

## Concerning Things which cannot go on.

Of course, in the full meaning of the words. Ben Nevis is one of the Things that cannot Go On. And among these, too, we may reckon the Pyramids. Likewise the unchanging ocean: and all the everlasting hills, which cannot be removed, but stand fast for ever.

But it is not such things that I mean by the phrase; it is not such things that the phrase suggests to ordinary people.

You can stand a very disagreeable and painful thing for once: or for a little while. But a very small annoyance, going on unceasingly, grows insufferable. No annoyance can possibly be slighter, than that a drop of cold water should fall on your bare head. But you are aware that those ingenious persons, who have investigated the constitution of man with the design to discover the sensitive places where man can feel torture, have discovered what can be got out of that falling drop of water. Continue it for an hour; continue it for a day: and it turns to a refined agony. It is a thing which cannot go on long, without driving the sufferer mad. No one can say what the effect might be, of compelling a human being to spend a week, walking, through all his waking hours, in a path where he had to bend his head to escape a branch every minute or so. You, my reader, did not ascertain by experiment what would be the effect. However pretty the branch might be, beneath which you had to stoop, or round which you had to dodge, at every turn; that branch must go. And you cut away the blossoming apple branch; you trained in another direction the spray of honeysuckle: you sawed off the green bough, beautiful with the soft beechen leaves. They had become things which you could not suffer to go on.

Any very extreme feeling in a commonplace mind, is a thing not likely to go on long. Very extravagant likes and dislikes: very violent grief, such as people fancy must kill them: will, in most cases, endure not long. In short, anything that flies in the face of the laws which regulate the human mind: anything which is greatly opposed to Nature's love for the Average: cannot, in general, go on. I do not forget, that there are striking exceptions. There are people who never quite get over some great grief or disappointment; there are people who form a fixed resolution, and hold on by it through life. I have seen more than one or two men or women, whose whole soul and energy were so devoted to some good work, that a stranger, witnessing their doings for a few days, and hearing their talk, would have said, "*That cannot last.*" It must soon burn itself out, zeal like that! But if you had made enquiry, you would have learned that all *that* had gone on unflagging, for ten, twenty, thirty years. There must

have been sound and deep principle there at the first, to stand the wear of such a time: and you may well believe that the whole nature is now confirmed irretrievably in the old habit: you may well hope that the good Christian and philanthropist who has gone on for thirty years, will go on as long as he lives;—will go on for ever. But as a general rule, I have no great faith in the stability of human character: and I have great faith in the law of Average. People will not go on very long, doing what is inconvenient for them to do. And I will back Time against most feelings and most resolutions in human hearts. It will beat them in the end. You are a clergyman, let us suppose. Your congregation are fond of your sermons. They have got into your way: and if so, they probably like to hear you preach, better than anybody else; unless it be the two or three very great men. A family, specially attached to you, moves from a house near the church, to another two or three miles away. They tell you, that nothing shall prevent their coming to their accustomed places every Sunday still: they would come though the distance were twice as great. They are perfectly sincere. But your larger experience of such cases makes you well aware that time, and distance, and mud, and rain, and hot sunshine, will beat them. Coming to church over that inconvenient distance, is a thing that cannot go on. It is a thing that ought not to go on: and you make up your mind to the fact. You cannot vanquish the laws of Nature. You may make water run up hill, by laborious pumping. But you cannot go on pumping for ever: and whenever the water is left to its own nature, it will certainly run downhill. All such declarations as "I shall never forget you:" "I shall never cease to deplore your loss:" "I can never hold up my head again:" may be ethically true: but time will prove them logically false. The human being may be quite sincere in uttering them: but he will change his mind.

And it is chilling and irritating to be often reminded of the refrigerating power of Time upon all warm feelings and resolutions. I have known a young clergyman, appointed early in life to his first parish; and entering upon his duty with tremendous zeal. I think a good man, however old, would rejoice at such a sight: would delightedly try to direct and counsel all that hearty energy, and to turn all that labour to the best account. And even if he thought within himself that possibly all this might not quite last, I don't think he would go and tell the young minister so. And the aged man would thankfully remember, that he has known instances in which all that *has* lasted; and would hope that in this instance it might last again. But I have known a cynical, heartless, time-hardened old man (the uncle, in fact, of my friend Mr. Snarling), listen with a grin of mingled con-