CHAPTER XXXI

MATTHEW ARNOLD AS POET

FOR a number of years the prose work of Matthew Arnold has been considered to some degree as affording excellent models of English composition, and his essays have been studied as class texts all over the English-speaking world. I venture to say that this has been a mistake, and that the value of Matthew Arnold's essays has been greatly exaggerated in regard to the matter of style. Matthew Arnold's essays are very valuable indeed, in thought and instruction, but they are not great models of perfect English; they do not represent a vigorous nor a clear nor a concentrated style. It is quite different in regard to his poetry, which is not so well known, but which is steadily growing in the estimation of the literary world.

Now there are two ways of judging poetry. It is either great or not great by reason of its form or by reason of its thought. And I must tell you that the very greatest masters of form are not likely to be the very greatest masters of thought. Shakespeare, our greatest genius, is often very deficient in regard to form. The greatest of French poets, Victor Hugo, is a perfect master of form, and a very poor thinker; he is a magician, he is not a philosopher. The greatest of German poets and thinkers of his time, Goethe, a man who excelled in form and thought, said in his old age that if he could begin his literary life again he would give all his attention to the thought, and waste very little time upon the form. Among modern English poets we may take the cases of Browning and George Meredith as opposed to Rossetti and Swinburne. Swinburne is the greatest master of English verse that ever lived, but

he is very unimportant as a thinker; there are only two or three of his poems in which we find a grand flash of thought. Rossetti was perhaps the very greatest of our emotional poets during the nineteenth century, and he was nearly as great a master of form as Swinburne; but Rossetti did not teach men to think new thoughts about the great problems of life. He hated science, and he was not, in the modern sense of the word, a philosopher. But Browning and Meredith are philosophers, deep thinkers, great teachers —more especially Meredith. Neither of them was a master of form in the highest meaning of the term. They are both great sinners in the matter of obscurity and imperfect construction. They have followed the suggestion of Goethe to sacrifice the form to the thinking. I should like to be able to speak to you of some poet of our own day who is equally great as a thinker and as a verse-maker, but I cannot cite a single name. The nearest approach to such a person is Tennyson, but as a thinker Tennyson is much below Meredith. We have to take our choice in this world between two kinds of perfection in poetry which are seldom united in any one individual. In considering Matthew Arnold as a poet we must bear this in mind.

For Arnold cannot be placed among the great masters of form. He is very uninteresting in regard to form. It is chiefly as a thinker that we must study him, as a thinker of a very peculiar kind. Not for a moment could we place him upon the same level as George Meredith. His value is not the value of an expositor of new ideas, but the value of the man himself, a personal value, a value of character. Again, this character is not important because it is extremely original; quite the contrary. It is because Matthew Arnold's character and way of thinking faithfully represent hundreds of thousands of similar characters and similar ways of thinking during the middle of the present century, the thought of cultivated minds. In this class there was a great deal of solid thinking done, thinking based upon the whole experience of the past—the moral experience of the English

race. Macaulay's essays take much of their value from this kind of thinking. It is not new, but it is very good, very true in a certain sense, and likely to remain so for thousands of years to come. So we find the poetry of Matthew Arnold to be valuable as a crystallization of the best thinking of the time.

But now we must say a word about the time. It was the time of Darwin and Spencer, when evolutional philosophy first began to upset old doctrines and to shake the faith of the educated classes. It was the time also of the Oxford movement toward a new religious spirit — I might say toward a religious revival. For the sudden introduction of new and startling ideas must always produce two effects. One effect is to destroy old ways of feeling and thinking. The other effect is to create a violent reaction in favour of them. And the middle of the century witnessed both of these effects. Among the university men of Arnold's time there were three attitudes of mind. The strong men, like Clifford, went over to the new philosophy altogether. Less strong minds became frightened and fled for refuge into religious circles. Between these two there was a very remarkable class of young students, who were profoundly religious in feeling but much too intelligent to refuse to understand the new methods of science. They could not continue to believe in the old way, and yet the new way caused them terrible sorrow and pain. Intellectually they were sceptics; emotionally and by inheritance they were intensely religious.

Persons of this kind suffered much from the conflict between their natural character and their fresh convictions. Most noteworthy among them were Arthur Hugh Clough and Matthew Arnold. Both became poets, both expressed their feelings and thoughts in very good verse, but Matthew Arnold was altogether the greater man, and left the deeper mark upon the literature of his time. He was born in 1822 and died in 1888, so that he enjoyed a fairly long life. It was not, however, a happy life. He was a son of Dr. Ar-

nold, perhaps the greatest English educator in modern times. Dr. Arnold laid down a plan for teaching which is still followed, which will probably continue to be followed for all time in the best English schools. He taught that education itself, in the sense of learning from books or lectures, was a very secondary matter, and that the first and most important matter was the formation of character. He was a Christian, of course, but he was not a sectarian in the narrow sense of the term, and his plan of education was not religious at all. It was based upon the simplest rules of social morality. But as a matter of fact, to be good in this world is an extremely difficult thing; and it was to cultivate a knowledge of this difficulty and a knowledge of how to meet it that Dr. Arnold changed the system of education in those institutions which he controlled. It was very important that a young man should study well and obey the rules, but Dr. Arnold taught that it was more important for the student to learn how to master himself and how to be a great man and a gentleman outside of the class-room and outside of the college. Matthew Arnold was severely trained by his father in this way, and he went to Oxford a model of everything that his father could have desired. There, after having distinguished himself, having won several prizes in various literary studies, he graduated, and soon afterwards obtained the position of Inspector of Schools. He kept this position until the time of his death, but after middle life he was also Professor of Poetry at Oxford. All his literary work of importance was done somewhat later than one might suppose; it would indeed seem as if he had never wished to become a poet until after he had ceased to be a young man. These simple facts will help us to explain the very remarkable merits and shortcoming of his verse.

You will see that Matthew Arnold's intellectual and religious training must have been rather of the eighteenth than of the nineteenth century. His great father, with all his greatness, was essentially a man of the old traditions, a

man who belonged in principles and in feelings rather to the time of Dr. Johnson than to the time of the Lake poets. The principles and the feelings were right and true, but in form they were old-fashioned. To understand the position of Matthew Arnold in a period of transition, you must imagine the son of an old-fashioned *samurai*, educated strictly according to the ancient system, and then suddenly introduced to the new condition of *Meiji*. Such a one would necessarily suffer not a little in this new order of things. So it was with Matthew Arnold. He had been made a perfect gentleman, a true man, a good scholar, but he had not been prepared for the times of Darwin and Spencer and Huxley. Neither had he been prepared for the new feeling in poetry and in other branches of literature. By heredity and sentiment he was essentially religious; yet his religious ideas were necessarily changed by the new learning. By heredity and education he was essentially classic; yet he found himself suddenly placed in the middle of the romantic movement in literature. And what is more worth while for you to know than anything else, his duties were of the most monotonous and unsympathetic kind. There is no position more tiresome, more uninviting, more hopeless for a man of original power than the position of Inspector of Schools. But Matthew Arnold remained in that position during the rest of his life. Thus he was out of sympathy with the thought of his age in philosophy, with the literature of his age in poetry, and with the very conditions upon which his living depended.

If I have kept you thus upon the subject of the man's life, it is only because you should understand very clearly Matthew Arnold's curious position in English poetry. Our nineteenth century has been especially the century of the romantic movement in poetry. Even Wordsworth, with all his seriousness, was romantic. Byron, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, Southey, all were romantics. And the great Victorian poets brought the romantic feeling to its highest possible degree of perfected expression. It would be hard to mention

any great poet of the century who escaped the new influences. Even Matthew Arnold could not altogether escape them, but he had no sympathy with them—he disliked even Tennyson; and the all-important fact about Matthew Arnold for you to remember is that he remains a classical spirit in the middle of the romantic movement.

A good deal of his poetry reflects, as you might expect, his dissatisfaction with the new order of things, and with the tendency to new ways of thinking and feeling. One of his earliest poems bears witness to his sentiment in this regard. He had heard a clergyman of liberal tendencies utter some advice to his congregation about life in harmony with nature; and this advice, probably inspired by the same kind of feeling which characterizes the teaching of Rousseau, at once aroused his indignation, as the following verses testify.

IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

(TO A PREACHER)

"In harmony with Nature?" Restless fool,
Who with such heat dost preach what were to thee,
When true, the last impossibility—
To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool!

Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,
And in that *more* lie all his hopes of good.
Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;
Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore;

Nature is fickle, man hath need of rest;
Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;
Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest.

Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;
Nature and man can never be fast friends.
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave!

This is fine, and, in a particular sense, it is very true. If we understand by Nature merely the creating and destroy-

ing forces of the universe, we can understand the poet's indignation. The great thinker Huxley well said, that if humanity were simply to follow the laws of Nature in this sense, the successful man in the world would be the man with the strongest muscles and the hardest heart—in other words, one would have to become a cruel brute to succeed in life. The same teacher has also boldly said that everything good in human nature has been made not by acting according to the laws of the universe, but by opposing them, by fighting against them, by resisting them even in the face of death. When Matthew Arnold tells us, however, that man has something more than Nature has, we see there something of religious feeling expressing itself. A much greater man than Matthew Arnold, Shakespeare, better said that the highest excellencies of man, however supernatural they may seem, have been made by Nature. The whole meaning of poetry like this, the whole value of it, depends upon how one understands the word Nature. Huxley could make the observation which I have quoted, only after he had clearly defined what he meant by Nature. Nature can seem to the popular imagination something distinct from intelligent life and moral feeling. But Huxley reminds us at the same time that the opinion of Shakespeare is a correct one. All life throughout the universe is one, and Nature, in the modern scientific sense, would mean the universe itself. A pupil of the new philosophy would solve the riddle in this way: "It is true that man has become moral by resisting certain natural impulses, but even his resistance was compelled by other eternal and natural laws." What Nature really says to man is this: "It is not enough to obey me when you find an inclination to do it; it is much more important to disobey me—to make yourself strong with constant wrestling with me. I love only those who can fight me well." Nor is this all. Nature helps us to do this fighting against her own impulses. Consider the most powerful of human passions, the sexual instinct; this is natural, most certainly, and the natural tendency is to

indulge it. But without talking about reason at all, we have other natural impulses given us to oppose selfish indulgence even in this direction. For example, there is the love of children — maternal and paternal affection. These forms of affection are equally natural, and yet they more than anything else prevent either men or animals from committing certain forms of sexual excess. The love of offspring acts as a check upon the very impulse that produces the offspring, it makes the family, and the family depends upon the observance of certain moral obligations. Again, we have all of us the instinct of revenge, which is natural, and which has its uses even in the formation of society. It is natural that a man should strike back when he is struck. But he must not gratify even his natural instinct beyond a certain extent. For there is in all men the instinct also of self-preservation, and when a man indulges revenge beyond a certain limit, all men become afraid of him, and kill him in order to protect themselves. Their action is quite as natural as the action of the man to strike. There is no form of virtue which would not, upon close examination, be found quite as natural as the vice which is opposed to it. Nature gives both, like the God of the Hebrews, who says, "I am the Lord thy God, creating both good and evil." And, therefore, I should certainly think that the preacher thus criticized by Matthew Arnold was nearer to the truth than his critic. But mediæval religion regarded Nature as a kind of demon, inspiring the evil passions only, and the poet argues only from the mediæval standpoint. If the preacher meant, with Shakespeare, that "Nature is made better by no means, but Nature makes that means," then, I should say, his position was beyond criticism. It is not a case of human choice at all; we must live in harmony with Nature, or else disappear from the face of the earth. But when we recognize this, we must recognize also that Nature makes morality, and Matthew Arnold could not recognize that. His thoughts were in the eighteenth century.

He was much happier in his philosophy when he wrote

from the results of personal experience, not from the results of theory. At an early time he thought, for example, of what the pains of life mean—of the difficulty of being good, of the impossibility of obtaining more than one is really fitted for. He recognized a certain terrible Justice in the very Nature that he had spoken ill of. A man's chances in this world really depend very much upon his personal power, more so in Western countries even than in Japan. But one of the last things which a man can learn is the extent of his weakness. A young man scarcely ever discovers this. If young men really knew their weaknesses, their deficiencies, their ignorance, they never could succeed in life; such knowledge would make them afraid. But after the great struggle is over, then they learn why many things happened to them which they formerly thought unjust and cruel and wicked. They begin to understand that their own deficiencies were in great part the reason of their sorrows and of their failures. Oriental philosophy meets the puzzle of life better than Western religion in this regard. It teaches that the misfortunes of this life are consequent upon faults committed in former lives; modern science, in other language, teaches exactly the same thing. The best things are for the strong man; if the man is not strong, that is the fault of the race from which he springs, the consequence of something that happened perhaps hundreds of years before he was born. In a little poem called "Human Life" Matthew Arnold expresses a dim perception of the truth.

> What mortal, when he saw,
> Life's voyage done, his heavenly Friend,
> Could ever yet dare tell him fearlessly:
> "I have kept uninfringed my nature's law;
> The inly-written chart thou gavest me,
> To guide me, I have steer'd by to the end"?
>
> Ah! let us make no claim,
> On life's incognisable sea,

To too exact a steering of our way;
Let us not fret and fear to miss our aim,
If some fair coast have lured us to make stay,
Of some friend hail'd us to keep company.

Ay! we would each fain drive
At random, and not steer by rule.
Weakness! and worse, weakness bestow'd in vain
Winds from our side the unsuiting consort rive,
We rush by coasts where we had lief remain;
Man cannot, though he would, live chance's fool.

No! as the foaming swath
Of torn-up water, on the main,
Falls heavily away with long-drawn roar
On either side the black deep-furrow'd path
Cut by an onward-labouring vessel's prore,
And never touches the ship-side again;

Even so we leave behind,
As, charter'd by some unknown Powers,
We stem across the sea of life by night,
The joys which were not for our use design'd;—
The friends to whom we had no natural right,
The homes that were not destined to be ours.

This grave poetry is not attractive at first sight, neither is it easy to understand. But when we examine it patiently, we shall find that it repays study. Let us paraphrase it: What man after his death could dare to say to God, "I have never done anything wrong, I have always obeyed my conscience"? We must not pretend to be too good, we do not know anything about the secrets of this great sea of life upon which we sail, and we must not be afraid of our mistakes in youth. If we have sometimes yielded to temptation caused by beauty or friendship, we need not on that account despair.

Why? Simply because we cannot do as we would altogether, either in the direction of right or wrong. Of course we should like to do as we please, instead of follow-

ing rules. But that is useless and foolish. Whatever we wish, good or bad, our wishes are not likely to be gratified. If we love a woman who is not suited to us—either because she is too good or because we are too bad, the result is separation. If we want to live in some beautiful place where our lives would not be useful, we find that we cannot stop there. There is a law that governs everything which we do, and it is quite impossible for men to escape that law.

Just as the water that is cut by a ship closes again after the ship passes, and never again touches that ship, so each man, as he passes over the great sea of life, has to leave behind him everything that according to the eternal law of fitness he ought not to have. He would like to have certain men as friends, but he is not naturally fitted to become intimate with them, therefore he cannot have their friendship. He wishes for certain pleasures, but if his natural capacities have not entitled him to such pleasures, he will never obtain them. He would like to have a beautiful home; that also is a wish only to be gratified in the case of men of larger powers. He must remember, to console himself, that he is only indeed a ship chartered to cross the sea of life and death, and to follow a fixed course. That is his destiny—not a blind destiny, but a destiny evolved by his own past history, by his own inheritance of greater or of less ability than his fellow man.

This is sad in tone, but it is also wise and true. Equally true is a piece upon the folly of prayer. Did you ever think what could happen if the gods were to answer all the prayers that are made to them every day? The world would be very soon destroyed. For example, in Western countries all Christian people every day pray for food, that they may have enough to eat. If they did have all the food which they desired, the result would be an enormous increase of population that could only end in misery, war, or destruction of some horrible kind. Again, who does not pray for long life? But many of the miseries of this world

are caused by excess of population, and if all men could live as long as they wish, the world would eventually become unendurable. People do not often think about these things, and Matthew Arnold is one of the very few who make us think about them. In a poem called "Consolation" he makes a series of little pictures of life in different parts of the world, and shows us how in each of these places people are praying to the gods, and how all the prayers contradict each other. The poem is a little too long to quote complete, but we may cite the verses about young lovers which conclude the composition.

Two young, fair lovers,
Where the warm June-wind,
Fresh from the summer fields
Plays fondly round them,
Stand, tranced in joy.

With sweet, join'd voices,
And with eyes brimming:
"Ah," they cry, "Destiny,
Prolong the present!
Time! stand still here!"

The prompt stern Goddess
Shakes her head, frowning;
Time gives his hour-glass
Its due reversal;
Their hour is gone.

With weak indulgence
Did the just Goddess
Lengthen their happiness,
She lengthen'd also
Distress elsewhere.

The hour, whose happy
Unalloy'd moments
I would eternalise,
Ten thousand mourners
Well pleased see end.

The bleak, stern hour,
Whose severe moments
I would annihilate,
Is pass'd by others
In warmth, light, joy.

Time, so complain'd of,
Who to no one man
Shows partiality,
Brings round to all men
Some undimm'd hours.

This has the value of suggestion more than of poetical art, as we generally understand the term, but even considered only as form it is admirably and severely correct. Cold Matthew Arnold's poetry certainly is, but it makes us think. As I said before, he is especially successful in telling the result of his own mental experience, and this is an instance. Evidently he has thought a great deal about the world in relation to human will, and has recognized that none of us could have our desires fulfilled, except at the expense of some other person's happiness. We recognize this truth in more familiar ways every day. For example, when we regret that the weather is rainy instead of fine, we do not reflect that this rain which spoils our pleasure is bringing fertility to the crops, benefit to farmers. Also we soon learn that a man sometimes cannot become rich, unless somebody else becomes poor. But we are not apt to remember, as we ought to do, that many of our wishes fall under the same universal law. What we wish for can often be obtained only at somebody else's cost. After all, the world is not so very bad, for even the most unfortunate among us have some bright, or, as the poet calls them, undimmed hours.

The preceding verses are, I must tell you, rather cheerful, considering how very gloomy much of Matthew Arnold's poetry is. But it is in his glooms and shadows that his best work is, the work which affords food for thought be-

cause it has grown out of the memories and personal sufferings of the man. As an example of warmer feeling in the same melancholy direction, there is nothing more touching than the little poem which he calls "The Voice." Have you ever noted that a voice is one of these things that longest remain in memory? Sometimes even after we have forgotten the face of some dead friend, forgotten even his name, kind words which he spoke to us continue to resound in our remembrance, with the very same tone in which they were uttered. The poet here is speaking, however, about the voice of a dead woman, remembered in his old age. This woman very often appears in his poems, a girl — a French girl, probably — whom he met when he was very young, and whom he was only prevented from marrying by reason of some social obstacle, we know not what, perhaps duty, perhaps want of money. I shall quote only two stanzas. The last is more than beautiful.

Like bright waves that fall
With a lifelike motion
On the lifeless margin of the sparkling Ocean;
A wild rose climbing up a mouldering wall—
A gush of sunbeams through a ruin'd hall—
Strains of glad music at a funeral—
So sad, and with so wild a start
To this deep-sober'd heart,
So anxiously and painfully,
So drearily and doubtfully,
And oh, with such intolerable change
Of thought, such contrast strange,
O unforgotten voice, thy accents come,
Like wanderers from the world's extremity,
Unto their ancient home!

In vain, all, all in vain,
They beat upon mine ear again,
Those melancholy tones so sweet and still.
Those lute-like tones which in the bygone year
Did steal into mine ear—

Blew such a thrilling summons to my will,
  Yet could not shake it;
Made my tost heart its very life-blood spill,
  Yet could not break it.

Why these comparisons about the breaking waves on a dreadful shore, about roses blooming on broken walls, sunlight in a ruined chamber, music at a funeral? Because the time of youth and hope and love is utterly dead, and the memory of the voice recalling it also recalls years of pain, but not of joy. The contrast between what is and what might have been is itself, as Dante teaches in a certain immortal verse, the greatest of all sorrows. The voice referred to might have said, "Take me! I can make your life beautiful—I am youth, love, and happiness." But duty would have said, "Impossible." The poem suggests the desperate character of the struggle between inclination and reason. Reason proved the stronger, duty was obeyed, but at how terrible a cost. The reference to the breaking of the heart becomes very pathetic if you understand that the English phrase "to break one's heart" signifies to die of grief. The line "yet could not break it" implies a wish to die of the struggle instead of living to endure all its consequences.

The meditative character in Matthew Arnold's poetry, in its most personal form, is also beautifully shown in a composition recording his thoughts while listening to the roar of the sea at night. This piece is called "Dover Beach," but the incident might be anywhere, on any coast in the world, in Japan as well as in England. There is only the presentation of thoughts awakened by the sound of the sea in the mind of a scholar and a doubter.

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits;—on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægæan, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

We may paraphrase a part of this, the better to show its beauty and its relation to the writer's own experience. Telling us to listen to the sound of the waves, he thus proceeds: "Thousands of years ago, by the shores of the Greek sea, the great poet and dramatist Sophocles listened to that sound as we are doing now and it made him think

of the great sea of life, with all its confused sounds of joy and pain. We also in this nineteenth century can find in that sound something to think about, just as Sophocles did, although the world has greatly changed since his time, and although this is not the warm coast of Greece, but the cold Northern shore of England.

"I hear the roar of the retreating tide, fainter and fainter as the moments pass. Then it seems to me that I am listening, not to the sounds of the sea on the English coast, but to the sound of the ebbing of the great sea of religion. Once men believed in God and a future life; once Christianity covered the whole world like the water of a sea. But to-day in the age of new philosophy, in this age of scientific doubt, the tide of religious faith is beginning to ebb away, leaving only naked barren sands and stones behind it.

"Then let us who love each other, draw close to each other. There is nothing left in this world but friendship and love. For all that the world promises of pleasure, proves to be empty and worthless, and there is really no beauty, nor glory, nor rest nor happiness, no certainty and no God to pray to. We are like people alone in darkness in the middle of a great plain, where armies are fighting without light."

To an Oriental thinker, I fancy, the sound of the sea by night would bring suggestions of the great sea of birth and death, in which suggestion there is much consolation of a certain kind. Feeling that we are a part of the sea that has no shore, no beginning, and no end, we cannot feel very anxious or very unhappy about the future. The fact that we now exist is proof positive that we have always existed; it is equal proof that we never can cease to exist. To-day this would be the position of the most advanced Western philosopher. But Matthew Arnold's time was the interval between the death of old ideas and the birth of new convictions. And men of such a time are likely to be very unhappy. A man who trusts entirely to

religion, to belief in God and Heaven and the reward of good conduct, becomes utterly miserable if he suddenly discovers that he cannot longer believe the doctrines which once gave him so much consolation. This poem expresses faithfully and painfully the thoughts of many men of that time.

But it also expresses something more — the melancholy of old age. You may have read of what are called the "disillusions of a man of fifty." I do not think that any of you could exactly understand what the phrase means, for the simple reason that none of you is fifty. But you can imagine a good deal about it. When a man has lived for fifty years in this world, he has learned a great many things that never could be learned from books, some things which are not pleasant to learn and which make him serious. He cannot trust his fellow men as he did in other times, because he has learned a great deal about human motives and human weaknesses. He cannot believe in a great many things which it is happiness to believe in, because these have been proved impossible by his personal experience. He has learned that scarcely any honest ambition can be gratified except at such a cost that the result is not worth struggling for. And then his capacity for pleasure has become very much lessened. I do not mean only that his bodily strength has been diminished and his passions impaired, but I mean especially that his mind has become less sensitive either to pleasure or to pain. The sweet fresh air that delights the boy, the beauty of a summer sunset or an autumn afternoon, the singing of birds, the blossoming of flowers—all these make very little impression upon the man who is beginning to grow old. And Matthew Arnold is, I think, almost the only Englishman who has written a poem upon the subject. Of course he is expressing only his own feeling, but this is the feeling of thousands and thousands who have attempted to do what he tried to do, and who have failed even more than he failed.

GROWING OLD

What is it to grow old?
Is it to lose the glory of the form,
The lustre of the eye?
Is it for beauty to forego her wreath?
—Yes, but not this alone.

Is it to feel our strength—
Not our bloom only, but our strength—decay?
Is it to feel each climb
Grow stiffer, every function less exact,
Each nerve more loosely strung?

Yes, this, and more; but not,
Ah, 'tis not what in youth we dream'd 'twould be!
'Tis not to have our life
Mellow'd and soften'd as with sunset-glow,
A golden day's decline.

'Tis not to see the world
As from a height, with rapt prophetic eyes,
And heart profoundly stirr'd;
And weep, and feel the fulness of the past,
The years that are no more.

It is to spend long days
And not once feel that we were ever young;
It is to add, immured
In the hot prison of the present, month
To month with weary pain.

It is to suffer this,
And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel.
Deep in our hidden heart
Festers the dull remembrance of a change,
But no emotion—none.

It is—last stage of all—
When we are frozen up within, and quite
The phantom of ourselves,
To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost
Which blamed the living man.

I suppose that this is one of the most horrible pictures of old age ever written, but it is true of the old age of many a good and great man in the history of civilization. It was certainly the history of Matthew Arnold's old age. Only at a very late day did success come to him, when he could no longer enjoy it. But you must not think that his poetical complaint signifies weakness. He was too well trained by his father to show weakness. The despair of the pessimist never took hold upon him. He only thought of himself as a soldier in a losing battle, certain of defeat, but resolved to die bravely. The brave note, mixed with a little bitterness, we find in another poem of much simpler form called "The Last Word."

Creep into thy narrow bed,
Creep, and let no more be said!
Vain thy onset! all stands fast.
Thou thyself must break at last.

Let the long contention cease!
Geese are swans, and swans are geese.
Let them have it how they will!
Thou art tired; best be still.

In other words, "Go to your grave in silence, and stop talking truth. It is no use. You have been fighting with a society too powerful for you, prejudices too strong for you, superstitions impregnable. Society, prejudice, superstition, are not only stronger than you, they are longer-lived; you must die before they die. Stop your hopeless fighting. Of course you know that geese are not swans, but since people persist in saying that they are swans, it is no use for you to be angry with them. Why be angry with stupidity?"

But the reformer states that he has other reasons to be angry, in the injustice and cruelty and malice of men.

They out-talk'd thee, hiss'd thee, tore thee?
Better men fared thus before thee;

Fired their ringing shot and pass'd,
Hotly charged—and sank at last.

Charge once more, then, and be dumb!
Let the victors, when they come,
When the forts of folly fall,
Find thy body by the wall!

This is excellent advice to any reformer who despairs or feels like despairing. It is good to remember that no matter what injustice the world may do to you, it has done injustice to greater men in past times, and will doubtless continue to do greater injustice to still greater men in the future. If you want to benefit the world, you must make up your mind about two things; you must be content to sacrifice your life or your happiness or both, and whatever you do, you must not expect to be told or to hear of your own success. The new truth which you wish to teach will certainly be some day accepted, if it is truth, but you must not hope to have even the reward of seeing it accepted. Great reforms demand the absolute sacrifice of self.

Now, the thinker who observes the tendencies of modern civilization often finds reason to doubt not only the possibilities of ethical reform, but the possibilities even of mental or moral development in the highest sense. It seems to him that the necessities of this civilization are turning men's minds away from noble ideas to selfish and material ambitions. It seems to him that even the feeling which makes poetry must die. It seems to him that the spiritual and moral ideals of the past must be forgotten in the great hurried hungry struggle for money and position. The world is becoming material in the ugliest meaning of the term. The great cities are drawing away from nature the millions who used to feel and know the poetry of country life. The fields are no longer cultivated by men, but by machinery, and vast parts of America and of other countries which are tilled by steam, remain practically uninhabited except in the season of the harvests. Everywhere the population

increases, and always the struggle for existence becomes fiercer, and always the duties of life become heavier and harder. Will there be in the future any time to think, any time to feel, any time to be happy, any time to cherish noble motives and sublime thoughts? Certainly things look dark. Herbert Spencer told us that the period of the greatest possible human suffering has yet to come. Scientific civilization cannot save us from that; on the contrary it will bring it about, by increasing the population of the world to a degree never before known. The struggle for life in Europe will become like the struggle for life in China.

All these thoughts are suggested in a little poem by Matthew Arnold called "The Future." In this poem the course of human progress is compared to the flowing of a river, down which the soul of man is floating. The idea of the River of Life is very old, and has been used by many thousands of poets, but Matthew Arnold has treated the subject in a new way. In the first part of the poem there is not much which is new, only a comparison of humanity's first joy in the life of the world to the joy of a child in a boat upon a little country stream. Somewhat further on, as it recedes from its source, the stream broadens, and great shapes of mountains and forests appear on the horizon. "As is the world on the banks, so is the mind of man." Human knowledge of the world itself has always been, and still is, limited to impressions of the senses, and these are illusions. But while these illusions were beautiful in the past, men were comparatively happy. They were close to nature in ancient times; they did not live in great gloomy cities, full of dust and smoke, but they delighted in their life in forests and fields, on mountains and by rivers. The course of progress was then like the course of a river winding through sunlit valleys and plains, under a bright blue sky. But with the development of material civilization the landscape darkens. Great cities appear on the banks of a winding stream, blackening the sky with the smoke of their

innumerable fires, and the water itself is no longer clear and pure. Still the spirit of man floats on with the stream, and this spirit feels the sadness of the great change. Does this sadness signify wisdom? Perhaps so, but as yet only in a relative sense—that is, in relation to the world of which man forms a part. But of the origin of the world itself, of the source of the stream of Being, or of the destiny of the stream, we know nothing at all. We float on, watching the banks, but we do not know where we came from nor whither we are going. This only we know, that always as we float with the stream the cities on either bank become larger and more tumultuous and the sky darker and the river stormier, and the horizon is black before us, so black that we cannot see.

> And we say that repose has fled
> For ever the course of the river of Time.
> That cities will crowd to its edge
> In a blacker, incessanter line;
> That the din will be more on its banks,
> Denser the trade on its stream,
> Flatter the plain where it flows,
> Fiercer the sun overhead.
> That never will those on its breast
> See an ennobling sight,
> Drink of the feeling of quiet again.

That is, we feel as if the joy of calm had for ever been destroyed by this new industrial civilization, and the future, as we behold it, looks so gloomy that we doubt whether mankind can ever again be happy.

Still, who can predict what changes will come? A hundred years ago, who could have believed in the power which science has given us to-day? There may be a hope that some new and totally unimaginable faculties will yet restore to us something of the happiness of those conditions of peace which we have left behind. In the suggestion of this hope, the poet gives us one beautiful touch of mysticism:

But what was before us we know not,
And we know not what shall succeed.

Haply, the river of Time—
As it grows, as the towns on its marge
Fling their wavering lights
On a wider, statelier stream—
May acquire, if not the calm
Of its early mountainous shore,
Yet a solemn peace of its own.

And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the grey expanse where he floats,
Freshening its currents and spotted with foam
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast—
As the pale waste widens around him,
As the banks fade dimmer away,
As the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.

You remember the previous description of the mountain stream descending to the plain, and widening, and always flowing over flatter ground. Observe that the word "flat" means not only level, but also commonplace, dull, uninteresting, vulgar. What gives poetry life is our sense of the beautiful, our sense of duty, our idea of conditions better than any which we have. Now, the tendency of industrial civilization is to compel men to think more about money than ever before, and less about truth and beauty and divine things. This is what the poet means when he expresses the fear that the River of Life will be flowing in the future through a flatter world than now, more selfish, more vulgar. It does indeed seem as if mankind were going to lose all spiritual ambitions, and to think only about commonplace and vulgar things. We imagine greater cities, greater wealth, more people, more material power in the future, but we cannot at the same time imagine great no-

bility of mind, greater beauty of thought, or finer qualities of emotion. However, says the poet, we do not know the future; we do not even know the past. Being ignorant as to where we came from, how can we tell whither we are going? One thing only is certain—that we issued originally out of the Infinite Mystery and that we must return to the Mystery. Outside of us, outside this world, all about us the Infinite lies like a sea without shore, and the drifting of all life is to that fathomless deep. Thither flows this River of Time, with the spirit of man floating upon it through countless different kinds of illusions, like the scenery of landscapes. When and how and where the stream will enter the sea, we cannot tell. But it is possible that at some time, before we all pass back into that Unknown out of which we came, some sudden revelation will come to us. Mankind will continue to learn, and continue to hope, and continue to pray for rest through all the centuries, while the world grows older and approaches the end. If you have ever descended a river to the sea in a boat, you will remember the pleasure of the moment when you first began to smell the salt air of the sea, and to feel the pure, fresh sea wind in your face. At once you feel stronger and happier, and all your senses seem to become sharper and finer. So it may be with humanity, as it descends the River of Time toward the Sea of Eternity. Perhaps it will be only in the moment when we first perceive the odour of that Infinite Sea, and hear far away the muttering of its waves —that is to say, perhaps it will only be when the life of the world is nearly done—that we shall suddenly discover some great truth that will make us happy.

In his power of suggestiveness, Matthew Arnold is certainly very remarkable, and not only when he treats of large subjects. We notice this characteristic still more when he touches upon slighter things than the destiny of man or the meaning of the universe. For example, he has written a little poem about the great French actress Rachel, which is, I think, a very wonderful thing, because the whole story

and meaning of her life is put into fourteen lines. You know Rachel was the greatest actress of modern times. She was a Jewess, and always remained true to her religion and race, but she found pleasure sometimes in reading Christian and other religious books. She was the child of very poor people, and belonged to an oppressed race, yet she rose to the very highest rank in her profession, and obtained from kings and emperors the highest marks of honour and esteem. She never married, and she died, before her time, of consumption. What Matthew Arnold writes about her might be called a little study in the great problem of heredity.

> Sprung from the blood of Israel's scatter'd race,
> At a mean inn in German Aarau born,
> To forms from antique Greece and Rome uptorn,
> Trick'd out with a Parisian speech and face,
>
> Imparting life renew'd, old classic grace,
> Then, soothing with thy Christian strain forlorn,
> A-Kempis! her departing soul outworn,
> While by her bedside Hebrew rites have place—
>
> Ah, not the radiant spirit of Greece alone
> She had—one power, which made her breast its home!
> In her, like us, there clash'd, contending powers,
>
> Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, Rome.
> The strife, the mixture in her soul, are ours;
> Her genius and her glory are her own.

Here was a curious mingling of emotional elements, artistic elements, and race elements — a Jewess acting as a Greek woman of the past in the Paris of the present. But there was yet another curious fact, the interest that this Jewess took in Christian mysticism. When she was dying the prayers repeated at her bedside were Hebrew prayers, but she read in those moments "The Imitation of Christ" by Thomas ā Kempis. So we have in her history mingled

religious sentiments also. What does such a life as this signify?

That is the question which Matthew Arnold asks and answers in his own way. He says: Rachel had genius and fame born of genius; these were peculiar to her; nobody else had such a genius or such a fame. But Rachel had nothing else which other people have not. Just as in her soul there were mingled the spirit of Greece and the spirit of Rome, of Judaism and Christianity, of modern Germany and modern France, so with every one who inherits the fruits of the ancient and the modern civilization. It is not only a mental inheritance which many of us have, there is a physical inheritance also — sometimes the blood of many races in one person. I suppose you know the curious fact that most of the great Englishmen of the present century, even of the men of science, are men who have descended from unions between different races. Even Tennyson had some French blood. The English race itself has been made by a mingling of many peoples. Scientifically, there is no unmixed race. Is it, the poet asks, for this reason that the minds of many of us are constantly in a state of struggle, as though between impulses and emotions originally belonging to different civilizations, different religions, different nations? Very possibly, but every man who passes through the whole range of modern university education must have the like experience and like struggle, for he mentally inherits not only the wisdom but the conflicting emotions and sentiments of many vanished civilizations.

The sonnet is the form generally chosen by Matthew Arnold for short philosophical studies of this kind. It is the sonnet in its simplest and oldest form — at least, the oldest English form, for the early foreign form was more elaborate. We have sonnets treating about bits of life seen in the street, about the meaning of religion, about the nature of God, about the difficulty of being good in this world, about pictures seen in ancient houses, and about many other things. These are not the least interesting of

Arnold's compositions, and I want to quote several of them. Let us first take one which has a bit of street life for its subject. I remember that a student of the literature class, last year, wrote for me a little story or sketch of exactly the same experience, though I am tolerably sure that he never read Matthew Arnold's "West London." As a matter of fact, you will observe the same thing in Tokyo or in any part of the civilized world, exactly as the poet saw it in London.

Crouch'd on the pavement, close by Belgrave Square,
A tramp I saw, ill, moody, and tougue-tied.
A babe was in her arms, and at her side
A girl; their clothes were rags, their feet were bare.

Some labouring men, whose work lay somewhere there,
Pass'd opposite; she touch'd her girl, who hied
Across, and begg'd, and came back satisfied.
The rich she had let pass with frozen stare.

Thought I: "Above her state this spirit towers;
She will not ask of aliens, but of friends,
Of sharers in a common human fate.

"She turns from that cold succour, which attends
The unknown little from the unknowing great,
And points us to a better time than ours."

By "cold succour" the poet means public charity, for in London there are hundreds of places where poor people can go and ask for food, and get it upon certain unpleasant conditions. Thousands of rich people subscribe for such public charities, and a rich person usually answers a beggar's request by saying, "Why do you not go to the proper place for help?" Poor people hate public charities, for many reasons. But the main truth of the poem is the fact that suffering makes sympathy. Rich people who do not understand the pain of hunger and cold or the difficulty of living, do not pity the poor in most cases; they refuse to give. On the other hand the working man, the poor labourer,

knows what pain is, and little as he has, he will give when his heart is touched. In the essay written for me last year the writer said that he had seen exactly the same thing on the way to Ueno. A woman with a little boy was begging on that street, and she asked many persons to help her, but the only one who gave her any money was a poor carpenter on his way home after a hard day's work. Why does Matthew Arnold say that this instinct of the poor to ask help from the poor "points us to a better time than ours?" Because the fact in itself suggests that when all classes of men have learned what suffering is, there will be much more sympathy and much less suffering. If the rich are not kind, it is often because they do not know.

Another sonnet on the difficulty of life is of equal interest. It is inspired by a reading of Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius was the most virtuous of all the Roman Emperors, although living at an age when the people were very corrupt. The important thing to know about him in this connection is that he wrote a beautiful little book which has been translated into all Western languages, and which is still studied by everybody who loves modern philosophy. The book begins with a history of the Emperor's own life, from boyhood; then follow a number of chapters containing his thoughts about many things, but especially about morality, the gods, and the future life. This book is called "The Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius."

Now, this emperor found it very difficult to be as good as he wished to be; he frankly tells us that in a very high position it is much harder to be good than in a very humble position. It is very curious to read what he says about the little miseries of his everyday life, about the pain of having to meet disagreeable people and vicious people and ungrateful people, and of knowing how to act justly with them. But he adds, "Even in a palace a man can live a good life." This is the sentence that Matthew Arnold writes a poem about, under the title of "Worldly Place."

Even in a palace, life may be led well!
So spake the imperial sage, purest of men,
Marcus Aurelius. But the stifling den
Of common life, where, crowded up pell-mell,

Our freedom for a little bread we sell,
And drudge under some foolish master's ken
Who rates us if we peer outside our pen—
Match'd with a palace, is not this a hell?

Even in a palace! On his truth sincere,
Who spoke these words, no shadow ever came;
And when my ill-school'd spirit is aflame

Some nobler, ampler stage of life to win,
I'll stop, and say: "There were no succour here!
The aids to noble life are all within."

The compact language may be paraphrased as follows: "What a strange thing to say, that even in a palace a man can be virtuous! Yet the man who said it was himself an emperor, a philosopher, and the purest of men in his own life. Yet, when we think of our own pain and trouble, how difficult it is for us to believe that the state of an emperor is not happier than the state of a common man. Think of the trouble that we have to earn a living—obliged to work every day in some uncomfortable position, watched by some man not wiser than ourselves, but often even more foolish, who is only watching our work in order to find fault with us. Surely the Emperor, who is the master of all men, and who is not obliged to obey anybody, or even obliged to do anything he does not wish to do, ought to be happier than we. But these are the words of the wisest and noblest of the Roman emperors—'Even in a palace!' Therefore we must understand that it is still harder for an emperor to be good and happy than it is for a common man. To believe this may be difficult, but Marcus Aurelius said it, and in his whole life he never told even the shadow of a lie. I believe him. When I feel myself dissatisfied, when I wish

to leave the work that I now do, in order to obtain a higher or a better position, I remember the words of Marcus Aurelius. The secret of happiness and the power of virtue are in our hearts. That is the meaning of life as it was understood by that great teacher and great emperor."

So excellently does this poem represent the moral teaching of Matthew Arnold, that no other example of the same kind is necessary. You will see the same idea repeated in hundreds of passages, and really there is no better teaching. The all-important fact to know in the first place is the nature of duty; when we know this, the rules of conduct can be tolerably well understood without any teaching of creed or dogma. On this subject of dogma, Matthew Arnold is liberal enough. Nowhere does he plainly declare himself a Christian, and we cannot always be sure of the meaning which he attaches to the word "God." He uses the word frequently (so does Mr. Swinburne, who does not believe in what is usually understood by God); but he may use it in a signification which is not by any means Christian, nor even religious in the sectarian sense. Sometimes God means not the poet's idea of the Supreme Unknown, but the idea of goodness and justice, personified. In one place we have a plain statement of sympathy with a Christian definition, but you must not suppose this sympathy to mean that the poet accepts the definition in the original meaning. He sympathizes with it only because it symbolizes for him a truth independent of any religion. The statement to which I refer is in a sonnet entitled "The Divinity."

> "Yes, write it in the rock," Saint Bernard said,
> "Grave it on brass with adamantine pen!
> 'Tis God himself becomes apparent, when
> God's wisdom and God's goodness are display'd,
>
> "For God of these his attributes is made."—
> Well spake the impetuous Saint, and bore of men
> The suffrage captive; now, not one in ten
> Recalls the obscure opposer he outweigh'd.

God's wisdom and God's goodness!—Ay, but fools
Mis-define these till God knows them no more.
Wisdom and goodness, they are God!—what schools

Have yet so much as heard this simple lore?
This no Saint preaches, and this no Church rules;
'Tis in the desert, now and heretofore.

Saint Bernard was a great church reformer, who lived in the twelfth century; I think that the best account of him is that which we find in Froude's "Essays." The incident which Matthew Arnold mentions happened in the year 1148, when Bernard was accused of heresy for saying that wisdom and goodness were God. But he was not ashamed or afraid of what he had said, and he argued so well that he silenced his accusers. You must know the Church of Rome at no time would acknowledge that goodness could exist outside faith; in other words a person could not be good who was not a Christian, according to mediæval opinion. No matter how kind or how generous or how noble a man might be, unless he were a Christian his good deeds could not save him. Therefore it seemed to many people shocking to say that wisdom and goodness were identical with divinity. Matthew Arnold's thought about this declaration is that it is really true from a modern philosophical point of view. Wisdom is divine, goodness is divine. From the oldest time the great value of belief in God has been the value of recognizing the divine nature of wisdom and of goodness. I think Saint Bernard was right, says Matthew Arnold, when he called these God. But according to sectarian and dogmatic declarations, what are wisdom and goodness? Do they mean the highest knowledge and the highest morality? No, they do not. Religious prejudice calls wisdom what is not wisdom, and goodness what is not goodness. If we should take the highest conception of goodness and of wisdom, we should certainly find these to be divinity in the deepest and grandest meaning. But to-day there is nobody in the churches to teach such a truth; very few men would

have the courage to utter it. Therefore the voice of Saint Bernard is still a voice in the desert, a voice speaking alone in the great ignorant silence of the past and of the present. If mankind ever generally recognize that wisdom and goodness are divine, they will have learned the best that any religion could teach them. There is something in this little poem that reminds us also of Renan, who said, in one of his philosophical dialogues, that perhaps there is no God existing at present, but that men are gradually working to make a God, and that out of all the sorrow and the labour of mankind, a God will be created at last. Well, this God of the French philosopher, not yet made but in process of being made, would certainly be the same God suggested by Matthew Arnold's verses — infinite goodness and infinite knowledge.

I do not wish to keep you too long at the study of this grey, colourless, but very curious poetry. Still, I may cite to you another sonnet, about a picture which Matthew Arnold once saw. You must know that this picture really exists. Long ago an English nobleman, a great warrior and great statesman, very brave but also very proud and positive in his character, became angry one day with his little son, a boy of six or seven years old, and thoughtlessly struck him. Perhaps a man would scarcely have been pained by the blow, but a child's brain and body are very delicate things, and the shock of the blow destroyed the little brain. The child never again knew anything; he was without any remembrance even of what had happened; he could not even understand why his father asked for pardon. In order to punish himself, the father had a great picture painted of the cruel act which he had committed, so that all the world might know his own shame and sorrow. This picture still hangs in the Abbey at Newstead.

I presume you remember that Newstead Abbey was the residence and property of Lord Byron. Because of his great memory, Newstead Abbey has long been a place of literary pilgrimage, strangers from all parts of the world

making visits there in order to see the relics of the great poet. It was while upon such a visit that Matthew Arnold saw this picture, and wrote the following sonnet about it:

> What made my heart, at Newstead, fullest swell?—
> 'Twas not the thought of Byron, of his cry
> Stormily sweet, his Titan-agony;
> It was the sight of that Lord Arundel
>
> Who struck, in heat, his child he loved so well,
> And his child's reason flicker'd, and did die.
> Painted (he will'd it) in the gallery
> They hang; the picture doth the story tell.
>
> Behold the stern, mail'd father, staff in hand!
> The little fair-hair'd son, with vacant gaze,
> Where no more lights of sense or knowledge are!
>
> Methinks the woe, which made that father stand
> Baring his dumb remorse to future days,
> Was woe than Byron's woe more tragic far.

I do not know any poem more painful than this in modern literature, and scarcely any equally touching—perhaps Coventry Patmore's poem "The Toys" comes nearest to it in the latter quality. And yet how very simply the thing is told!

My purpose in this lecture has been to make you interested in those parts of Matthew Arnold's work which are least known to the general reader. School textbooks and anthologies contain plenty of extracts from Arnold, but no extracts which really give you any idea of the thought and the feelings of the man. Such extracts are usually chosen because of the beauty of the verse, and they are therefore chosen usually from those longer poems in which Arnold shows himself a student of Milton, as in "Thyrsis," or a student of the Greek tragedians, as in "Merope." You will also find quotations made from "Sohrab and Rustum," one of which is so famous that it is quoted in hundreds of

books — I mean the passage about the Chinese porcelain maker. But these would not at all serve the object which I had in view — namely, to make you see the great, sad, tender mind of the man. This you will learn only by reading and liking those shorter pieces, such as I have quoted, which are a little difficult to study, but which repay study much better than the most of the poet's more ambitious work. In writing these he probably did not intend or expect to appear as a great poet, yet it is here indeed that the great poet is, rather than in even such beautiful lines as the following:

> Then, with weak hasty fingers, Sohrab loosed
> His belt, and near the shoulder bared his arm,
> And show'd a sign in faint vermilion points
> Prick'd; as a cunning workman, in Pekin,
> Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,
> An emperor's gift at early morn he paints,
> And all day long, and when night comes, the lamp
> Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands.

Milton might have written that, it is so truly beautiful. But it is not characteristic of Matthew Arnold otherwise than by being in the style of Milton. The imitation of a great poet may be admirable, but original thought always proves in the end to be the supreme test of poetical value.