

The thesis I am anxious to combat, namely, that such intellectual work must in itself be admirable, is nearly always associated with the kindred fallacy that there is necessarily something meritorious in unpleasant work of this kind. The latter notion has so permeated the atmosphere we breathe that even those of us who are in our hearts convinced of its inherent falsity are, nevertheless, influenced by it against our will. I suppose we are all of us familiar with the feeling that a morning has been well spent simply because we feel it to have been unpleasantly spent. We may, more or less dimly, recognize that the commentary we have been writing is a mere encumbrance to the text, that the index we have been compiling is the index to a useless book, that the scientific abstract we have been making is a hindrance, not a help, to any serviceable thought, and yet, in spite of ourselves, we also have a sneaking self-congratulatory feeling that we have justified our existence for those wasted hours solely because we have submitted to pass them in dull and tedious drudgery. I do not say that there is not some small excuse for such a sentiment when the taskwork in which we have been engaged is done for daily bread; we can then shift the initial responsibility of our labour on to other shoulders and may perhaps indulge in a certain complacency at having finished our spell with credit. Doubtless the Israelites in their Egyptian bondage felt every now and then a good deal of satisfaction when the tale of bricks was prosperously achieved. But there are innumerable cases in which the sentiment I speak of has not even this slight palliation, and it is to be explained, I think, as a form of unconscious ascetism—the pestilent ascetism which declares that because a thing is disagreeable we are bound to be benefited by it. Whereas, if we pass a morning in doing something that makes us happy to do and that brings us no immediately tangible reward, the pernicious suggestions made to us in our early youth or inherited from our still tyrannous forbears for ever so many generations back, rise up in us and persuade our foolish conscious selves, so ready always to be overborne by any specious, confident lie, that the precious moments