

CUI BONO ?

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A few years ago the greatest scholar in France, a man looked upon by many of his countrymen as the apostle of "sweetness and light," surprised his admirers and literary men in general by declaring that after all that had been said of the noble ends to be attained by culture he had a lurking belief that the voluptuary makes the most of life and comes nearest fulfilling the end of his existence. Such an opinion from one of the most thoughtful, refined and honoured men of the age is not to be treated with indifference or contempt. Thousands have hung with rapture on the words of Ernest Renan. Scholars have extolled his erudition, philosophers have been charmed with his quiet enthusiasm, and courtiers and literary men have alike borne testimony to the grandeur of a character in which gentleness is united to manly strength, womanly tenderness to heroic courage, the simple faith and candor of a child to the wisdom of a sage. Yet this man, the beau ideal of French culture, almost asserts that he has missed the goal, and that his life has been a failure.

Let us, therefore, try if we can discover what reasons may be urged against seeking to unfold the moral and intellectual side of human nature and bring it under the power of spiritual forces.

We live in a rough world. The environments of the actual are crude and harsh, and he who would adjust himself to his surroundings must be no fastidious dilettante. He should be in some measure like to his conditions. Life is a battle with rude enemies, and to contend successfully one must be inured to hardships. Softness and sensibility are qualities of doubtful utility in those who bear the brunt of the battle, and whose business is to fight, not to sit in camp and form plans as to how the victory may be won. It may be true that the ideal touches the actual on every side, and surrounds it with eternal beauty; but

why tear aside the veil that half conceals our vision, that the full blaze of exceeding brightness may beget discontent, and and fill us with divine despair? Why introduce the contented hind into the palace of regal splendour? Why not leave him to dream on the hillside, and drink of the mountain stream, to gaze into the depths of the blue sky and be happier than the over-cultured king or philosopher, whose whole being is keenly alive to every touch of pleasure or pain? Listen to the melodious cursings of a Byron, hear the despairing wail of a Shelley, ever haunted by the presence of an ideal world, and say does not "the humble cottager who steals his sole dominion from the waste" appear to be the more practical sage? Why awaken by education that nameless unrest,

"Those high instincts before which our mortal nature,

Does tremble like a guilty thing surprised."

Why intensify desires that cannot be satisfied, strivings for the perfect amidst imperfection, thoughts that dwell too fondly on the future and condemn the present?

The full and habitual activity of all the faculties tends to make us dissatisfied with the existing state of things. It disposes us too much to prospection and retrospection,

"To look before and after and pine for what is not."

It is said that all the clever young men in the American universities are of the Byronic type—melancholy and moody. The great are always pensive, if not gloomy, and the outward appearance of gaiety they may exhibit never springs from the depths of the soul. Their extraordinary endowments tend to keep them apart from the great mass of mankind, and their keen sensibilities expose them to sufferings which persons of coarser natures never experience. A distinguished American writer says, "Every great passion, sublime purpose, singular