

is superadded to prompt to the discharge of that duty, and is one of those admirable provisions, which the great author of nature has made to bind his children together, and to make us aiding and assisting one to another. So it is with the other impressions and emotions of which we are susceptible. Each is designed and fitted to stimulate to some desired and useful course of action.

Now the first of the mental laws, to which we wish now to call your attention, respects those emotions—passive emotions, observe, in which the mind does not act, but is acted on and it is this, that the oftner they are repeated, they grow weaker, or in other words, it is the tendency of emotions to be felt less acutely, the oftner they are called forth. That this is really a law of our mental nature no one can deny. Our own experience readily testifies to it. We all know that emotions called forth by an object or scene or circumstance, gradually weaken as with these, we become familiar. The landscape viewed for the hundredth time, though still as lovely as ever, gives not to us, the same vivid and strong impression of its exceeding beauty, as when, in all the charms in which nature had adorned it, it first burst upon our view. It is not in the power of any moral considerations, to continue from day to day to excite within us the same strength and vividness of emotion, which they at first produced; and if we are from day to day witnessing scenes of distress, they cease to excite the same intensity of feeling, the same vivid emotion of pity or sympathy which they at first called forth. So it is with other feelings. By repetition, their acuteness diminishes. It is in keeping with this law of our mental nature, that when you introduce a physician into some scene of affliction, where he finds his patient suffering, it may be, excruciating pain, or apparently in the agonies of death, the scene does not produce the same excitement of feeling in him, which it would do in another man. You do not expect from him those expressions of deep emotion which you would expect from other men. And you know, that while another man would perhaps suffer much under the uneasy feeling produced by witnessing such a scene of distress, and the remembrance of it would haunt him for days to disturb and to sadden him, he will return from it, to his ordinary avocations, without concern, and his ordinary habits of thought and feeling be scarcely if at all disturbed. The physician is not naturally less susceptible of sympathetic impressions than other men. But by the frequent repetition of them, to which his profession necessarily exposes him, they have become weaker. So it is with the soldier and the sailor. In his hundredth

battle the soldier may not be in less danger, than in the first; but his impression of dangers, is greatly less vivid. In the hundredth storm to which his frail bark has been exposed on the tempestuous ocean, the sailor may be in as great danger as in the first which awakened his fears; but his apprehension of danger is by no means so great. The law, in short is universal—emotion, becomes by repetition weaker and weaker. And the law is unalterable. We have no power to change it. It is as steady in its operation as are the laws by which the courses of the heavenly bodies are regulated.

Now of this law there is one directly beneficial consequence. It renders the mind more composed and more independent, than it could otherwise have been. The continuance of the emotions which any circumstances produce,—the continuance of these emotions, as vividly as the first time the circumstances presented themselves, every time they appear, would keep the mind in a continual ferment; would render it ever the sport of external influences;—and would be totally inconsistent with that sane and sober state of mind, which is necessary for the due discharge of the duties of life. Did the emotion of horror at sights of severe bodily distress continue equally strong in the physician, throughout life, as when he begun to witness these sights, or did the feelings of sympathy continue equally vivid or painful, he would be rendered unfit for, as he would be rendered miserable in, the performance of these duties, to which his profession necessarily leads him. So in other cases the continuance of the emotion in its original strength would be really injurious.

But, the question readily occurs, if the susceptibility of the emotion was given to lead to a desired course of action, and if the strength of the emotion diminishes by repetition, must it not follow that the desired action will cease to be performed—that the course of conduct will cease to be persisted in, to lead to which the susceptibility of emotion was given and the emotion called forth. Such we might suppose would be the effect of the gradual diminution in the intensity of the feeling. But such we certainly know is not necessarily the effect of that diminution. Take for instance the case of medical men, to which we have already alluded, whose feelings of pity or sympathy are, as you might say, blunted, by their frequent familiarity with scenes of distress. Are they less actively benevolent, because of this blunting of the feelings? Why, it is but paying them a compliment which we think they fairly deserve, to say that, speaking of the profession generally, they are of all men in the community the most actively benevolent. They will take most trouble and put themselves to most