

one of its most precious possessions—not because we have any right to plume ourselves upon their having existed as a matter of national vanity, but because we have a just and rational ground of expectation that the race which has brought forth such products as these may, in good time and under fortunate circumstances, produce the like again. I am one of those people who do not believe in the natural decay of nations. I believe, to speak frankly, though perhaps not quite so politely as I could wish—but I am getting near the end of my lecture—that the whole theory is a speculation invented by cowards to excuse knaves. My belief is, that so far as this old English stock is concerned it has in it as much sap and vitality and power as it had two centuries ago; and that, with due pruning of rotten branches, and due hoeing up of weeds, which will grow about the roots, the like products will be yielded again. The “weeds” to which I refer are mainly three: the first of them is dishonesty, the second is sentimentality, and the third is luxury. If William Harvey had been a dishonest man—I mean in the high sense of the word—a man who failed in the ideal of honesty—he would have believed what it was easiest to believe—that which he received on the authority of his predecessors. He would not have felt that his highest duty was to know of his own knowledge that that which he said he believed was true, and we should never have had those investigations, pursued through good report and evil report, which ended in discoveries so fraught with magnificent results for science and for man. If Harvey had been a sentimentalist—by which I mean a person of false pity, a person who has not imagination enough to see that great, distant evils may be much worse than those which we can picture to ourselves, because they happen to be immediate and near (for that, I take it, is the essence of sentimentality)—if Harvey had been a person of that kind, he, being one of the kindest men living, would never have pursued those researches which, as he tells us over and over again, he was obliged to pursue in order to the ascertainment of those facts which have turned out to be of such inestimable value to the human race; and I say, if on such grounds he had failed to do so, he would have failed in his duty to the human race. The third point is that Harvey was devoid of care either for wealth, or for riches, or for ambition. The man found a higher ideal than any of these things in the pursuit of truth and the benefit of his fellow-men. If we all go and do likewise, I think there is no