

even as there are fundamental affinities and resemblances, and these differences will not be neglected or ignored by wise men. They will be kept in view when we have to make choice of the special work to which we intend to set our hand. But here, for the present, we are not thinking of the special and particular, but of the universal, of those characteristics which belong to all men who may be called good. In short, we are here taking up the thought of one who said: "First, be a man." One who can in any tolerable degree realize true manhood will not be likely to fail greatly in any enterprise, unless he is very unwise in his choice.

In what manner, then, shall men undertake this great enterprise of self-discipline or self-formation? We assume that, to a large extent, this is in every man's power. Granting the limitations of freedom already noted, we deny that men are mere creatures of circumstances. We must affirm that, in a certain real sense, men are free; and practically all men are substantially of this opinion, however their theories may seem to contradict it.

Two things, at least, are clear. We may choose our aim. Our leading purpose in life is our own. We may also choose our actions, and actions result in habits which constitute character. Perhaps we may offer here a definition or description of character which we may keep before us throughout our inquiry. The word itself is a Greek word, signifying a stamp; and the character of man is a kind of stamp impressed upon him. Herein we have unity in variety; and perhaps we may say that character consists of habits animated by motive, and good character of good habits animated by a good motive. Readers of Aristotle will remark the correspondence between our results and that great thinker's definition of virtue.

It will be seen, then, that the word character is here used not in the sense of reputation, but to signify the whole of a man's moral and mental disposition, to express the unity of a man's inner life. Now this character is a spiritual reality. It is not a mere expression for a set of qualities which coexist without unity or cohesion. We employ the word to designate a distinct stamp which we recognize as separating one man from another, the clearness or indistinctness of which will make the difference between what we call a man of strong character and a characterless man.

This character enters into everything that we do. It colours all our thoughts and words. It imparts a special form to all our modes of action. You see a man at work; but, if you knew him well, you knew beforehand how he would do it. You would know how he would work and how he would play. You would anticipate his judgments and his actions. It would, therefore, be impossible to exaggerate the importance of this subject; and it would be culpable to think lightly of its formation, whether in our own case, or in the case of those whom we may have it in our power to influence.

But there is one consideration which adds greatly to an estimate of the importance of the subject before us. We cannot prevent the formation of character in ourselves and others: we are, in fact, constantly contributing to its formation in ourselves, constantly influencing others and assisting in moulding their characters. Even the man who hardly believes in character, if there be such a man, is no less engaged in this work than the man who is most thoroughly convinced of its importance and habitually lives and acts under the influence of that conviction.

No less striking than the universality of character are its diversities.