

I feel just the same towards my friends as towards myself; I wish them an easy life, and of course an easy death, as a part of it; but it is idle to grieve in their case or my own, for any past suffering, which cannot recur, or have left any ill effects behind it; and of this number must be the sufferings of such of them as are dead. It is a folly to shiver for last year's snow.

But when we reflect on the excruciating tortures of a dying man which we have witnessed or heard of, our sympathy is excited by the operation of conception (for it is *conception, not perception*, that we have of anything not in actual present existence), and our recollection of the distinction of past, present, and future, becomes confused; so that we thus feel real pain for an unreal suffering; just as we sometimes do on reading or seeing a tragedy. But then people reply, "Oh, the sufferings detailed in a tragedy are fictitious, but these are real." No, they are not; they were real (and so, perhaps, if you come to that, were Lear's; for the tale may be a true one), but they are not; and that which is past has existed, but *does not now* exist; in the *present time*, it is as unreal as a pure fiction. There is a great difference, indeed, between the two cases; one really was, the other never was; but they are so far alike, that neither of them is. If my house were burnt down, it would be true indeed that there was a house there, but I can no more live in it than in Aladdin's palace, which never was. The bread which I ate a year ago, and the ambrosia of Homer's gods, are both equally non-existent at this moment; I may make either of them an object of thought; and I may think, very truly, that the one did exist, and the other not; and that other bread is prepared for me to-day, and ambrosia never did exist; but still I could not subsist on the bread which was consumed a year ago, any more than on ambrosia. Why then should I grieve now at anything which has now no existence? There was good reason for my grieving at my friend's sufferings, at the time; because they were, not past, but actually existing; but that is no reason why I should grieve now. "Present" and "past" makes all the difference. And this I think most people perceive clearly enough in their own cases. A man who has had a leg cut off does not, I think, in general grieve over the pain of the operation, unless he has any suspicion that he may again suffer amputation; and even in that case it is the thought of the future, of which the past presents so lively a picture, that gives him the pain.

But in the case of others there are two causes that make the difference:—1st, In our own case we have a very distinct view of the difference between the past and the present because we have a *perception* of the latter, and only a *conception* of the former; whereas in the case of another's sufferings we have *only* a conception of each; so that we do not

so readily draw the line. It may be said, that of the future also we have only a conception; and in truth it often happens that the unthinking are occupied almost exclusively with the present; but those who use their understanding are taught by that that their conceptions of the future, if correct, will be succeeded by perceptions; that though the things which are to befall them are not real now, they will be so, and therefore are just objects of pursuit or avoidance; while the same understanding teaches, that past evils, so far as they have left no results, are, to us, the same as if they had never been; except, indeed, that many even derive pleasure from thinking of them in contrast with present ease. 2d, Though reason would teach us the same in respect of the past sufferings of a friend, we are less apt to listen to the lesson, from our attaching a kind of merit to tender-heartedness towards a friend, while it is regarded as no merit, but rather a reproach, to feel very keenly for ourselves. All which is very right; only it should not blind us to the real state of the case, and lead us to sympathize with those who are, at the very moment we are grieving for them, perfectly free from the affliction.

To all this I have been answered, "O, you are for altering the nature of man; nothing can be more *natural* than this kind of sympathy; and you might as well pretend that one ought not to feel pain." Certainly the weakness of our nature are a part of our nature; and imagination is a part of the human mind as well as reason; but if every thing that is natural is to be vindicated on that ground, what folly may not? To go on further, it is undeniably natural to feel real and acute pain at a tragedy or mournful tale; but I do not admire the wisdom of him who gives way to this, and does not, when the pain predominates, recall his feelings and rouse himself by the recollection that it is all unreal. As for the latter part of the objection, it is quite possible; for to pretend that pain is no evil is not to follow the dictates of the understanding, which does not at all teach us to deny that we feel; but in the present case, the understanding *does* teach us that what we grieve for has no real existence, at the present moment. Reason does not teach us that a man who was burnt alive *SUFFERED* no pain; but it does tell us that he *suffers* none now; and that if we grieve for him, it is through a confused conception, which gives no distinct view of the past and the present.

I believe the reason why the sufferings of the death-bed affect people so much more than any other, is because in any other case there is at least a hope of a kind of *compensation* resulting from the enjoyment of subsequent health and comfort in this life; which in a man's *last* illness, of course, cannot be. This is a fanciful ground of affliction, however, even in a heathen; and it is utterly unchristian. On the whole, I think