

Hence, you perceive, what we desiderate is not mere earnestness. This may spring from the grossest errors and produce the most disastrous consequences. It was indeed this, in one of its most awful forms, which at the fanatical call of Peter the Hermit aroused all Europe to arms, and filled the plains of Asia with needless carnage. And, when the hour came that saw all the old barriers of society in France give way, it was again this that filled Paris with such lamentation and woe as no city in modern times has witnessed. It is only good to be zealously affected in a good thing. Zeal in what is bad not only fits man for great crimes, but is sure to beget that blind approbation of crime which steels the heart against remorse, and by drawing to its aid the approval of conscience fatally prepares the soul for almost any sort of wickedness. A dull, wicked man may be loathsome and in many ways mischievous; but who can set bounds to his criminality, who is thoroughly in earnest to gratify his own bad passions! To find an apology for a wicked course of conduct in the wreckless ardor with which it is prosecuted, although common enough with writers of a certain class, is yet one of the most pernicious lessons that can be taught to the young. To be blind to the claims of justice or to invert these, and then seek for justice in mere revenge with quenchless ardor, is perhaps as true and simple a notion as we are able to form of the wickedness of devils. And just in as far as this is seen in bad men, who employ great intellectual powers to accomplish bad ends, whatever fictitious charms may be thrown around their character, or by what sophistry soever it may be disguised, still to all virtuous persons the ardent hero of wickedness is an object of peculiar loathing and dread. If it be painful to see a human mind becoming imbecile through inaction, it is still more so to see a mind frenziedly active under the influence of some vicious passion. To be thoroughly in earnest to go to perdition, or drive others to it, is the consummation of madness. Yet this madness has been celebrated by not a few writers, who appear to be so enamoured with ardent heroism, but find, in the daring with which great crimes are committed, something that gives them the hue, if not the substance of virtues. It were easy, not merely from writers of fiction, but from grave historians, to illustrate the pernicious commendation of men whose heroism was simply a daring, reckless wickedness. Let me guard you against being imposed on by this most mischievous sophistry. No man is a true hero who tramples under foot the laws of God and the rights of his fellow-men. A man may be great in wickedness without being great in anything else.

But, while it is true that misdirected earnestness, like every other power—and it may be said to be the misdirection of all human powers—can only produce harm, still it is no less true that the earnestness which springs from right motives, and strives to accomplish worthy ends, is of unspeakable advantage to man. *It strengthens all the powers of the mind.* For, although it may be assumed that all men have the same radical faculties, yet it does not follow that they all have these originally in equal strength, or have an equal capacity to perform the same amount of labour, or produce intellectual fruit of the same kind. It will hardly admit of question, that there are original elementary differences necessary to make one man a true poet, another a great orator, a third an able statesman. Yet experience shows that, be the original powers what they may, the mind cannot acquire either the strength or material for putting forth great efforts without long and severe exercise.

It is the want of this, or of the motives which lead to it, that is the cause of the sloth and frivolity which ruin so many young men. For, although they possibly had good natural parts, yet, as these were never thoroughly exercised in the prosecution of any great object, their powers were either never unfolded, or suffered a premature decay. The latter, which is often witnessed with pity, would never take place without some mental or bodily disease, had all the faculties of the soul been laboriously exercised. For, when there is an earnest application to duty, all the powers of the mind not only find employment, but are wonderfully strengthened by every effort that is made. Hence, the task accomplished by an earnest man but prepares him for still higher achievements.—*Address of Professor George to the Students of Queen's College, Kingston.*