

THE GLEANER.

And Northumberland, Kent, Gloucester, and Restigouche Schediasma.

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Nec araneorum sane textus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignunt, nec noter vilior quia ex alienis libamus ut apes.

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From the Dial for April

THOUGHTS ON LABOUR.

God has given each man a back to be clothed, a mouth to be filled, and a pair of hands to work with. And since wherever a mouth and a back are created, a pair of hands also is provided, the inference is unavoidable, that the hands are to be used to supply the needs of the mouth and the back. Now, as there is one mouth to each pair of hands, and each mouth must be filled, it follows quite naturally, that if a single pair of hands refuses to do its work, then the mouth goes hungry, or, what is worse, the work is done by other hands. In the one case, the supply failing, an inconvenience is suffered, and the man dies; in the other he eats and wears the earnest of another man's work, and so a wrong is inflicted. The law of nature is this—'If a man will not work neither shall he eat.' Still further, God has so beautifully woven together the web of life, with its warp of Fate, and its woof of Free-will, that in addition to the result of a man's duty, when faithfully done, there is a satisfaction and recompense in the very discharge thereof. In a rational state of things, Duty and Delight travel the same road, sometimes hand in hand. Labor has an agreeable end, in the result we gain; but the means also are agreeable, for there are pleasures in the work itself. These unexpected compensations, the gratuities and stray-gifts of Heaven, are scattered abundantly in life. Thus the kindness of our friends, the love of our children, is of itself worth a thousand times all the pains we take on their account. Labor, in like manner, has a reflective action, and gives the working man a blessing over and above the natural result which he looked for. The duty of labor is written on man's body, in the stout muscle of the arm, and the delicate machinery of the hand. That it is congenial to our nature, appears from the alacrity with which children apply themselves to it, and find pleasure in the work itself, without regard to its use. The young duck does not more naturally betake itself to the water, than the boy to the work which goes on around him. There is some work, which even the village sluggard and the city fop love to do, and that they only can do well. These two latter facts show that labour, in some degree, is no less a pleasure than a duty, and prove that man is not by nature, a lazy animal, who is forced by hunger to dig and spin.

Yet there are some who count labour a curse and a punishment. They regard the necessity of work, as the greatest evil brought on us by the Fall; as a curse that will cling to our last sand. Many submit to this yoke, and toil, and save, in hope to leave their posterity out of the reach of this primitive curse.

Others, still more foolish, regard it as a disgrace. Young men—the children of honest parents, who, living by their own manly and toil-hardened hands, bear up the burthen of the world on their shoulders, and eat with thankful hearts their daily bread, won in the sweat of their face—are ashamed of their father's occupation, and forsaking the plough, the chisel, or the forge, seek a livelihood in what is sometimes named a more respectable and genteel vocation; that is in a calling which demands less of the hands, and quite often less of the head likewise, than their fathers' hard craft; for that imbecility which drives men to these callings, has its seat mostly in a higher region than the hands. Affluenced damsels beg their lovers to discover or invent some ancestor in buckram who did not work. The Sophomore in a small college is ashamed of his father who wears a blue frock, and his dusty brother who toils with the saw and the axe. These men, after they have wiped off the dirt and soot of their early life, sometimes become arant coxcombs, and standing like the heads of Hermes without hands, having only a mouth, make faces at such a contigue to serve the state by plain handiwork. Some one relates an anecdote which illustrates quite plainly this foolish desire of young men to live without work. It happened in one of our large towns, that a Shopkeeper and a Blacksmith, both living in the same street, advertised for an apprentice on the same day. In a given time fifty beardless youngsters applied to the Haberdasher, and not one to the Smith. But this story has a terrible moral, namely, that forty nine

out of the fifty were disappointed at the outset.

It were to be wished, that this notion of labor being disgraceful, was confined to vain young men and giddy maidens of idle habits and weak heads, for then it would be looked upon as one of the diseases of early life, which we know must come, and rejoice when our young friends have happily passed through it, knowing it is one of the ills which flesh is heir to, but is not very grievous, and comes but once in the lifetime. This aversion to labour, this notion that it is a curse and a disgrace, this selfish desire to escape from the general and natural lot of man, is the sacramental sin of 'the better class' in our great cities. The children of the poor pray to be rid of it, and what son of a rich man learns a trade or tills the soil with his own hands? Many men look on the ability to be idle as the most desirable and honorable ability. They glory in being the Mouth that consumes not the Hand that works. Yet one would suppose a man of useless hands and idle head, in the midst of God's world, where each thing works for all; in the midst of the toil and sweat of the human race, must needs make an apology for his sloth, and would ask pardon for violating the common law; and withdrawing his neck from the general yoke of humanity. Still more does he need an apology if he is active only in getting into his hands the results of others' work. But it is not so. The man who is rich enough to be idle, values himself on his leisure, and what is worse others value him for it. Active men must make a shameful excuse for being busy, and working men for their toil, as if business and toil were not the duty of all and the support of the world. In certain countries men are divided horizontally into two classes, the men who WORK and the men who RULE, and the latter despise the employment of the former as mean and degrading. It is the slave's duty to plough, said a Heathen poet, and a freeman's business to enjoy at leisure the fruit of that ploughing. It is a remnant of those barbarous times, when all labor was performed by serfs and bondsmen, and exemption from toil was the exclusive sign of the freeborn. But this notion, that labour is disgraceful, conflicts as sharply with our political institutions as it does with common sense, and the law God has writ on man. An old author, centuries before Christ, was so far enlightened on this point, as to see the true dignity of manual work, and to say—'God is well pleased with honest works; he suffers the labouring man, who ploughs the earth by night and day, to call his life most noble. If he is good and true, he offers continual sacrifice to God, and is not so lustrous in his dress as in his heart.'

Manual labour is a blessing and a dignity. But to state the case on its least favorable issue, admit it were both a disgrace and a curse, would a true man desire to escape it for himself, and leave the curse to fall on other men? Certainly not. The generous soldier fronts death, and charges in the cannon's mouth; it is the coward who lingers behind. If labor were hateful, as the proud would have us believe, then they who bear its burdens, and feed and clothe the human race, and fetch and carry for them, should be honored as those have ever been who defend society in war. If it be glorious, as the world fancies, to repel a human foe, how much more is he to be honored who stands up when wants comes upon us, like an armed man, and puts him to rout?—One would suppose the world was mad, when it bowed in reverence to those who by superior cunning possessed themselves of the earnings of others, while it made wide the mouth and drew out the tongue of such as do the world's work. 'Without these,' said an ancient, 'cannot a city be inhabited, but they shall not be sought for in public council, nor sit high in the congregation,' and those few men and women who are misnamed the World, in their wisdom have confirmed the saying. Thus they honor those who sit in idleness and ease; they extol such as defend a state with arms, or those who collect in their hands the result of Asiatic or American industry, but pass by with contempt the men who rear corn and cattle, and weave and spin, and fish and build for the whole human race. Yet if the state of labour were so hard and disgraceful as some fancy, the sluggard in fine raiment and the trim figure—which, like the lilies in the Scripture, neither toils nor spins, and is yet clothed in more glory than Solomon—would both bow down be-

fore Colliers and Farmers, and bless them as the benefactors of the race. Christianity has gone still farther, and makes a man's greatness consist in the amount of service he renders to the world. Certainly he is the most honorable who by his head or his hand does the greatest and best work for his race. The noblest soul the world ever saw appeared not in the ranks of the indolent: but 'took on him the form of a servant,' and when he washed his disciples feet, meant something not very generally understood perhaps in the nineteenth century.

Now manual labor, though an unavoidable duty, though designed as a blessing, and naturally both a pleasure and a dignity, is often abused, till by its terrible excess, it becomes really a punishment and a curse. It is only a proper amount of work that is a blessing. Too much of it wears out the body before its time; cripples the mind, debases the soul, blunts the senses, and chills the affections. It makes the man a spinning jenny, or a ploughing machine, and not 'a being of large discourse, that looks before and after.' He ceases to be a man, and becomes a thing.

In a rational and natural state of society,—that is, one in which every man went forward towards the true end he was designed to reach, towards perfection in the use of all his senses, towards perfection in wisdom, virtue, affection, and religion,—labor would never interfere with the culture of what was best in each man. His daily business would be a school to aid in developing the whole man, nature and spirit, because he would then do what nature fitted him to do. Thus his business would be really his calling. The diversity of gifts is quite equal to the diversity of work to be done. There is some one thing which each man can do with pleasure, and better than any other man, because he was born to do it. Then all men would labor, each at his proper vocation, and an excellent farmer would not be spoiled to make a poor lawyer, a blundering physician or a preacher, who puts the world asleep.

Then a small body of men would not be pampered in indolence, to grow up into gouty worthlessness and die of inertia; nor would the large part of men be worn down as now by excessive fatigue before half their life is spent. They would not be so severely tasked as to have no time to read, think, and converse. When he walked abroad, the laboring man would not be forced to catch mere transient glimpses of the flowers by the way side, or the stars over his head, as the dogs, it is said, drink the waters of the Nile, running while they drink, afraid the crocodiles should seize them if they stop. When he looked from his window at the landscape, distress need not stare at him for every bush. He would then have leisure to cultivate his mind and heart no less than to do the world's work.

In labor as in all things beside, moderation is the law. If a man transgresses and becomes intemperate in his work, and does nothing but toil with his hand, he must suffer. We educate and improve only the faculties we employ and cultivate most what we use oftenest. But if some men are placed in such circumstances that they can use only their hands, who is to be blamed if they are ignorant, vicious, and without God? Certainly not they. Now it is as notorious as the sun at noon day, that such are the circumstances of many men. As society advances in refinement, mere labor is needed to supply its demands, for houses, food, apparel, and other things must be refined and luxurious. It requires much more work, therefore, to fill the mouth and clothe the back, than in simpler times. To aggravate the difficulty, some escape from their share of this labor, by superior intelligence, shrewdness and cunning, others by fraud and lies, or by inheriting the result of these qualities in their ancestors. Still farther, this class of mouths, forgetting how hard it is to work, and not having their desires for the result of labor checked by the sweat necessary to satisfy them, but living vicariously by other men's hands, refuse to be content with the simple gratification of their natural appetites. So caprice takes the place of Nature, and must also be satisfied. Natural wants are few, but to artificial desires there is no end. When each man pays the natural price, and so earn what he gets, the hand stops the mouth, and the soreness of the toil corrects the excess of desire, and if it do not, none has cause of complaint, for the man's desire is allayed by

his own work. Thus if Absalom wishes for sweet cakes, the trouble of providing them checks his extravagant or unnatural appetite. But when the mouth and hand are on different bodies, and Absalom can coax his sister, or bribe his friend, or compel his slave to furnish his dainties, the natural restraint is taken from appetite, and it runs to excess. Fancy must be appeased, peevishness must be quieted; and so a world of work is needed to bear the burthens which those men bind, and lay on men's shoulders, but will not move with one of their fingers. The class of Mouths thus commit a sin, which the class of Hands must expiate.

Thus by the treachery of one part of society, in avoiding their share of the work; by their tyranny in increasing the burthen of the world, an evil is produced quite unknown in a simpler state of life, and a man of but common capacities not born to wealth, in order to insure a subsistence for himself and his family, must work with his hands so large a part of his time, that nothing is left for intellectual, moral, æsthetic, and religious improvement. He cannot look at the world, talk with his wife, read his Bible, nor pray to God, but Poverty knocks at the door, and hurries him to his work. He is rude in mind before he begins his work, and his work does not refine him. Men have attempted long enough to wink the matter out of sight, but it will not be put down. It may be worse in other countries, but it is bad enough in New England, as all men know who have made the experiment. There must be a great sin somewhere in that state of society, which allows one man to waste day and night in sluggishness or riot, consuming the bread of whole families, while from others, equally well-gifted and faithful, it demands twelve, or sixteen, or even 19 hours of hard work out of the 24, and then leaves the man so weary and worn, that he is capable of nothing but sleep—sleep that is broken by no dream. Still worse is it when this life of work begins so early, that the man has no fund of acquired knowledge on which to draw for mental support in his hours of toil. To this man the blessed night is for nothing but work and sleep, and the Sabbath day simply what Moses commanded a day of bodily rest for Man as far as his Ox and his Ass. Man was sent into this world to use his best faculties in the best way, and thus reach the high end of a man. How can he do this while so large a part of his time is spent in unmitigated work? Truly he cannot. Hence we see, that while in all other departments of nature each animal lives up to the measure of his organization, and with very rare exceptions becomes perfect after his kind, the greater part of men are debased and belittled, and shortened of half their life, so that you are surprised to find a man well educated whose whole life is hard work. If a man is placed in such circumstances, that he can use only his hands, they only become broad and strong. If no pains be taken to obtain dominion over the flesh, the man loses his birthright, and dies a victim to the sin of society.

No doubt there are men, born under the worst of circumstances, who have redeemed themselves from them, and obtained an excellence of intellectual growth, which is worthy of wonder; but these are exceptions to the general rule; man gifted at birth with a power almost superhuman. It is not from exceptions that we are to frame the law.

Now to put forward the worst possible aspect of the case. Suppose that the present work of the world can only be performed at this sacrifice, which is the best—that the work should be done as now, and seven-tenths of men and women should, as the unavoidable result of their toil, be cursed with extremity of labour, and ignorance, and rudeness, and unmanly life, or that less of this work be done and, for the sake of a wide spread and generous culture, we sleep less softly, dine on humbler food, dwell in mean houses, and wear leather like George Fox? There is no doubt what answer Common Sense, Reason, and Christianity would give to this question, for wisdom, virtue, and manhood are as much better than sumptuous dinners, fine apparel, and splendid houses, as the Soul is better than the Senses. But as yet we are slaves. The senses overlay the soul. We serve brass and mahogany, beef and porter. The class of Mouths oppresses the class of Hands, for the strongest and most cunning of the latter are continually pressing into the ranks of the former, and while they increase the demand for work, leave their own share of it to be done by others. Men and women of humble prospects in life, while building the connubial nest which is to shelter them and their children, prove plainly enough their thralldom to the senses, when such an outlay of upholstery and joiners' work is demanded, and so little is required that appeals to Reason, Imagination, and Faith. Yet