf Erden: an Pfaffen, sonst durfte einer nit 6 bis 7 Pfrunden; an Adelichen, sonst wollte nit jeder Bauer ein Junker sein; an Huren, sonst wurden die Handwerk Eheweiber and Nunnen nit trieben; an Juden, sonst wurden Christen nit wuchern.

with the making of collections of proverbs have sometimes failed to realize this to themselves with sufficient clearness, or at any rate have not kept it always before them. It has thus come to pass, that many collections include whatever brief sayings their gatherers have anywhere met, which to them have appeared keenly, or wisely, or wittily spoken;¹ while yet a multitude of these have never received their adoption into the great family of proverbs, or their rights of citizenship therein: and inasmuch as they have never passed into general recognition and currency, have no claim to this title, however just a claim they may have on other grounds to our admiration and honour. For instance, this word of Goethe's, 'A man need not be an architect to live in a house,' seems to me to have every essential of a proverb, saving only that it has not passed over upon the lips of men. It is a saying of manifold application; an universal law is knit up in a particular example; I mean that gracious law in the distribution of blessing, which does not limit our use and enjoyment of things by our understanding of them, but continually makes

¹ When Erasmus, after discussing and rejecting the definitions of those who had gone before him, himself defines the proverb thus, *Celebre dictum, scita quapiam novitate insigne*, it appears to me that he has not escaped the fault which he has blamed in others—that, namely, of confounding the accidental adjuncts of a good proverb with the necessary conditions of every proverb. In rigour the whole second clause of the definition should be dismissed, and *Celebre dictum* alone remain. Better Eifelein (*Sprichwörter des Deutschen Volkes*, Friburg, 1840, p. x): Das Sprichwort ist ein mit öffentlichem Gepräge ausgemünzter Satz, der seinen Curs and anerkannten Werth unter dem Volke hat.

the enjoyment much wider than the knowledge; so that it is not required that one be a botanist to have pleasure in a rose, nor a critic to delight in *Paradise Lost*, nor a theologian to taste all the blessings of Christian faith, nor, as Goethe here expresses it, an architect to live in a house. And here is an inimitable saying of Schiller's: 'Heaven and earth fight in vain against a dunce;' yet it is not a proverb, because his alone; although abundantly worthy to become such;¹ moving as it does in the same line with, though far superior to, the Chinese proverb, which itself also is good: *One never so much needs his wit, as when he argues with a fool.*

Or take another example still more to the point. James Howell, a prolific English writer of the earlier half of the seventeenth century, and one who merits something better than that entire oblivion into which his writings have fallen, occupied himself much with proverbs; and besides collecting those of others, he has himself set down 'five hundred new sayings, which in tract of time may serve for proverbs to posterity.' So he hoped, but, as might be expected, they have not fulfilled this hope of their author; for it is not after this artificial method that such are born. And yet many of these proverbs in expectation are expressed with sense and felicity; for example: 'Pride is a flower that grows in the devil's garden.' So too the selfishness which characterizes too many proverbs is not ill reproduced in the following: 'Burn not thy

¹ It suggests, however, the admirable Spanish proverb, spoken no doubt out of the same conviction: *Dios me de conciencia con quien me entienda.*

fingers to snuff another man's candle;' and there is at any rate good theology in the following: 'Faith is a great lady, and good works are her attendants;' and in this: 'The poor are God's receivers, and the angels are his auditors.' For all this, it would be inaccurate to quote these as proverbs (and their author himself, as we have seen, did not do more than set them out as proverbs upon trial), inasmuch as they have remained the private property of him who first devised them, never having passed into general circulation; which until men's sayings have done, maxims, sentences, apophthegms, aphorisms they may be, and these of excellent temper and proof, but proverbs as yet they are not.

It is because of this, the popularity inherent in a genuine proverb, that from such in a certain sense there is no appeal. You will not suppose me to intend that there is no appeal from its wisdom, truth, or justice; from any word of man's there may be such; but no appeal from it, as most truly representing a popular conviction. Aristotle, who in his ethical and political writings often finds very much more than this in a proverb, always finds this. It may not be, it very often will not be, an universal conviction which it expresses, but ever one popular and widespread. So far indeed from an universal, very often over against the one proverb there will be another, its direct antagonist; and the one shall belong to the kingdom of light, the other to the kingdom of darkness. *Common fame is seldom to blame*; here is the baser proverb, for as many as drink in with greedy ears all reports to the injury of their neighbours; being determined from the first that they *shall* be true. But it is not left

without its compensation: '*They say so, ' is half a liar;* here is the better word with which *they* may arm themselves, who count it a primal duty to close their ears against all such unauthenticated rumours to the discredit of their neighbours. *The noblest vengeance is to forgive;* here is the godlike proverb on the manner in which wrongs should be recompensed: *He who cannot revenge himself is weak, he who will not is vile,*¹ here is the devilish. In a sonnet which Howell has prefixed to his collection of proverbs these lines occur:

‘The people's voice the voice of God we call;
And what are proverbs but the people's voice?
Coined first, and current made by common choice?
Then sure they must have weight and truth withal.’

It will follow from what has just been said, that, however true in the main, this statement cannot be taken without important qualifications and exceptions.²

Herein the force of a proverb mainly consists, namely, that it has already received the stamp of popular allowance. A man might produce (for what another has done he might do again) something as witty, as forcible, as much to the point, of his own; which should be hammered at the instant on his own anvil. Yet still it is not ‘the wisdom of many;’ it has not stood the test of experience; it wants that which the other already has, but which it only after a

¹ Chi non pub fare sua vendetta e debile, chi non vuole a vile.

² Quintilian's words (*Inst.* v. i. i. 41), which are to the same effect, must be taken with the same exception: Neque enim durassent haec in aeternum, nisi vera omnibus viderentur; and also Don Quixote's: Pareceme me, Sancho, que no ay refran que no sea verdadero, porque todas son sentencias sacadas de la misma experiencia, madre de las ciencias todas.

shorter or longer period can acquire—the consenting voice of many and at different times to its wisdom and truth. A man employing a ‘proverb of the ancients’ (I Sam. xxiv. 13), one of these ‘short sentences drawn from long experience,’ as Cervantes calls them, is not speaking of his own, but uttering a faith and conviction very far wider than that of himself or of any single man; and it is because he is so doing that they, in Lord Bacon’s words, ‘serve not only for ornament and delight, but also for active and civil use; as being the edge tools of speech which cut and penetrate the knots of business and affairs.’ The proverb has in fact the same advantage over the saying now produced for the first time, which for present currency and value has the recognized coin of the realm over the rude unstamped ore newly washed from the stream, or dug up from the mine. This last *may* possess an equal degree of fineness; but the other has been stamped long ago, has already passed often from man to man, and found free acceptance with all:¹ it inspires therefore a confidence which the metal unstamped and unattested cannot at present challenge. And the same satisfaction which the educated man finds in referring the particular matter before him to the universal law which rules it, a plainer man finds in the appeal to a proverb. He is doing the same thing; taking refuge, that is, as each man so gladly does, from his mere self and single fallible judgment, in a larger experience and in a wider conviction.

¹ Thus in a proverb about proverbs, the Italians say, with a true insight into this its prerogative: Il proverbio s’*invecchia*, e chi vuol far bene, vi si *specchia*.

And in all this which has been urged lies, as it seems to me, the explanation of a sentence of an ancient grammarian, which at first sight appears to contain a bald absurdity, namely, that a proverb is ‘a saying without an author.’ For, however without a known author it may, and in the majority of cases it must be, still, as we no more believe in the spontaneous generation of proverbs than of anything else, an author every one of them must have had. It might, however, and it often will have been, that in its utterance the author did but precipitate the floating convictions of the society round him; he did but clothe in, happier form what others had already felt, or even, already uttered; for a proverb has oftentimes been in this respect, the wit of one, and the wisdom of many. And further, its constitutive element, as we must all now perceive, is not its utterance on the part of the one, but its acceptance on the part of the many. It is their sanction which first raises it to the dignity of such; so that every one who took or gave it during the period, when it was struggling into recognition may claim to have had a share in its production; and in this sense without any single author it may have been. From the very first the people will have vindicated it for their own. And thus though they do not always analyse the compliment paid to them in the use of their proverbs, they always feel it; they feel that a writer or speaker using these is putting himself on their ground, is entering on their region, and they welcome him the more cordially for this.¹

¹ The name which the proverb bears in Spanish points to this fact, that popularity is a necessary condition of it. This name

Let us now consider if some other have not sometimes been proposed as essential notes of the proverb, which yet are in fact accidents, such as may be present or may be absent without affecting it vitally. Into an error of this kind they have fallen, who claim for the proverb, and make one of its necessary conditions, that it should be a figurative expression. But how many excellent proverbs, such as *Haste makes waste*; —*Honesty is the best policy*, with ten thousand more, have nothing figurative about them: Here again the error has arisen from taking that which is the ornament of many, and those oftentimes the best and choicest, and transferring it, as a necessary feature, to all. This much of truth there is here, namely, that the employment of the concrete instead of the abstract is one of the most frequent means by which the proverb obtains and keeps its popularity; making in this way an appeal not to the intellectual faculties alone, but to the feelings, to the fancy, or even to the imagination, as well, and stirring the whole man to pleasurable activity.

By the help of an example or two we can best realize to ourselves how immense an advantage it thus obtains for itself. Thus if one contented himself with saying, 'He may wait till he is a beggar, who waits to be rich by other men's deaths,' would this trite morality go half so far, or be remembered half so long, as the vigorous image of this proverb: *He*

is not *proverbio*, for that in Spanish signifies an apophthegm, an aphorism, a maxim; but *refran*, which is a *referendo*, from the frequency of its repetition; yet see Diez, *Etymol. Worterbuch*, p. 284. The etymology of the Greek *παροιμία* is somewhat doubtful, but it too means probably a *trite*, *wayside* saying.

*who waits for dead men's shoes may go barefoot?*¹ Or again, what is 'All men are mortal,' as compared with the proverb: *Every door may be shut but death's door?* or with this: *Death always finds some excuse?* Or let one observe: 'More perish by intemperance than are drowned in the sea,' is this anything better than a painful, yet at the same time a flat, truism? But put it thus: *More are drowned in the beaker than in the ocean;*² or thus: *More are drowned in wine and in beer than in water;*³ (and these both are German proverbs), and it is quite a different matter. There is something that lays hold on us now. We are struck with the smallness of the beaker as set against the vastness of the ocean, while yet so many more deaths are ascribed to that than to this; and further with the fact that literally none are, and none could be, drowned in the former, while multitudes perish in the latter. In the justifying of the paradox, in the extricating of the real truth from the apparent falsehood of the statement, in the answer to the appeal and challenge made here to the imagination—in all this there is a process of mental activity, oftentimes so rapidly exercised as scarcely to be perceptible, yet not therefore the less grateful.⁴

Let me mention now some other helps which the

¹ The same, under a different image, in Spanish: *Larga sogá tira, quien por muerte agena suspira.*

² *Im Becher ersaufen mehr als im Meere.*

³ *In Wein and Bier ertrinken mehr dens im Wasser,*

⁴ Here is the explanation of the perplexity of Erasmus. *Deinde fit, nescio quo pacto, ut sententia proverbio quasi vibrata feriat acrius auditoris animum, et aculeos quosdam cogitationum elinquat infixos.*

proverb employs for obtaining free course among men, for securing that it shall be listened to with pleasure by them, that it shall not slip again from their memories who have once heard it;—helps at the same time so separable from it, that none can be in danger of affirming them essential features or conditions of it. Of these rhyme is perhaps the most frequently recurring. I will enter into no discussion here on the causes of the charm which rhyme possesses for us all; but that it does possess a wondrous charm, that we like what is like, is attested by a thousand facts, and not least by the rhyming form into which a multitude of proverbs, and those among the most widely current, have been thrown. Take a handful of these: *Good mind, good find*;— *Wide will wear, but tight will tear*;— *Truth may be blamed, but cannot be shamed*;— *Fury wasteth as patience lasteth*;— *Be still, and have thy will*;— *Little strokes fell great oaks*;— *Women's jars breed men's wars*, — *A king's face should give grace*; *East, west, home is best*, *Store is no sore*;— *Slow help is no help*;— *Who goes a-borrowing, goes a-sorrowing*;— *Measure is treasure*. There are hundreds of the same character behind, uniting, for the most part, this of rhyme with that which I spoke of before, namely, extreme brevity and conciseness.¹

¹ So, too, in other languages; *Qui prend, se rend*;— *Qui se loue, s'emboue*;— *Chi va piano, va sano, e va lontano*;— *Chi compra terra, compra guerra*;— *Quien se muda, Dios le ayuda*;— *Ehestand, wehestand*;— *Wie gewonnen, so zerronnen*; and the Latin medieval;— *Qualis vita, finis ita*;— *Vita crucis, via lucis*;— *Uniti muniti*. We sometimes regard rhyme as a modern invention, and to the modern world no doubt the discovery of

Alliteration, which is nearly allied to rhyme, is another help whereof the proverb largely avails itself. Alliteration was at one time an important element in our English versification; it almost promised to contend with rhyme itself, which should be the more important; and perhaps, if some great master in the art had at the critical moment arisen, might have retained a far stronger hold on English poetry than it now possesses. It might have continued what one declares it once to have been, namely, ‘the soul of the earliest English Poetry.’ At present it is merely secondary and subsidiary. Yet it cannot be called altogether unimportant; no master of melody despises it; on the contrary, the mightiest, as in our days Tennyson, make the most frequent, though not always the most obvious, use of it. In the proverb you will find it of continual recurrence, and where it falls, as, to be worth anything, it must, on the key-words of the sentence, of very high value. Thus: *Frost and fraud both end in foul;*

all its capabilities, and the consequent large application of it, belongs. But proverbs alone would be sufficient to show that in itself it is not modern, however restricted in old times the employment may have been. For instance, there is a Greek proverb to express that men learn by their sufferings more than by any other teaching; **Παθήματα, μαθήματα** (Herodotus, i. 207); one which in the Latin, *Nocumenta, documenta*, or, *Quae nocent, docent*, finds both in rhyme and sense its equivalent. Another rhyming Greek proverb, **Πλησμονή ἐπιλησμονή**, implying that fulness of blessings is too often accompanied with forgetfulness of their Author (Deut. viii. 11-14), is, I fancy, not ancient—at least does not date further back than Greek Christianity. The sentiment implies this, and the fact that the word **ἐπιλησμονή** does not occur in classical Greek would seem to be decisive upon it.

*Like lips, like lettuce;—Meat and matins minish no way;—Who swims in sin, shall sink in sorrow;—No cross, no crown;—Out of debt, out of danger;—Do on hill as you would do in hall;*¹ that is, Bear yourself in solitude as you would in a crowd. Alliterative proverbs are almost as common in other languages as in our own, but I shall not count it necessary to quote them; I will only adduce, in concluding this branch of the subject, a single Italian proverb, which in a remarkable manner unites all the three distinctive -features of which we have been just treating, brevity, rhyme, and alliteration: *Traduttori, traditori*; one which we might reconstitute in English thus: *Translators, traitors*; so untrue very often are they to the genius of their original, to its spirit, if not to its letter, and frequently to both; so do they surrender, rather than render, its meaning; not turning, but only overturning, it from one language to another.²

A certain pleasant exaggeration, the use of the figure hyperbole, a figure of natural rhetoric which Scripture itself does not disdain to employ, is a not unfrequent engine with the proverb for the arousing of attention and the making of a way for itself into the minds of men. Thus the Persians have a proverb: *A needle's eye is wide enough for two friends; the whole world is too narrow for two foes.* Again, of a man whose good luck seems never to forsake him, so that from the very things which would be another man's

¹ So in Latin: *Nil sole et sale utilius*; and in Greek: Σῶμα, σῆμα.

² This is St. Jerome's pun, who complains that the Latin Versions of the Greek Testament current in the Church in his day were too many of them not *versiones*, but *eversiones*.

ruin he extricates himself not merely without harm, but with credit and with gain, the Arabs say: *Throw him into the Nile, and he will come up with a fish in his mouth*; while of such a Fortunatus as this the Germans have a proverb: *If he flung a groat on the roof, a dollar would come back to him*;¹ as, again, of the man in the opposite extreme of fortune, to whom the most unlikely calamities, and such as beforehand might seem to exclude one another, befall, they say: *He would fall on his back, and break his nose*.

In all which I have just traced out, in the fact that the proverbs of a language are so frequently its highest bloom and flower, while yet so much of their beauty consists often in curious felicities of diction pertaining exclusively to some single language, either in a rapid conciseness to which nothing tantamount exists elsewhere, or in rhymes which it is hard to reproduce, or in alliterations which do not easily find their equivalents, or in other verbal happinesses, lies the difficulty which is often felt, which I shall often in these lectures feel, of transferring them without serious loss from one language to another.² Oftentimes it will be abso-

¹ Wurf er einen Groschen aufs Dach, fiel ihm Ein Thaler herunter;—compare another: Wer Gluck hat, dem kalbet ein Ochs.

² Take for example this German proverb:

Stultus and Stolz

Wachset aus Einem Holz;

its transfer into any other languages is manifestly impossible.

The same may be affirmed of another, commending stay-at-home habits to the wife: *Die Hausfrau soil nit sein eine Ausfrau*; or again of this beautiful Spanish one: *La verdad es siempre verde*.

lutely impossible. Oftentimes, to use an image of Erasmus,¹ they are like those wines (I believe the Spanish Valdepenas is one), of which the true excellence can only be known by those who drink them in the land which gave them birth. Transport them under other skies, or, which is a still more dangerous undertaking, empty them from vessel to vessel, and their strength and flavour will have well nigh disappeared in the process.

Not indeed that this difficulty is always felt. We feel it most when we seek deliberately, and in a literary interest, to transfer some proverb which we admire from its native language into our own or another. Where, on the contrary, it has transferred itself, made for itself a second home, and taken root a second time in the hearts and affections of a people, in such a case one has often to admire the instinctive skill with which it has found compensations for that which it has been compelled to let go, replaced one vigorous idiom by another, one happy rhyme or play on words by its equivalent; and all this while the extremely narrow limits in which it moves have left to it the very smallest liberty of selection. And thus, presenting itself equally finished and complete in two or even more Lang stages, the internal evidence will be quite insufficient to determine which of these forms is the original and which the copy. For example, the

¹ Habent enim hoc peculiare pleraque proverbia, ut in ea lingua sonare postulant in qua nata sunt; quod si in alienum sermonem demigrarint, multum gratae decedat. Quemadmodum sunt et vina quaedam quae recusant exportari, nec germanam saporis gratiam obtineant, nisi in his locis in quibus proveniunt.

proverb at once German and French, which I can present in no comelier English dress than this,

Mother's truth
Keeps constant youth;

but which in German runs thus,

Mutter-treu
Wird taglich neu;

and in French,

Tendresse maternelle
Toujours se renouvelle;

appears to me as graceful and tender in the one language as in the other; while yet so much of its beauty depends on the form, that beforehand one could hardly have expected that the charm of it would survive a transfer to the second language, whichever that maybe, wherein it found a home. But of a subject thus opened, I must reserve the further development for lectures that will follow.

LECTURE II.

THE GENERATION OF PROVERBS.

My first lecture was occupied with the form and necessary conditions of a proverb; let us endeavour in the present to realize to ourselves, so far as this lies in our power, the processes by which a people gets together the main body of its proverbs, the sources from which it most largely derives them, and the circumstances under which such as it creates for itself of new, had their birth and generation.

And first, I would call your attention to the fact that a vast number of its proverbs a people does not make for itself at all, but finds ready made to its hands, entering upon them as a part of its intellectual and moral inheritance. The world has now endured so long, and the successive generations of men have thought, felt, enjoyed, suffered, and altogether learned so much, that there is an immense stock of wisdom which may be said to belong to humanity in common, being the accumulated fruits of all this its experience in the past. Even Aristotle, more than two thousand years ago, could speak of proverbs as ‘the fragments of an elder wisdom, which, on account of their brevity and aptness, had amid a general wreck and ruin been preserved.’ These, the common property of the

civilized world, are the original stock with which each nation starts; these, either orally handed down to it, or made its own by those of its earlier writers who brought it into living communication with the world beyond it. Thus, and having reached us through these channels, a vast chamber of Greek, Latin, and medieval proverbs live on with us, and with all the modern nations of the world.

It is, indeed, oftentimes a veritable surprise to discover the venerable age and, antiquity of a proverb, which we have hitherto taken for granted to be quite a later birth of modern society. Thus we may perhaps suppose that well-known saying which forbids the too critical scanning of a present, *One must not look a gift horse in the mouth*, to be of English extraction, the genuine growth of our own soil. I will not pretend to say how old it is; it is certainly older than St. Jerome, a Latin father of the fourth century; who, when some found fault with certain writings of his, replied with a tartness which he could occasionally exhibit, that they were voluntary on his part, free-will offerings, and with this quoted the proverb, *that it did not behove to look a gift horse in the mouth*; and before it comes to us, we meet it once more in one of the rhymed Latin verses, which were such favourites in the Middle Ages.

Si quis det mannos, ne quere in dentibus annos.

Again, *Liars should have good memories* is a saying which probably we assume to be modern; it is very far indeed from so being. The same Jerome, who, I may observe by the way, is a constant quoter of proverbs, and who has preserved some that would

not otherwise have descended to us,¹ speaks of one as ‘unmindful of the *old* proverb, *Liars should have good memories*,² and we find it ourselves in a Latin writer a good deal older than he.³ So too I was certainly surprised to discover that our own proverb: *Good company on a journey is worth a coach*, has come down to us from the ancient world.⁴

Having lighted just now on one of those Latin rhymed verses, let me by the way warn against an error about them, into which it would be very easy; to fall. I have seen it suggested that these, if not the source from which, are yet the channels *by* which, very many proverbs of the old world have reached us. I doubt it exceedingly; should indeed have little hesitation in denying it wholly. This much we may conclude from the existence of proverbs in this shape, namely, that

¹ Thus is it, I believe, with *Bos lassus fortius figit pedem*; a proverb with which he warns his junior Augustine not to provoke a contest with him, the weary, but therefore the more formidable, antagonist.

² *Oblitus veteris proverbii: mendaces memores esse oportere* Let me quote here Fuller's excellent unfolding of this proverb: ‘Memory in a liar is no more than needs. For first lies are hard to be remembered, because many, whereas truth it but one secondly, because a lie cursorily told takes little footing and settled fastness in the teller's memory, but prints itself deeper in the hearer's, who takes the greater notice because of the improbability and deformity thereof; and one will remember the sight of a monster longer than the sight of an handsome body. Hence comes it to pass that when the liar hath forgotten himself, his auditors put him in mind of the lie and take him therein.’

³ Quintilian, *Inst.* 1. 4.

⁴ Comes facundus in via pro vehiculo est.

since these rhymed or leonine verses went altogether out of fashion at the revival of the classical taste in the fifteenth century, such proverbs as exist in this form may be confidently affirmed to date at least as far back as that period; but not that in all or even in a majority of cases this shape was their earliest. Oftentimes the proverb in its more popular form is vastly superior to the same in this its Latin monkish dress; the latter by its tameness and flatness betraying itself at once as the inadequate translation, and not the genuine proverb. Many are 'so essentially Teutonic, that they appear to great disadvantage in the Latin garb which has been huddled upon them.'¹ Thus, when we have on one side the English, *Hungry bellies have no ears*, and on the other the Latin,

Jejunus venter non audit verba libenter,

who can doubt that the first is the proverb, and the second only the versification of the proverb? Or who would hesitate to affirm that the old Greek proverb, *A rolling stone gathers no moss*, may very well have come to us without the intervention of the medieval Latin.

Non fit hirsutus lapis hinc atque inde volutus?

And the true, state of the case comes out still more clearly, where there are two, or it may be more, of these rhymed Latin equivalents for the one popular proverb, and these quite independent of each other. So it is in respect of our English proverb: *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*; which appears in this form:

Una avis in dextra melior quam quatuor extra;

¹ Kemble, *Salomon and Saturn*, p. 56.

and also in this:

Capta avis est pluris quam mille in gramine ruris:

and again in this:

Plus valet in manibus passer quam sub dubio grus.

Who can fail to see here three independent attempts to render the same saying? Or when Chaucer works up into his narrative that rule of natural equity, *First come, first serve*, in the following verse:

Whoso first cometh to the mill, first grint,

can any doubt that we have here the proverb, and in the Latin line,

Ante molam primus qui venit, non molat imus,

the mere versification of the proverb? Sometimes the Latin line confesses itself to be only the rendering of popular saying; thus is it with the following:

Ut dicunt multi, cito transit lancea stulti

in other words, *A fool's bolt is soon shot*:

or again:

Res satis est nota, plus foetent stercora mota,

which may be left without its interpretation.

Then, besides this derivation from elder sources, from the literature of nations which as such now exist no longer, besides this process in which a people "are merely borrowers and receivers, there is also at somewhat later periods in its life a mutual interchange between it and other nations growing up beside, and contemporaneously with it, of their own several inventions in this kind; a free giving and taking, in which it is often hard, and oftener impossible, to say which is the lender and which the borrower. Thus the quantity of proverbs not drawn from antiquity, but

at the same time common to all, or nearly all of the modern European languages, is very considerable. The 'solidarity' (to use a word which it is in vain to struggle against), of all the nations of Christendom comes out very noticeably here.

There is indeed nothing in the study of proverbs, in the attribution of them to their right owners, in the arrangement and citation of them, which creates more perplexity than the fact of finding the same proverb in so many different quarters, current among so many different nations. In quoting it as of one, it often seems as if we were doing wrong to many; while yet it is sometimes almost, and oftener altogether, impossible to determine to what nation it first belonged, so that others drew it at second hand from that one;—even granting that any form in which we now possess it is really the oldest of all. More than once this fact has occasioned a serious disappointment to the zealous collector of the proverbs of his native country. Proud of the rich treasures which in this kind it possessed, he has very reluctantly discovered on a fuller investigation of the whole subject, how many of these which he counted native; the peculiar heirloom and glory of his own land, must at once and without hesitation be resigned to others, who can be shown beyond all doubt to have been in earlier possession of them: while in respect of many more, if his own nation can put in a claim to them as well as others, he has no choice but to allow that it can put in no better than many competitors, and frequently a claim not as good as theirs.¹

¹ Kelly, in the preface to his very useful collection of Scotch

This single and undoubted fact, that nations are thus continually deriving proverbs from one another, is sufficient to show that, however the main body of a nation's proverbs may be, some almost as old as itself, and some far older, it would for all this be a serious mistake to regard the sum of them as a closed account, neither capable of receiving, nor actually receiving, addition nor suffering diminution. The mistake is of the same character as that sometimes made about the words of a language. So long as a language is living, it will be appropriating foreign words, putting forth new words of its own; at the same time that it suffers other, and not seldom very good ones to retire into obscurity, and in the end to disappear and die. Exactly in the same way, so long as a people have any vigorous energies at work in them, are acquiring any new experiences of life, are forming any new moral convictions, for these new experiences and convictions new utterances will be found; and some of the happiest of these will receive that stamp of general allowance which shall constitute them proverbs. And this fact makes it certain that the collections which exist in print will be very far from embracing the whole body of proverbs in circulation. They preserve, indeed, many others; many, as I have said, which have now become obsolete, and which would, but for them, have been forgotten. I speak not, however, of these, but of the many rather which, living on the lips of men, have yet never found their way into books, however worthy to have done so; and this, either because the sphere in which they

proverbs, describes his own disappointment at making exactly such a discovery as this.

circulate has continued always a narrow one, or that the occasions which call them out are very rare, or that they, having only lately risen up, have not hitherto attracted the attention of any who cared to record them. It would be well, if such as take an interest in the subject, and are sufficiently well versed in the proverbial literature of their own country to recognize these unregistered proverbs when they meet them, would secure such from that perishing, which, so long as they remain merely oral, might easily overtake them; and would make them at the same time, what all *good* proverbs ought certainly to be, the common heritage of all.¹

¹ The pages of *Notes and Queries* are always open to receive such, and in them they might be safely garnered up. That there are such proverbs to reward him who should carefully watch for them, is abundantly proved by the immense addition, which, as I shall have occasion hereafter to mention, a Spanish scholar was able to make to the collected proverbs, so numerous before, of Spain. Nor do we want other indications of the like kind. Thus, the editor of what was till very lately quite the best modern collection of German proverbs, records this one, found in no preceding collection, and by himself never heard but once, and then from the lips of an aged lay servitor of a monastery in the Black Forest: *Offend one monk, and Me lappets of all cowls will flutter as far as Rome*; (Beleidigestu einen Munch, so knappen alle Kuttentzipfel bis nach Rom;) and yet who can doubt that we have a genuine proverb here, and one excellently expressive of the common cause which the whole of the monastic orders, despite their inner dissensions, made ever, when assailed from without, with one another? It is very easy to be deceived in such a matter, but the following, which is current in Ireland, I have never seen in print: *'The man on the dyke always hurls well;*' the looker-on at a game of hurling, seated indolently on the wall, always imagines that he could improve

But it is not merely proverbs, which, though current on the lips of men, have never yet been registered, that are wanting to complete our collections. There are besides them, a vast number in every European literature, certainly in our own, which are still lurking in books, in those mainly of the early and middle period of our literature, and which have never been gathered out of these. Before we could flatter ourselves that a complete collection, or one at all approaching to completeness, had been made, it would need that the whole of English literature should have been carefully and intelligently *dragged*, with the special object of drawing these from the innumerable lurking places in which at present they so effectually lie hid, that, although from time to time encountered by the rare readers of our older books, they yet form no part of any collected body of our proverbs, and are taken no account of, when we are estimating our riches in this kind. It is little likely that such a task will ever be undertaken; yet something in this way might be accomplished, if every reader of an Elizabethan drama, of a volume of Puritan divinity, of Fuller, of a hundred more, would make a note of the proverbs or proverbial phrases which they severally offered, and where these are new, be at pains that by one channel or another they should enter into the common stock of our collected proverbs.¹

on the strokes of the actual players, and, if you will listen to him, would have played the game much better than they; a proverb of sufficiently wide application.

¹ Several such proverbs, of my own noting, I have used in this little volume, as for instance that very beautiful one which I never met but in the writings of Tyndal, *Be still, and have thy*

And as new proverbs will be born from life and from life's experience, so too there will be another mine from which they will be largely dug, from the plays and poems which a people have made heartily their own. Precious fragments of these they will continually detach, most often word for word; at other times wrought up into new shapes with that freedom which men claim to exercise in the modifying or moulding of whatever they thus appropriate to their own use. These fragments thus detached they will give and take as part of their current intellectual money. Thus '*Evil communications corrupt good manners*'¹ (I Cor. xv. 33) is word for word a metrical line from a Greek comedy. It is not very likely that St. Paul had ever read this comedy, but the words for their truth's sake had in his time or before it been taken up into the common language of Greek-speaking men; and not as a citation, but as a proverb, he uses them. And if you will, from this point of view, glance over a few pages of one of Shakespeare's more popular dramas,—Hamlet, for example,—you will be surprised, should your attention never have been called to this before, to note how much has in this manner been detached from it, to pass into the every-day use and

will; nor this, which I have found in the same: *Of little meddling cometh much rest*. Fuller would yield numbers, as for instance these: *Fury wasteth as patience lasteth.—I am black, but I am not the devil.—It is ill wool that will take no dye. — The more courtesy, the more craft*. Wander in his *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexicon*, pp. xvii–xx, gives a very interesting account of what he is doing in this way to enrich, or rather to learn the extent of the riches of, the proverbial literature of Germany.

¹ Φθειρουσιν ἤθη χρήσθ' ὁμιλίαι κακαί.

service of life; and you will be prepared to estimate higher than ever what he has done for his fellow-countrymen, the 'possession for ever' which his writings have become for them. And much, no doubt, is passing even now from favourite authors into the tissue, the flesh and blood of a nation's moral and intellectual life; and as 'household words,' as a portion of its proverbial philosophy, for ever incorporating itself therewith. We have a fair measure of an author's true popularity, I mean of the real and lasting hold which he has taken on his nation's heart and imagination, in the extent to which it has thus fared with his writings.

In another way additions from time to time are made to the proverbial wealth of a people. Some event has laid strong hold of their imagination, has stirred up the depths of their moral consciousness; and all which they have then felt they have gathered up for themselves, perhaps in some striking phrase which was uttered at the moment, or it may be in some allusive words, understood by everybody, and which at once summon up the whole incident before their eyes.

Sacred history furnishes us with one example at the least of this generation of a proverb. Of that saying, '*Is Saul also among the prophets?*' we know the exact manner in which it grew to be a 'proverb in Israel.' When the son of Kish revealed of a sudden that nobler life which had hitherto been slumbering in him, undreamt of alike by himself and by others, took his part and place among the sons of the prophets, and, borne along in their enthusiasm, praised and

prophesied as they did, showing that he was indeed 'turned into another man,' then all that had known him before exclaimed one to another, some probably in sincere astonishment, some in irony and unbelief, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' And the question they asked found and finds its application as often as any one reveals suddenly, at some crisis of his life, qualities for which those who knew him the best had hitherto given him no credit, a nobleness which had been latent in him until now, a power of taking his place among the worthiest and the best, which none had at all deemed him to possess. It will, of course, find equally its application, when one does not truly step, but only affects to step of a sudden, into a higher school, to assert his place in a nobler circle of thought and action than any in which hitherto he has moved.

Another proverb, and one well known to the classical scholar, *The Cranes of Ibycus*,¹ had its rise in one of those remarkable incidents, which, witnessing for God's inscrutable judgments, are eagerly laid hold of by men. The story of its birth is indeed one of a moral interest so deep, that I shall not hesitate to repeat it, even with the risk before me that Schiller's immortal poem on the subject, or it may be the classical studies of some here present, may have made it already familiar to a portion of my hearers. Ibycus, a famous lyrical poet of Greece, journeying to the games at Corinth, was assailed by robbers: as he fell beneath their murderous strokes he looked round, to see if any witnesses or avengers were nigh. No living thing

¹ Αἱ Ἰβύκου γέρανοι.

was in sight, save only a flight of cranes soaring high over head. He called on them, and to them committed the avenging of his blood. A vain commission, as it might have appeared, and as no doubt it did to the murderers appear. Yet it did not prove so. For these, sitting a little time after in the open theatre at Corinth, beheld this flight of cranes soaring above them, and one said scoffingly to another, 'Lo, there, the avengers of Ibycus!' The words were caught up by some near then; for already the poet's non-appearance at the games had awakened anxiety and alarm. Being seized and questioned, they betrayed their guilt, and were led to their doom; and *The Cranes of Ibycus* passed into a proverb, very much as our *Murder will out*, to express the wondrous leadings of God whereby continually the most secret things of blood are brought to the open light of day.

*Gold of Toulouse*¹ is another of these proverbs in which men's sense of a God verily ruling and judging the earth has found its embodiment. A Roman Consul had taken the city of Toulouse by an act of more than common perfidy and treachery; and possessed himself of the immense hoards of wealth there stored in the temples of the Gaulish deities. From this day forth he was so hunted by calamity, all worst evils and disasters, all shame and dishonour, fell so thick and fast on himself and on all who were his, and were so traced up by the moral instinct of mankind to this accursed thing which he had made his own, that any wicked gains, fatal to their pos-

¹ Aurum Tolosanum; see Merivale, *Fall of the Roman Republic*, p. 63.

essor, acquired this name of 'Tolosan gold;' while of him, at once the sinner and the sufferer, it would be said 'He has gold of Toulouse.'

Another proverb, which in English has run into the following posy, *There's many a slip 'twixt the cups and the lip*, descends to us from the Greeks, and has a very striking story connected with it. A master treated with extreme cruelty his slaves who were engaged in planting and otherwise laying out a vineyard for him; until at length one of them, the most misused of all, prophesied that for this his cruelty he should never drink of its wine. When the first vintage was completed, he bade this slave to fill a goblet for him, and taking this in his hand he taunted him with the failure of his prophecy. The other replied in the words which have since become proverbial. As he spake, tidings were brought of a huge wild boar that was wasting the vineyard. Setting down the untasted cup, and snatching hastily a spear, the master went out to meet the wild boar, and was slain in the encounter; and thus, as we are told, the proverb, *Many things find place between the cup and the lip*, arose.¹

A Scotch proverb, *He that invented the Maiden first hanselled it*, is not altogether unworthy to rank with these. It alludes to the well-known historic fact that the Regent Morton, the inventor of a new instrument of death called 'The Maiden,' a sort of anticipation

¹ Πολλὰ μεταξὺ πέλει κύλικος καὶ χείλεος ἄκρου. In Latin, Inter calicem et os multa cadunt; in French, Entre la bouche et le verre le vin souvent tombe a terre; in Spanish, De la mano a in boca se pierde in sopa.

of the guillotine, was himself the first upon whom the proof of it was made. Men felt, to use the language of the Latin poet, that ‘no law was juster than that the artificers of death should perish by their own art,’ and embodied their sense of this in the proverb.

Memorable words of illustrious men will frequently not die in the utterance, but pass from mouth to mouth, being still repeated with complacency, till at length they have received their adoption into the great family of national proverbs. Such were the gnomes or sayings of the Seven Wise Men of Greece, supposing these to have been indeed theirs, and not ascribed to them only after they had obtained universal currency and acceptance. So too a saying, attributed to Alexander the Great, may very well have arisen on the occasion, and under the circumstances, to which its birth is commonly referred. When some of his officers reported to him with something of dismay the innumerable multitudes of the Persian hosts which were advancing to assail him, the youthful Macedonian hero silenced them and their apprehensions with the reply: *One butcher does not fear many sheep*; not in this applying an old proverb, but, as the issue proved, framing a new, and one admirably embodying the confidence which he felt in the immeasurable superiority of the Hellenic over the barbarian man;—and this saying, having been once launched upon the world, has since lived on, the occasions being so numerous on which it would find its fit application.

Taking occasion from this royal proverb, I observe by the way, that it would be a great mistake to assume, though the error is not an uncommon one, that

because proverbs are popular, they have therefore originally sprung from the bosom of the populace. What was urged in my first lecture of their popularity was not at all intended in this sense; and the sound common sense, the wit, the wisdom, the right feeling, which are their *predominant* characteristics, alike contradict any such supposition. They spring rather from the sound healthy kernel of the nation, whether in high place or in low; and it is surely worthy of note, how large a proportion of these with the generation of which we are acquainted, owe their existence to the foremost men of their time, to its philosophers, its princes, and its kings; as it would not be difficult to show. And indeed the evil in proverbs testifies to this no less than ale good. Thus the many proverbs in almost all modern tongues expressing scorn of the 'villain' are of themselves sufficient to show that for the most part they have their birth not quite in the lower regions of society, but reflect much oftener the convictions, prejudices, and passions of those higher in the social scale.

Let me adduce another example of the proverbs which have grown out of an incident, which contain an allusion to it, and are only perfectly intelligible when the incident itself is known. It is this Spanish, *Let that which is lost be for God*; one the story of whose birth is thus given by the leading Spanish commentator on the proverbs of his nation:—The father of a family, making his will and disposing of his goods upon his death-bed, ordained concerning a certain cow which had strayed, and had been now for a long time missing, that, if it was found, it should be for his children, if not found, for God: and hence the pro-

verb, *Let that which is lost be for God*, arose. The saying was not one to let die; laying bare as so wonderfully it does some of the subtlest treacheries of the human heart; for, indeed, whenever men would give to God only their lame and their blind, that which costs them nothing, that from which they hope no good, no profit, no pleasure for themselves, what are they saying in their hearts but that which this man said openly, *Let that which is lost be for God*.

This subject of the generation of proverbs, upon which I have thus touched so slightly, is one upon which whole volumes have been written.¹ Those who have occupied themselves herein have sought to trace historically the circumstances out of which various proverbs have sprung, and to which they owe their existence; that so by the analogy of these we might realize to ourselves the rise of others whose origins lie beyond our vision, obscure and unknown. No one

¹ Erasmus in the *Preface* to his *Adagia* has a few excellent words on the subject, which are well worth quoting: Quibus ex rebus accedat novitas adagiis, mox ostendemus; nunc quot in modis celebritas contingit, paucis indicabimus. Veniunt igitur in vulgi sermonem, vel ex oraculis numinum; vel a sapientium dictis, quae quidem antiquitas oraculorum instar celebravit; vel a poeta quopiam maxime vetusto; vel e stem, hoc est tragicorum vel comicorum actis fabulis; praecipue vero comedia mutuo quodam commercio et usurpat pleraque jactata vulgo, et gignit traditque vulgo jactanda, nonnulla ducuntur ex fabularum argumentis; ex historiis aliquot mutuo sumpta sunt. Quaedam profecta sunt ex apophthegmatis, hoc est, scite breviterque responsis. Sunt quae ex verbo temere dicto sunt arrepta. Denique mores, ingenium, seu gentis, sive hominis alicujus, sive etiam animantis, postremo rei quoque vis quae pianm insignis et vulgo nota locum fecerunt adagio.

will deny the interest of the subject, of the being enabled thus to preside at the birth of a saying that has lived on and held its ground in the great struggle for existence which is raging everywhere, and has not ceased, from the day it was first uttered, to be more or less of a spiritual or intellectual force among men. Still the cases in which this tracing of the genesis of proverbs is possible are rare, as compared with the far larger number in which the first birth is veiled, as is almost all birth, in mystery and obscurity. And indeed it could scarcely be otherwise. The vast majority of proverbs are foundlings, the happier foundlings of a nation's wit, which the collective nation, refusing to let perish, has taken up and adopted for its own. But still, as must be expected with foundlings, they can for the most part give no distinct account of themselves. They make their way, relying on their own merits, not on the merits of their parents and authors; whom they have forgotten; and who seem equally to have forgotten them, or, at any rate, fail to claim them. Not seldom, too, when a history has been offered to account for a proverb's birth, it must remain an open question, whether the story has not been subsequently imagined for the proverb, rather than the proverb grown out of the story.¹

The proverb thus springing out of the actual life of men, however it may be often impossible to trace

¹ Livy's account of *Cantherium in fossa*, and of the manner in which it became a rustic proverb in Italy (xxiii. 47), is a case in point, where it is very hard to give credit to the parentage which has been assigned to the saying (see Doderlein, *Lat. Synonyme*, vol. iv. p. 289).

the circumstances of its rise, will continually find its way back to active life again. It will attest its own practical character by the frequency with which it will present itself for use, and, it may be, will have been actually used, upon earnest and notable occasions; throwing its weight into one scale or the other at some critical moment, and sometimes with decisive effect. I have little doubt that with knowledge sufficient one might bring together a large collection of instances, wherein at significant moments the proverb has played its part, and helped to bring about issues, of which all would acknowledge the importance.

In this aspect, as having been used at some crisis or turning-point of things, and as part of the moral influence brought to bear on that occasion for effecting a great result, no proverb of man's can be compared with that one which the risen Lord used when He met his future Apostle, but then his persecutor, on the way to Damascus, and 'warned him of the fruitlessness and folly of further resistance to a might which must overcome him, and with a more disastrous overcoming, at the last: It is hard for thee to hick against the pricks¹ (Acts xxvi. 14). It is not always observed, but adds much to the fitness of this proverb's use on this ever-memorable occasion, that it was already, even in that heathen world to which originally it belonged, predominantly used to note the madness of a striving on man's part against the overmastering power of the gods for so we find it employed in the chief passages of heathen antiquity in which it occurs.²

¹ Σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν.

² AEschylus, *Prom. Vinct.* 322; Euripides, *Bacch.* 795

I must derive the second illustration of my assertion from a very different quarter, passing at a single stride from the kingdom of light to the kingdom of darkness, and finding my example there. We are told then, that when Catherine de Medicis desired to overcome the hesitation of her son Charles IX., and to draw from the wretched king his consent to the massacre, afterwards known as that of St. Bartholomew, she urged on him with effect a proverb, which she had brought with her from her own land, and assuredly one of the most convenient maxims for tyrants that was ever framed: *Sometimes clemency is cruelty, and cruelty clemency.*

Later French history supplies another and a more pleasant illustration. At the siege of Douay, in 1667, Lewis XIV. found himself with his suite unexpectedly under a heavy cannonade from the besieged city. The charge is brought often against Lewis that he was deficient in personal courage; I believe unjustly; while yet, in compliance with the entreaties of many round him, who urged that he should not expose so valuable a life, he was about, in somewhat unsoldierly and unkingly fashion, immediately to retire; when M. de Charost, drawing close to him, whispered the well-known French proverb in his ear: *The wine is drawn; it must he drunk.*¹ The king remained exposed to the fire of the enemy for a suitable period,

Pindar, *Pyth.* ii. 94-96. The image is of course that of the stubborn ox, which when urged to go forward, recalcitrates against the sharp-pointed iron goad, and, already wounded, thus only wounds itself the more.

¹ Le vin est verse; it faut le boire.

and, it is said, held in higher honour than before the counsellor who had with this word saved him from an unseemly retreat. Let this on the generation of proverbs, with the employment which at critical moments has been made of them, for the present suffice.

LECTURE III.

THE PROVERBS OF DIFFERENT NATIONS
COMPARED.

‘THE genius, wit, and spirit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs,’—this is Lord Bacon's well-worn remark; although, indeed, only well-worn because of its truth. ‘In them,’ it has been further said, ‘is to be found an inexhaustible source of precious documents in regard of the interior history, the manners, the opinions, the beliefs,¹ the customs, of the people among whom they have had their

¹ The writer might have added, the superstitions; for proverbs not a few involve and rest on popular superstitions, and a collection of these would be curious and in many ways instructive. Such, for instance, is the Latin (it is, indeed, also Greek) *A serpent, unless it devour a serpent, grows not to a dragon;* (Serpens, nisi serpentem comederit, non fit draco); which Lord Bacon moralizes so shrewdly: ‘The folly of one man is the fortune of another; for no man prospers so suddenly as by other men's errors.’ Such again is the old German proverb: *The night is no man's friend* (Die Nacht ist keines Menschen Freund): which rests, as Grimm observes (*Deutsche Mythol.* p. 713) on the wide-spread feeling in the northern mythologies, of the night as an unfriendly and, indeed, hostile power to man. And such, too, the French: *A Sunday's child dies never of the plague* (Qui nait le dimanche, jamais ne meurt de peste).

course.¹ Let us put these assertions to the proof, and see how far in this people's or in that people's proverbs that which is nearest to their heart reveals itself to us; how far the comparison of the proverbs of one nation with those of other nations may be made instructive to us; how much this comparison will tell us severally about each. This only I will ask, ere we enter upon the subject, namely, that should I fail here in eliciting anything strongly characteristic, if the proverbs regarded from this point of view should fail to reveal to you any of the true secrets of a people's life, you will not therefore misdoubt the assertions with which my lecture opened; or assume that these documents would not yield up their secret, if questioned aright; but only assume that the test has been unskilfully applied; or, if you would not willingly find fault, that my brief limits have not allowed me to make that clear, which with larger space at command I might not have wholly fallen short of doing.

I am very well aware that in pursuing this line of thought, we are ever liable to deceive ourselves and to impose upon others, picking out and adducing such proverbs as conform to a preconceived theory, passing over those which will not fit themselves into this. There is no doubt such a danger needing to be guarded against; nor do there want a multitude of these sayings which cannot be made to illustrate differences, for they rest on the broad foundation of the

¹ We may adduce further the words of Salmasius: *Argutae hae brevesque loquendi formulae suas habent venteres, et genium cujusque gentis penes quam celebrantur, atque acumen ostendunt.*

universal humanity, and not on anything which is peculiar and national. But, with all this, enough of proverbs, I am persuaded, will remain, and such as may with perfect good faith be adduced, to confirm these assertions; we may, I am convinced, learn from the proverbs current among a people, what is the true moral tissue of their lives; the aspects under which they contemplate life; in what ways honour and dishonour are distributed among them; what is of good, what of evil report in their eyes; with much more which it can never be unprofitable to know.

To begin, then, with the proverbs of Greece. What we are most struck with in these, and what, the more they are studied, the more fills the thoughtful reader with astonishment, is the evidence they yield of an entire people penetrated and leavened through and through with the most intimate knowledge of their own mythology, history, and poetry. The infinite multitude of slight and fine allusions to the legends of their gods and heroes, to the earlier incidents of their own history, to the Homeric narrative, the delicate side glances at all these which the Greek proverbs constantly embody,¹ presuppose an acquaintance, indeed a familiarity, with all this on their parts among whom these proverbs passed current, which is perfectly marvellous. In many and most important respects, the Greek proverbs, taken in the aggregate, are inferior to those of some nations of modern Christendom. This is nothing strange, the Christian

¹ Thus Ἄϊδος κυνῆ—ἄπληστος πίθος-- Ἰλιάς κακῶν—Χαρῶνιος θύρα—Λήμνιον κακόν—χούσεα χαλκείων.

religion would have done little for the world, would have proved ineffectual for the elevating, purifying, and deepening of man's life, if it had been otherwise. But, with all this, as bearing testimony to the high intellectual training of the people who employed them, to a culture not restricted to certain classes, but which must have been diffused through the whole nation, no other collection of proverbs can bear comparison with the Greek.¹

It is altogether different with the Roman. These, the genuine Roman, the growth of the Italian soil, are very far fewer in number than the Greek, as was indeed to be expected from the far less subtle and less fertile genius of the people. Hardly any of them are legendary or mythological; this again agrees with the fact that the Italian pantheon was very scantily peopled as compared with the Greek. Very few have much poetry about them, or any very rare delicacy or refinement of feeling. In the matter of love indeed, not the Roman only, but Greek and Roman alike, are immeasurably inferior to those which many modern nations could supply. Thus a proverb of such religious depth

¹ On proverbs in general, but mainly on Greek proverbs, there is a pleasant article in the *Quarterly Review*, July, 1868. I append a small group of these: Αἱ χάριτες γυμναί. — ἄκαιρος εὐνοια οὐδὲν ἔχθρας διαφέρει. — γλυκὺς ἀπείρω πόλεμος. — ἀνδρὸς κακῶς πράσσοντος ἐκποδὼν φίλοι. — ἄρκτου παρούσης ἵχνη μὴ ζητεῖ — ἀεὶ γεωργὸς εἰς νέωτα πλούσιος. — δις πρὸς τὸν αὐτὸν αἰσχρὸν προσκρούειν λίθον. — ἐχθρῶν ἄδωρα δῶρα. — ζεῖ χύτρα, ζεῖ φιλία. — Θεὸς ἢ Ἀναΐδεια. — κακοῦ κόρακος κακὸν ὦν. — ἀνὴρ δὲ φεύγων οὐ μένει λύρας κτύπον. — κακῶ σὺν ἀνδρὶ μηδ' ὄλως ὄδοιπόρου. — δρῦος πεσοῦσης πᾶς ἀνὴρ ξυλεύεται. — ἦθος ἀνθρώπου δαίμων.

and beauty as our own, *Marriages are made in heaven*, it would have been quite impossible for all heathen antiquity to have produced, or even remotely to have approached.¹ In the setting out not of love, but of friendship, and of the claims which it makes, the advantages which it brings, is exhibited whatever depth and tenderness of affection they may have.² This indeed, as has been truly observed,³ was only to be expected, seeing how much higher an ideal of friendship existed in the old world than of love, the full realization of which was reserved for the modern Christian world. But all this admitted, the Roman proverbs possess substantial merits of their own. A vigorous moral sense speaks out in many;⁴ and even

¹ This Greek proverb on love is the noblest of the kind which I remember: **Μουσικὴν ἔρωσ διδάσκει, κᾶντις ἄμουσος ἦ τὸ πρὶν.**

² In this respect the Latin proverb, *Mores amici noveris, non oderis*, on which Horace has furnished so exquisite a comment (*Sat. i. 3, 24-93*), and which finds its grateful equivalent in the Italian, *Ama l' amico tuo con il difetto suo* (*Love your friend with his fault*), is worthy of all admiration.

³ By Zell, in his slight but graceful treatise, *On the Proverbs of the ancient Romans* (*Ferienschriften*, vol. ii. p. 1-96).

⁴ Thus, *Noxa caput sequitur*;—*Conscientia, mille testes*. I subjoin a few more Latin proverbs; but of these two or three perhaps are medieval or modern. *Heroum filii noxae*.—*Lupus pilum mutat, non mentem*.—*Galeatum sero duelli poenitet*.—*Gladiator in arena consilium capit*.—*Ex scintilla incendium*.—*Sui cuique mores fingunt fortunam*.—*Piscis primuni a capite foetet*.—*Ubi uber, ibi tuber*.—*Simul sorbere et flare difficile est*.—*Qui celocem agere nescit, onerariam ne petat* [*Jer. xii. 15*].—*Nescis quid serus vesper vehat*.—*Bona tergo formosissima*.—*Virum improbum vel mus mordet*.—*Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur*.—*Ubi amici, ibi opes*.—*Nec nulli sis amicus, nec omnibus*.—*Nunquam periculum sine periculo vincitur*.—*Sine pennis*

when this is not so prominent, they wear often a thoroughly old Roman aspect; being business-like and practical, frugal and severe, wise saws such as the elder Cato must have loved, such as will have been often upon his lips;¹ while in the number that relate to farming, they bear singular witness to that strong and lively interest in agricultural pursuits, which formed so remarkable a feature of the old Italian life.

It will not be possible to pass under even this hastiest review more than a few of the modern families of proverbs. Let us turn first to those of Spain.³ I put them in the foremost rank, because Spanish literature, poor in some provinces wherein many other literatures are rich, is eminently rich in this; and deserves this praise whether we regard the quantity or

volare haud facile est.—Dies adimit aegritudinem.—Ars non habet osorem, nisi ignorantem. —Aliquis in omnibus est nullus in singulis.—Medice vivere est misere vivere.—Liter n: marsupium non sequuntur.—Beneficium accipere, libertatem est vendere. — Homini diligenti semper aliquid superest.

¹ He has preserved for us that very sensible and at the same time truly characteristic one, Quod non opus est, asse carum est.

² These are three or four of the most notable—the first against ‘high farming,’ to which I have never seen an appeal in modern controversies on the subject: Nihil minus expedit quam agrum optime colere (Pliny, *H. N.* vi. 18). Over against this, however, we must set another, warning against the attempt to farm with insufficient capital: Oportet agrum imbecilliorum esse quam agricolam; and yet another, on the liberal answer which the land will make to the pains and cost bestowed on it: Qui arat olivetum, rogat fructum; qui stercoret, exorat; qui caedit, cogit: and one more, which no doubt is true: Agricolam vendacem oportet esse, non emacem.

³ On Spanish proverbs see Ticknor, *History of Spanish Literature*, ch. 39.

quality of the proverbs which it owns.¹ I should call the mere number of Spanish proverbs astonishing, if the German, of which presently, did not exhaust any astonishment on the score of the mere number of proverbs which any nation could possess. A Spanish collection I have used while preparing these lectures, contains between seven and eight thousand, but can make no pretence to containing all; for I have searched it in vain for several with which from other sources I had become acquainted. So far from doing this, there exists a manuscript collection brought together by a distinguished Spanish scholar, which is reported to contain from five and twenty to thirty thousand.²

And their quality is on a par with their quantity. It needs only to call to mind some of those, so rich in humour, so double-shotted with homely good sense, wherewith the Squire in *Don Quixote* adorns his discourse, until oftentimes they constitute not the fringe and border, but the main woof and texture of it: and then, if we assume that the remainder are not alto-

¹ This was the judgment of Salmasius, who says: *Inter Europos Hispani in his excellunt, Itali vix cedunt, Galls proximo sequuntur intervallo.*

² What may have become of this collection I know not; but it was formerly in Richard Heber's library (see the *Catalogue*, vol. ix. no. 1697). Juan Yriarte was the collector, and in a note to the *Catalogue* it is stated that he devoted himself with such eagerness to the bringing of it to the highest possible state of completeness, that he would give his servants a fee for any new proverb they brought him; while to each, as it was inserted in his list, he was careful to attach a memorandum of the quarter from which it came; and if this was not from books but from life, an indication of the name, the rank, and condition in life of the person from whom it was obtained.

gether unlike these, we shall acknowledge that it would be difficult to rate them more highly than they deserve. And some are in a loftier vein; we might indeed expect as much; for taking, as we have a right to do, Cervantes himself as the truest exponent of the Spanish character, we should be prepared to meet in the proverbs of Spain a grave thoughtfulness, a stately humour, to find them breathing the very spirit of chivalry and honour, and indeed of freedom too;—for in Spain, as throughout so much of Europe, it is despotism, and not freedom, which is new. The expectation is abundantly fulfilled. How eminently chivalresque, for instance, the following: *White hands cannot hurt*.¹ What a grave humour lurks in this: *The ass knows well in whose face he brays*.² What a stately apathy, how proud a looking of calamity in the face, speaks out in the admonition which this one contains: *When thou seest thine house in flames, approach and warm thyself by it*.³ What a spirit of freedom, which refuses to be encroached on even by the highest, is embodied in another: *The king goes as far as he may, not as far as he would*;⁴ what Castilian pride in the following: *Every layman in Castile might make a king every clerk a pope*. The Spaniard's contempt for his peninsular neighbours finds emphatic

¹ Las manos blancas no ofenden. Calderon has taken this for the title of one of his plays. Many of his plays, like Shakespeare's, have proverbs for their titles: thus, Mariana sera otro dia—Casa con dos puertas mala es de guardar—Guardate de la agua mansa—Bien vengas, mal, si vienes solo.

² Bien sabe el asno en cuya cara rebozna.

³ Quando vieras to casa quemar, llega te a escalar.

⁴ El rey va hasta do puede, y no hasta do quiere.

utterance in another: *Take from a Spaniard all his good qualities, and there remains a Portuguese.*

Nations will occasionally in their proverbs indulge in a fine irony upon themselves, and show that they are perfectly aware of their own weaknesses, follies, and faults. This the Spaniards must be allowed to do in their proverb, *Succours of Spain, either late or never.*¹ However largely and confidently promised, these Succours of Spain either do not arrive at all, or only arrive after the opportunity in which they could have served has passed away. Certainly any one who reads the despatches of England's Great Captain during the Peninsular War will find in almost every page of them justifications of this proverb, will own that those who coined it read themselves aright, and could not have designated broken pledges, unfulfilled promises of aid, tardy and thus ineffectual assistance, by a happier title than *Succours of Spain*. And then, again, what a fearful glimpse of those blood-feuds which, having once begun, seem as if they could never end, blood touching blood, and violence evermore provoking its like, have we in the following: *Kill, and thou shalt be killed, and they shall kill him who kills thee.*²

¹ Socorros de Espana, o tarde, o nunca. The Italians have a proverb in which they express their sense of the tardiness of the despatch of all business in Spain, and the infinite delays which are sure to attend it—*May my death come to me from Spain* (Mi venga la morte da Spagna), for so it will come late or not at all.

² Mataras, y matarte han, y mataran a quien to matara. These which follow are all good, and some very good: Quien a lobo embia, carne espera.—Quien en la plaza a labrar se mete,

The Italians also are eminently rich in proverbs; yet if ever I have been tempted to retract or seriously to modify what I shall have occasion by-and-bye to affirm of a nobler life and spirit as predominating in proverbs, it has been after the study of some Italian collection. 'The Italian proverbs,' it has been said not without too much reason, though perhaps also with overmuch severity, 'have taken a tinge from their deep and politic genius, and their wisdom seems wholly concentrated in their personal interests. I think every tenth proverb in an Italian collection is some cynical or some selfish maxim, a book of the world for worldlings.'¹ Certainly many of them are

muchos adestradores tiene.—Con agua pasada no muele molino.—A carros quebrados carriles a fartos.—Buscáis cinco pies al gato, y el no tiene sino cuatro.—En los nidos de antano no hay pajaros hogano.—El mal cobrador hace mal pagador.—La oveja lozana dijo a la cabra, Dame lana.—El dia que te casas o te sanas, o te matas.—Quando el corsario promete misas y cera, con mal anda la galera.—Quando Dios quiere, con todos vientos llueve.—Quando te dier-en la vaquilla, acude con la soguilla.—Quando to dieren el anillo, pon el dedillo.—Pierde el lobo los dientes, rnas no las mientes.—Quando mayor ventura, es menos segura.—No pidas al olmo Ia pera; pues no la lleva.—Una vez salí, y diez me arrepenti.—Uno piensa el bayo, y otro el que to ensilla.—Nacen las alas a la hormiga, para que se pierda mas aina.—No con cada mal al fisico, ni con cada pleito al letrado), ni con cada sed al jarro.—Mas quiero asno que me lleve, que cavallo que me derrueque.—Jurado ha el bano de to negro no hacer blanco.—Necio es, que piensa que otros no piensan.--Mas vale humo de mi casa que fuego de la agena.—Al fin se canta la gloria.—Aunque la mona se vesta de seda, mona se queda.--Quando pienses meter el diente en seguro, toparas en duro.—Mandan al mono, y el mozo al gato, y el gato a su rabo.

¹ *Cusriosities of Literature*, London; 1838, p, 391. Les Ita-

shrewd enough, and only too shrewd; inculcating an universal suspicion, teaching to look everywhere for a foe, to expect, as the Greeks said, a scorpion under every stone, glorifying artifice and cunning as the true guides and only safe leaders through the perplexed labyrinth of life, and altogether seeming dictated as by the spirit of Machiavel himself.¹

Worse than this is the glorification of revenge which speaks out in too many of them. I know nothing of its kind calculated to give one a more shuddering sense of horror than the series which might be drawn together of Italian proverbs on this matter; especially when we take them with the commentary which Italian history supplies, and which shows them no empty words, but truest utterances of the nation's heart. There is no misgiving in these about the right of entertaining so deadly a guest in the bosom; on the contrary, one of them, exalting the sweetness of revenge, declares, *Revenge is a morsel for God.*² There is nothing in them (it would be far better if there were) of blind and headlong passion, but rather a spirit of deliberate calculation, which makes the blood run cold. Thus one gives this advice: *Wait time and place to act thy revenge,*

liens s'y montrent ruses, gracieux et moqueurs, is the judgment of a French writer, F. Denis, in a slight but clever essay on what he calls *The Philosophy of Sancho*.

¹ These may serve as examples: Chi ha sospetto, di rado e in difetto.—Fidarsi e bene, ma non fidarsi e meglio.—Da chi mi fido, mi guardi Iddio; di chi non mi fido, mi guardero io.—Con arte e con inganno si vive mezzo l' anno; con inganno e con arte si vive l' altra parte.—A mal passo l' onore.

² Vendetta, boccon di Dio.

*for it is never well done in a hurry;*¹ while another proclaims an immortality of hatred, which no spaces of intervening time shall have availed to weaken: *Revenge of a hundred years old hath still its sucking teeth.*² We may well be thankful that we have in England, so far at least as I am aware, no sentiments parallel to these, embodied as the permanent convictions of the national mind.

How curious again is the confession which speaks out in another Italian proverb, that the maintenance of the Roman system and the study of Holy Scripture cannot go together. It is this: *With the Gospel one becomes a heretic.*³ No doubt with the study of the Word of God one becomes a heretic, in the Italian sense of the word; and therefore it is only prudently done to put all obstacles in the way of that study, to assign three years' and four years' imprisonment with hard labour, as was lately assigned in Spain, to as many as shall dare to peruse it; yet certainly it is not a little remarkable that such a confession should have embodied itself in the popular utterances of the nation.

But while it must be freely owned that the charges brought just now against the Italian proverbs are sufficiently borne out by too many, they are not all to be included in the common shame. Very many there are not merely of a delicate refinement of beauty, as this, expressive of the freedom in regard of thine and mine which will exist between true friends:

¹ *Aspetta tempo e luogo a far tua vendetta, che la non si fa mai ben in fretta. Compare another: Vuoi far vendetta del tuo nemico, governati bene, ed e bell' e fatta.*

² *Vendetta di cent' anni ha ancor i lattaiuoli.*

³ *Con l' Evangelo si diventa eretico.*

*Friends tie their purses with a spider's thread;*¹ and of a subtle wisdom which has not degenerated into cunning and deceit; others too of a still nobler stamp; honour and honesty, plain dealing and uprightness, have here their praises, and are not seldom pronounced to be in the end more than a match for all cunning and deceit. How excellent in this sense is the following: *For an honest man half his wits is enough, the whole is too little for a knave;*² the ways, that is, of truth and uprightness are so simple and plain, that a little wit is abundantly sufficient for those who walk in them; the ways of falsehood and fraud are so perplexed and crooked, that sooner or later all the wit of the cleverest rogue will not preserve him from being entangled therein. How often and how wonderfully has this found its confirmation in the lives of evil men; so true it is, to employ another proverb and a very deep one from the same quarter, that *The devil is subtle, yet weaves a coarse web*³

¹ Gli amici legano la borsa con un filo di ragnatelo.

² Ad un uomo dabbene avanza la meta del cervello; ad un tristo non basta ne anche tutto.

³ Jeremy Taylor appears to have found much delight in the proverbs of Italy. In the brief foot-notes appended to his *Holy Living* I counted five and twenty such, to which he makes more or less remote allusion in the text. There is an excellent article on 'Tuscan Proverbs' in *Fraser's Magazine*, Jan. 1857. I subjoin a small group. A nave rotta ogni vento e contrario.—Chi ha tempo, non aspetti tempo.—Chi ha la sanita e ricco, e non lo sa.—Chi non da fine al pensare, non da principio a fare.—Fammi indovino, ed io ti faro ricco.—Fra l' incudine e 'l martello non metta la mano chi ha cervello.—Chi edifica, sua borsa purifica.—La morte sempre trova qualche scusa.—Il diavolo e facile da invitare, ma non da scacciare.—E meglio

On French proverbs I cannot linger long. They have very much the excellence which we should beforehand have expected; being full of grace and finish; with a rapier's point and polish; yet at the same time often with the rapier's coldness as well.¹

And the German proverbs I must hastily pass over. Whatever other merits they possess, and they possess many, and of such different kinds that it is difficult, if not impossible, to seize their most characteristic features, they may certainly boast of being the most numerous family of proverbs in existence.² I shall often have occasion to recur to them.

cader della finestra che del tetto.—Chi piglia leoni in assenza suol temer dei topi in presenza.—Chi troppo abbraccia, nulla stringe.—Chi offende, scrive nella rena, chi e offeso nel marmo.—Ad un tristo un tristo e mezzo.—Il diavolo tenta tutti, ma l' ozioso tenta it diavolo.—A flume famoso non andar a pesca. -- Chi vuol it lavoro mal fatto, paghi innanzi tratto. —Chi non vuol servir ad un sol signor, a molti ha da servir.—Chi si fa fango, it porco lo calpesta.—Corpo satollo non crede all' affamato.-- Dall' aqua cheta mi guardi Iddio, dalle correnti mi guardero io.—Chi ha arte da per tutto ha parte [cf. Phaedrus, *Fab.* iv. 21].—Chi asino e, e cervo esser si crede, al saltar del fosso se n' avvede.—Se il giovine sapesse, ed it vecchio potesse, non v' e cosa che non si facesse.

¹ Donner est mort, et preter est bien malade.—Il ne faut pas faire d'un diable deux.—D'un sac a charbon ne peut sortir que la poussiere noire. —Un sot savant est plus sot qu'un sot ignorant.—Le mal est gros du bien.—L'homme est un arbre renverse.-- A bon demandeur bon refuseur.—Le fol cherche son malheur. -- La gloire qui dine de l'orgueil fait son soupe de mepris.—Tous les renards se trouvent chez le pelletier.—Qui veut prendre un oiseau, qu'il ne l'effarouche.—On ne trouve jamais meilleur messenger que soi-meme.

² I was disposed once to claim this pre-eminence for the pro-

English proverbs in like manner have so many excellences without having any one excellence which is greatly predominant, that in their case also it is difficult to seize upon features which more than any other are peculiarly their own.¹ With Scotch it is

verbs of Spain, but the 30,000 of which I spoke just now are immensely outnumbered by the contents of Wander's *Deutsches Spichworter-Lexicon*, which when completed will certainly not contain less than 100,000; if, indeed, this almost incredible number is not exceeded. It may give some notion of the German opulence in this line of things when I mention that under 'Haus' are ranged 686 proverbs, under 'Frau' 770, under 'Gluck' 1025, under, 'Gott' 2660; that is, there is this number of proverbs in which these severally constitute the principal word; while other words yield proverbs in the same proportion. I subjoin a very small handful of these:—Die Augen sind weiter, als der Bauch.—Mancher sucht Einen Pfennig, und verbrennt dabei drei Lichter.—Dem Esel traumet von Disteln.—Frau und Mond leuchten mit fremden Licht.—Es giebt mehr Diebe als Galgen.—Dem Diebe will kein Baum gefallen, daran er hange.—Gedanken sind zollfrei, aber nicht hollenfrei. --Besser zweimal fragen, denn einmal irre gehn.—Wass man Gott opfern will, muss man nicht von Teufel einsegnen lassen.—Vermogen sucht Vermogen.—Zu viel Gluck ist Ungluck.—Wenn der Esel auch eine Lowenhaut tragt, die Ohren gucken vor.—Wenn der Fuchs Richter ist, gewinnt schwerlich eine Gans den Process.—Wenn der Fuchs sie todt stellt, so sind die Huhner in Gefahr.

¹I append here a few of these: Who hath horns in his bosom need not put them on his head.—Better a little loss than a long sorrow.—A fool always rushes to the fore.—Folks' dogs bark worse than themselves.—A bribe enters without knocking.—Prosperity makes friends, adversity proves them.—What can you expect from a hog but a grunt? —High winds blow on high hills.—A man will never change his mind if he has no mind to change.—Mettle is dangerous in a blind horse.—What, keep a dog and bark myself? It is of no use flogging a dead horse.—The hobgoblin reads his own writing,—Losers may have leave

easier. Of course an immense number of Scotch proverbs are identical with our own, or it may be, distinguished from them only by slight dialectic differences. But this is by no means the case with all. Many of ours, so far as I can trace them, have at no time had free course in Scotland; while Scotland in the same way possesses many which have never crossed the border, and in which we have no share. Other nations may own larger collections of proverbs, and may produce single proverbs of a grace, tenderness and elevation, which none of these can match; but I know of no collection so uniformly good, in which so few flat, pointless, and merely trivial are to be found. Their one serious fault as a whole is that there are so few among them which move in, or assume, or at all reach out after, an ideal world, higher than that in which we commonly move; but as maxims of prudential morality they deserve all praise. Thus, what better in this way could be found than the following: *Raise nae mair deils than ye're able to lay?* It need not be said that they are canny; and some over canny and with the touch of a too visible contempt for those that are otherwise; as, for instance, this one: *Fools make feasts, and wise men eat them.* They are almost always witty; as these are: *As long as ye serve the tod [the fox], ye maun carry his tail—A crow is nae whiter for being washed—Dinna lift me before I fall—A blate cat makes a proud*

to speak.—He dances well to whom Fortune pipes.—Where God has his Church, the devil has his chapel. If thy name be up, thou mayest lie abed till noon.—Drawn wells are seldom dry. —He that will eat the kernel must crack the nut.—Treat thy horse as a friend, and mount him as an enemy.—It is a sad house where the hen crows louder than the cock.

mouse—As good eat the deil, as the hail he's boiled in; while this, if not witty, yet is wise: *Better keep the deil out than hae to turn him out.* This that follows is in a higher strain, in that strain of which I just now complained that Scotch proverbs offer too few examples: *A thread will tie an honest man better than a rope will do a rogue,* How far the Irish may have a stock of home-born proverbs I cannot undertake to say; but the poet Spenser, who long dwelt in Ireland, records a very characteristic one as in his time current among the Irish. It is this: *Spend me and defend me;* and no doubt exactly expresses their idea of what they owed to their native chiefs, and what these owed in return to them. There has been no time in which their leaders have not taken them only too well at their word so far as the first half of the proverb reaches, and have not failed prodigally to *spend* them; while if they have ever undertaken to *defend*, these undertakings have issued exactly as must ever issue all undertakings to defend men from those evils wherefrom none can effectually protect them but themselves.

Russian proverbs appear to me to be singularly good. I have no choice, however, but to pass, them by with this slight notice, and to wander still further afield. The proverbs of the Eastern world go far to tell the story of the East. Thus, what description of Egypt as it now is, could set us at the heart of its moral condition, could make us to understand all which long centuries of oppression and misrule have made of it and of its people, as compared with the Arabic proverbs now current there?¹ In other books

¹ These *Arabic Proverbs of the Modern Egyptian*, London

others describe the modern Egyptians, but here they unconsciously describe themselves. The selfishness, the utter extinction of all public spirit, the servility, which no longer as with an inward shame creeps into men's acts, but utters itself boldly as the avowed law of their lives, the sense of the oppression of the strong, of the insecurity of the weak, and, generally, the whole character of life, as poor, mean, sordid, and ignoble, with only a few faintest glimpses of that romance which we usually attach to the East; all this, as we study these documents, rises up before us in clearest, though in painfulest, outline.

Thus only in a land where rulers, being evil themselves, instinctively feel all goodness to be their foe, and themselves therefore entertain a corresponding hostility to it, where they punish but never reward, where not to be noticed by them is the highest ambition of those under their yoke, in no other save a land like this could a proverb like the following, *Do no good, and thou shalt find no evil*, have ever come to the birth. How assured a conviction that wrong, and not right, is the lord paramount of the world must have settled down on men's spirits, before such a word as this, (I know of no sadder one), could have found utterance from their lips.¹

1830, were collected by the traveller Burckhardt, and after his death published with his name.

¹Yet this very mournful collection of Burckhardt's possesses at least one very beautiful proverb on the all-conquering power of love: *Man is the slave of beneficence*. I will add a few others, Persian, Arabic, Turkish. They all seem to me to possess more or less merit, and some to be eminently characteristic of that East to which they belong. Thus, He who has need of

The author of an article on Chinese proverbs in the *China Review* expresses himself thus: 'If it be asked what is the distinguishing note of Chinese proverbs? I would say, a certain quiet and keen long-headedness, a somewhat cynical and worldly view of human nature, but a piercing insight into it, reminding one most of those incisive Florentine bywords recovered for us by the unwearied diligence of George Eliot. And thus the proverbs of China are marked more by wisdom than by sweetness, for they have sprung from the heart of a hard-working, not too much rejoicing, people. They turn more on the foibles of humanity than its excellences.'¹

a dog, calls him Sir Dog.—He is the true sage who learns from all the world. —It is ill sport between the cotton and the fire. —Treat thy horse as a friend, and mount him as an enemy.—Two water-melons are not held in one hand. —Thou wilt catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a cask of vinegar. —The king makes free with an apple; his servants have cut down the tree. —If the monkey reigns, dance before him.—Though thy friend be honey, do not swallow him up.—Keep the dogs near when thou suppest with the wolf.—Who chatters to you, will chatter of you. —The dust of the sheepfold is ointment for the sore eyes of the wolf.—Cast thy bread upon the waters; God will know of it, if the fishes do not.—Stones and sticks are flung only at fruit-bearing trees.—When once thy cart is overturned, everyone will show thee the way.

¹ The proverbs which follow will, I think, bear this judgment out: It is easier to visit friends than to live with them. —Master easy, servant slack.—A coach and four cannot bring back a word once uttered.—Better go home and make a net than jump into a pool after fish.—Great folks may set the town in a blaze, common people must not even light a lantern.—All ten fingers cannot be of the same length. —Leave to the tiger the care of attacking the wolf.—The tiles which defend thee in the

Other families of proverbs would each of them tell its own tale, give up its own secret; but I must not seek from this point of view to question them further. I would rather bring now to your notice that even where they do not spring, as they cannot all, from the central heart of a people, nor declare to us the secretest things which are there, but dwell more on the surface, they have still oftentimes local or national features, which it is worth our while to remark. Thus, how many clothe themselves in an outward form and shape, borrowed from, or suggested by, the peculiar scenery or circumstances or history of their own land; so that they could scarcely have come into existence at all, not certainly in the shape that they now wear, anywhere besides. Thus our own, *Make hay while the sun shines*, is truly English, and could have had its birth only under such variable skies as ours,—not, at any rate, in those southern lands where, during the summer time at least, the sun always shines. In the same way a fine Cornish proverb tells the story of obstinate wrongheads, who will take no warning except from calamities, dashing themselves to pieces against obstacles, which with a little prudence and foresight they might easily have avoided: *Who will not be ruled by the rudder, must be ruled by the rock*. It sets us at once upon some rocky and wreck-strewn coast; we feel that it could never have been the proverb of an inland people. And this, *Do not talk*

wet weather were fashioned in the dry.—The ripest fruit does not drop into the mouth. —Who borrows to build, builds to sell. —In accounts finish all, or you have finished nothing. —You may be arrested by mistake, but not released.

Arabic in the house of a Moor,¹—that is, because there thy imperfect knowledge of the language will be detected at once,—this, wherever we met it, we should confidently affirm to be the Spanish version of a proverb not strange to ourselves: *It is hard to halt before a cripple*. In like manner a traveller with any experience in the composition of Spanish sermons and Spanish dishes could make no mistake about the following: *A sermon without Augustine is as a stew without bacon*.² *Big and empty, like the Heidelberg tun*,³ could have its home only in Germany; that enormous vessel, known as the Heidelberg tun, constructed to contain nearly 300,000 flasks, having now stood empty for hundreds of years. As little does the following, *It's not every village parson whom Dr. Luther's shoes will fit*,⁴ leave us in any doubt to what people it appertains. And this, *The world is a carcase, and they who gather pound it are dogs*, plainly proclaims itself as belonging to those Eastern lands, where the unowned dogs prowling about the streets of a city are the natural scavengers that assemble round a carcase thrown in the way. So too the form which our own proverb, *Man's extremity, God's opportunity*, or as we sometimes have it, *When need is highest, help is nighest*, assumes among the Jews, namely this, *When the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses comes*,⁵ plainly roots

¹ En casa del Moro no hables algarabia.

² Sermon sin Agostino, olla sin tocino.

³ Gross and leer, wie das Heidelberger Fass.

⁴ Doctor Luther's Schuhe sind nicht alien Dorfpriestern gerecht.

⁵ Cum duplicantur lateres, Moses venit. This proverb was a favourite one with the German Protestants during the worst

itself in the early history of that nation, being an allusion to Exod. v. 9-19, and without a knowledge of that history would be wholly unintelligible. The same may be said of this: *We must creep into Ebal, and leap into Gerizim*; in other words, we must be slow to curse, and swift to bless (Deut. xxvii. 12, 13).

But while it is thus with some, which are bound by the very conditions of their existence to a narrow and peculiar sphere, or at all events move more naturally and freely in it than elsewhere, there are others which we meet all the world over. True cosmopolites, they seem to have travelled from land to land, and to have made themselves a home equally in all. The Greeks obtained them probably from the older East, and again imparted them to the Romans ; and from these they have found their way into all the languages of the modern world.

Much, I think, may be learned from knowing what those truths are, which are so felt to be true by all nations, that all have loved to possess them in these compendious forms, wherein they may pass readily from mouth to mouth: which, thus cast into some happy shape, have become a portion of the common stock of the world's wisdom, in every land making for themselves a recognition and a home. Such a proverb, for instance, is *Man proposes, God disposes*;¹ one I believe that every nation in Europe possesses, so deeply upon all men is impressed the sense of Hamlet's words, if not the very words themselves:

times of the Thirty Years War. Gustavus Adolphus was the Moses who should come in the hour of uttermost need.

¹ La gente pone, y Dios dispone.—Der Mensch denkt's; Gott lenkt's.

‘There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.’

Sometimes the proverb does not actually in so many words repeat itself in various tongues. We have, indeed, exactly the same thought; but it takes an outward shape and embodiment, varying according to the various countries and various periods in which it has been current and thus we have proverbs totally diverse from one another in form and appearance, but which yet, when looked at a little deeper, prove to be at heart one and the same, all these their differences being only, so to speak, variations of the same air. These furnish almost always an amusing, often an instructive, study; and to trace this likeness in difference has an interest lively enough. Thus the *forms* of the proverb, which brings out the absurdity of those reproving others for a defect or a sin, which cleaves in an equal or in a greater degree to themselves, have for the most no visible connexion at all, or the very slightest, with one another; yet for all this the proverb is at heart and essentially but one. We say in English: *The kiln calls the oven, ‘Burnt house;’*—the Italians: *The pan says to the pot, ‘Keep for you'll smutch me;’*¹—the Spaniards: *The raven cried to the crow, ‘Avaunt, blackamoor;’*²—the Germans: *One ass nicknames another, Longears;*³—while it must be owned there is a certain originality in the Catalan version of the proverb: *Death said to the man with his throat cut, ‘How ugly you look.’* Under how rich

¹ La padella dice al pajuolo, Fatti in la, the to mi tigni.

² Dijo la corneja al cuervo, Quitate alla, negro.

³ Ein Esel schimpft den andern, Langohr.

a variety of forms does one and the same thought array itself here.

Take another illustration of the same fact. Coals to Newcastle is a thoroughly home-born phrase, expressing well the absurdity of sending to a place that which already abounds there, as water to the sea, or fagots to the wood: but it is only English in the outward garment which it wears in its innermost being it belongs to the whole world and to all times. Thus the Greeks said: *Owls to Athens*,¹ Attica abounding with these birds; the Rabbis: *Enchantments to Egypt*, Egypt being of old accounted the head-quarters of all magic; the Orientals: *Pepper to Hindostan*; the Germans: *Deals to Norway*; while in the Middle Ages they had this proverb: *Indulgences to Rome*, Rome being the centre and source of this spiritual traffic; nor do these by any means exhaust the list.

I adduce some other variations of the same kind, though not running through quite so many languages. Thus compare the German, *Who lets one sit on his shoulders, shall have him presently sit on his head*,² with the Italian, *If thou suffer a calf to be laid on thee, within a little they'll clap on the cow*,³ and, again, with the Spanish, *Give me where I may sit down; I will make where I may lie down*.⁴ All three alike remind us that undue liberties are best resisted at the outset, being otherwise

¹ Γλαῦκας εἰς Ἀθήνας.

² Wer sich auf der Achsel sitzen lasst, dem sitzt man nachher auf dem Kopfe.

³ Se ti lasci metter in spalla it vitello, quindi a poco ti metteran la vacca.

⁴ Dame donde me asiente, que yo hare donde me acueste.

sure to be followed up by other and greater ones; but this under how rich and humorous a variety of forms. Not very different is the lesson of these that follow. We say: *Daub yourself with honey, and you'll be covered with flies*; the Danes: *Make yourself an ass, and you'll have every man's sack on your shoulders*; the French: *Who makes himself 'a sheep, the wolf devours him*;¹ and the Persians: *Be not all sugar, or the world will gulp thee down*;² to which they add, however, as its necessary complement, *nor yet all wormwood, or the world will spit thee out*. Take another group. We are content to say without a figure: *The receiver's as bad as the thief*; but the French: *He sins as much who holds the sack, as he who puts into it*;³ and the Germans: *He who holds the ladder is as guilty as he who mounts the wall*.⁴ Or again, we say: *A stitch in time saves nine*; the Spaniards: *Who repairs not his gutter, repairs his whole house*.⁵ We say: *Misfortunes never come single*; the Italians have no less than three proverbs to express the same popular conviction: *Blessed is that misfortune which comes single*; and again *One misfortune is the vigil of another*, and again: *A misfortune and a friar are seldom alone*.⁶ The Germans

¹ Qui se fait brebis, le loup le mange.

² There is a Catalan proverb to the same effect: Qui de tot es moll, de tot es foll.

³ Autant peche celui qui tient le sac, que celui qui met dedans.

⁴ Wer die Leiter halt, ist so schuldig wie der Dieb.

⁵ Quien no adoba gotera, adoba casa entera.

⁶ Benedetto e quel male, the viensolo.--Unmal e la vigili, dell altro.—Un male e un frate di rado soli.

say: *Many go out for wool, and come bath shorn*; but the Romans long ago: *The camel that desired horny lost even its ears.*¹ Many languages have this proverb *God gives the cold according to the cloth;*² it is very beautiful, but attains not to the tender beauty of our own: *God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.*

And, as in that last example, will there be not seldom an evident superiority of a proverb in one language over one, which resembles it closely in another. Moving in the same sphere, it will yet be richer, fuller, deeper. Thus our own, *A burnt child fears the fire*, is good; but that of many tongues, *A scalded dog fears cold water*, is better still. Ours does but express that those who have suffered once will henceforward be timid in respect of that same thing from which they have suffered; but that other the tendency to exaggerate such fears, so that now they shall fear where no fear is. And the fact that so it will be, clothes itself in an almost infinite variety of forms. Thus one Italian proverb says: *A dog which has been beaten with a stick, is afraid of its shadow;*³ and another, which could only have had its birth in the sunny South, where the glancing but harmless lizard so often darts across your path: *Whom a serpent has bitten, a lizard alarms.*⁴ With a little varia-

¹ Camelus cornea desiderans etiam aures perdidit. The camel in AEsop's fable asks horns of Jove. Indignant: at the foolish request, he deprives it of its ears.

² Dieu donne le froid selon le drap.—Cada cual siente el frio como anda vestido.

³ In Spanish: Quien del alacran esta picado, la sombra le espanta.

⁴ Cui serpe mozzica, lucerta teme.

tion from this, the Jewish Rabbis had said long before: *One bitten by a serpent, is afraid of a rope's end*; even that which bears so remote a resemblance to a serpent as this does, shall now inspire him with terror ; and the Cingalese, still expressing the same thought, but with imagery borrowed from their own tropical clime: *The man who has received a beating from a firebrand, runs away at sight of a firefly.*

Some of our Lord's sayings contain lessons which the proverbs of the Jewish Rabbis contained already; for He did not refuse to bring forth from his treasury things old as well as new; but it is instructive to observe how they acquire in his mouth a decorum and dignity which, it may be, they wanted before. We are all familiar with that word in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.' The Rabbis have a proverb to match, lively and piquant enough, but certainly lacking the gravity of this: *If thy neighbour call thee ass, put a pack-saddle on thy back*; do not, that is, withdraw thyself from the wrong, but rather go forward to meet and to welcome it.

Sometimes a proverb, without an entire transformation, will yet on the lips of different nations be slightly modified; and these modifications, slight as they are, may be eminently characteristic. Thus in English we say, *The river past, and God forgotten*, to express with how mournful a frequency He whose assistance was invoked, and perhaps earnestly invoked, in the moment of peril, is remembered no more, so soon as by his help the danger has been surmounted. The Spaniards have the proverb too; but it is with

them: *The river past, the saint forgotten.*¹ In its Italian form it sounds a still sadder depth of ingratitude: *The peril past, the saint mocked;*² the vows made to him in peril remaining unperformed in safety; and he treated somewhat as, in Greek story, Juno was treated by Mandrabulus the Samian. Of him we are told that having under the auspices of the goddess and through her direction discovered a gold mine, in his instant gratitude he vowed to her a golden ram; this he presently exchanged in intention for a silver one; and again this for a very small brass one; and this for nothing at all. Certainly the rapidly descending scale of the gratitude of this gold-finder, with little by little the entire disappearance of his thank-offering, might very profitably live in our memories, as so perhaps it would be less likely that the same should repeat itself in our lives.

¹ El rio pasado, el santo olvidado.

² Passato il punto, gabbato il santo.

LECTURE IV.

THE POETRY, WIT, AND WISDOM OF
PROVERBS.

I PROPOSE in my three remaining lectures to justify the attention which I have claimed for proverbs, not merely by appealing to the authority of others who in divers lands and in divers ages have prized and made much of them, but by bringing out and setting before you, so far as my skill reaches, some of the excellences by which they are mainly distinguished. Their wit, their wisdom, their poetry, the delicacy, the fairness, the manliness which characterize so many of them, their morality, their theology, will all by turns come under our consideration. At the same time I shall beware of presenting them to you as though they embodied these nobler qualities only. I shall not keep out of sight that there are proverbs, coarse, selfish, unjust, cowardly, profane; 'maxims' wholly undeserving of the honour implied by that name.¹ Still as my pleasure, and I doubt not yours, is rather in the wheat than in the tares, I shall, while I make no attempt to keep such out of sight, prefer to dwell in the main on proverbs which present nobler features to us.

¹ Propositiones quae inter *maximas* numerari merentur.

And first, of the poetry of proverbs. Whatever is *from* the people, or truly *for* the people, whatever either springs from their bosom, or has been cordially accepted by them, still more whatever unites both these conditions, will have more or less of poetry, or imagination, in it. For little as the people's craving after wholesome nutriment of the imaginative faculty, and after an entrance into a fairer and more harmonious world than that sordid and confused one with which often they are surrounded, is duly met and satisfied, still they yearn after all this with an honest hearty yearning, such as may well put to shame the palled indifference, the only affected enthusiasm of too many, whose opportunities of cultivating this glorious faculty have been so immeasurably greater than theirs. This being so, and proverbs being, as we have seen, the sayings that have found favour with the people, such as they have made peculiarly their own, we may confidently anticipate that there will be poetry, imagination, passion, in them. A closer examination will not put our confidence to shame.

Bold imagery, lively comparisons we have a right to expect to find in them. Nor do we look for it in vain. As a proof, let serve our own: *Gray hairs are death's blossoms*;¹ or the Italian: *Time is an inaudible file*;² or the Greek: *Man a bubble*;³ which last Jeremy Taylor has expanded into such glorious poe-

¹ In German: Grau' Haare sind Kirchhofsblumen; but older than either German or English ; for we may compare Erinna: *παυρολόγοι πολιαί, τὰ γήραος ἄνθεα θνατοῖς.*

² Il tempo e una lima sorda.

³ Πομφόλυξ ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

try in the opening of the Holy Dying; or the Turkish: *Death is a black camel which kneels at every man's gate*; to take up, that is, the burden of a coffin there; or this Arabic, on the never satisfied eye of desire: *Nothing but a handful of dust will fill the eye of man*; or another from the same quarter, worthy of Mecca's prophet himself; and of the earnestness with which he realized Gehenna, whatever else he may have come short in: *There are no fans in Hell*; or this other, also from the East: *Hold all skirts of thy mantle extended, when heaven is raining gold*; improve, that is, to the uttermost the happier crises of thy spiritual life; or this Indian, suggesting that good should be returned for evil: *The sandal tree perfumes the axe that fells it*; or this, current in the Middle Ages *Whose life lightens, his words thunder*;¹ or once more, this Chinese: *Towers are measured by their shadows, and great men by their calumniators*; however this last may have a somewhat artificial air, as tried by our standard, about it.

There is a French proverb: *One can go a long way after one is weary*;² which presents itself to me as having; the poetry of an infinite sadness about it, so soon as one gives it that larger range of application which it is capable of receiving, and which, no doubt, it was intended to receive. How many are the wayfarers utterly weary of the task and toil of life, who are still far off from their journey's end; and who despite of this weariness of theirs will have no choice but to

¹ Cujus vita fulgor, ejus verba tonitrua. Cf. Mark iii. 87: υἱοὶ βροντῆς.

² On va bien loin depuis qu'on est las.

fulfil those long stages which may still remain for them before their journey will be completed.

There may be poetry in a play upon words; and who can refuse to recognize as much in that exquisite Spanish proverb: *La verdad es siempre verde?* which I must leave in its original form; for were I to translate it, *The truth is always green*, its charm and chief beauty would have disappeared. It finds a pendant and complement in another, which I must equally despair of adequately rendering: *Gloria vana florece, y no grana*: all glory, this would say, which is not true, can shoot up into stalk and ear, but can never attain to the full grain in the ear. Nor can we refuse the title of poetry to this Eastern proverb, in which the wish that a woman may triumph over her enemies clothes itself thus:—*May her enemies stumble over her hair*;—may she flourish so, may her hair, the outward sign of this prosperity, grow so rich and long, may it so sweep the ground, that her detractors and persecutors may be entangled by it and fall.

And then, how exquisitely witty many proverbs are. Thus, not to speak of one familiar to us all, which is perhaps the queen of all proverbs: *The road to hell is paved with good intentions*, and admirably glossed in the *Guesses at Truth*: 'Pluck up the stones, ye sluggards, and break the devil's head with them,' take this Scotch one: *A man may love his house well, without riding on the ridge*; it is enough for a wise man to know what is precious to himself, without making himself ridiculous by evermore proclaiming it to the world. Or take this of our own, which has not to my knowledge hitherto found its way into any of our col-

lections; *When the devil is dead, he never lacks a chief mourner*; in other words, there is no abuse so enormous, no evil so flagrant, but that the interests or passions of some will be so bound up in its continuance that they will lament its extinction; or this Italian: *When rogues go in procession, the devil holds the cross*;¹ when evil men have all their own way, worst is best, and in the inverted hierarchy which is then set up, the foremost in badness is foremost also in such honour as is going. Or consider how happily the selfishness and bye-ends which too often preside at men's very prayers are detected and noted in this Portuguese: *Cobblers go to mass, and pray that cows may die*;² in the hope, that is, that leather may be cheap; or take another, a German one, noting with slightest exaggeration a measure of charity which is only too common: *He will swallow an egg, and give away the shells in alms*; or this from the Talmud, whose interpretation I may leave to yourselves: *All kinds of wood burn silently, except thorns, which crackle and cry out, We too are wood*. While treating of witty proverbs, I know of no wittier, and it is something more than witty, for rightly followed up it may lead to some very, deep heartsearchings, than this of our own, *The cat shuts its eyes while it steals cream*. How often men become wilfully blind to the wrong which is involved in some pleasing or gainful sin, refuse to see the evil of it; and may thus be fitly compared to the cat in the adage, shutting its eyes while it steals the cream.

¹ Quando i furbi vanno in processione, il diavolo porta la croce.

² Vao a missa capateiros, rogao a Deos que morrao os carneiros.

The wit of proverbs spares few or none. They are, as may be supposed, especially intolerant of fools. We say: *Fools grow without watering*; no need therefore of adulation or flattery, to quicken them to a ranker growth; for indeed *The more you stroke the cat's tail, the more he raises his back*;¹ and the Russians: *Fools are not planted or sowed; they grow of themselves*; and the Danes: *Fools have no need of a passport*;² they present themselves everywhere and find an entrance everywhere without one; while the Spaniards: *If folly were a pain, there would be dying in every house*;³ having further an exquisitely witty one on the folly of a pedant as the most intolerable of all follies: *A fool, unless he know Latin, is never a great fool*.⁴ And here is excellently unfolded to us the secret of the fool's confidence: *Who knows nothing, doubts nothing*.⁵

The shafts of their pointed satire are directed with an admirable impartiality against men of every sort and degree, so that none of us will be found to have wholly escaped. To pass over those, and they are exceedingly numerous, which are aimed at members of the monastic Orders,⁶ I must fain hope that this Bohemian one, pointing at the clergy, is not true; for

¹ This is Swedish: Zu mera man stryken Katten pa Swanzen, zu mera pyser pan.

² Galne Folk have ey Pas-Bord fornoden.

³ Si la locura fuese dolores, en cada casa darian voces.

⁴ Tonto, sin saber latin, nunca es gran tonto.

⁵ Qui rien ne sait, de rien ne doute.

⁶ An earnest preacher of righteousness just before the Reformation quotes this one as current about them: Quod agere veretur obstinatus diabolus, intrepide agit reprobus et contumax monachus.

it certainly argues no very forgiving temper on our parts in cases where we have been, or fancy ourselves to have been, wronged. It is as follows: *If you have offended a cleric, kill him; else you will never have peace with him.*¹ And another proverb, worthy to take its place among the best even of the Spanish, charges the clergy with being the authors of the principal spiritual mischiefs which have grown up in the Church: *By the vicar's skirts the devil climbs up into the belfry.*² Nor do physicians appear in the Middle Ages to have been in very high reputation for piety; for a Latin medieval proverb boldly proclaims: *Where there are three physicians, there are two atheists.*³ And as for lawyers, this of the same period, *Legista, nequista,*⁴ expresses itself not with such brevity only, but with such downright plainness of speech, that I shall excuse myself for attempting to render it into English. Nor do other sorts and conditions of men escape. 'The miller tolling with his golden thumb,' has been often the object of malicious insinuations; and of him the Germans have a proverb: *What is bolder than a miller's*

¹ It is Hus who, denouncing the sins of the clergy of his day, records this proverb: *Malum proverbium contra nos confinxerunt, dicentes, Si offenderis clericum, interfice eum; alias nunquam habebis pacem cum illo.*

² *Por las haldas del vicario sube el diablo al campanario.*

³ *Ubi tres medici, duo athei.* Chaucer, it will be remembered, introduces this as one trait of his 'Doctour of Phisike.'

'His studie was but litel on the Bible.'

Of course those which imply that they shorten rather than prolong the term of life, are numerous, as for instance, the old French: *Qui court apres le miere, court apres la biere.*

⁴ In German: *Juristen, bosen Christen.*

*neckcloth, which takes a thief by the throat every morning?*¹ Evenhanded justice might perhaps require: that I should find caps for other heads; and it is not that such are wanting, nor yet out of fear lest any should be offended, but only because I have much ground to cover, that I refrain. And yet one word before I hasten onward. I said just now that the shafts of their pointed satire were directed against men of every degree. I might have said against persons of every degree; for let none who can be included in this last designation suppose that they escape; certainly not wives, when a proverb so ungallant as this is current about them: *Next to nae wife, a gude wife is the best;* or this: *He that has lost a wife and sixpence has lost sixpence.* Maidens too can as little hope to escape, when the same Scottish soil which yielded the two I have just quoted, has yielded this third as well, *All are gude lasses; but where do all the ill wives come frae?*

What a fine knowledge of the human heart will they often display;—this Persian saying, for example, on the subtleties of pride, though I know not whether it is a proverb in the strictest sense of the word: *Thou shalt sooner detect an ant moving in the dark night on the black earth, than all the motions of pride in thine heart.* And on the wide reach of this sin the Italians say: *If pride were an art, how many graduates we should have.*² And then how excellent and searching is this word of theirs on the infinitely various shapes which

¹ Bebel: Dicitur in proverbio nostro: nihil esse audacius indusio molitoris, cum omni tempore matutino furem collo apprehendat.

² Se la superbia fosse arte, quanti dottori avremmo.

this protean sin will assume: *There is who despises pride with a greater pride,*¹ a proverb founded, as might seem, on the story of Diogenes, who, treading under his feet a rich carpet of Plato's, exclaimed, 'Thus I trample on the ostentation of Plato;' 'With an ostentation of thine own,' being the sage's excellent retort;—even as on another occasion he excellently well observed, that he saw the pride of the Cynic peeping through the rents of his mantle: for indeed pride can array itself quite as easily in rags as in purple; can affect squalors as easily as splendours; occupation of the lowest place and last being of itself no security at all for humility; out of a sense of which we very well have said: *As proud go behind as before.*

Sometimes in their subtle observation of life they arrive at conclusions which we would very willingly question or reject if we might, but to which it is impossible to refuse a certain amount of assent. Thus it is with the very striking German proverb: *One foe is too many; and a hundred friends too few.*² There speaks out in this a sense of the much more *active* principle in this world which enmity will too often prove than love. The hundred friends will *wish* you well; but the one foe will *do* you ill. Their benevolence will be ordinarily passive; his malevolence will be constantly active; it will be animosity, or spiritedness in evil. The proverb will have its use, if we are stirred up by it to prove its assertion false, to show that, in very many cases at least, there is no

¹ Tal sprezza la superbia con una maggior superbia.

² Ein Feind ist zu viel; and hundert Freunde sind zu wenig.

such blot as it would fix on the scutcheon of true friendship. In the same rank of unwelcome proverbs I must range this Persian one: *Of four things every man has more than he knows of sins, of debts, of years, and of foes*; and this Spanish: *One father can support ten children; ten children cannot support one father*; this last, so far as it has a ground of truth, attesting the comparative weakness of the filial as set over against the paternal affection, so that to the one those acts of self-sacrificing love are easy, which to the other are hard, and often impossible. At the same time, seeing that it is the order of God's providence in the world that fathers should in all cases support children, while it is the exception when children are called on to support parents, one can only admire that wisdom which has made the instincts of natural affection to run rather in the descending than in the ascending line; a wisdom to which this proverb, though with a certain exaggeration of the facts, bears witness.

How exquisitely delicate is the touch of this French proverb: *It is easy to go afoot, when one leads one's horse by the bridle*.¹ How fine and subtle an insight into the inner workings of the human heart is here displayed; how many cheap humilities are in this proverb set at their true value. It is easy to stoop from state, when that state may be resumed at will; to forego the homage which may be reclaimed at any moment, to part with luxuries and indulgences, which one only parts with exactly so long as it may please oneself. No reason indeed is to

¹ Il est aise d'aller a pied, quand on tient son cheval par la bride.

be found in this comparative easiness for the not 'going afoot;' on the contrary, it may be a most profitable exercise; but every reason for not esteeming the doing so too highly, nor setting it on a level with the toiling upon foot of him, who has no horse to fall back on at whatever moment he may please.

There is, and always must be, a vast deal of rough work to be done in the world; work which, though rough, is not therefore in the least ignoble; and the schemes, so daintily conceived, of a luxurious society, which repose on a tacit assumption that this work will endure to be left undone, that, at any rate, nobody shall be told off to do it, are judged with a fine irony in this Arabic proverb: *If I am master, and you are master, who shall drive the asses?*¹ The following proverb is, or rather used to be, current among the slave population of St. Domingo, who ridiculed with it the ambition and pretension of the mulatto race immediately above them. These, in imitation of the French planters, must have their duels too—duels, however, which had nothing earnest or serious about them, invariably ending in a reconciliation and a feast, the kids which furnished this last being in fact the only sufferers, their blood the only blood which was shed. All this the proverb uttered: *Mulattoes fight, kids die.*² This too with its keen appreciation of the fact that our faults may be hidden from others, but

¹ The Gallegan proverb, *You a lady, I a lady, who shall drive the hogs afield?* (Vos dona, yo dona, quen botara aporca fora?) is only a variation of this; and so too our own: *I stout and you stout, who will carry the dirt out?* It need not be observed that 'stout' here is equivalent to proud.

² *Mulates qua battent, cabrites qua worts.*

scarcely from those with whom we are brought into the nearness of daily life, is witty, and comes to us from a Creole source: *The shoe knows whether the stocking has holes.*

And proverbs, witty in themselves, often become wittier still in their application, like gems that acquire new brilliancy from their setting, or from some novel light in which they are held. No writer that I know has a happier skill in thus adding wit to the witty than Fuller, the Church historian. One or two examples drawn from his writings will shew this. He is describing the indignation, the outcries, the remonstrances, which the multiplied extortions, the intolerable exactions of the Papal See gave birth to in England during the reigns of such subservient kings as our Third Henry; yet he will not have his readers to suppose that the Popes fared a whit the worse for all this outcry which was raised against them; not so, for *The fox thrives best when he is most cursed*;¹ the very loudness of the clamour was itself rather an evidence how well they were faring. Or again, he is telling of that Duke of Buckingham, well known to us through Shakespeare's *King Richard the Third*, who, having helped the tyrant to a throne, afterwards took mortal displeasure against him; this displeasure he sought to hide in the deep of his heart, till a season should arrive for shewing it with effect; but in vain; for, as Fuller observes, *It is hard to halt before a cripple*, the arch-hypocrite Richard, he to whom dissembling was

¹ A proverb of many tongues beside our own: thus in the Italian: Quanto pin la volpe e maladetta, tanto maggior preda fa

as a second nature, saw through and detected at once the shallow Buckingham's clumsier deceit. And the Church History abounds with similar happy applications. Fuller, indeed, possesses so much of the wit out of which proverbs spring, that not seldom it is difficult to tell whether he is adducing a proverb, or uttering some proverb-like saying of his own, destined to become such, or at all events abundantly deserving to do so. Thus I cannot remember ever to have met any of the following, which yet sound like proverbs—the first on solitude as preferable to ill-fellowship: *Better ride alone than have a thief's company*;¹ the second against certain who disparaged one whose excellences they would have found it very difficult to imitate: *They who complain that Grantham steeple stands awry, will not set a straighter by it*,² while in another he warns against despising in any the tokens of honourable toil: *Mock not a cobbler for his black thumbs*.³

But the glory of proverbs, that, perhaps, which strikes us most often and most forcibly about them, is their shrewd common sense, the sound wisdom for the management of our own lives, or the management of our intercourse with our fellows, which so many of them contain. In truth, there is no region of practical life which they do not occupy, for which they do not supply some wise hints and counsels and warnings. There is hardly a mistake that in the course of our lives we have committed, but some proverb, had we known and attended to its lesson, might have saved us from it. 'Adages' indeed, according to the more

¹ *Holy State*, iii. 5.

² *Ibid.* ii. 23.

³ *Ibid.* iii. c. 2.

probable etymology of that word, they are, apt for action and use.¹

Thus, how many of these popular sayings turn on the prudent governing the tongue,—I speak not now of those urging the *duty*, though such are by no means wanting,—but the wisdom and profit of knowing how to keep silence as well as how to speak seeing that, as one which I only know in its German form says, *It is better to stumble with the foot than with the tongue.*² The Persian is no doubt familiar to us all: *Speech is silvers, silence is golden*; with which we may compare the Italian: *Who speaks, sows; who keeps silence, reaps*;³ and on the *safety* that is in silence, I know none happier than another from the same quarter, and one most truly characteristic of Italian caution: *Silence was never written down*;⁴ while, on the other hand, we are excellently warned of the irrevocable nature of the word which has once gone from us in this Eastern proverb: *Of thy word unspoken thou art master; thy spoken word is master of thee*; even as the same is set out elsewhere by many striking comparisons; it is the arrow from the bow, the stone from the sling; and, once launched, can as little be recalled as these.⁵ Our own, *Who says what he likes, shall hear what he does not*

¹ Adagia, ad agendum apta; this is the etymology of the word given by Festus.

² Besser mit dem Fusse gestrauchelt als mit der Zunge.

³ Chi pal la semina, chi tace raccoglie; compare the Swedish *Bättre tyga än illa tala* (Better silence than ill speech).

⁴ Il tacer non fu mai scritto.

⁵ Palabra de Boca, piedra de honda. —Palabra y piedra suelta no tiene vuelta.

like, gives a further motive for self-government in speech; while this Spanish is in a higher strain: *The evil which issues from thy mouth falls into thy bosom.*¹ Nor is it enough to abstain ourselves from all such rash or sinful words; we must not make ourselves partakers in those of others; which it is only too easy to do; for, as the Chinese have said very well: *He who laughs at an impertinence, makes himself its accomplice.*

And then, in proverbs not a few what profitable warnings have we against the fruits of evil companionship, as in that homely one, which certainly is as old as Seneca,² and no doubt older, *Who lies down with dogs shall rise up with fleas*; or, again, in the old Hebrew one: *Two dry sticks will set on fire one green*; or, in another from the East, which repeats the same caution, and plainly shows whither such companionship will lead: *He that takes the raven for a guide, shall light upon carrion.*

What warnings do many contain against unreasonable expectations, against a looking for perfection in a world of imperfection, and generally a demanding of more from life than life can yield. We note very well the folly of one addicted to this, when we say: *He expects better bread than can be made of wheat*; and the Portuguese: *He that will have a horse without fault, let him go afoot*; and the French: *Where the goat is tied, there she must browse.*³ Again, what a word of

¹ El mal que de tu boca sale, en tu seno se cae.

² He has it word for word: Qui cum canibus concumbunt, cum pulcibus surgent.

³ La ou la chevre est attachee, it faut qu'elle broute.

timely caution on the wisdom of considering oftentimes a step which, being once taken, is taken for ever, lies in the following Russian proverb: *Measure thy cloth ten times; thou canst cut it but once.* And in this Spanish the final issues of procrastination are well set forth: *By the street of 'By-and-bye' one arrives at the house of 'Never.'* How pleasantly a wise discretion which shall avoid all appearance of evil is urged in this Chinese proverb: *In a field of melons lace not thy boot; under a plum-tree adjust not thy cap.* And this Danish warns us well against relying too much on other men's continence in speech, since there is no rarer gift than that of keeping a secret: *Tell nothing to thy friend which thine enemy may not know.* Here is a word which we owe to Italy, and which, laid to heart, might go far to keep men out of lawsuits, or, being entangled in them, from refusing to accept tolerable terms of accommodation: *The robes of lawyers are lined with the obstinacy of suitors.*² Other words of wisdom and warning, for so I must esteem them, are these: this, on the danger of being overset by prosperity: *Everything may be borne, except good fortune;*³ with which may be compared our own: *Bear wealth, poverty will bear itself;* and another of our own, *It is hard to lift a full cup without spilling;* and another Italian which says: *In prosperity no altars smoke.*⁴ This is on the exposure which is sure

¹ Pot la calle de despues se va a la casa de nunca.

² Le vesti degli avvocati sono fodrate dell' ostinazion dei litiganti.

³ Ogni cosa si sopporta, eccetto it buon tempo,

⁴ Nella prosperity on funiano gli altari.

sooner or later to follow upon the arraying of ourselves in intellectual finery that does not belong to us:

*Who arrays himself in other men's garments, remains naked in the middle of the street;*¹ he is detected and laid bare, and this under conditions which make detection the most shameful.

Of the same miscellaneous character, and derived from quarters the most diverse, but all of them of an excellent sense or shrewdness, are the following. This is from Italy: *Who sees not the bottom, let him not pass the river.*² This is current among the free blacks of Hayti: *Before fording the river, do not curse mother alligator;*³ that is, provoke not wantonly those in whose power you presently may be. This is Spanish: *Call me not 'olive,' till you see me gathered;*⁴ being nearly parallel to our own: *Praise a fair day at night.* This comes to us from Portugal: *Do you wish to become poor, without knowing how, set workmen on and do not overlook them.*⁵ The following is French: *Take the first advice of a woman, and not the second;*⁶ a proverb of much wisdom; for in processes

¹ Quien con ropa ajena se viste, en la calle se queda en cueros.

² Chi non vede it fondo, non passi l' acqua.

³ Avant traverse rivier, pas jure maman caiman. This and one or two other Haytian proverbs quoted in this volume I have derived from a curious article, *Les moeurs et la litterature negres*, by Gustave d'Alaux, in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, 15 mai, 1852.

⁴ No me digas oliva, hasta que me veas cogida.

⁵ Ques ser pobre, e naom o sentas, mete obryros, e naom s vejas.

⁶ Prends le premier conseil d'une femme, et non le second.

of reasoning, out of which the second counsels spring, women may and will be inferior to us; but in intuitions, in moral intuitions above all, they surpass us far; they have what Montaigne ascribes to them in a remarkable word, 'l'esprit *primesautier*,' the spirit which may be compared to the leopard's spring, taking its prey, if it take it at all, at the first spring.

And I must needs think that for as many as are seeking diligently to improve their time and opportunities of knowledge, with at the same time little of these which they can call their own, a very useful hint and warning against an error that lies very near, is contained in the brief Latin proverb: *Compendia, dispendia*. Nor indeed for them only, but for all, and in numberless aspects, it continually proves true that a short cut may be a very long way home; yet the proverb can have no fitter application than to those little catechisms of science, those skeleton outlines of history, those epitomes of all useful information, those thousand delusive short cuts to the attainment of that knowledge, which can indeed only be acquired by such as are content to travel on the king's highway, on the old and royal road of patience, perseverance, and toil. Surely these *compendia*, so meagre and so hungry, with little nourishment for the intellect, with less for the affections or the imagination, barren catalogues of facts, bones with no flesh adhering to them, we may style with fullest right *dispendia*, wasteful as they generally prove of whatever money and time and labour is bestowed upon them; and every true scholar will set his seal to the following word, as wisely as it is grandly spoken: 'All spacious minds,

attended with the felicities of means and leisure, will fly abridgments as bane.¹

And being on the subject of books and the choice of books, let me put before you a proverb, and in this reading age a very serious one; it comes to us from Italy, from whence so many had books have come, and it says: *There is no worse robber than a bad book.*² None worse, indeed, perhaps none so bad; other robbers may spoil us of our money: but this robber of our 'goods'—of our time at any rate, even assuming the book to be only negatively bad; but of how much more, of our principles, our faith, our purity of heart, supposing its badness to be positive, and not negative only. What a cleaving stain on the memory and the imagination an unholy book will often leave. One proverb more on books may fitly find place here: *Dead men open living Men's eyes*; I take it to contain implicitly the praise of history, or perhaps rather of biography, and an announcement of the instruction which a faithful record of those who have long passed away may yield us.³

Here are one or two thoughtful words on education. *A child may have too much of its mother's*

¹ Bacon (*Advancement of Learning*) has not expressed himself less strongly: 'As for the corruptions and moths of history, which are epitomes, the use of them deserveth to be banished, as all men of sound judgment have confessed, as those that have fretted and corroded the sound bodies of many excellent histories, and wrought them into base and unprofitable dregs.'—And again in his *Essays*: 'Distilled books are like women's distilled waters, flashy things.'

² Non v' e il peggior ladro d' un cattivo libro.

³ Los muertos abren los ojos a los vivos.

blessing; yes, for that *blessing* may be no blessing at all, but rather a curse, if it take the shape of foolish and fond indulgence; and in the same strain is this German: *Better the child weep than the father.*¹ And this, like many others, is found in so many tongues, that it can hardly be ascribed to one rather than another: *More springs in the garden than the gardener ever sowed.*² It is a proverb for many, but most of all for parents and teachers, that they lap not themselves in a false dream of security, as though nothing was at work or growing in the minds of the young under their charge, but what they themselves had sown there; as though there was not another who might very well be sowing his tares beside and among any good seed of their sowing. But this proverb has also its happier side. There may be, there often are, better things also in this garden of the heart than ever the earthly gardener set there, seeds of the more immediate sowing of God. In either of these aspects this proverb deserves to be laid to heart.

Proverbs will sometimes outrun and implicitly anticipate conclusions, which are only after long struggles and efforts arrived at as the formal and undoubted conviction of all thoughtful men. After how long a conflict has that been established as a maxim in political economy, which the brief Italian proverb long ago announced: *Gold's worth is gold.*³

¹ Es ist besser, das Kind weine denn der Vater. Compare the Scotch proverb, *Better bairns should greet than bearded men*—a proverb employed, if I remember rightly, on one very memorable moment in Scottish history.

² Nace en la huerta lo que no siembra el hortelano.

³ Oro e, the oro vale.

What millions upon millions of national wealth have been, as much lost as if they had been thrown into the sea, from the inability of those who have had the destinies of nations in their hands to grasp this simple proposition, that everything which could purchase money, or which money would fain purchase, is as really wealth as the money itself. What forcing of national industries into unnatural channels has resulted from this, what mischievous restrictions in the buying and selling of one people with another. Nay, can the truth which this proverb affirms be said even now to be accepted without gainsaying, so long as the talk about the balance of trade being in favour of or against a nation, as the fear of draining a country of its gold, still survive?

Here is a proverb of many tongues: *One sword keeps another in its scabbard*,¹--surely a far wiser and far manlier word than the puling yet mischievous babble of our shallow Peace Societies; which, while they fancy that they embody, and that they only embody, the true spirit of Christianity, proclaim themselves in fact ignorant of all which it teaches; for they dream of having peace the fruit, while ate the same time 'the root of bitterness' out of which have grown all the wars and fightings that have ever been in the world, namely the lusts which stir in men's members, remains strong and vigorous as ever. But no; it is not they that are the peacemakers: In the face of an evil world, and of a world determined to continue in its evil, *He who bears the sword*, and who though he fain

¹ Una spada ties l' altra nel fodro.

would leave it in the scabbard yet will not shrink, if need be, from drawing it, *he bears peace*.¹

A remarkable feature of a good proverb is the immense variety of applications which it will admit, which indeed it challenges and invites. Not lying on the surface, but going deep down to the heart of things, it will prove capable of being applied again and again, under circumstances the most different. Like the gift of which Solomon spake, 'whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth;' like a diamond cut and polished upon many sides, it reflects and refracts the light upon every one. There can be no greater mistake than the attempt to tie it down and restrict it to a single application, when indeed its glory is that it is ever finding or making new applications for itself.

It is nothing strange, and needs no proof, that with words of Eternal Wisdom this should be so. Yet suffer me to adduce in confirmation words which fell from our Lord's lips in his last prophecies about Jerusalem: *Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together* (Matt. xxiv. 28); words of which probably there is a certain anticipation in Job (xxxix. 30). Who would venture to affirm that he had exhausted the meaning of this wonderful saying? For is it not properly inexhaustible? All history is a comment upon it. Wherever there is a Church or a nation abandoned by the spirit of life, and so a carcase, tainting the air of God's moral world, around it assemble the ministers and messengers of Divine justice, 'the eagles' (or more strictly 'the vultures,' for the eagle feeds only on what itself has killed), the

¹ Qui porte epee, porte paix.

scavengers of God's moral world; scenting out as by a mysterious instinct the prey from afar, and charged to remove presently the offence out of the way. This proverb, for such it has become, is finding evermore its fulfilment. The wicked Canaanites were the carcase, and the children of Israel the commissioned eagles that should remove this out of sight. At a later day the Jews were themselves the carcase, and the Romans the eagles. And when, in the progress of decay, the Roman empire had quite lost the spirit of life, the reverence for law, and those virtues of the family and the nation which had deservedly raised it to that pre-eminence of power, the northern races, the eagles now, lighted upon it, to tear it limb from limb, and make room for a new creation that should grow up in its stead. Again, the Persian empire was the carcase; Alexander and his Macedonian hosts, the eagles that by unerring instinct gathered round it to complete its doom. The Greek Church in the seventh century was too nearly a carcase wholly to escape the destiny of such, and the armies of Islam scented their prey, and divided it among them. In modern times it can hardly, I fear, be denied that Poland did in the same way invite its doom; and this one may say without in the least extenuating their guilt who tore it asunder; for what it may have been just for one to suffer, may have been most unrighteous for others to inflict. Where indeed will you not meet illustrations of this proverb, from such instances on the largest scale as these, down to that of the silly and profligate heir, surrounded by sharpers and black-legs and usurers, and preyed on by these? In a thousand shapes, in little and in great, it remains true that

Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

Or, lastly, consider a proverb familiar as it is brief: *Extremes meet*. Brief as it is, it is yet a motto on which whole volumes might be written; which is finding its illustration every day,—in things trivial and in things most important,—in the lives of single men, in the histories of nations and of Churches. Consider some of its every-day fulfilments,—old age ending in second childhood,—cold performing the effects of heat, and scorching as heat would have done,—the extremities alike of joy and of grief finding utterance in tears,—that which is above all value qualified as having no value at all, as invaluable,—the second singular ‘thou’ instead of the plural ‘you’ employed in so many languages to inferiors and to God, but not to equals. Or take some moral fulfilments of this same proverb; note those who begin their lives as spendthrifts often ending them as misers; the flatterer and the calumniator meeting in the same person;¹ the men who yesterday would have sacrificed to Paul as a god, to-day eager to stone him as a malefactor (Acts xiv. 18, 19; cf. xxviii. 4–6); even as Roman emperors would one day have blasphemous honours paid to them, their bodies on the next day dragged by a hook through the streets of the city, to be flung at last into the common sewer. Or observe

¹ Out of a sense of this the Italians say well, *Who taints me before, smudges me behind* (Chi dinanzi mi pingge, di dietro mi tinge). The history of the word ‘sycophant,’ and the manner in which it has travelled from its original to its present meaning, is a very striking confirmation of this proverb's truth.

again in what close alliance hardness and softness, cruelty and self-indulgence ('lust hard by hate'), are continually found: or in law, how the *summum jus*, where unredressed by equity, becomes the *summa injuria*, as in the case of Shylock's pound of flesh, which was indeed no more than was in the bond. Or observe, on a larger scale, the inner affinities between a democracy and a tyranny, which Plato has so wonderfully traced.¹ Or read thoughtfully the history of the Church and of the sects, and note how often things apparently the most remote from one another are found to be in the most fearful proximity: how often, for example, a false asceticism has issued in frantic outbreaks of fleshly lusts, and those who at one time were fain to live lives above angels, have ended in living lives below beasts. Again, regard England at the Restoration, exchanging all in a moment the sour strictness of the Puritans for a licence and debauchery unknown to it before. Or, once more, consider how similar in some ways is the position taken up by the Romanists on the one side, by the Quakers and Familists on the other. Seeming, and in much being, so diverse from one another, they yet have this fundamental in common, that Scripture, insufficient in itself, needs a supplement from without, those finding such in a Pope, and these in an 'inward light.'² With these examples before you, not to speak of many others which might be adduced,³ you

¹ *Rep.* ii. 217.

² See Jeremy Taylor, *Dissuasive from Popery*, part ii. b. i. sect. II, § 6.

³ *Extremes meet.* Truths, of all others the most awful and interesting, are too often considered as so true, that they lose all

will own that this proverb, *Extremes meet*, or its parallel, *Too far East is West*, reaches very far into the heart and centre of things. With this much said on these aspects of the subject, for the present I must conclude.

the power of truths, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors,'--
COLERIDGE, *Aids to Reflection*.

LECTURE V.

THE MORALITY OF PROVERBS.

WHETHER I desired this, or did not, I have been obliged to touch already on the morality of proverbs. The subject has offered itself to us continually, in one shape or another; yet hitherto we have rather cast side-glances upon it, than set it before us as a distinct subject for consideration. To this morality of proverbs I propose to devote the present lecture. But how, it may be asked at the outset, can any general verdict be pronounced about them? In a family like theirs, so vast in numbers, spread so widely over the face of the earth, must there not be found worthy members and unworthy, proverbs noble and base, holy and profane, heavenly and earthly;—yea, heavenly, earthly, and devilish? How can they be judged together, and, so to speak, in a mass? What common verdict of praise or censure can be pronounced upon them all? Evidently none. The only question, therefore, for our consideration must be, whether there exists any such large and unquestionable excess either of the better sort or of the worse, as shall give us a right to pronounce a judgment on the whole in their favour or against them, to affirm of

them that their preponderating influence and weight is thrown into the scale of the good or of the evil.

And here I am persuaded that no one can have devoted serious attention to this question, but will own (and seeing how greatly popular morals are affected by popular proverbs, will own with thankfulness), that in the main they range themselves under the banners of the right and of the truth. Not denying that there are numerous exceptions, he will yet acknowledge that of so many as move in an ethical sphere at all, far more are children of light and the day than of darkness and the night. Indeed, the comparative paucity of morally unworthy proverbs is a very noticeable fact, and one to the causes of which I shall presently recur.

At the same time, affirming this, I find it necessary to make certain explanations, to draw certain distinctions. In the first place, I would not in the least deny that a very large company of coarse proverbs are extant. It needs only to turn over a page or two of Ray's *Collection of English Proverbs*, or of Howell's, or indeed of any collection in almost any tongue, which has not been carefully weeded, to convince oneself of this. Nor are these extant only, but, some at least of them, living on the lips of men. Having their birth, for the most part, in a period of a nation's literature and life, when men are much more plain-spoken, and have far fewer reticences than is afterwards the case, it is nothing strange that some of them, employing words forbidden now, but not forbidden then, should sound coarse and indelicate in our ears: while indeed there are others, whose offence and grossness these considerations may mitigate, but

are quite insufficient to excuse. But at the same time, gross words and images (I speak not of wanton ones), had as they may be, are altogether of a different character from immoral maxims and rules of life. And it is these immoral maxims, unrighteous, selfish, or otherwise unworthy rules and suggestions of conduct, whose number I would affirm to be, if not absolutely, yet relatively small.

Then too, in estimating the morality of proverbs, this will claim in justice not to be forgotten. In the same manner as coarse proverbs are not necessarily immoral, but may be quite the contrary, so our application of a proverb may very often be hardhearted and selfish, while the proverb itself is very far from so being. This selfishness and hardness may lie in it not of primary intention, but only in our abuse; and not seldom these two things, the proverb itself, and men's ordinary employment of it, will demand to be kept carefully asunder. *He has made his bed, and now he must lie on it;—As he has brewed, so he must drink;—As he has sown, so must he reap;*¹—if these are employed to justify our refusal to save others, so far as we may, from the consequences of their own folly and imprudence, or even guilt, why then they are very ill employed; and there are few of us with whom it would not have fared hardly, had all those about us acted in the spirit of these proverbs so misinterpreted had they refused to mitigate for us, so far as they could, the consequences of our errors. But if the

¹ They have for their Latin equivalents such as these: *Colo quod aptasti, ipsi tibi nendum est.—Qui vinum bibit, faecem bibat.—Ut sementem feceris, ita metes.*

words are taken in their proper sense, as homely announcements of that law of divine retaliations in the world, according to which men shall eat of the fruit of their own doings, and be filled with their own ways, who shall gainsay them? What do they affirm more than almost every page of Scripture, every turn of human life, is affirming too; namely, that the everlasting order of God's moral universe cannot be violated with impunity, that there is a continual returning upon men of what they have done, and that-oftentimes in their history their judgment may be read?

Charity begins at home is the most obvious and familiar of these proverbs, selfishly abused. It may be, no doubt it often is, made the plea for a selfish withholding of assistance from all but a few, whom men may include in their 'at home,' while sometimes it receives a narrower interpretation still; and self, and self only, is accounted to be 'at home.' And yet, in truth, what were that charity worth, which did not begin at home, which did not preserve the divine order and proportion and degree? It is not for nothing that we have been grouped in families, neighbourhoods, and nations; and he who will not recognize the divinely appointed nearnesses to himself of some over others, who thinks to be a cosmopolite without being a patriot, a philanthropist without owning a distinguishing love for them that are peculiarly 'his own,' who would thus have a circumference without a centre. deceives his own heart; and, affirming all men to be equally dear to him, is indeed declaring all to be equally indifferent. Home, the family, this is as the hearth at which the affections which are afterwards to go forth and warm in a larger circle, are themselves to

be kept lively and warm; and the charity which does not exercise itself in outcomings of kindness and love in the narrower, will be little likely to seek a wider range of action for itself. Wherever else charity may end, and the larger the sphere which it makes for itself the better, it must yet begin at home.¹

There are, again, proverbs which, from another point of view, might seem of an ignoble cast, and as calculated to lower the tone of morality among those who received them; proposing as they do secondary, and in a measure therefore unworthy, motives to actions which ought to be performed out of the highest. I mean such as this: *Honesty is the best policy*; wherein honesty is commended, not because it is right, but because it is most prudent and politic, and has the promise of this present world. Now doubtless there are proverbs not a few which, like this, move in the region of what has been by Coleridge so well called ‘prudential morality;’ and did we accept them as containing the whole circle of motives to honesty or other right conduct, nothing could be worse, or more fitted to lower the tone and standard of our lives. He who resolves to be honest because, and only because, it is *the best policy*, will be little likely long to continue honest at all. But the proverb does not pretend to usurp the place of an ethical rule; it does not presume to cast down the higher law which should

¹ Concerning other proverbs, which speak a language in some sort similar, such as these, *Tunica pallio propior, Frons occipitio prior*; I have more doubt. The misuse lies nearer; the selfishness may very probably be in the proverb itself, and not in our application of it; though even these are not incapable of a fair interpretation.

determine to honesty and uprightness, that it may put itself in its place; it only declares that honesty, let alone that it is the right thing, is also, even for this present world, the wisest. Nor dare we, let me further add, despise prudential morality, such as is embodied in sayings like this. The motives which it suggests are helps to a weak and tempted virtue, may prove more useful assistances to it in some passing moment of a strong temptation, however little they can be regarded as able to make men *for a continuance* even outwardly upright and just.

And once more, proverbs are not to be accounted selfish, which announce selfishness; unless they do it, either avowedly recommending it as a rule and Maxim of life, or, if not so, yet with an evident complacency and satisfaction in the announcement which they make, and in this more covert and perhaps still more mischievous way, taking part with the evil which they-proclaim. There are proverbs not a few, which a lover of his race would be very thankful if there had been nothing in the world to justify or to provoke, if, in fact, they could be shown to have no right to exist; for the convictions they embody, the experiences on which they rest, are very far from complimentary to human nature: but seeing they express that which is, it would be idle to wish them away, to wish that this evil had not uttered itself in human speech. Nay, it is much better that it should have so done; for thus taking form and shape, and being brought directly under notice, it may be better watched against and avoided. Such proverbs, not selfish, but rather detecting selfishness and laying it bare, are the following; this Russian, on the only too slight degree in which

we are touched with the troubles of others: *The burden is light on the shoulders of another*; with which the French may be compared: *One has always enough strength to bear the misfortunes of one's friends.*¹ Such is this Italian: *Every one draws the water to his own mill;*² or as it clothes itself in its Eastern imagery, and calls up the desert-bivouac before our eyes: *Every one rakes the embers to his own cake.* And such this Latin, on the comparative wastefulness wherewith that which is another's is too often used: *Men cut broad thongs from other men's leather;*³ with many more of the same character, which it would be only too easy to bring together.

With all this, I am very far from denying that immoral proverbs, and only too many of them, exist. For if proverbs are, as we have recognized them to be, a genuine transcript of what is stirring in the hearts of men, then, since there –is cowardice, untruth, selfishness, unholiness, profaneness there, how should these be wanting here? The world is not so consummate a hypocrite as the entire absence of all immoral proverbs would imply. There will be merely selfish ones, as our own: *Every one for himself, and God for us all;* or as this Dutch: *Self's the man;*⁴ or as the French, more shamelessly cynical still: *Better a drape for me, than two figs for thee;*⁵ or, again, such as proclaim a

¹ On a toujours assez de force pour supporter le malheur de ses amis. I confess this sounds to me rather like an imitation of Rochefoucault than a genuine proverb.

² Ognun tira l'acqua al suo molino.

³ Ex alieno tergo lata secantur lora.

⁴ Zelf is de Man.

⁵ J'aime mieux un raisin pour moi que deux figes pour toi.

doubt and disbelief in the existence of any high moral integrity anywhere, as *Every man has his price*; or assume that poor men can scarcely be honest, as *It is hard for an empty sack to stand straight*; or take it for granted that every man would cheat every other if he could, as the French: *Count after your father*;¹ or, if they do not actually ‘speak good of the covetous,’ yet assume it possible that a blessing can wait on that which a wicked covetousness has heaped together, as the Spanish: *Blessed is the son, whose father went to the devil*; or find cloaks and apologies for sin, as the German: *Once is never*;² or such as would imply that the evil of a sin lies not in its sinfulness, but in the outward disgrace annexed to it, as the Italian: *A sin concealed is half forgiven*;³ or, as Comus has it, ‘*Tis only daylight that makes sin*. Or, again, there will be proverbs dastardly and base,

¹ Comptez apres votre pere. Compare the Spanish: Entre dos amigos un notario y dos testigos.

² Einmal, keinmal. This proverb, with which we may compare a French one, On peut user une fois l'an de sa conscience, was turned to such bad uses, that a German divine thought it necessary to write a treatise against it. There exist indeed several old works in German with such titles as the following, *Ungodly Proverbs and their Refutation*. Nor is it for nothing that Jeremy Taylor in one place gives this warning: ‘Be curious to avoid all proverbs and propositions, or odd sayings, by which evil life is encouraged, and the hands of the spirit weakened.’ In like manner Chrysostom (*Hom. 73 in Matt.*) denounces the Greek proverb: γλυκὺ ἦτω καὶ πνιξάτω.

³ Peccato celato, mezzo perdonato. This is the faith of Tartuffe :

Le scandale du monde est ce qui fait l'offense;
Et ce n'est pas pecher, que pecher en silence.

as the Spanish maxim of caution, *Draw the snake from its hole by another man's hand*; put, that is, another, and it may be for your own profit, to the peril from which you shrink yourself;—or more dastardly still, 'scoundrel maxims,' an old English poet has called them; as that which is acted on only too often: *One must howl with the wolves*;¹ in other words, when a general cry is raised against any, it is safest to join it, lest we be supposed to sympathize with its object; safest to howl with the wolves, if one would not be hunted by them. In the whole circle of proverbs there is scarcely a baser or more cowardly than this; and yet who will say that he has never traced in himself the temptation to conform his conduct to it? Besides these there will be, of which I shall of course spare you any examples, proverbs wanton and impure; and not merely proverbs thus earthly and sensual, but others devilish; such as those Italian on the sweetness of revenge which I quoted in my third lecture.

Then, too, there are proverbs about which it is difficult to determine whether they ought to be included in this catalogue of immoral proverbs or not; and which, doubtless, if put on their defence, would have much to say for themselves, while yet they can hardly escape this charge altogether. I refer to those which embody, deepen, and propagate unfavourable judgments about whole classes of men, judgments which at the worst can be true only of some, and must often be exaggerated even in respect of these. Take

¹ Badly turned into a rhyming pentameter:

Consonus esto lupis, cum quibus esse cupis.

for example, the proverbs about the 'villain' or peasant—I have referred to them already—in almost all the languages of modern Europe. They are in themselves exceedingly curious, furnishing as they do a descending scale from the expression of a slight contempt for his clownishness and unmannerly ways to that of intensest scorn for the servility, greediness, ingratitude, knavery, and ill conditions of every kind which are freely credited to him. They abundantly explain how in some languages, in our own for example, whatever is worst and wickedest comes in the end to be bound up in the 'villain's' name. But whatever may have been his faults, we may be quite sure that they are caricatured and exaggerated here that this army of hostile proverbs, all directed against him, represent in good part the passions and prejudices of the aristocratic and middle classes; these, as we cannot doubt, finding in such hard sayings about the peasant, a justification of their dislike, and an excuse for their treatment of him. In this sense these proverbs, with any others conceived in the same spirit, must be owned to have wrought for ill.¹

¹ One is embarrassed with the multitude of these in which this scorn or hatred of the 'villain' utters itself. Torriano has thirty Italian proverbs under 'villano;' they are almost every one conceived in this spirit. These may serve as specimens: Al villano, se gli porge it dito, e' prende la mano.--Chi vuol castigar un villano, lo dia da castigar ad un altro villano.--Il villan, gettata la pietra, nasconde la man. —Fa ben al villano, e' ti vuol mal; fagli mal, e' ti vuol bene.—Ponge il villano chi l' onge, e onge chi lo ponge [so the medieval Latin proverb: Ungentem pungit, pungentem rusticus ungit]; but Wander has 405 proverbs under 'Bauer;' of these quite the larger number

But, all this being freely admitted, these immoral proverbs, rank weeds among the wholesome corn, are yet comparatively rare. In the minority with all people, they are very much indeed in the minority with most. The fact is well worthy of note. Surely there lies in it a solemn testimony, that however men may and do in their conduct continually violate the rule of right, yet these violations are ever felt to be such, are inwardly confessed not to be the law of man's life, but transgressions of the law; and thus, stricken as with a secret shame, and paying an unconscious homage to the majesty of goodness, they do not presume to raise themselves into maxims, nor, for all the allowance which they find, pretend to claim recognition as abiding standards of action.

Proverbs about money, how we may use and how abuse it, are very numerous. As the sphere in which the proverb moves is no world of fiction or imagination, but that actual and often very homely world which is round us and about us; as it is the character

are utterances of the same character; here are half a dozen almost taken at random: *Der Bauer and sein Stier sind Ein Thier.—Wer einem Bauer aus dem Koth hilft, hat ebenso viel Dank, als der ihm hineingestossen hat.—Ein Bauer gibt kein gutes Wort, als wenn er gewinnen oder betrogen will.—Wenn der Bauer ein Feldmann wird, sterben ihm alle Freunde.—Wenn sich die Bauern tief bucken, haben sie den Teufel im Rucken.—Der Bauer ist nicht zu verderben, man hau' ihm denn Hand and Fuss ab.* There are many proverbs in French which tell the same tale, see *Le Livre des Proverbes Francais* by Le Roux de Lincy, vol. ii. pp. 80-83, and I believe in every other modern literature of Europe. Abundance too in medieval Latin; but let one, a very detestable one, suffice: *Rustica gens est optima fiens, et pessima ridens.*

of the proverb not to float in the clouds, but to set its feet firmly on this common earth of ours from which originally it sprung, treating of present needs and every-day cares, this could not be otherwise;¹ and in the main it would be well if the practice of the world rose to the height of its convictions as expressed in these. Frugality is connected with so many virtues—at least, its contrary makes so many impossible—that the numerous proverbial maxims inculcating this, and none are more frequent on the lips of men, must be regarded as belonging to the better order.² Above all, this is true when they are taken with the check of others, which forbid this frugality from degenerating into a sordid and dishonourable parsimony; such, I mean, as our own: *The goat is ill saved which shames its master*. In how many the conviction speaks out that the hastily gotten will hardly be honestly gotten, that ‘he who makes haste to be rich shall not be innocent,’ as when the Spaniards say: *He who will be rich in a year, at the half-year they hang him*,³ in how many others, the confidence that the ill-won will also be the ill-spent, that in one way or another it shall have no continuance,⁴ that he who shuts up

¹ In Wander's *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexicon* (see back, p. 59), there are 1420 proverbs under 'Geld,' that is, proverbs in which this is the principal word, and it is manifest that these cannot at all exhaust the proverbs having to do with money. Thus 'Gold' yields more than 200 more.

² There are a few inculcating an opposite lesson: this is one: *Spend, and God will send*; which Howell glosses well; ‘yes, a bag and a wallet.’

³ Quien en un ano quiere ser rico, al medio le ahorcan.

⁴ Male parta male dilabuntur.—Wie gewonnen, so zerronnen. Compare Euripides, *Elect.* 948:

unlawful gain in his storehouses, is shutting up a fire that will one day destroy them. Very solemn and weighty in this sense is the German proverb: *The unrighteous penny eats up the righteous pound*;¹ and the Spanish, too, is striking: *That which is another's always yearns for its lord*;² it yearns, that is, to be gone and get to its rightful owner. In how many the conviction is expressed that this mammon, which more than anything else men are tempted to imagine God does not concern Himself about, is yet given and taken away by Him according to the laws of his righteousness; given sometimes to his enemies and for their sorer punishment, that under its fatal influence they may grow worse and worse, for *The more the carte riches, he wretches*; but oftener withdrawn, because no due acknowledgment of Him was made in its use; as when the German proverb declares: *Charity gives itself rich; covetousness boards itself poor*;³ and our own, *Covetousness bursts the bag*; and the Danish *Give alms, that thy children may not ask them*; while the Talmud reaches still nearer to the heart of things when it says, *Alms are the salt of riches*; the true antiseptic, which shall prevent these riches from them-

‘Ο δ’ ὄλβος ἄδικος καὶ μετὰ σκαιῶν ξυνῶν
ἐξέπτατ’ οἴκων, σμικρὸν ἀνθήσας χρόνον.

¹ Ungerechter Pfennig verzehrt gerechten Thaler.

² Lo ageno siempre pia por su dueno.

³ Der Geiz sammlet sich arm, die Milde giebt sich reich. In the sense of the latter half of this proverb we say, *The charitable gives out at the door, and God pacts in at the window*; and again, *Drawn wells are seldom dry*; though this last is capable of a far wider application.

selves corrupting, and from corrupting those that have them.¹

At the same time, as it is the very character of the company of proverbs to look at matters all round and from every side, there are others to remind us that even this very giving shall itself be with forethought and discretion; with selection of right objects, and in a due proportion to each; for indeed there is an art in giving as in everything else. The Greeks, who never lost sight of measure and proportion, taught us this when they said, *Sow with the hand, and not with the whole sack*;² for as it fares with the seed-corn, which, if it shall prosper, must be providently dispersed with the hand, not prodigally shaken from the sack's mouth, so must it fare with benefits that shall do good either

¹ A Latin proverb on the moral cowardice which it is the character of riches to generate, *Timidus Plutus*, says more briefly what Wordsworth has said more at large in one of his noblest sonnets, written in the prospect of invasion, and ending with these words:

‘riches are akin

To fear, to change, to cowardice, and death.’

Compare Euripides :

Δειλόν θ' ὁ πλοῦτος καὶ φιλύψυχον κακόν.

² *Τῇ χειρὶ δεῖ σπείρειν, ἀλλὰ μὴ ὄλω τῷ θυλάκῳ*. Plutarch affords here an instructive example of the manifold applications whereof a proverb may be capable. Corinna, he tells us, found fault with Pindar that his poetry was not richer in mythical allusion. After a little he brought her a hymn which he had composed, and having recited the three first lines in which there was no less than five of these allusions, she stopped him, laughing and saying, *One must sow with the hand, not from the sack's mouth*.

to those who impart or to those who receive them.¹
 A Danish proverb urges the same lesson, which says,
So give to-day, that thou shalt be able to give to-morrow;
 or in a slightly different form, *So give to one, that thou
 shalt have to give to another.*² And take these two as
 closing the series; and first this Italian, which teaches
 us in a homely but striking manner, with an image
 Dantesque in its vigour, that 'a man shall carry nothing
 away with him when he dieth,' *Our last robe*, that is,
 our winding sheet, *is made without pockets;*³ and
 then, secondly, this Russian, which, looking out
 beyond this present world, declares that there is that
 which even money is impotent to do, *Gold has wings
 which carry everywhere except to heaven.*

There are proverbs which contain warnings against
 subtle sins and temptations, such as it is only too easy
 to fall into. What a warning, for instance, against
 that most familiar temptation of looking forward to
 certain advantages, as increase of fortune, advance in
 worldly position,, which may accrue to us through the
 death of some who now stand, or whom we fancy to
 stand, between us and the good that we desire, is
 contained in that proverb: *It is ill standing in dead
 men's shoes.* It is indeed ill in many ways, ill because,
 feeding on hope, we may abate our present industry; ill
 because the advantage we look for may never come
 but another may fill the emptied place, another inherit
 the coveted hoards; and ill, because the *expectation* of
 the event that is to give us what we wait for may so

¹ Thus Seneca Multi sunt qui non donant, sed projiciant.

² Giv saa i Dag, at du og kandst give i morgen,—Give een
 at du kand give en anden.

³ L' ultimo vestito ce lo fanno senza tasche.

easily and by almost unmarked degrees pass into the *desire* for that event; and thus we, before we know it, may become transgressors in spirit of the sixth commandment.

Let me further invite you to observe and to admire the prevailing tone of manliness which pervades the great body of the proverbs of all nations: to take note how very few there are which would fain persuade you that 'luck is all,' or that your fortunes are in any other hands, under God, except your own. This our own proverb, *Win purple and wear purple*, proclaims, Other proverbs there are, but they are quite the exceptions, to which the gambler, the loafer, the idler, the so-called 'waiter upon providence,' can appeal. But for the most part they courageously accept the law of labour, No pains, no gains,—No sweat, No sweet,—No mill, no meal,¹ as the appointed law and condition of man's life. *Where wilt thou go, ox, that thou wilt not have to plough?*² is the Catalan remonstrance addressed to one, who imagines by any outward change of condition to evade the inevitable task and toil of existence. And this is Turkish: *It is not with saying, Honey, Honey, that sweetness comes into the mouth;* and to many languages another with its striking image. *Sloth, the key of poverty,*³ belongs. On the other hand, there are in almost all tongues such proverbs as the

¹ This is the English form of that worthy old classical proverb: *φεύγων μύλον, ἄλφιστα φεύγει*, or in Latin: *Qui vitat molam, vitat farinam*.

² Ahont aniras, bou, que no llaures? I prefer this form of it to the Spanish: *Adonde ira el buey, que no are?*

³ Pereza, llave de pobreza.

following: *God helps them that help themselves:*¹ or, as it appears with a slight variation in the Basque *God is a good worker, but He loves to be helped;* or, as it was current long ago in Greece: *Call Minerva to aid, but bestir thyself.*² And these proverbs, let me observe by the way, were not strange, in their spirit at least, to the founder of that religion which is usually supposed to inculcate a blind and indolent fatalism—however some who call themselves by his name may have forgotten the lesson which they convey. Certainly they were not strange to Mahomet himself; if the following excellently-spoken word has been rightly ascribed to him. One evening, we are told, after a weary march through the desert, he was camping with his followers, and overheard one of them saying, ‘I will loose my camel, and commit it to God;’ on which the prophet took him up: ‘Friend, *tie* thy camel, and commit it to God;’³ do, that is, whatever is thy part to do, and then leave the issue in higher hands; but till thou hast done this, till thou hast thus helped thyself; thou hast no right to look to Heaven to help thee.

How excellently genuine modesty and manly self-assertion are united in this: *Sit in your own place,*

¹ *Dii facientes adjuvant;* compare AEschylus
 Σπεύδοντι σαυτῶ χῶ θεὸς ξυνάψεται.

And again,

Ἔϊωθε τῶ κάμνοντι σὺσπεύδειν θεός

And Sophocles:

Οὐκ ἔστι τοῖς μὴ δρῶσι σύμμαχος Τύχη

² Σὺν Ἀθηνᾶ καὶ χεῖρα κίνει.

³ According to the Spanish proverb : *Quien bien ata, bien desata.* Compare our own: *Fast bind, Fast find.*

and no man can make you rise; and how good is this Spanish, on the real dignity which there often is in doing things for ourselves, rather than in standing by and suffering others to do them for us: *Who has a month, let him not say to another, Blow.*¹ And as a part of that which I just now called the manliness of proverbs, let me especially note the lofty utterances which so many contain, summoning to a brave encountering of adverse fortune, to perseverance under disappointment and defeat and a long-continued inclemency of fate; breathing as they do a noble confidence that to the brave and bold the world will not always be adverse. *Where one door shuts another opens;*² this belongs to too many nations to allow of our ascribing it especially to any one. And this Latin: *The sun of all days has not yet gone down,*³ however, in its primary application intended for those who are at the top of Fortune's wheel, to warn them that they be not high-minded, seeing there is yet time for many a revolution in that wheel,⁴ is equally good for those at the bottom, and as it contains warning for those, so strength and encouragement for these; for, as the Italians say: *The world is for him who has patience.*⁵ And then, to pass over some of our own, so familiar that they need not be adduced, how manifold a lesson is contained in this Persian proverb: *A*

¹ Quien tiene Boca, no diga a otro, Soplá.

² Donde una puerta se cierra, otra se abre.

³ Nondum omnium dierum sol occidit.

⁴ In this sense magnificently glossed in one of Calderon's finest passages. It occurs in *La Gran Cenohia*, Act iii. Sc. 2.

⁵ Il mondo e, di chi ha pazienza.

stone that is fit for the wail, is not left in the way. It is a saying made for them who appear for a while to be overlooked, neglected, passed by; who perceive in themselves capacities, which as yet no one else has recognized or cared to turn to account. Only be *fit for the wall*; square, polish, prepare thyself for it; do not restrict thyself to the bare acquisition of such knowledge as is absolutely necessary for thy present position; but rather learn languages, acquire useful information, stretch thyself out on this side and on that, cherishing and making the most of whatever aptitudes thou findest in thyself; and it is certain thy turn will come. Thou wilt not be *left in the way*; sooner or later the builders will be glad of thee; the wall will need thee to fill up a place in it, quite as much as thou needest a place to occupy in the wall. For the amount of real capacity in this world is so limited, that places want persons to fill them quite as really and urgently as persons want to fill places; although, as it must be allowed, they are not always as much aware of their want. This too from the Talmud is a manful proverb, looks cheerfully in the face the defeat of larger purposes and plans of life, and suggests the spirit in which the summons to come down and take a humbler sphere of work should be accepted: *If I cannot keep geese, I will keep goslings.*

Among these brave proverbs of which I have been speaking, I must count this Dutch one: *Money lost, nothing lost; courage lost, much lost; honour lost, more lost; soul lost, all lost.*¹ And this Italian and Spanish,

¹ Goed verloren, niet verloren; moed verloren, veel verloren; eer verloren, meer verloren; ziel verloren, al verloren.

deserves here a place, *If I have lost the ring, yet the fingers are still here.*¹ In it is asserted the comparative indifference of that loss which reaches but to things external to us, so long as we ourselves remain, and are true to ourselves. The fingers are far more than the ring: if indeed those had gone, then the man would have been maimed; but another ring may come in place of that which has disappeared, or even with none the fingers will be fingers still, for indeed, as another Italian proverb declares, *Who has a head will not want a hat.*² And as at once a contrast and complement to this, take another, current among the free blacks of Hayti, and expressing well the little profit which there will be to a man in pieces of mere good luck, such as are no true outgrowths of anything which is in him; the manner in which, having no root in him out of which they grew, they will, as they came to him by hazard, go from him by the same: *The knife which thou hast found in the highway, thou wilt lose in the highway.*³

But these numerous proverbs, urging self-reliance, bidding us first to aid ourselves, if we would have

¹ Se ben ho persol' anello, ho pur anche le dita;—Si seperdieron los anillos, aqui quedaron los dedillos.

² A chi ha testa, non manca cappello.

³ In their bastard French it runs thus: Gambette ous trouve nen gan chimin, nen gan chimin ous va pede li. It may have been originally French, at any rate the French have a proverb very much to the same effect: Ce qui vient par la flute, s'en va par le tambour; compare the modern Greek proverb: Ἄνεμομαζώματα, δαιμονοσκορπίσματα (*What the wind gathers, the devil scatters*); and the Latin, Quod non dedit Fortuna, non eripit.

Heaven to aid us, must not be dismissed without a word or two at parting. Prizing them, as we well may, and the lessons which they contain, at the highest, it will still be good for us ever to remember that there lies very near to all these such a mischievous perversion as this: 'Aid thyself, and thou wilt need no other aid;' even as they have been sometimes, no doubt, understood in this sense. As, then, the pendant and counterweight to them all, not as unsaying what they say, but as fulfilling the opposite hemisphere in the complete orb of truth, let me remind you of others like the following, often quoted or alluded to by Greek and Latin authors: *The net of the sleeping (fisherman) takes;*¹—a proverb the more interesting, that we have in the words of the Psalmist (Ps. cxxvii. 2), when accurately translated, a beautiful and perfect parallel: 'He giveth his beloved' (not 'sleep,' as in our Version, but) 'in, sleep;' God's gifts gliding into their bosom, they knowing not how, and as little expecting as having laboured for them. Of how many among the best gifts of every man's life will he not thankfully acknowledge this to have been true; or, if he refuse to allow it, and will acknowledge no eudamonia, no 'favourable providence' in his prosperities, but will see them all as of work, and not of grace, how little he deserves, how little likely he is to retain them to the end.

¹ Εὔδοντι κύρτος αἰρέϊ.—Dormienti rete trahit. The reader with a *Plutarch's Lives* within his reach may turn to the very instructive little history told in connexion with this proverb, of Timotheus the Athenian commander; a history which only requires to be translated into Christian language to contain a deep moral for all (*Sulla*, c. 6).

I should be wanting to hearers such as those who are assembled before me, I should fall short of that purpose which has been, more or less, present to me even in dealing with the lighter portions of my subject, if I did not earnestly remind you of the many of these sayings, which, having a lesson for all, yet seem more directly addressed to those standing, as not a few of us stand here, at the threshold of the more serious and earnest portion of their lives. Lecturing to a *Young Men's Society*, I shall not unfitly press these upon your notice. Take this Italian one, for instance: *When you grind your corn, give not the flour to the devil, and the bran to God*;—in the distribution, that is, of your lives, apportion not your best years, with their strength and vigour, to the service of sin and of the world, and only the refuse and rejected to your Maker; the wine libation poured out to the god of this world, and only the lees reserved for Him; for indeed, if you so do, there is another ancient proverb, which in English runs thus: *It is too late to spare, when all is spent*;¹ that will condemn you. The words have obviously a primary application to the goods of this present life; it is ill saving here, when nothing or next to nothing is left to save; but they are applied well by a heathen moralist (and the application lies very near), to those who begin to husband precious time, and to live for life's true ends, when life is nearly gone, is now at its dregs; for, as he well urges, it is not the least only hich remains at the bottom, but the *worst*.² On the

¹ Sera in imo parsimonia.

² Seneca (*Ep.* i.): Non enim tantum *minimum* in imo, si *pessimum* remanet.

other hand, *The morning hour has gold in its mouth*;¹ and this, true in respect of each of our days, in which the earlier hours given to toil will yield larger and more genial returns than the later, is true in a yet higher sense, of that great life-day, whereof all the lesser days of our life make up the moments, is true in respect of moral no less than mental acquisitions. The *evening* hours have often only *silver* in their mouths at the best. Nor is this Arabic proverb, as it appears to me, other than a very solemn one, having a far deeper meaning than at first sight might seem: *Every day in thy life is a leaf in thy history*; a leaf which shall once be turned back to again, that it may be seen what was written there, and that whatever was written may be read out for all the world to hear.

Among the proverbs having to do with a prudent ordering of our lives from the very first, this Spanish seems well worthy to be adduced: *That which the fool does in the end, the wise man does at the beginning*;² the wise with a good grace what the fool with an ill; the one to much profit what the other to little or to none. A word worth laying to heart; for, indeed, that purchase of the Sibylline books by the Roman king, what a significant symbol it is of much which at one time or another, or, it may be, at many times, is finding place in almost every man's life;—the same thing to be done in the end, the same price to be paid at the last, with only the difference, that much of the advantage, and perhaps all the grace, of an earlier compliance has passed away. The nine precious volumes

¹ Morgenstund' hat Gold im Mund.

² Lo que hace el loco a la postre, hace sabio al principio.

have shrunk to six, and these dwindled to three, while the like price is demanded for the few as for the many; for the remnant now as would once have made all our own.

We every one of us have made, we probably shall make again, many and serious mistakes in the conduct of our lives. We may stupidly refuse to be taught by these mistakes, acting them over anew; or, angry with ourselves and losing all heart, we may throw up the game in despair. But there is a more excellent way than either that or this a way which the Latin proverb, *To-day is the scholar of yesterday*,¹ points out. Let our 'to-day' learn of our 'yesterday.' Believe me there is a teaching in our blunders and our errors, in what we have done in our haste or in our pride, which is not anywhere else to be obtained—not from wise books, not from the exhortations of wise men, but oftentimes only to be gotten from those. Man has been likened well to a diamond which can be polished only in its own dust.

In a former lecture I adduced a proverb which warned against a bad book as the worst of all robbers. There are books which are not bad, nay, which in the main are good, but in which there is yet an admixture of evil. Such is the case with many which we have derived from that old world, whose moral atmosphere had not yet been purified by the presence of Christ's Spirit in its midst. Now there is a proverb, which may very profitably accompany us in our study of all such books: *Where the bee sucks honey, the spider sucks poison*. Keep this in mind, you who are making yourselves acquainted with the classical literature of

¹ Discipulus est prioris posterior dies.

antiquity, the famous writers of heathen Greece and Rome. How much of noble, how much of elevating do they contain: what love of country, what zeal for wisdom, may be quickened in us by the study of them; what intellectual, yes, and even to us Christians what large moral gains will they yield. Let the student be as the bee looking for honey, and from the fields and gardens of classical literature he may store of it abundantly in his hive. And yet from this same body of literature what poison is it possible to distil, what loss, through familiarity with evil, of all vigorous abhorrence of that evil, till even the worst enormities shall come to be regarded by us with a speculative curiosity rather than with an earnest hatred;—yea, what lasting defilements of the imagination and the heart may be contracted here, till nothing shall be pure, the very mind and conscience being defiled. Let there come one whose sympathies and affinities are with the poison and not with the honey, and in these fields it will not be impossible for him to find deadly flowers and weeds from which he may suck of this poison more, far more than enough,

With a few remarks on two proverbs more I will bring this lecture to an end. Here is one with an insight at once subtle and profound into the heart of man: *Ill doers are ill deemers*. Instead of any commentary on this of my own, I shall quote some words of Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, which were not intended to be a commentary upon it at all, while they furnish notwithstanding a far better one than any that I could give. He is accounting for the offence which the Pharisee took at the Lord's acceptance, as recorded in the Gospel, of the affectionate homage

and costly offering of the woman that was a sinner ‘Which familiar and affectionate officiousness, and sumptuous cost, together with that sinister fame that woman was noted with, could not but give much scandal to the Pharisees there present. For that dispensation of the law under which they lived making nothing perfect, but only curbing the outward actions of men it might very well be that they, being conscious to themselves of no better motions within than of either bitterness or lust, how fair soever they carried without, could not deem Christ's acceptance of so familiar and affectionate a service from a woman of that fame to proceed from anything better than some loose and vain principle, . . . for by how much every one is himself obnoxious to temptation, by so much more suspicious he is that others transgress, when there is anything that may tempt out the corruption, of a man.’¹ Thus the suitors in the *Odyssey*, even at the time when they are themselves plotting the death of Telemachus, are persuaded that he intends to mix poison with their wine and to make an end of them all.

And in this Chinese proverb which follows, *Better a diamond with a flaw, than a pebble without one*, there is, to my mind, the assertion of a great Christian truth, and of one that reaches deep down to

¹ *On Godliness*, b. viii. How remarkable a confirmation of the fact asserted in that proverb and in this passage lies in the twofold uses of the Greek word *κακοήθεια*; having, for its first meaning, an evil disposition in a man's self, it has for its second a readiness on his part to interpret for the worst all the actions of others. Compare the Greek comic poet:

Ὅστις γὰρ ὀμνύοντι μηδὲν πείθεται,
Αὐτὸς ἐπιορκεῖν ῥᾶδ ὡς ἐπ σταται.

the very foundations of Christian morality, the more valuable as coming to us from a people beyond the range and reach of the influences of direct Revelation. All whom I address may not be aware of the many and malignant assaults which were made on the Christian faith, and on the morality of the Bible, through the character of David, by the self-righteous Deists of the last century. Taking the Scripture testimony about him, that he was the man after God's heart, and putting beside this the record of those grievous sins in which he was entangled, they sought to set these grievous, yet still isolated, offences in the most hateful light; and thus to bring him, and the Book that praised him, and the God who found pleasure in him, to a common shame. But all this while, the question concerning *the man*, what *he* was, and what was the moral sum-total of his life, to which alone the Scripture bore witness, and to which alone it was pledged, this was a question wherewith they concerned themselves not at all; while yet it was a far more important question than what any of his single acts may have been; and it was this which, in the estimate of his character, was really at issue. Of the flaws there can be no doubt, in him, as in every other except the one 'entire and perfect chrysolite;' but were they flaws in a diamond? If so, then we are bold to affirm that the one diamond even with these flaws outvies and outvalues a mountain of pebbles without such. Not to say that in all likelihood the pebbles on closer inspection would be found not so much to *be*, as to seem to be, without blemish, their flaws escaping immediate detection, while the clearer and more translucent medium revealed at once the presence of these.

LECTURE VI.

THE THEOLOGY OF PROVERBS.

I ENDEAVOURED in my last lecture to furnish you with some helps for estimating the ethical worth of proverbs. Their theology alone remains to consider; the aspects, that is, under which they contemplate, not now any more man's relations with his fellow-man, but those on which in the end all other must depend, his relations, direct and immediate, with God. Between the subject-matter, indeed, of that lecture and of this I have found it nearly impossible to draw any very accurate line of separation. Much which was there said might nearly as fitly be spoken here; some things which I have reserved for this lecture might already have found an entrance there. This, however, is the subject which I now keep directly before my eyes, namely, what proverbs have to say concerning the moral government of the world, and, more important still, concerning its Governor? How does all this present itself to the popular mind and conscience, as attested by these? What, in short, is their theology? for such, good or bad, it is evident that to no small amount they have.

Here, as everywhere else, their testimony is a mingled one. The darkness, the error, the selfishness, the confusion of man's heart, out of which he

oftentimes sees distortedly, and sometimes sees not at all, have all embodied themselves in his word. Yet still, as it is the very nature of the false, in its separate manifestations, to resolve into nothingness, though only to be succeeded by new births in the same kind, and appointed for the same doom, while the true abides and continues, it has thus come to pass that we generally have in those utterances on which the stamp of permanence has been set, the nobler voices, the truer faith of humanity, in respect of its own destinies and of Him by whom those destinies are ordered.

I do not hesitate to say that the glory of proverbs in this their highest aspect, making many of them full of blessing to those who cordially accept them, is the conviction of which they are full, that, despite all appearances to the contrary, this world is God's world, and not the world of the devil, nor of those wicked men who may be doing his work, and receiving his wages. Precious indeed is this faith of theirs, that however the 'tabernacles of the robbers' may prosper in the world for a while, in the long run this world will approve itself to be God's; which being so, that it must be well in the end with the doer of the right, the speaker of the truth, and ill with them that forsake these; no blind 'whirligig of time,' but the hand of a living God, in due time 'bringing round his revenges.' It is not easy to estimate too highly the value of their bold and clear proclamation of this conviction; for it is, after all, the belief of this or the denial of this, on which everything in the life of each one of us turns. On this depends whether we shall separate ourselves from the world's falsehood and

evil, and do vigorous battle against them; or acquiesce in these, and be ourselves dominated by them.

And first, hear a proverb of our own: *A lie has no legs*; this is true in small and in great; let the lie be the petty spiteful falsehood which disturbs the peace of a family or a neighbourhood for a day or one of the huger falsehoods not in word only but in act, to which a far longer date and a far ampler sphere are assigned, which for a time seem to fill the world, and to carry everything in triumph before them. Still the lie, in that it is a lie, always carries within itself the seeds of its own dissolution. As the Greek poet said long ago, 'It never arrives at old age.'¹ Its priests may prop it up from without, may set it on its feet again, after it has once fallen before the presence of the truth, yet this all will prove labour in vain. Raised up again it may be; but this will only be, like Dagon again to fall, and more shamefully and with a more irrecoverable ruin than before.² On the other hand, the vitality of the truth, as contrasted with this short-lived existence of the lie, is well expressed in a Swiss proverb: *It takes a good many shovelfuls of earth to bury the truth*. It does so indeed bury it as deep as men may, it will have a resurrection notwithstanding. Those who have conspired against it may roll a great stone, and seal the sepulchre in which it is laid, and set a watch upon it; yet for all this, like

¹ Sophocles: *Οὐδέν ποθ' ἔρπει ψεῦδος εἰς γῆρας χρόνον.*

² Perhaps the Spanish form of this proverb is still better: *La mentira tiene cortas las piernas*; for the lie does go, though not far. Compare the French: *La verite, comme l' huile, vient au-dessus.*

its Lord, it comes forth again at the appointed hour. It cannot die, being of an immortal race; for, as the Spanish proverb nobly declares, *The truth is daughter of God.*¹

Again, consider this proverb: *Tell the truth, and shame the devil.* It is one which will well repay a few thoughtful moments bestowed on it, and the more so because, even while we instinctively feel its truth, the profound moral basis on which it rests may not reveal itself to us at once. Nay, the saying may seem to contradict the actual experience of things; for how often telling the truth—confessing, perhaps, some great fault, taking home to ourselves, it may be, some grievous sin—must appear anything rather than a shaming of the devil; a shaming indeed of ourselves, but rather a bringing of glory to him, whose glory, such as it is, is in the sin and shame of men. And yet for all this the word is true. The element of lies is the only element in which he who is ‘the father of them’ lives and thrives. So long then as a wrong-doer presents to himself, or seeks to present to others, the actual facts of his conduct different from what they really are, conceals, palliates, distorts, denies them,—so long, in regard of that man, Satan's kingdom stands. But so soon as ever the things concerning a man are seen and owned by himself as they indeed exist in God's sight, as they verily are when weighed in the balances of the eternal righteousness; when once a man has brought himself to tell the truth to himself and to God, and, where need requires, to his fellow-men, then, having this

¹ La verdad es hija de Dios.

done, he has defied the devil, abandoned his standard; he belongs to the kingdom of the truth; and, belonging to it, he may rebuke, and does rebuke and put to shame, all makers and lovers of a lie, even to the very prince of them all. 'Give glory to God,' was what Joshua said to Achan, when he would lead him to confess his guilt (Josh. vii. 19; cf. John ix. 24). This is but the other and fairer side of the tapestry; this is but the exhortation to *shame the devil* on its more blessed side.

Once more;—the Latin proverb, *The voice of the people, the voice of God*,¹ is one which it is well worth our while to understand. If it were affirmed in this that every outcry of the multitude, supposing only it be loud enough and wide enough, ought to be accepted as God's voice speaking through them, no proposition more foolish or more profane could well be imagined. But the voice of the people here is something very different from this. The proverb rests on the assumption that the foundations of man's being are laid in the truth; from which it will follow, that no conviction which is really a conviction of the universal humanity, but reposes on a true ground; no faith, which is indeed the faith of all mankind, but has a reality corresponding to it: for, as Jeremy Taylor has said: 'It is not a vain noise, when many nations join their voices in the attestation or detestation of an action:' and Hooker: 'The general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God Himself. For that which all men have at all times learned, nature herself must needs have taught; and

¹ Vox populi, vox Dei.

God being the author of nature, her voice is but his instrument.¹ The task and difficulty, of course, must ever be to discover what this faith and what these convictions are; and this can only be done by an induction from a sufficient number of facts, gathered from sufficiently diverse quarters, and in sufficiently different times, to enable us to feel confident that we have indeed seized that which is the constant quantity of truth in them all, and separated this from the inconstant quantity of falsehood and error, evermore offering itself in its room; that we have not taken some momentary cry, wrung out by interest, by passion, or by pain, for *the voice of God*; but claimed this august title only for that true voice of humanity, which, unless everything be false, 'and earth's base built on stubble,' we have a right to assume an echo of the voice of God.

Thus, to take an example, the natural horror everywhere felt in regard of marriages contracted between those very near in blood, has been always and with right appealed to as a potent argument against such unions. The induction is so large, that is, the nations who have agreed in entertaining this horror are so many, oftentimes nations disagreeing in almost everything besides; the times during which this instinctive revolt against such mixtures has been felt, extend through such long ages; that the few exceptions, even where they are the exceptions of civilized nations, as of the Egyptians who married their sisters, or of the Persians, among whom marriages more dreadful still were permitted, cannot be allowed

¹ *Eccles. Pol. i. § 8.*

any weight; and of course still less the exception of any savage tribe, in which all or nearly all that constitutes the truly human in humanity has now disappeared. These exceptions can only be regarded as violations of the divine order of man's life; not as evidences that we have erroneously imagined such an order where there was none. Here is a true *voice of the people*; and on the grounds laid down above, we have a right to assume this to be *a voice of God* as well. And so too, on the question of the existence of a First Cause, Creator and Upholder of all things, the universal consent and conviction of all people, the *consensus gentium*, must be considered of itself a mighty evidence in its favour; a testimony which God is pleased to render to Himself through his creatures. This man or that, this generation or the other, might be deceived, but hardly all men and all generations; the *vox populi* makes itself felt as a *vox Dei*. The existence here and there of an atheist no more disturbs our conclusion that it is of the essence of man's nature to believe in a God, than do such monstrous births as from Time to time find place, children with two heads or with no arms, shake our assurance that it is the normal condition of man to have one head and two arms.

This last is one of the proverbs which may be said to belong to the Apology for Natural Religion. There are others, of which it would not be far-fetched to affirm that they belong to the Apology for Revealed. Thus it was very usual with Voltaire and other unbelievers of his time to appeal to the present barrenness and desolation of Palestine, in proof that it could never have supported the vast population which the

Scripture everywhere assumes or affirms. A proverb in the language of the arch-scoffer himself might, if he had given heed to it, have put him on the right track, had he wished to be put upon it, for understanding how this could have been: *As the man is worth, his land his worth.*¹ Man is lord of the outward conditions of his existence to a far greater extent than is commonly assumed; even climate, which seems at first sight so completely out of his reach, it is in his power immensely to modify; and if nature stamps herself on him, he stamps himself yet more powerfully on nature. That word of the Psalmist is no mere figure of speech: 'A fruitful land maketh He barren for the wickedness of them that dwell therein' (Ps. cvii. 34). God makes it barren, and ever less capable of nourishing its inhabitants; but He makes it so through the sloth, the indolence, the selfish shortsightedness, the quarrels among themselves of those that should have dressed and kept it. In the condition of a land may be found the echo, the reflection, the transcript of the moral and spiritual condition of those that should cultivate it: where one is waste, the other will be waste also. Under the desolating curse of Mohamedan domination the fairest portions of the earth have gone back from a garden to a wilderness: but only let that people for whom Palestine is yet destined return to it again, and return a righteous nation, and in a little while all the descriptions of its earlier fertility will be more than borne out by its later, and it will easily sustain its millions again.

How many proverbs, which cannot be affirmed to

¹ Tant vaut l'homme, tant vaut sa terre.

have been originally made for the kingdom of heaven, do yet in their highest fulfilment manifestly belong it, which claims them as of right for its own: even as it claims, or rather reclaims, whatever else is good or true in the world, the seeds of truth wherever dispersed abroad, as belonging rightfully to itself. Take for example that beautiful proverb, of which Pythagoras is reputed the author: *The things of friends are in common.*¹ Where does this find its exhaustive fulfilment, but in the communion of saints, their communion not with one another merely, though indeed this is a partial fulfilment, but in their communion with Him, who is the Friend of all good men? That such a conclusion lay legitimately in the words Socrates plainly saw; who argued from them, that since good men were the friends of the gods, therefore whatever things were the gods', were also theirs; being, when he thus concluded, as near as one who lacked the highest light of all could be to that great word of the Apostle's, 'All things are yours.'

Nor can I otherwise than esteem the ancient proverb as a very fine one, and one which we may gladly claim for our own: *Many meet the gods, but few salute them.* How often do *the gods* (for I will abide by the language which this proverb suggests and supplies), *meet* men in the shape of a sorrow which might be a purifying one, of a joy which might elevate their hearts to thankfulness and praise; in a sickness or a recovery, in a disappointment or a success; and yet how few, as it must be mournfully confessed, salute them; how few recognize their august presences in

¹ Κοινὰ τὰ τῶν φίλων.

this joy or this sorrow, this blessing added or this blessing taken away. As this proverb has reference to men's failing to see the Divine presences, so let me remind you of a very grand French one expressing the same truth, under the image of a failing to hear the divine voices, those voices being drowned for too many by the deafening tumult and hubbub of the world:

*The noise is so great, one cannot hear God thunder.*¹

Here is another proverb which the Church has long since claimed, at least in its import, for her own: *One man no man.*² I should be slow to believe that whoever uttered it first, meant by it nothing more than Erasmus gives him credit for—namely, that nothing important can be effected by a single man, destitute of the help of his fellows.³ The word is far profounder than this, and rests on that great truth upon which the deeper thinkers of antiquity laid so much stress namely, that in the idea the state precedes the individual, man not being merely accidentally gregarious, but essentially social. The solitary man, it would say, is a monstrous conception, so utterly maimed and morally crippled must he be; the condition of solitariness involving so entire a suppression of all which belongs to the development of that wherein the true idea of humanity resides, of all which differences man from the beasts of the field. In this sense, and not in that merely trivial one of Erasmus, One man is no man; and this, I am sure, the proverb from the first

¹ Le bruit est si fort, qu'on n'entend pas Dieu tonner.

² Εἷς ἀνὴρ, οὐδεὶς ἀνὴρ.—Ein Mann, kein Mann.

³ Senses est, nihil egregium praestari posse ab uno homine, omni auxilio destituto.

intended. Nor may we stop here. This word is capable of, and seems to demand, a still higher application to man as a destined member of the kingdom of heaven. But he can only be training and educating for this, when he is, and regards himself, as not alone, but as the member of a family. As one man he is no man; and the strength and value of what is called Church-teaching is greatly this, that it does recognize and realize this fact, contemplates and deals with the faithful man, not as isolated, but as one of an organic body, with duties which flow as moral necessities from his position therein; rather than by himself; and as one whose duties to others are indeed only opportunities for the exercise of private graces for his own benefit. 'We are what we are by reciprocation; the individual is not the factor, but the product, of society.'¹

There is another proverb, which Socrates (or Plato speaking by the mouth of Socrates), did not fail to quote often against the sophists, the men who flattered and corrupted the nobler youth of Athens, promising to impart to them easy short cuts to the attainment of wisdom and knowledge; such as should demand no exercise of labour or patience or self-denial upon their parts. With the proverb, *Good things are hard*,² he continually rebuked their empty pretensions; and made suspicious at least their delusive promises; and surely this proverb, true in the sense wherein Plato used it, and that sense one earnest and serious enough, yet

¹ I quote these last few words from a noble lecture on *Ideal substitutes for God*, by James Martineau.

² χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά.

reappears, glorified and transfigured but, recognizable still, in more than one of our Saviour's words: for indeed what else does He say when He reminds his disciples of the strait gate, or of that holy violence by which alone they could scale the heights of the kingdom of heaven?¹

¹ The deepening of a proverb's use among Christian nations as compared with earlier applications of the same may be illustrated by an example, which, however, as not being directly theological, and thus not bearing immediately upon the matter in hand, I shall prefer to append in a note. An old Greek and Latin proverb, *A great city, a great solitude* (*Magna civitas, magna solitudo*), dwelt merely on the outside of things, and meant no more than this, namely, that a city ambitiously laid out and upon a large scheme would with difficulty find inhabitants sufficient, would wear an appearance of emptiness and desolation; as there used to be a jest about Washington, that strangers would sometimes imagine themselves deep in the woods, when indeed they were in the centre of the city. But with deeper cravings of the human heart after love and affection, the proverb was claimed in a higher sense. We may take in proof these striking words of De Quincey, which are the more striking that neither they nor the context contain any direct reference to the proverb: 'No man,' he says, 'ever was left to himself for the first time in the streets, as yet unknown, of London, but he must have felt saddened and mortified, perhaps terrified, by the sense of desertion and utter loneliness which belongs to his situation. No loneliness can be like that which weighs upon the heart in the centre of faces never ending, without voice or utterance for him; eyes innumerable that have "no speculation" in their orbs which he can understand; and hurrying figures of men and women weaving to and fro, with no apparent purposes intelligible to a stranger, seeming like a masque of maniacs, or a pageant of shadowy illusions.' A direct reference to the proverb is to be found in some affecting words of Lord Bacon, who glosses and explains it exactly in this sense:--'For a crowd is

I cannot speak with confidence of the proverb *Amantes amantes*, whether it belongs to the old heathen or to the modern Christian world this much, however, is certain, namely, that it is a proverb capable of a very lofty application. 'We are fools for Christ's sake,' said the Apostle Paul, he being one of the *amentes*, but only because first one of the *amantes*. And how many since might have taken the words on their lips, even as they have illustrated them by the fine madness of their lives. Francis of Assisi stands out before me as eminently one of the first and foremost among these, the *Amantes amantes* of the proverb; his scholar Jacopone, author of the *Stabat Mater*, is another.

This method of looking in proverbs for a higher meaning than any which lies on their surface, or which they seem to bear on their fronts; or rather this searching out their highest intention, and claiming that as their truest, even though it be not that which those who use them generally perceive in them, or that lay nearest to them at their first generation, will lead in many interesting paths. Nor is it merely those of heathen antiquity that shall thus be persuaded often, and that without any forcing, to render up a Christian meaning; but (as might indeed be expected) still more often those of a later time, such as the world had seemed to challenge for its own, shall be found to move in a spiritual sphere as that to which they are most native. Take in evidence these four or five, which come to us from Italy: *He who has love in his heart,*

not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.

*has spurs in his sides;—Love rules without law;—Love rules his kingdom without a sword;—Love knows nothing of labour;—Love is the master of all arts.*¹

Take these in their original beauty, or even with the necessary drawbacks of my English translation; and how exquisitely do they set forth, in whatever light you regard them, the free and fresh-springing impulses of love, its delight to labour and to serve; how worthily do they glorify the kingdom of love as the only kingdom of a free and joyful obedience. While yet at the same time, if we would appreciate them at all their worth, is it possible to stop short of an application of them to that kingdom of love, which, because it is in the highest sense such, is also a kingdom of heaven? And then, what precious witness do these utterances contain, the more precious as current among a people nursed in the theology of Rome, against the assertion that selfishness is the only motive sufficient to produce good works: for in such an assertion the impugners of a free justification constantly deal; charging this that we hold, of our justification by faith only (which, when translated into the language of ethics, is quite as important in the province of morality as in that of theology), with being an immoral doctrine, such as must remain barren in deeds of charity, as compared with a doctrine which should connect these deeds with a selfish purpose of promoting our own interest thereby.

¹ Chi ha l' amor nel petto, ha lo sprone ai fianchi.—Amor regge senza legge (cf. Rom. xiii. 9, 10).—Amor regge il suo regno senza spada.—Amor non conosce travaglio (cf. Gen. xxix. 20, 30).—Di tutte le arti maestro e amore.—Di tutto condimento e amore.

There are proverbs which reach the height of evangelical morality. ‘Little gospels’¹ the Spaniard has somewhat too boldly entitled some of his; and certainly there are too many which, as at once we feel, could nowhere have been born and obtained circulation save under the influence of Christian faith; being in spirit, and often in form no less than in spirit, the outcomings of it. Thus is it with that exquisitely beautiful proverb of our own: *The way to heaven is by Weeping-Cross*;² nor otherwise with the Spanish: *God never wounds with both hands*;³ not with both, for He ever reserves one with which to bind up and to heal. And another Spanish, evidently intended to give the sum and substance of all which in life is to be desired the most, *Peace and patience, and death with penitence*,⁴ gives this sum certainly only as it presents itself to the Christian eye. And this of our own is Christian both in form and in spirit: *Every cross hath its inscription*, the name, that is, inscribed upon it, of the person for whom it was shaped; it was intended for those shoulders upon which it is laid, and will adapt itself to them; for that fearful word is never true, which a spirit greatly vexed spake in the hour of its impatience: ‘I have little faith in the paternal love which I need; so ruthless, or so negligent seems the government of this earth.’

¹ Evangelios pequenos.

² Compare the German: Der Weg zum Himmel geht durch Kreuzdorn. Compare the medieval obverse of the same: Via Crucis, via lucis.

³ No hierie Dios con dos manos.

⁴ Paz y paciencia, y muerte con penitencia.

⁵ *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller*, vol. iii. p. 266. Of words like these, wrung out from moments of agony, may we not hope that

Of the same character is that ancient German proverb: *When God loathes aught, men presently loathe it too.*¹ He who first uttered this must have watched long the ways by which shame and honour travel in this world; and in this watching must have noted how it ever came to pass that even worldly honour tarried not long with them from whom the true honour whereof God is the dispenser had departed. For the worldly honour is but a shadow and reflex that waits upon the heavenly; it may indeed linger for a little, but it will be only for a little, after it is divorced from its substance. Where the honour from Him has been withdrawn, He causes in one way or another the honour from men ere long to be withdrawn too. When He loathes, presently man loathes also. The saltless salt is not merely cast out by Him, but is trodden under foot of men (Matt. v. 13). A Lewis the Fifteenth's death-bed is in: its way as hideous to the natural as it is to the spiritual eye.²

We are told of the good Sir Matthew Hale, who was animated with a true zeal for holiness, an earnest desire to walk close with God, that he had continually in his mouth the modern Latin proverb, *We perish by permitted things.*³ Assuredly it one very well worthy

our own proverb, *For mad words deaf ears*, is often graciously true, even in the very courts of heaven?

¹ Wenn Gott em Ding verdreusst, so verdreusst es auch bald die Menschen.

² The following have all a right to be termed Christian proverbs: Chi non vuol servir ad un solo Signor, a molti ha da servir;—E padron del mondo chi lo disprezza, schiavo chi lo apprezza;—Quando Dios quiere, con todos vientos llueve.

³ Perimus licitis.

to be of all remembered, searching as it does into the innermost secrets of men's lives. It is no doubt true that nearly as much danger threatens the soul from things permitted as from things unpermitted; in some respects more danger; for these last being disallowed altogether, do not make the insidious approaches of the other, which coming in under allowance, so easily slip into dangerous excess.

It would be interesting to collect, as with reverence one might, variations on Scriptural proverbs or sayings, which the proverbs of this world supply; and this, both in those cases where these have grown out of those, owing more nearly or more remotely their existence to them, and in the cases as well where they own an independent life,—so far, that is, as aught which is true can be regarded as independent of the absolute Truth. Some which I shall proceed to quote evidently belong to one of these classes, some to the other. Thus Solomon has said: 'It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop than with a brawling woman in a wide house' (Prov. xxi. 9); and again: 'Better a dry morsel and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife' (Prov. xvii. 1). With these may be compared a Latin proverb, which, however, turning on a play of words, I have no choice but to cite in the original: 'Non quam *late* sed quam *laete* habitas, refert.'¹ The Psalmist has said: 'As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him' (Ps. cix. 17). The Turks express their faith in this same law of the

¹ Compare this Spanish: Mas vale un pedazo de pan con amor, que gallinas con dolor.

divine retaliations: *Curses, like chickens, always come home to roost*: they return, that is, to those from whom they went forth, while in the Yoruba language there is a proverb to the same effect: *Ashes always fly back in the face of him that throws them*; while our own, *Harm watch, harm catch*, and the Spanish, *Who sows thorns, let him not walk barefoot*,¹ are utterances of very nearly the same conviction. Our Lord declares, that without his Father there falls no single sparrow to the ground, that ‘not one of them is forgotten before God’ (Luke xii. 6). The same truth of a *providentia specialissima* (between which and no providence at all there is indeed no tenable position), is asserted in the Catalan proverb: *No leaf moves, but God wills it*.² Again, He has said: ‘No man can serve two masters’ (Matt. vi. 24); compare the Spanish proverb: *He who must serve two masters, must lie to one*.³ Or compare with Matt. xix. 29, this remarkable Arabic proverb: *Purchase the next world with this; so shalt thou win both*. Christ has spoken of ‘mammon of unrighteousness’—indicating hereby, in Leighton's words, ‘that iniquity is so involved in the notion of riches, that it can very hardly be separated from them;’ and this phrase Jerome illustrates by a proverb which would not otherwise have reached us; ‘that saying,’ he says, ‘appears true to me: *A rich man is either himself an*

¹ Quien siembra abrojos, no ande descalzo. Compare the Latin: *Si vultur es, cadaver expecta*; and the French: *Maudissons sont feuilles; qui les sème il les recueille*.

² No se mou la fulla, que Deu no ha vulla. This is one of the proverbs of which the peculiar grace and charm nearly disappear in the rendering.

³ Quien a dos senores ha de servir, al uno ha de mentir.

unjust one, or the heir of one.'¹ Again, the Lord has said: 'Many be called, but few chosen' (Matt. xx. 16); many have the outward marks of a Christian profession, few the inner realities. Some early Christian Fathers loved much to bring into comparison with this a Greek proverb, spoken indeed quite independently of it, and long previously; and the parallel certainly is a singularly happy one: *The thyrsus-bearers are many, but the bacchants few;*² many assume the outward tokens of inspiration, whirling the thyrsus aloft; but those whom the god indeed fills with his spirit are few all the while.³ With our Lord's words concerning the mote and the beam (Matt. vii. 3, 5) compare this Chinese proverb: *Sweep away the snow from thine own door, and heed not the frost upon thy*

¹ Verum mihi videtur illud: Dives aut iniquus, aut iniqui haeres. Out of a sense of the same, as I take it, the striking Italian proverb had its rise: Mai divento fiume grande, che non v' entrasse acqua torbida.

² Πολλοί τοι ναρθηκοφόροι, παῦροι δέ τε βάκχοι.

³ The fact which this proverb proclaims, of a great gulf existing between what men profess and what they are, is one too frequently thrusting itself on the notice of all, not to have found its utterance in an infinite variety of forms, although none perhaps so deep and poetical as this. Thus there is another Greek line, fairly represented by this Latin:

Qui tauros stimulent multi, sed rarus arator;

and there is the classical Roman proverb: Non omnes qui habent citharam, sunt citharoedi; and the medieval rhyming verse:

Non est venator quivis per cornua flator;

and this Eastern word: *Hast thou mounted the pulpit, thou art not therefore a preacher;* with many more.

neighbour's tiles. And is there not the echo or the anticipation—which, it does not matter much—of more than one of our Lord's most solemn exhortations (as of Matt. xix. 28, 29), in this proverb of the Talmud, *Divorce from this world is marriage with the next?*

We of the clergy might make freer use of proverbs in our public teaching than we do. Great popular preachers, or, seeing that this phrase has now so questionable a sound, great preachers for the people, such as have found their way to the common heart of their fellow men, have not disdained largely to employ them. Any who would know how rich the German tongue is in these, and at the same time of what vigorous and manifold application they are capable, need only turn to the writings of Luther. One who in this intent has gone through the sixteen folio volumes which these writings fill, reports to the existence of three thousand proverbs therein. Our country congregations would gain not a little by such a use of our proverbs as I suggest. Any one, who by after investigation should seek to discover how much our rustic hearers carry away, even from the sermons to which they have attentively listened, would rarely find that it is the course and tenor of the argument, supposing the discourse to have contained such. But if anything was uttered, as it used so often to be by the best Puritan preachers, tersely, pointedly, epigrammatically, this will have stayed by them, while all beside has passed away. Now the merits of terseness and point, and sometimes of apparent paradox, which have caused other words to be remembered, are exactly the

merits which signalize the proverb, those by whose aid it has obtained such general acceptance as it possesses.

It need scarcely be observed, that in this sphere and region they will need to be used with discretion. It is not every good proverb will be good for a sermon. The pulpit must be always grave; a quite different thing from being dull—which last it should never be. But this being kept in remembrance, that which I suggest might, I am persuaded, be done, and with profit. Thus, in a discourse warning against sins of the tongue, we might produce many words of our own to describe the mischief it inflicts which would be flatter, less likely to be remembered than the old proverb: *The tongue is not steel, but it cuts*. On God's faithfulness in sustaining, upholding, rewarding his servants, there are feebler things which we might bring out of our own treasure-house, than to remind our hearers of that word: *He who serves God, serves a good Master*. And this one might sink deep, telling of the enemy whom every one of us has the most to fear: *No man has a worse friend than he brings with him from home*, standing too as it does, in striking agreement with Augustine's remarkable prayer, 'Deliver me from the evil man, from myself.'¹ Or again: *Ill weeds grow apace*;—with how lively an image does this set forth to us the rank luxuriant upgrowth of sinful lusts and desires in the garden of an uncared-for, untended heart. And then on the danger of overlooking and forgetting all the suffering of others which keeps out of our sight, which is not actually submitted to our eyes: *What the eye does not see, the*

¹ Libera me ab homine malo, a meipso.

heart does not rue. Or take again the world's confession that he who hides his talent is guilty not less than he who wastes it, as it utters itself in the following proverb: *He who does no good, does evil enough.* I know not whether we might presume sufficient quickness of apprehension on the part of our hearers to venture on the following: *The horse which draws its halter is not quite escaped;* but I can hardly imagine a happier illustration of the fact, that so long as any remnant of a sinful habit is retained by us, so long as we draw this halter, we make but an idle boast of our liberty; we may, by means of that which we still drag with us, be at any moment again entangled in the bondage from which we seemed to have altogether escaped.

Some of the noblest proverbs in every language are those embodying men's confidence in God's moral government of the world, in his avenging righteousness, however much there may be in the confusions of the present evil time to suggest a doubt or provoke a denial of this. When, for example, the Germans say, *God is a creditor who has no bad debts,*¹—in as much, that is, as sooner or later, in this world or the other, He gets in all that is due to Him--this may seem familiarly, almost too familiarly, spoken; though, indeed, who has a right to quarrel with words which express so well a very real, indeed a very awful, truth? Or take this, *Punishment is lame, but it comes,* which, if not old, yet rests on an image derived from antiquity, but has also merits of its own, however inferior in

¹ Gott ist ein Glaubiger, der keine bosen Schulden macht.

energy of expression and in fulness of sense to that ancient Greek proverb: *The mill of God grinds late, but grinds to powder*;¹ for this brings in the further thought, that his judgments, however long they tarry, yet when they arrive, are crushing ones. There is indeed another of our own, not unworthy to be set beside this, announcing, though under quite another image, the same fact of the tardy but terrible advents of judgment: *God moves with leaden feet, but strikes with iron hands*. And then, how awfully sublime another which has come down to us as part of the wisdom of the ancient heathen world: *The feet of the (avenging) deities are shod with wool*.² Here a new thought is introduced—the noiseless approach and advance of these judgments, as noiseless as the steps of one whose feet are wrapped in wool,—the manner in which they overtake secure sinners even in the hour of their utmost security. Who that has studied the history of the great crimes and criminals of the world, but will with a shuddering awe set his seal to the truth of this proverb? Indeed, meditating on such and on the source from which we have derived them, one is sometimes tempted to believe that the faith in a divine retribution evermore making itself felt in the world, this sense of a Nemesis, as men used to call it, was stronger and deeper in the better days of heathendom, than alas! it is in a sunken Christendom now.³

¹ Ὁψὲ θεῶν ἀλέουσι μύλοι, ἀλεύουσι δὲ λεπτά. We may compare the Latin: *Habet Deus suas horas et moras*; and the Spanish: *Dios no se queja, mas lo suyo no lo deja*.

² *Di laneos habent pedes*.

³ Thus how solemn and sublime a series of passages on this

But to resume. Even those proverbs which have acquired a use which seems to unite at once the trivial and the profane, may yet on closer inspection be found to be very far from having either triviality or profaneness cleaving to them. There is one, for instance, often taken lightly enough upon the lips: *Talk of the devil, and he is sure to appear*; or, as it used to be: *Talk of the devil, and his imps will appear*; or as in German it is: *Paint the devil on the wall, and he will shew himself anon*;—which yet contains truth serious and important enough, if we would only give heed to it: it contains, in fact, a very needful warning against a very dangerous temptation, I mean curiosity about evil. It has been often noticed, and is a very curious psychological fact, that there is a tendency in a great crime to reproduce and repeat itself, to call forth, that is, other crimes of the same character: and there is a fearful response which the evil we may hear or read about, is in danger of finding in our own hearts. This danger, then, assuredly makes it true wisdom, and a piece of moral prudence on the part of all to whom this is permitted, to avoid knowing or learning about the evil; where neither duty nor necessity obliges them thereto. It is men's wisdom to talk as little about the devil, either

matter might be drawn from the Greek tragic poets; all setting their seal to that great truth--

ὀρμᾶται μόλις, ἀλλ' ὅμως
πιστὸν τό γε θεῖον σθένος.

Or again, as the same poet has it,

χρόνια μὲν τὰ τῶν θεῶς πως,
εἰς τέλος δ' οὐκ ἀσθενῆ.

with themselves or with others, as they can; lest he appear to them. 'I agree with you,' says Niebuhr very profoundly in one of his letters,¹ 'that it is better not to read books in which you make the acquaintance of the devil.' And certainly there is a remarkable commentary on this proverb, so interpreted, in the earnest warning given to the children of Israel, that they should not so much as inquire how the nations which were before them in Canaan, served their gods, with what cruelties, with what abominable impurities, lest through this inquiry they should be themselves, entangled in the same (Deut. xii. 29, 30). They were not to talk about the devil, lest he should appear to them. The *infanda*, *nefanda*, declare by these very names which they bear that they are not to be spoken about.

And other proverbs, too, which at first sight may seem over-familiar with the name of the ghostly enemy of mankind, yet contain lessons which it would be an infinite pity to lose; as this German: *Where the devil cannot come, he will send*;² a proverb of very serious import, which excellently sets out to us the *penetrative* character of temptations, and the certainty that they will follow and find men out in their most secret retreats. It rebukes the absurdity of supposing, that by any outward arrangements, cloistral retirements, flights into the wilderness, sin can be kept at a distance. So far from this, temptations will inevitably overleap all these outward and merely artificial barriers which may be raised up against them; for

¹ *Life*, vol. i. p. 312.

² Wo der Teufel nicht hin mag kommen, da send er seinen Boten hin.

our spiritual enemy is as formidable from a seeming distance as *in close combat*; where he cannot come, he will send. There are others of the same family, as the following: *The devil's meal is half bran; or all bran*, as the Italians more boldly and more truly proclaim it;¹ unrighteous gains are sure to disappoint the getter; the pleasures of sin, even in this present time, are largely dashed with its pains. And will any refuse to acknowledge that this has its lesson: *He had need of a long spoon that eats with the devil?* or, as Chaucer has it,

‘Therefor behoveth him a ful long spoon
That shall ete with a fend’—

men fancy, it would say, they can cheat the arch-cheater, can advance in partnership with him up to a certain point, and then, whenever the connexion becomes too perilous, break it off at their will; being care in this to be miserably deceived; for, to quote another in the same tone: *He who has shipped the devil, must carry him over the water*; there is no getting rid of him when he is found a dangerous fellow passenger. In this too there speaks out a just scorn of those who, having entertained no scruple about a sin, reserve all their scruples for some trifling adjunct of the sin: *If you have swallowed the devil, you may swallow his horns*. Granting these and the like to have been often carelessly uttered, yet they rest notwithstanding upon a true moral basis in the main. This last series of proverbs I will close with an Arabic one, to which not even this appearance of levity can be ascribed; for it is as solemn and sublime

¹ La farina del diavolo se ne va in semola.

in form as it is profound in substance: *The blessings of the evil Genii are curses*. How deep a significance the story of Fortunatus acquires, when regarded as a commentary on this.

But I am warned to draw the last of my lectures to an end. I have adduced in their course no inconsiderable number of proverbs, and have sought for the most part to derive from them lessons, which were lessons in common for us all. There is one, however, which I must not forget, for it contains an especial lesson for myself, and a lesson which I shall do wisely and well at this present time to lay to heart. When the Spaniards would describe a tedious writer, one who possesses the art of exhausting the patience of his readers, they say of him: *He leaves nothing in his inkstand*. The phrase is a happy one, for assuredly there is no such secret of tediousness, no such certain means of wearing out the patience and losing the attention of our readers or our hearers, as the attempt to say everything ourselves, instead of leaving something to be filled in by their intelligence; while the merits of a composition or of a speech are often displayed as really, if not so prominently, in what is passed over as in what is spoken or set down; in nothing more than in the just measure of confidence in the capacities and powers of those to whom it is addressed which it displays. I would not willingly come under their condemnation, who thus *leave nothing in their inkstand*; and lest I should do so, I will bring now this my final lecture to its close; and having put you upon this track, I will ask you to draw out for yourselves those further lessons from proverbs, which they are abundantly capable of yielding.

APPENDIX.

ON THE METRICAL LATIN PROVERBS OF
THE MIDDLE AGES. (See p. 26.)

I HAVE nowhere seen brought together a collection of these medieval proverbs cast into the form of a rhyming hexameter. Erasmus, though he often illustrates the proverbs of the ancient world by those of the modern, does not quote, as far as I am aware, through the whole of his enormous collection, a single one of these which occupy a middle place between the two; a fact in its way curiously illustrative of the degree to which the attention of the great Humanists at the revival of learning was exclusively directed to the classical literature of Greece and Rome, and their entire estrangement from the medieval. For these proverbs thrown into leonine verse exist in considerable numbers; being of various degrees of merit, as will be seen from the following selection; in which some are keen and piquant enough, while others are of very subordinate value; those which seemed to me utterly valueless—and they were many—I have excluded altogether. The reader familiar with proverbs will detect correspondents to very many of them, besides the few which I have quoted, in one modern language or another, often in many.

Accipe, sume, cape, tria sunt gratissima Papae.

Let me observe here, once for all, that the lengthening of the final syllable in *cape*, is not to be set down to the

ignorance or carelessness of the writer; but is the scheme of the medieval hexameter, the unavoidable stress or pause on the first syllable of the third foot was counted sufficient to lengthen the shortest syllable in that position.

Ad secreta poli curas extendere noli.
 Ad terrae morem vitae decet esse tenorem.
 AEdibus in propriis canis est mordacior omnis.
 AEgro sanato, frustra dices, Numerato.
 Amphora sub veste raro portatur honeste.
 Ante Dei vultum nihil unquam restat inultum.
 Ante molam primus qui venit, non molat imus.
 Arbor honoretur cujus nos umbra tuetur.
 Arbor naturam dat fructibus atque figuram.
 Arbor ut ex fructu, sic nequam noscitur actu.
 Ars compensabit quod vis tibi magna negabit.
 Artem natura superat sine vi, sine cura.
 Artes per partes, non partes disce per artes.
 Aspera vox, Ite, sed vox est blanda, Venite.
 An allusion to Matt. xxv. 34, 41.
 Audi, cerne, tace, si vis to vivere pace.
 Audi doctrinam si vis vitare ruinam.
 Audit quod non vult qui pergit dicere quod vult.
 Autumat hoc in me quod novit perfidus in se.
 Capta avis est pluris quam mille in gramine ruris.
 Cari rixantur, rixantes conciliantur.
 Carius est carum, si praegustatur amarum.
 Casus dementis correctio fit sapientis.
 Catus saepe satur cum capto mure jocatur.
 Cautus homo cavit, si quem natura notavit.
 Conjugium sine prole, dies veluti sine sole.
 Contra vim mortis non herbula crescit in hortis.
 Cui peer assuescit, major dimittere nescit.

The same appears also in a pentameter, and under an Horatian image: Quod nova testa capit, inveterata sapit.

Cui sunt multa bona, huic dantur plurima dona.
 Cum furit atque ferit, Deus olim parcere quaerit.
 Cum jocus est verus, jocus est malus atque severus.
 So the Spanish: Malas son las burlas verdaderas.
 Curvum se praebet quod in unicum crescere debet.
 Dat bene, dat multum, qui dat cum munere vultum.
 ‘He that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness’ (Rom. xii. 8).
 Cf. Eccclus. xxxv. 9; SENECA, *De Benef.* i. I.
 Deficit ambobus qui vult servire duobus.
 Destruit et rodit sors juste quod Deus odit.
 Dicitur oblatum fore servitium male gratum.
 Dives marcescit quanto plus copia crescit.
 Dormit secure, cui non est functio curae.
 Far from court, far from care.
 Dum sis vir fortis, ne des tua robora scortis.
 Ebibe vas totum, si vis cognoscere potum.
 Eligat aequalem prudens sibi quisque sodalem.
 Est facies testis, quales intrinsecus estis.
 Est nulli certum cui pugna velit dare sertum.
 Esto laborator, et erit Deus auxiliator.
 Ex gutta mellis generantur flumina fellis.
 Ex lingua stulta veniunt incommoda multa.
 Ex magna coena stomacho fit maxima poena.
 Ex minimo crescit, sed non cito fama quiescit.
 Ex ovis pullus non natis sero fit ullus.
 Fac bene dum vivis, post mortem vivere si vis.
 Foemina ridendo flendo fallitque canendo.
 Frangitur ira gravis, cum fit responsio suavis.
 Fundit aquam cribro qui discere vult sine libro.
 Fures in lite pandunt abscondita vitae.
 So in Spanish: Rinen las comadres, y dicense las ver-
 dades.
 Furtivus potus plenus dulcedine totus.
 Hoc retine verbum, frangit Deus omne superbum.

Illa mihi patria est, ubi pascor, non ubi nascor.

Impedit omne forum defectus denariorum.

In vestimentis non stat sapientia mentis.

In vili veste nemo tractatur honeste.

The Russians have a worthier proverb: *A man's reception is according to his coat; his dismissal according to his sense.*

Jejunus venter non audit verba libenter.

Laudat adulator, sed non est verus amator.

Lingua susurronis est pejor felle draconis.

Linguam fraenare plus est quam castra domare.

Mentiri ventri nemo valet esurienti.

Multum deliro, si cuique placere requiro.

Musca, canes, mimi veniunt ad fercula primi.

Mus salit in stratum, cum scit non adfore catum.

Nati prudentes sunt qui noverere parentes.

Ne credas undam placidam non esse profundam.

Nil cito mutabis, donec meliora parabis.

Nobilitas morum magis ornat quam genitorum.

Non colit arva bene, qui semen mandat arenae.

Non est in mundo dives qui dicit, Abundo.

Non fit hirsutus lapis hinc atque inde volutus.

Non rex est legi, sed lex obnoxia regi.

Non est venator quivis per cornua flator.

Non facit hoc stultum prudenter quaerere multum.

Non tenet anguillam, per caudam qui tenet illam.

Non stat secures, qui protinus est ruiturus.

Non vult scire satur quid jejunos patiatur.

O dives dives, non omni tempore vives.

Omnibus est nomen, sed idem non omnibus omen.

Parvis imbutus tentabis grandia tutus.

Pelle sub agnina latitat mens saepe lupina.

Per multum Cras, Cras, omnis consumitur aetas.

Per risum multum poteris cognoscere stultum.

Plus valet in manibus passer quam sub dubio grus.

Pone gulae metas, ut sit tibi longior aetas.

Prodigus est natus de parco patre creatus.
Quam semel errare melius bis terve rogare.
Quando mulcetur villanus, pejor habetur.
Quando tumet venter, produntur facta latenter.
Qui bene vult fari debet bene praemeditari.
Qui prius implorat Christum, feliciter orat.
Quidquid agit mundus, monachus vult esse secundus.
Qui nescit partes in vanum tendit in artes.
Qui petit alta nimis, retro lapsus ponitur imis.
Qui pingit florem non pingit floris odorem.
Qui se non noscat vicini jurgia poscat.
Quisquis amat luscam, luscam putat esse venustam.
Quisquis amat ranam, ranam putat esse Dianam,
Quo minime reris de gurgite pisce frueris.
Quod raro cernit oculi lux, cor cito spernit.

Out of sight out of mind.

Quos vult sors ditat, et quos vult sub pede tritat.
Res satis est nota, plus foetent stercora mota.
Rustica natura semper sequitur sua jura.
Scribatur portis, Meretrix est janua mortis.
Sepes calcatur, qua pronior esse putatur.
Si curiam curas, pariet tibi curia curas.
Si das plorando, perdis tua munera dando.
Si lupus est agnum, non est mirabile magnum.
Si nequeas plures, vel to solummodo cures.
Singula captentur; sic omnia fine tenentur.
Si non morderis, cane quid latrante vereris?
Si quis det mannos, ne quaere in dentibus annos,
Stare diu nescit, quod non aliquando quiescit.
Subtrahe ligna focus, flammam restinguere si vis.
Sunt asini multi solum bino pede fulti.
Sus magis in coeno gaudet quam fonte sereno.
Tam male nil cusum, quod nullum prosit in usum,
Tota equidem novi plus testa pars valet ovi.
Ultra posse viri non vult Deus ulla requiri.

Una avis in dextra melior quam quatuor extra.
 Unde superbimus? ad terram terra redimus.
 Ungentem pungit, pungentem rusticus ungit.
 Ut dicunt multi, Cito transit lancea stulti.
 Verba satis celant mores, eadernque revelant.
 Vir bene vestitus vir creditur esse peritus.
 Vive Deo purus velut hic et nunc moriturus.
 Vos inopps nostis, quis amicus quisve sit hostis,
 Vulpes vult fraudem, lupus agnum, foemina laudem.

Add to these a few of the same character, but un-
 rhymed:

Catus amat pisces, sed non vult tingere plantam.
 It is with this proverb, which is almost of all languages,
 that Lady Macbeth taunts her husband, as one--
 ‘Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
 Like the poor cat i' the adage.’—Act I. Scene 7.

Cochlea consiliis, in factis esto volucris.
 Dat Deus omne bonum, sed non per cornua taurum.
 The Chinese say: *Even the ripest fruit does not drop into
 one's mouth*; and another Latin: *Non volat in buccas
 assa columba tuas.*

De male quaesitis non gaudet tertius haeres.
 Ense cadent multi, perimit sed crapula plures.
 Fide Deo soli, mundo diffide tibi que.
 Fronte capillata post est Occasio calva.
 Compare Bacon: ‘Occasion turneth a bald noddle, after
 she hath presented her locks in front, and no hold taken.’

Furfure se miscens porcorum dentibus estur.
 With a slight variation the Italian: *Chi si fa fango, il
 porco lo calpesta.*

Invidus haud eadem semper quatit ostia Daemon.
 Ipsa dies quandoque parens, quandoque noverca.
 Irretit muscas, transmittit aranea vespas.

Mergere nos patitur, sed non submergere Christus.
 Mirari, non rimari, sapientia vera est.
 Nomina si nescis, pent et cognitio rerum.
 Non stillant omnes quas cernis in aere nubes.
 Non venit ad silvam, qui cuncta rubeta veretur.
 Occurrit cuicumque Deus, paucique salutant.
 Pro ratione Deus dispertit frigora vestis.
 Quod rarum carum; vilescit quotidianum.
 Regis ad exemplar totus componitur orbis.
 Sermones blandi non radunt ora loquentis.
 Stultorum calami carbones, moenia chartae.
 So the French: Muraille blanche, papier des sots.

Add further these pentameters:

Conveniunt rebus nomina saepe suis.
 Dat Deus immiti cornua curta bovi.
 Plus male facta nocent quam bene dicta docent.

Add further a few which occupy two lines:

Argue consultum, te diliget; argue stultum,
 Avertet vultum, nec te dimittet inultum.

Balnea cornici non prosunt, nec meretrici;
 Nec meretrix munda, nec cornix alba fit unda.

Curia Romana non quaerit ovem sine lana;
 Dantes exaudit; non dantibus ostia claudit.

Dives eram dudum; fecerunt me tria nudum;
 Alea, vina, Venus; tribus his sum factus egenus,

Omnia sunt nulla; rex, Papa, et plumbea bulla;
 Cunctorum finis mors, vermis, fovea, cinis.

These lines are ascribed to Thomas a Kempis. There
 are seldom in monkish verses false quantities like the two
 which occur here close together.

Si bene barbatum faceret sua barba beatum,
 Nullus in hoc circo queat esse beatior hirco.

Si dat oluscula mensa minuscula, pace quieta,
Ne pete grandia lautaque prandia lite repleta..

Si doceas stultum, laetum non dat tibi vultum;
Odit te multum; vellet te scire sepultum.

Si qua sede sedes, et sit tibi commoda sedes,
Illa sede sede, nec ab illa sede recede.

Hoc scio pro certo, quod si cum stercore certo,
Vinco seu vincor, semper ego maculor.

Multum deliro, si cuique placere requiro;
Omnia qui potuit, hac sine dote fuit.

Permutant mores homines, cum dantur honores;
Corde stat inflato pauper, honore dato.

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