

Human life is represented in two slightly different aspects. According to one view, it is a probation, according to the other it is an education or discipline. If the latter seems the deeper view, the other may sometimes furnish a useful estimate of life. In a certain sense, every hour may be said to be a probation for the hour which follows. We are always before the judgment seat. Within and above there goes forth a perpetual sentence of condemnation, acquittal, approval. But perhaps the representation of a life as a course of education or discipline furnishes us with a more perfect analogy. In probation we think of a present which looks forward to a future of trial. In education we have all the moments linked together in one continuous chain; or rather, we have life considered as one organic whole without division or separation. We are thus taught to regard our whole course on earth as a series of moments producing each other, coming out of each other, without any sharp break in the continuity of our life, whilst our fitness or unfitness for any particular position, occupation, office, or mission, will depend upon all the steps which have led us up to that moment of decision. From this point of view we find no difficulty in understanding that man's future life will be regulated by the same principles as his life on earth.

Even here we may learn that Character is not something to be regarded as almost external to the former of it, something to be contemplated and fashioned as by the hand of an artist; but rather as something to be evolved in life. We are not, of course, condemning self-examination, the value of which is inestimable; but we are pointing out a certain danger which is incurred by those who isolate character as something which has to be manufactured and established, rather than as a quality or combina-

tion of qualities which has to be produced, no doubt in accordance with rules, yet in a certain unconsciousness, and rather as the result of a course of life animated and sustained by pure and lofty aims steadily and earnestly prosecuted for their own sake.

In thinking of this process of self-discipline we are to remember that there are two factors which enter into its composition, the one voluntary, which we may be said to control, the other involuntary which is given to us apart from our own choice. It is of necessity that we should recognize the limitations under which we work out our destiny in life and character. In the first place, then, is our mere nature, our constitution of body and soul, received from our parents, over which we have no control at all in the first beginning although afterwards it may be considerably modified by actions and habit. Next comes the early training of home in which the child is little more than a passive recipient of impressions and influences; but as life progresses, the two factors become mingled, until at last the involuntary becomes more or less subordinated to the voluntary. Throughout the whole of man's life on earth there is always some mingling: liberty can never be said to be absolute; altho' man becomes freer the higher and the purer his life becomes.

In speaking of the personal discipline of life and character, we begin at the point at which men may be said to take their life into their own hands, when each one becomes, comparatively at least, his own master; when, if we believe that we are moral beings at all, we must say that a man has much in his own power, and is able largely to determine what manner of man he is to be.

Between one man and another there are, of course, manifold differences,