

might in after-life, because it is newer to him. Perhaps, too, the moral eye resembles the physical—by custom familiarizes itself with delusion, and inverts, mechanically, the objects presented to it, till the deceit becomes more natural than Nature itself.

There are men who say they know the world, because they know its vices. So does an officer at Bow-street, or the turnkey at Newgate. This would be a claim to knowledge of the world, if there were but rogues in it. But these are as bad judges of our minds as a physician would be of our bodies, if he had never seen any but those in a diseased state. Such a man would fancy health itself a disease. We generally find, indeed, that men are governed by their weaknesses, not their vices, and those weaknesses are often the most amiable part about them. The wavering Jaffier betrays his friend through a weakness, which a hardened criminal might equally have felt, and which, in that criminal might have been the origin of his guilt. It is the knowledge of these weaknesses, as if by a glance, that serves a man better in the understanding and conquest of his species, than a knowledge of the vices to which they lead—it is better to seize the one cause than ponder over the thousand effects. It is the former knowledge which I chiefly call the knowledge of the world. It is this which immortalised Moliere in the drama, and distinguishes Talleyrand in action.

It has been asked whether the same worldly wisdom which we admire in a writer would, had occasion brought him prominently forward, have made him equally successful in action? Certainly not, as a necessary consequence. Swift was the most sensible writer of his day, and one of the least sensible politicians, in the selfish sense—the only sense in which he knew it—of the word. What knowledge of the world in “Don Juan” and in Byron’s “Correspondence”—what seeming want of that knowledge in the great poet’s susceptibility to attack, on the one hand, and his wanton trifling with his character on the other? How is this difference between the man and the writer to be accounted for? Because, in the writer, the infirmities of constitution are either concealed or decorated by genius—not so in the man: fretfulness, spleen, morbid sensitiveness, eternally spoil our plans in life—but they often give an interest to our plans on paper. Byron, quarrelling with the world, as Childe Harold, proves his genius; but Byron quarrelling with the world in his own person betrays his folly! To show wisdom in a book, it is but necessary that we should possess the theoretical wisdom; but in life, it requires not only the theoretical wisdom, but the practical ability to act up to it. We may know exactly what we ought to do, but we may not have the fortitude to do it. “Now,” says the shy man in love, “I ought to go and talk to my mistress—my rival is with her—I ought to make myself as agreeable as possible—I ought to throw that fellow in the shade by my *bons mots* and my compliments.” Does he do so? No! he sits in a corner and scowls at