

neighbours; he is the subject of their conversation; too often the pattern of their life, and the excuse for their sins. And each of these observers and imitators exerts in turn an influence on others. Each observer is observed again. Each imitator is a pattern to somebody. Now let all these results be considered. Accurately calculated they cannot be; but let them be considered: and it will easily be seen how much harm one man may do, not only by open and shameless iniquity, but simply by a selfish, idle, and worthless life.

Or take another of the important differences between man and man—that which relates to intellectual eminence, natural or acquired.—What harm has been worked by individual men, who have sowed the seeds of error in their day, leaving whole harvests of superstition or profaneness to be reaped by subsequent generations! What power does the imagination possess to spread mischief and undermine all faith and principles, especially when it is found in those minds where a certain kind of natural beauty assumes the appearance of goodness, and when fine and delicate feeling can easily pass current for religion. The experience of the woe arising from this kind of offence, in its highest degree, has been reserved for modern centuries, in which so much of our education and so much of our employment are provided by Books. Who can calculate the mischief which can be done by the bad doctrines, or even by the ill-considered fancies, of one man, when they are multiplied by being printed, and circulated among thousands, and then copied into other books, and made the foundation of new structures of falsehood and folly?

By following such strains of thought as these, we come to take a very gloomy, but a very just, view, of the evil and the misery which pervade the whole of society. However widely we may wander among the tracks of human action and human thought, we find them everywhere strewn with stumbling-blocks. But I believe we might gain a still deeper impression of the woe which comes from offences, if we were to look closely into the best and most sacred portions of our natural human life. The Father, who sets an example of careless ungodliness to his family; the Mother, who by the evident wickedness of her own spirit, justifies all the wickedness of her children; the Brothers and Sisters, who imbue each other with a systematic disregard for what is sacred; the Familiar Friends, who learn and teach the habit of unbelief; the close Companions who come together for mutual encouragement in the forgetfulness of God—these it is that the worst occasions of

falling are to be found. I am content to glance at this part of the subject thus lightly in passing. But the writer on such a subject must ask his readers to look closely into their families and their friendships, and to see what is going on there—to watch carefully that you “walk in a way wherein you shall not stumble,” or rather (since our own unassisted watchfulness is nothing else but slumber and blindness) let us all pray to God that He would “hold up our goings, that our footsteps slip not,” and graciously in his mercy prevent us from endangering the footsteps of those whom we love.

It will naturally be felt, that the view we have just taken of human life is mournful and dreary. And it is good that we should feel this, if it helps us to appreciate the extent of human corruption, and really to desire that better life for which we profess to be preparing. It is good for us to feel keenly that we are in a fallen world—that no human power can save us—that our best affections may be made the channels of wickedness—that the natural ornaments of character are quite different from Christian holiness—that every man, however pleasing, is a sinner, and can only be withheld by God's grace from becoming the occasion of sin in others.

We must now go one step further, and having devoted some lines to the *fact* of that woe which offences bring, must now consider the *inevitable necessity* of their existence, and of the misery they produce.

“Offences must needs come” in a world of sinful men. The very constitution of the world makes it inevitable. The disparity which subsists between one man and another, is of necessity the occasion of offences. Sin in the higher classes, must act at a great advantage in its effects on the lower. Legitimate influence can never abdicate its throne. It must reign over its subjects, for good or for evil. Where there is a superior wealth or superior power, unless there is also superior holiness, the bad cause cannot but reap the benefit of the difference. Where there is a greater height of intellectual eminence, unless there is also a greater depth of Christian humility, our Enemy will always know how to pervert the best gifts for his own purposes.

There is no possibility of escaping this necessity. Suppose that we could, by some violent effort, alter the constitution of society—Suppose that the rights of property were abolished, and all ranks reduced to the same level. This state of things would not last a day. Industry would soon begin to gather its harvest. Prudence would secure what industry had gained. The quick would outstrip the slow. The strong would defeat the