

a blunder—and they are sorry for it. They will not condemn, but they cannot commend; and if their advice had been asked it would never have been done at all. This is the utmost length to which they will go in public, after they have patted one's back and said "bravo" and "go on" in private. And these are only the best, remember; the picked and trusty ones among the crowd. The rank and file do not even go so far as this, and decline to endorse even one's good intentions.

It disturbs people to have protesters and iconoclasts knocking around. What the world wants is rest, and to let things slide—that is, the world which has and does not need, the world which has and wants to keep. As for the lower half of disreputable strugglers, of dissatisfied grumblers, of pokers and pryers into the truth and causes of things, they are unmitigated nuisances and ought to be suppressed. The ideal of Heaven itself is a state of absolute rest; and it is our duty to try and realise that ideal here on earth. Do not talk to them, they say, of the beauty of truth and having the courage of your opinions! You have no right to opinions which the rest of the world does not share, and if you are unfortunate enough to think at cross-angles with the majority, why be so foolish as to proclaim your dissent? Wisdom they say, is patient and silent, and trusts to the benign operations of time. She does not go about the streets with trumpets and a drum, offering nostrums to cure all moral ills, like an ethical Dulcamara who has found the true elixir. Wisdom is modest, and her best emblem is that of Harpocrates with his finger on his lip. Why give up cherished superstitions—yes, they grant they are superstitions—but, why give them a shock that will topple them over into the sand of the desert, and leave nothing standing in their place? What harm does it do if simple folks do believe in this bit of spiritual thaumaturgy? if that small remnant of feudal oppression still obtains and is submitted to? We cannot hope to come to the reign of justice and truth pure and simple. We must go cautiously, take what we can get, and put up with the remainder. You are brave, and you have the courage of your convictions; doubtless you are right as well, but you are unwise. Let these evils of which you complain cure themselves by time; all things do. As if we had not always to create public opinion by insistence and reiteration!—as if we were nothing but plants growing according to fixed rules, and our minds incapable of either advancement or retardation by what we are taught and believe! Perhaps, of all the arguments urged against those who, believing that life has truths which we have not yet fully compassed, strive to give them as a possession to their kind, that of "Wait, let things accomplish themselves," is the most futile, the most barren. If we want temples and palaces wherein the soul of man may dwell in beauty and holiness, we must build them. They will not fashion themselves by mere accretion, like crystals or the silted shores of rivers. They must be worked for, wept for, died for, now as in the past. But to some among us the life of martyrdom, like that of miracles, is at an end; and now we must go delicately without knocking our own heads against the brazen wall of falsehood, not hurting sensitive consciences by uncovering the clay feet of idols and showing them in their true baseness and deformity. The dead pioneers by whose labours we now live have left names which every man venerates, and memories which every man respects; but the past is to be no pattern for the present, according to these timid conservatives, these contented heirs of time and unwilling workers for futurity. What was is not; and, if they are to be believed, ethics change like water, and the virtues of one age are rococo and out of fashion the next.

Another set of friends will uphold you on the ground-work of principle, and say "Yes, you are quite right *au fond*; it is an abuse that you have attacked, it is a falsehood that you have unmasked." And yet they cannot stand by you shoulder to shoulder in public. They question to begin with, whether the times are ripe. To some people the times are never ripe, and the fruit of the tree of knowledge is always too green for public digestion. They acknowledge the fruit and the tree whereon it grew; they make no question about that; but the fitness of period and the ripeness of condition perplex them sorely. They will applaud your courage, your sincerity, your enthusiasm; but they will qualify it all by that one word premature, and you may think yourself lucky if they do not add excess. What you have said is quite true; that they confess, but you have not said it properly! You have gone too far; you have indeed! Courage does not mean aggressiveness, and honesty is not rashness. If you had been more temperate—if you had softened your expressions and allowed falsehood a glimmer of truth, baseness a *souffçon* of magnanimity; if you had run with the hare over this field and hunted with the hounds over that, your work would have been so much better! As it is they cannot hold with you. They are very sorry not to be able to range themselves openly on your side. You have outstepped the bounds of discretion too far for them to follow you, and so they bid you sorrowfully God-speed, and leave you to your fate. And if that fate flings you beneath the wheels of the great car of Establishment, which crushes all who would add to or take away from that which is, so much the worse for you. You courted your own ruin, and must abide by it; and, after all, the Mammon of Unrighteousness has a claim to be heard!

Add to these the rank and file of "Ministerialists," who always vote with

the party in power—the crowd that waits on the bank watching which way the cat jumps before they will bet on her chances. Establish your position with these people as a recognised teacher—no matter what your theme—have a following, make a noise in the world, force a hearing, be quoted as the celebrated So-and-So who holds such-and-such an opinion, teaches such-and-such a philosophy, and they will applaud you to the echo in all societies where you receive honour. If you teach the doctrine of human degradation and canine nobility, or that of human God-likeness and the absolute severance between man and the rest of creation, it will be all the same to them. The world listens to you, Mrs. Grundy thinks there is something in you; your philosophy has struck a chord in the floating harmonies of thought, and you are consequently so far safe and so far respectable. It was very nice of you to have the courage of your convictions and say out boldly what you thought, and the conformists applaud you to the echo. But if the Duchess had not adopted you—if society had cold-shouldered you, and Mrs. Grundy had pulled out her ferule and her fool's cap in place of her Ribbon and Order, where then would you have stood with that obedient crowd of Ministerialists—those worshippers of majorities? About where you stand with your personal friends who pat you on the back privately as a Great-Heart and repudiate you publicly as a Quixote.

If courage and conscience had no firmer basis than the approbation of one's friends and the world at large, Truth would be in a poor plight enough, and the prescriptive rights of falsehood would be well-nigh inalienable. Now as heretofore, the "blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," and none of us ought to descend into the arena who hopes to bring back his life, or its equivalent, out of the struggle. We are not shot, or burnt, or broken alive on the wheel now as in days bygone, but we suffer all the same. We who believe other than does the world at large—we who speak strange truths in a new language—we suffer by misrepresentation, by isolation, by ridicule, by blame. We pay for our truth by our happiness, and we have only the consciousness that it is truth to uphold us. If once we let ourselves doubt the absolute necessity of our testimony we are lost. Left without extraneous support, the fervour of our own convictions is our only shield-bearer, and courage is our main virtue. But let no one think that courage excludes suffering—that conviction means callousness. If we consecrate ourselves to the priesthood we go through the pain of the initiation, and the sacrifice that we offer is the living blood of our own hearts. So let it be. It would be a drear day for the world if we measured our actions by their effect on our lives, and if convenience overmastered conviction. But it is not everyone who has the courage of his opinions; and those who have this courage pay for those who have not.—*Truth.*

ABSENCE OF MIND.

Absence of mind is a mental infirmity more often ridiculed than pitied, yet one that is frequently seriously inconvenient to its possessor. From the philosopher of antiquity, who walked absently star-gazing till he fell into a well and was drowned, down to the absent man of our own day, who loses some important appointment by forgetting to change trains at the proper junction, absent persons have suffered from their unfortunate propensity for abstracting themselves from things present. It is curious that this failing is more common to clever persons than to foolish ones. People whose heads are comparatively empty cannot, perhaps, lose themselves in a train of thought so engrossing as to blot out other objects. Absence of mind generally proceeds from pre-occupation. Sir Isaac Newton, when pondering on his great discoveries, had to rely on his servant to inform him whether he had dined or not. St. Thomas Aquinas fell into a theological reverie at the Royal table, and startled Louis IX. and his courtiers by suddenly exclaiming, "That argument is unanswerable against the Manichees." A long list might be collected of great men who were remarkable for this failing, commencing with the worst specimens, like St. Thomas, who became utterly oblivious of their surroundings, down to the minor offenders, who only forgot some circumstance which made their remarks ill-timed. It is well known that Racine lost the favour of Madame de Maintenon, and consequently that of Louis XIV., by inadvertently alluding to "those wretched plays of Scarron's," oblivious that he was speaking to the poet's widow. According to Walpole, the Duchess of Marlborough never forgave Bishop Burnet for an unlucky speech to her husband, who remarked that he was "surprised at so great a general as Belisarius being so abandoned." "Consider what a brimstone of a wife he had," rejoined the good prelate, with unconscious satire.

Few examples of this forgetfulness are more amusing than a modern instance related by the late Archdeacon Sinclair, who speaks of an eccentric Scotch nobleman of the beginning of this century, who, dining at a house where the dinner was extremely bad, forgot that he was not at home, and gravely apologized to his fellow-guests for the badness of the repast, remarking that "he supposed the cook was drunk again, and that the kitchen wench had dressed the dinner." Equally delightful is the story of the lady who called at a house about two o'clock, expecting to share the midday meal, and, obliged to go without receiving the desired invitation, betrayed the current of her