

## THEORY, FANCY, FACT.

THOUGHT usually precedes action, and the value of an action must ever depend much upon the amount of consideration that preceded it. There may be too much, but the greater danger is that there will be too little. Delay threatens from the one quarter; rashness clamours from the other. Many emergencies will be forced upon us where thought must be brief as an electric spark, and action follow it in *quick succession*; but in the ordinary affairs of life ample time is afforded for deliberation, and the patient calculator receives his reward. The man of hasty action will often fail to compass the result of expended energy, and so will have the humiliation of seeing his proudest efforts crumbling into failure. Prudence counsels that our actions should be controlled by theory or guided by experiment.

When a person has considered a subject in the light of knowledge, has brought to bear upon it the force of analytical reasoning, and has viewed it in the light of results deduced from cases bearing a real analogy, he is in a position to speak with intelligence or act with assurance in connection with it. Definite knowledge is thus given to men. Through the arched vault of every man's intellectual expanse come trooping legions of ideas following one another in brilliant retinue, or, deep, dense, and dark, overclouding the mental firmament with the sable shades of the Plutonian shores. In wild concourse they assemble, and unite their forces for the assault of some grand citadel of *problematic issue*. Marshalled and led onward by their great captain Reason they win, and in this orderly outcome of the jarring, motley crowd we see the realization of a scheme to meet all similar emergencies—in other words, from the tumult of ideas issues a theory.

Every man has a theory, simple or complex, for the solution of the great problems of life. The Monarchist, Socialist, Communist, Nihilist, Landleaguer or Unionist, is prepared solemnly and unreservedly to affirm that the tenets he holds are the only grounds on which common equity can be obtained for all mankind. Yet were it not for the Gladstones and Bismarks who rise above the dust and noise of petty, clamoring, party strife, and with calm, cool eye survey the needs and provide for the wants of all alike, these puppets of an inflamed imagination would break the

bonds of civil law and cause gaunt havoc and blear-eyed destruction to ravage our fair fields and lay desolate our cities.

Again the theory with the most nonsense in it will be held most tenaciously, and propounded with the greatest gusto. Men with a fair share of common sense realize the difficulties of reaching realities that will stand amidst a universe of change, and hence while firm are still open to impression. But a fool at last convinced that he has made a fool of himself, will generally go on making a fool of himself out of mere obstinate foolishness.

A theory can only be founded on known data. It is supported by the manner in which it accounts for phenomena. The Ptolemaic theory long satisfied the astronomers; but finally it became apparent that cycles and epicycles could no longer meet the demand made upon them, and men would no longer listen to "the music of the spheres." Experience threw them out of her mouth, and the unfounded, though long-reverenced theory is now held by the student as but an interesting relic of a receding age. But experience has also taught that if man would be successful in a war against old theories, he must take another method than that of simple demolition. He must supplant the old with a new, and if the new be not the stronger, the old will regain its place.

The theorizing tendency is often apparent in the ordinary affairs of life. Every old farmer that you meet will propound a new theory for the successful cultivation of the soil, even though his own broad acres be but a wilderness. This is very often harmful, and the acceptance by all of some well grounded *system* would prove much more advantageous. Similar instances might be quoted from other walks in life. But in these contracted spheres where men are able to vent their ideas in practice, theory is but one of an association of forces, often antagonistic, that unite in the development of his course. Fancy, fickle creature, is another. It leads men upward and downward, hither and thither, without purpose or aim, a blind guide that knows not, fears not anything. Strong fancy will upset reason, purpose, action; and outrunning limited resources, pressing beyond the limited sphere to which a corporeal body binds us, will make men idle dreamers. Then will we find them wandering through a fairy-land, with golden shores, decked with amaranthine