

social attachment and reciprocal affection. Strong as is the influence of selfishness in regulating human action, there can hardly be a doubt that benevolence in the common acceptation of the term, is characteristic of human nature.

But in the hands of such a creature as man, the most amiable natural qualities are extremely liable to be corrupted or restrained in their exercise. This is peculiarly the case with our benevolent affections. Mistaking the mere animal emotion of good nature for the ennobling principle of brotherly kindness; ignorant of the world or viewing it through a distorted medium; permitting the more generous qualities of our minds to be perverted by the influence of selfishness or ambition—it is not unusual to find the benevolent affections contracted within the dimensions of a sentimental feeling, uninteresting in itself and inefficient in its operation. Many there are, who by an instinctive feeling which they cannot repress, weep at the tale of woe—who heave the commiserating sigh at fictitious representations of distress—and whose souls expand with joy when they hear of the prosperity of their brethren: but with these emotions and these expressions of emotion, their brotherly kindness and charity completely evaporate. Their benevolence is rather a feeling than a principle—a feeling to be cherished as a source of pleasure, rather than as an operative principle leading to active exertions for the general good. This speculative benevolence as we may term it, is extremely capricious in its modes of operation. It is excited not so much by scenes of real distress exhibited to its view, as by the descriptions of such scenes pictured to the imagination. It shrinks from the haunts of squalid wretchedness—the cold, gloomy cell—the bed of straw. It is not regulated by sound judgment, nor controlled by the agency of right religious principle.

In order to prevent one of the noblest affections of our nature from thus degenerating into a mere animal emotion, habits of brotherly kindness and charity may be
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