

Is the *Witness* quite oblivious to the fact, that there are both old maids and bachelors, not a few, who, rather than inflict the degradation of inherited, debased and sensual passions on future generations—the result of purely animal and loveless marriage—prefer to live alone, and so lessen a little the perpetuation of evil tendencies? To curb the lower and merely animal nature by the higher or spiritual being is surely religion. Hereditary physical evils, or diseases, in this age frequently render it a duty to forego marriage. Marriage that *can* have no evil results to the future race is only possible when there is union of spiritual nature—of heart and mind—as well as freedom from known hereditary physical and mental weakness. The *Witness*, if truly religious, ought to thank Divine Providence, who over-rules evil with good, that in a luxurious age the very selfishness of luxury and sin impels its votaries to refrain from perpetuating their self-derived tendencies to evil.

All which only goes to show that even a “religious daily” may err when it strives to urge men to do evil by giving the rein to the lower passions in order to accomplish good to the race; for that is a very different thing from the laws of Nature and of Providence, which are so wisely framed as ever to strive to “overcome evil with good.” Let the *Witness* beware lest it become a false witness, and in advocating temperance in one lesser direction, refuse to recognize and veto a much greater and more disastrous intemperance in another.

“*Censor*”

THE ROBUST STYLE OF WRITING.

A modest vice is less offensive than a virtue which is always blowing its own trumpet and beating the tom-toms of its own complacent conceit. We prefer a stingy man to a generous man who boasts of the favours he confers; nay, it is perhaps the quiet and unassuming character of avarice that has made it a “gentlemanly vice.” Most people are so well aware of these moral truths that they spare to congratulate themselves in public on their own excellences. Among the uncomfortable exceptions to this rule is the self-conscious manly man, the robust writer, who has invaded literature of late, and made it a bear-garden. This creature is for ever feeling his intellectual and moral biceps in public, thumping his dilated chest, and thanking heaven that he is “manly, sir, manly!” In presence of a life, of a poem, of a work of art, he first asks, in a blustering voice, “Is it manly? is it robust?” One of the more pleasing and delicate writers of this school has lately published a series of papers on the “Manliness of Christ,” and we may perhaps look for an essay on the “Boyishness of St. Luke.” The robust writer is so preoccupied by his love of biceps that he cannot think, even for a moment, of any other literary quality. He is an art critic, perhaps, and he is confronted with a landscape in twilight or a “romantic” interior. He cries at once that twilight and romance are unmanly, and he goes on to swear by his god Dagon that they are also immoral. It is amazing the scent for immorality that your robust critic displays. Every artist who does not fall down and worship biceps, every poet who has a soul to feel and a style to render shades of sentiment and refinements of character, is informed by the robust writer that he is corrupting youth. The robust writer, curiously enough, knows a great deal about corruption. He is always finding allusions to mysterious iniquities, and hinting at naughty books presumed to be in his enemies’ libraries where less strong-minded and able-bodied observers can detect nothing wrong. So fond is he of blaring about purity and of sniffing out impurity, that it is scarcely cynical to suspect the robust writer of possessing an unclean mind. Thus one’s admiration of this swaggering critical Puritan is checked by a doubt as to whether, after all, he is anything better than a hypocrite of the latest fashion.

The robust writer has his literary admirations as well as his objects of indignation and contempt. When he gets hold of a poet, or an essayist, or a humourist whom he thinks it manly to admire, he goes on to praise him in his barbarian style. He does not, when he plays the favourable critic, illumine “the hapless object of his howling homage” with a flood of equable light. He comes up, like the north wind, blowing and roaring, and through the storm of his eloquence it is difficult to catch a glimpse of the book or the character that he admires. One may instantly recognise the robust writer by his love of the words “pedant” and “specialist.” Every man is a pedant with him who has a clear and minute knowledge of the topic about which he is ignorantly bellowing. Exactness and accuracy of information, *netteté* of styles, are, in his eyes, the mark of the pedant. It is an insult to him, as it were, that other people should be learned where he is half-learned, should be scholars where he is a smatterer, should have taken pains where he has caught up the first random collection of gossip and legend. The robust writer glories in many misstatements of fact. He goes wrong in dates to the extent of some fifty years, or perhaps a hundred, and this he calls “sweeping away the nonsensical cobwebs of pedantry.” To let the robust writer into a literary period is like letting the north wind and an untutored housemaid with her broom into the study of a man of letters. All the notes and papers are blown about and confused, all the books are turned upside down and arranged in the wrong places. The effect is perhaps rather picturesque in its way; but the whole muddle must be cleared off, and order must be brought back with infinite pains. If any critic

attempts to restore order where the robust writer has gone before in his turbulent style, he must make up his mind to be called a “specialist,” a “pedant,” and a “dryasdust.” There is much merit in knowing things wrongly, in knowing half-truths, in drawing false conclusions from ludicrous premises, when it is the robust writer that has done these things. To set him right is to stamp oneself a pedant, a trifle,—a tame, minute, laborious nincompoop. Terms like these, or stronger, have lately been applied by the robustest of all writers on classical subjects, first, to the ancient critics who, with pains and labour, secured for us respectable texts of the classics; secondly, to the modern scholars who have set the manly one right when he has published nonsense. It is difficult at present to face the wrath of the robust; for by pushing, shouting, and practising the arts of popularity they have managed to seem fine honest fellows, with no nonsense about them. More careful and quiet critics must take heart, must not let themselves be browbeaten. All work based on mere indolence, and buttressed by mere assertion, must soon drop to pieces and perish with other fallacies well trumpeted in their time.—*Saturday Review*.

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS BELIEF.

A Sermon preached in Zion Church by Rev. Alfred J. Bray, November 2nd, 1879.

JOHN iii. 19.

The question is often asked, Is man responsible for his religious belief? and the answer is sometimes *yes* and sometimes *no*. I think the question is not a difficult one. The answer is easy, if you take care to define your terms. *Man, Responsibility, Belief*, are the words we want to understand, and the meaning of which we must agree upon. By man we mean not merely as a sentient creature, nor as an animal endowed with intellect which enables him to observe and reason and judge, but as an intellectual and moral being, having mind and conscience; that is, powers of thinking and a sense of a moral law, also affections and emotions and a will to enable him to determine upon certain actions; that is, man as we find him in the ordinary everyday walk and work of life, thinking, willing and acting as is usual with men.

Responsibility is next. The term is imported into the English language from the Latin tongue. The original word is *Responderere*,—to answer. It implies an existing relationship to some Superior, and the right of that Superior to put questions and demand a reply. The general idea is of a great Assize, presided over by *one* who has the right to enquire into the thoughts and acts of men, to sift motives, to analyze complex actions, and to award pains or praises as they may be deserved.

Let me pause here a moment to notice the importance to be attached to the fact that we find such terms in all languages. Go where you will—among what people you will—and you will find words to correspond with: I ought; you ought not; it was your duty, &c.; and these phrases are not the result of any particular education or domestic training, but they are inwrought with the feelings and instincts of humanity. The sense of duty is original in man, the great charter of rights has been written out by the deepest instincts of our nature. For language is the reflection of the facts and feelings of human nature. Facts and feelings clothe themselves with words.

Belief is a word of wide import: it includes all opinions, thoughts and sentiments, whatever the subject of them may be—social, scientific, political, or religious—all the conclusions to which the mind may come on facts, on questions, when it has sources of information and capacity for weighing evidences. There are entire classes of beliefs which carry no responsibility of any kind, because they do not enter the region of the moral. I believe that a stone is hard, that a ball is round, that the earth revolves around the sun, that the sun moves in an ellipse, that the moon governs the tides; I believe the axioms that form the bases of all mathematical conclusions, and I hold the accuracy of the solutions they enable me to arrive at; but no one ever talks, and I never think of any responsibility attaching to my belief in the results of exact science. Even when you come to matters of religious belief, which involve ideas of man’s relation to man, and man’s relation to God—to man’s duty and right work—it must be allowed, I think, that there are persons who have beliefs for which they cannot be responsible. We acknowledge that the heathen can only, in justice, be judged by the highest moral precepts of heathenism. He cannot be held to answer for the violation of laws which he has never known the existence of; he cannot be condemned for dishonour done to the Decalogue when his ears have never heard the thunder of its commands.

You can carry that same argument through whole classes of our religious society. There are people about us holding forms of faith which have no basis in even ordinary common sense; they cling to the veriest superstitions, as others do to ascertained facts. But everything is explained by the early education. Let a child be born of superstitious parents—be brought up in an atmosphere of superstition—&c.

Look at the children of Calvinists, &c.

Every man has within him mental and moral powers for distinguishing the truth, but they can only be called into play by some influences from without.