

will of God. Every one of these meagre swindlers, while admitting a failure in all things relative, claims an awful alliance with the Absolute. To many it will at first sight appear a dangerous doctrine indeed. But, in truth, it is a most solid and noble and salutary doctrine, far less dangerous than its opposite. Every one on this earth should believe, amid whatever madness or moral failure, that his life and temperament have some object on the earth. Every one on the earth should believe that he has something to give to the world which cannot otherwise be given. Every one should, for the good of men and the saving of his own soul, believe that it is possible, even if we are the enemies of the human race, to be the friends of God. The evil wrought by this mystical pride, great as it often is, is like a straw to the evil wrought by a materialistic self-abandonment. The crimes of the devil who thinks himself of immeasurable value are as nothing to the crimes of the devil who thinks himself of no value. With Browning's knaves we have always this eternal interest, that they are real somewhere, and may at any moment begin to speak poetry. We are talking to a peevish and garrulous sneak; we are watching the play of his paltry features, his evasive eyes, and babbling lips. And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God, uttering His everlasting soliloquy.