

But character-reading in its higher degree is an attribute of great minds. It is the secret of learned men's penetration, and of the leaders of men's power. It is the faculty, perverted, that enables the statesman to deceive the nation; that enables the politician to play upon the voter; that prompts the avaricious to extort from the meek. It is the power, righteous, that enables the great and good men of the world to discover the snares that beset man's career, and point out to him the vices that allure him from his true course and disfigure him for the divine ends of his creation.

Character-reading in its larger sense is an art difficult to acquire. To sum up a man's qualities from a mere glance at his general appearance—to discover his tastes from his dress or his bearing; to estimate his mental capacity from the contour of his head; to calculate the development of his passions from the expression of his countenance, being careful to detect, whenever necessary, the "false face hiding what the false heart doth know." To do this on seeing a man for the first time, and then, after slight intercourse, to judge him more fully by his activity, by the dash, the smoothness, or the hesitancy of his movements, by his ambition, his "hobbies," and his choice of companions; to discover his true nature from the bent of his thoughts, as revealed by his words and his manner of speaking; and then, with the aid of these observations, to perceive how he will act when left to his own directions, or when subjected to persuasion or force, or when thrust into the presence of prosperous or adverse circumstances—to accomplish all this implies the possession of a rare gift of sagacity, something that does not admit of complete elucidation, nor allows the laying down of any arbitrary precepts by which we might acquire the science.

But the subject of character-reading is altogether too interesting to be dismissed with this unsatisfying conclusion. It is too fertile in theories, and too remunerative of profitable reflexion, to be considered unworthy of further pursuit. Character-reading of the higher sort is especially remarkable in public men. Many of our modern politicians possess the gift in an eminent degree. History affords numerous examples of statesmen and rulers who were great character-readers.

The Romans have left us the best records of skill in this direc-