

giant? Nay, does not the very suggestion bring a smile to your lips? If our planet is a world in which the plans of God are understood, will you complain that its mass is but the hundredth or the thousandth part of some of those stars with which the firmament is sown? Will you have it that those physical limits prevent its being the marvellous observatory whence the universe may be faithfully studied? Let us dismiss, then, that strange argument which consists in measuring the value of man by the place that he occupies in space and in time. For myself, that value seems to me by so much the greater, it takes hold of me by so much the more, as it displays itself on a narrower stage, and never without a thrill of enthusiasm do I exclaim afresh with Pascal: 'Man is only a reed, the weakest in nature; but it is a reed that thinks! There is no need that the whole universe arm itself in order to crush him. A breath of vapor, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But though the universe should crush him, man would still be more noble than that which kills him, because he knows that he is dying; and of the advantage which the universe has over him, the universe knows nothing. All our dignity consists, then, in thought. It is from this that we should draw our exaltation, not from space and from duration which we should not be able to fill.' Admirable words, which, under a form of expression precise and severe, resemble the fragments of an orphic hymn chanting the true greatness of humanity."

Bersier's Third Part proceeds to admit that the foregoing demonstration of the true greatness of man is adapted to produce its effect only upon the elect few, while the common many need something more simple, more easily understood. This something he finds in those moral attributes which, distinguished herein from the purely intellectual, all men possess in common. With admirable oratoric instinct for oratoric effect, he describes a poor degraded human being, the pariah of the streets, and says:

"Behold him lost in the human ant-hill; you will be tempted to smile at the idea of his possessing an immortal soul, and of his occupying any place whatever in the plans of God. But suddenly the scene changes! You are in the court of justice; here before you is a judgment-bar, and that despicable creature of a moment ago is brought to the criminal bench under charge of being a murderer. Whence comes it that all is then transformed in your impressions? Why does society come to a halt in its march in order to attend the trial of this wretch? Why these magistrates, this assemblage of public officials, these long legal arguments, these learned researches? Why the intense emotion of this auditory, hanging on the speech of an advocate who seeks to defend this life? Why this silence as of death, at the moment when the sentence is about to be pronounced? Ah! I assure you at that moment you are no longer tempted to smile, and levity now would excite only indignation and disgust. The explanation is that man is great, that his liberty is not an empty sophism, that there is in his destiny something that marks it august. This is the more manifest in proportion as society advances, as it is educated and civilized. The savages of Dahomey may, in a day of reckless revelry, make a pond with human blood and build a pyramid of human skulls, but under the light of Christian civilization the lowest of malefactors may not be touched save by the sacred arm of law. There, my brethren, is something which the Gospel has made so clear that no one will attempt even to dispute it. Man is accountable, man is not a brute whose nerves or whose blood push him on by fate to murder, man has it in his power to say No to God Himself, man has it in his power to secure his own destruction or his own salvation."