

THEORIES OF LIFE.

AN ADDRESS ON THE "IDEAL AND THE ACTUAL," DELIVERED BEFORE THE LITERARY SOCIETIES OF WASHINGTON AND JEFFERSON COLLEGE, BY COLONEL A. K. McCURE.

Last evening Colonel A. K. McCure, of this city, delivered an address on "Life: the Ideal and the Actual," before the Literary Societies of Washington and Jefferson College, at Washington, Pa. Colonel McCure is one of the ablest writers and speakers in the State, and the address delivered by him last evening is in his happiest vein. He said:

Gentlemen of the Literary Societies:—I have heard it said, that of all hearers college students are the most critical; and I believe it is true that of all classes they are the most pitilessly criticized. I have no *alma mater* to worship, and I do not come to tell you how much wiser and better is mature manhood than youth. Let us rather be mutually generous, for the greatest miracle to man is man.

It is but too common to make college commencements seasons of humiliation to students. Speakers often come to repress your inspirations, to cloud or dissipate your dreams, and to picture to you a life that has no actual type amongst mortals. They bring the uneasy dreams of the closet to crush the buoyant, blissful dreams of boyhood, and to erect a standard of perfection that weak humanity has never approached. They mercilessly portray youthful follies, as if there had never been boys or follies before; and declare that you must become different from all that you are or have been. Fine theories of life, sustained by apparently irresistible logic, demand of you new departures, new ideas, new purposes, and new actions, as you assume the new and responsible duties of the transformed existence that is set before you; and almost impassable gulfs are pictured as opposing your advancement to the full stature of useful manhood.

You have often heard of the perfect man. He has been the theme of many eloquent orations to students, but unfortunately he has never lived. You have been gravely told of the many obstacles to be overcome, to effect successfully the transition from student life to perfect man life. The obstacles have never been exaggerated; but it is equally true that your teachers, fanatical and reverend as they may seem, have never mastered them, and never will. All the forgotten and unforgotten millions of the past were allied to frailty from their birth; so of all the great, progressive present; and so it will be of all the countless throats yet to follow us. All have been, are, or will be, what those here to-day are—from your honored President to the feeblest freshmen—but children of a varied growth.

I come not to complain of your dream-life. When you go hence to begin the battle of the world, it must go with you. I know how you would blush to own the ideal achievements with which it brightens your lives, and how pedantic orators affect to despise it. But let me assure you that it is a part of every life—of childhood, of manhood, of ripened years, of withered age; and it is life's crowning mercy to them all. The unlettered heathen bows before its altar, and the most learned are its worshippers. It is the perpetual sunshine of youth. It is the softened bow of promise that ever appears as the wild dreams of youth have vanished; and when childhood kindly comes again to lead the tottering frame gently to the shore, it is an unfulfilling well-spring of happiness. When the ideal ceases to be worshipped, life ceases to be tolerable. We read each day the sad story of those from whom hope has fled. Their ideal life was ended—that is all. Their actual life, brought face to face with sin or disappointment—and no angel-dream of a better day—could not be borne; and they pass from amongst us.

I shall disturb your college dreams somewhat; but it is best that I should. It will be but a passing cloud, and you will welcome your dreams again. I would not have you cherish the ideal any less, but remember that the actual will at times confront you, and dissipate your fondest hopes. Such is the story of every life, and it must be yours. Most of you hope sooner or later to be enrolled in the *alumni* of the college. It is a sweet word to lip, for it marks an important epoch in each individual history. You will go forth into the world with every avenue to usefulness and distinction open to you. Life will seem long and bright before you. Its prizes will glitter in your dreams. Its ideal flowers will bloom along your ideal pathways. Fame will point to the multitude of names engraved indelibly upon her scroll, and beckon you onward. Illustrious deeds, which are household words, will challenge imitation. Future Executives, Senators, and Commoners must take the places of the present great representative men, and the world must have its line of heroes unbroken. This is the field the ideal brings before you. It is yours to explore. Go gather its laurels, and make new names immortal.

But, ere you start, pause with me for a moment. The weary traveller in the waste of the burning desert, parched by thirst, is often gladdened by beholding what seems to be a clear, blue lake of water in the distance. Its banks are studded with greenest verdure, in delightful contrast with the arid plain about him, and its surface broken by refreshing life and beauty. Wild flowers, decked in nature's most gorgeous hues, fringe its inviting shores. The scene breaks upon the despairing wanderer like some enchantment. Cool shades, fresh waters, and fragrant blossoms seem to be but a little in advance of him and within his reach. His dying courage revives. Hope springs up afresh and reanimates him. Strength takes the place of weakness; his step is quickened, and he presses onward to grasp the priceless boon. He knows that it may be the mirage of the desert—that it may be a cruel delusion mocking him in his misery—that it may ever recede from him as he advances, until finally it takes the wings of solitude and leaves him to despair and death. It may be but the reflected beauties of some

far-off, unattainable blessing; but hope reigns in the sweet delusion, and it is joyously welcomed. It may, by the superhuman energy it inspires, carry the dreamer safely across the weird and trackless valley, or it may but lengthen a little the little span of life.

The mirage of life is ever around us all. It paints the bright prospective that crowds before you. It is the happy creation of the ideal; the unfulfilling source of hopeful effort, and blissful dreams of bountiful rewards. There is no fountain of happiness it cannot make to flow to quicken you. There is no measure of success or distinction it cannot present as attainable. What you most wish it freely offers you, and presses you onward to grasp it. And you will go onward, ever hoping, ever striving, ever dreaming, until, in the calm evening of your dreams, hope will gently point to the better life beyond.

Think not that the ideal life is to be shunned as a delusion and a snare. Delusive it may be in its promises you cherish most; but it will nevertheless be the parent of your sweetest hours. It will lead you to your noblest and best endeavors. It will arm you for the incalculable disappointments and sorrows which beset the most successful lives; for no life escapes the common inheritance of grief. In each "some rain must fall;" and those most envied must point to pathways strewn with blasted hopes. Were I empowered to paint your lives before you as they will be, not one of all those present could face the picture and go hence to battle hopefully. Could I even tell you that you will win high attainments in usefulness and honor; that your lives will be free from marked affliction and adversity, and that the world will wonder at the fullness of your cups of human happiness, the faithful picture would be none the less unwelcome. Could I reach out into the curtained future, and present before you the wisely hidden panorama of your actual lives, dispel all your bright dreams never to be realized, banish the sunny ideal from your destiny, and send you to face the known, inexorable actual—even those of you to whom fate has been most indulgent would be stricken with despair. Infinite wisdom has given us the ideal to be ever present, as the angel of mercy; and the actual is shut out in the veiled hereafter, until the true life is reached in immortality.

Look back on those who have gone before you, and who, as the world judges, have achieved greatness; what strange lessons the inner history of human achievements teaches! We learn that "one Caesar lives, a thousand are forgot." Again, we see some cruelly mocking her chosen favorites, and painful wrecks marking the path of distinction. Look how wearily and laboriously names have been made memorable. Dream as you will, none are born to greatness. They may inherit crowns and titles and estates, but true greatness is not the birthright of any one. The ideal tells us pleasing stories of such destinies, but they are unknown in the stubborn actual. Those who have become great have found life well-nigh too short to achieve it.

We have all read and re-read "Gray's Elegy." Its sublimity has made us hang upon each line to gather the fullness of its beauty. It made one name immortal; but think what long months and years of ceaseless thought were devoted to the work. To fashion a single line was at times the task of restless nights and weary days. Decades were numbered between its inception and completion—seven years elapsed after its actual commencement before it was finished; and when finished, the ideal creation of the author was not realized. He wrote much more, but what of it is remembered? The bitter school of adversity gave to the world the Goldsmith we know. His "Deserted Village" is the dream-picture of a happiness he had never found. More than two score years of grim penury and consuming disappointment made those immortal verses. Milton's "Paradise Lost" was the patient work of half a century. We are told of him that never was a mind more richly furnished, but life was too brief for more than one masterpiece. He had sorrow enough—the poet's fruitful inspiration—and wrote much that was beautiful, but the world speaks of him only as the author of one poem. He dreamed of a "Paradise Regained"—nothing more.

But it may be answered that poetry is the child of bitter memories and cruel misfortunes. Lives may be brighter in the list of names memorable in oratory and statesmanship and heroism and literature and science. The ideal orator reads of Demosthenes—how his voice was tuneless, his speech unready, and his action ungraceful. He took the people to educate a clumsy tongue—he declaimed to the billows of the sea—practiced with actors and before mirrors—and climbed rugged hills to fit himself for a calling that nature seemed to have forbidden to him. Cicero was schooled from youth to oratory. Training in Rome and Greece in those days implied a measure of assiduity to which our students now are strangers. He was twenty-six before he began to speak in public, and thenceforth his labors never were relaxed. Brougham was the soul of eloquence. His career as an advocate was unrivalled in his day. You will call him heaven-gifted. Perhaps he was, but not one in a thousand could accept his labors for his fame. The orators of Greece were the great lesson of his life. When he defended Queen Caroline, he devoted months to special study, and wrote the peroration of his speech more than twenty times. Walpole was the veriest galley-slave. His ambition and jealousy denied him repose. Power was his god, and anxious, devouring effort made him great—not so great, perhaps, as successful—and yet who can call his life successful? Pulteney, one of the most effective of British orators, developed his rhetorical powers slowly; but unwavering efforts enabled him to climb to eminence. The elder Pitt was an educated orator. He devoted himself to the severest course of training. Demosthenes was his model, and he revelled in translations from the ancients.

He studied everything pertaining to oratory—indeed, his whole life was but one hard lesson to master eloquence. The younger Pitt walked closely in his father's footsteps. His college life was "one long disease" from ceaseless application. We are told that his efforts knew no limits but the weakness of his frame. Many years were given to the classics, mathematics, and the logic of Aristotle, to conquer the art of eloquence. He made himself one of the first orators of England—and a confirmed invalid. Mansfield studied everything that had been written on oratory. While at Oxford he translated all of Cicero's orations into English, and then retranslated them into Latin. Burke devoted every waking moment to mental labor. He studied to acquire the power of thinking at all times and in every place. He tried to solve the realization of his ideal life. The incessant struggle of thought made him weary at forty-five, and he resolved to be content with his achievements; but the misery of idleness soon made him decide to grow old in learning. Grattan was an eager listener under Chatham, and with him everything was forgotten in the one great purpose of mastering oratory. Fox owned to but one ruling ambition—that of making himself a powerful debater—and he rose by slow degrees until the world acknowledged himself successful. Severe method and labor were parts of Clay's existence. Throughout his long and eventful life, even to his latest days, his great speeches were prepared with scrupulous care. Although for a quarter of a century a recognized candidate for the Presidency, with exacting public duties, his speeches never were delivered without the most mature reflection and systematic preparation. Few ever knew how every hour of his life was given to labor. Webster was born greater than are most men, but he attained distinction slowly and laboriously. When a student, he was for a long time unequal to declamation before his class, even when he had his part well committed. At twenty-five, we read that he was giving assiduous devotion to his profession, though it afforded him but a frugal livelihood. At thirty-two, he entered Congress unknown to fame, but his life had been one of restless mental industry, and he left the House with a wide-spread reputation for statesmanship. Thenceforth his life continued one of constant labor, and so it was to the end. His reply to Hayne was not prepared, but its immortal sentences were the creation of a life of mighty thought. Calhoun's unremitting study gave him the honors of his class, but with his health so broken that he could not crown them with the oration; and his whole life was one of ceaseless intellectual toil. Each day he was as much the student as the statesman.

But why multiply names? If I were to weary you with the whole list of ancient and modern orators and statesmen, the same history must be given of all. Various as nature endowed them, they achieved greatness by patient, persevering effort, that ended only with their lives. Dream of greatness, but understand that it is a rugged, thorny path; but dream on, and deck the thorns with bright and fragrant roses, and journey to the end.

How brightly the ideal portrays the triumphs of statesmanship! How the student's heart quickens as he reads of the giants who have left enduring monuments of their greatness in their political achievements. They tower above their fellows on the pages of history as if they had been created unlike other men. But history is forgetful of their infirmities, and their great deeds and their virtues alone survive them. They all have dreamed, and vainly dreamed, as have the humblest of their followers. They hoped, attained, and suffered more, and there the distinction ends. I speak of Henry Clay with reverence. He was the idol of my boyhood, and his name is linked with the grateful memories of the season when we invest greatness with the perfection of human attributes. He was beloved, even idolized, by his partisans. It would seem as if he had been born to test the measure of affection that could be lavished upon a popular leader by a free people. Others have been esteemed; have aroused a nation's gratitude; have commanded the sober approval of the country, or have been borne upward upon sweeping tides; but who, fallen and powerless, was followed to the close of his eventful life with such sincere and profound affection? He was great in all the great qualities of man, and yet he was but a child of larger stature. You will read of his victories—of his life, that seemed to be but one continued ovation—of his matchless eloquence in behalf of human liberty in every clime, and of his heroic pacification of our sectional estrangements. He was honored with every official trust, save the one he most desired. His ideal achievement was to be chosen ruler of the people who loved him. It was the sweet dream of half his allotted days. It seemed ever just within his reach, and yet was ever lost. Twice in his riper life his principles triumphed in national contests; but others were made his leaders, and wore the wreaths his tact and statesmanship had woven for his party. Never was a life so full of hope; never was the ideal so rich in promise; and never were disappointments more filled with bitterness. When you have read of his brilliant career, turn to the sad sequel in Colton's compilation of his private correspondence, and the bright picture is blotted out in the painful realization of a great life with its great ideal destiny overthrown.

Another name is immortal in the nation's pride, and shared its affections. Webster was our profoundest statesman a score of years before his death. He crushed out a gigantic crime by a single appeal to the Senate. It will be enduring as Time in the annals of rhetorical victories. He, too, was Commoner, Senator, and Premier; but he was not what he ardently hoped to be. His ideal destiny was plainly written in his later

days, and his life went out in harrowing disappointment. He had defeated Hayne and the threatened dismemberment of the Union, and the whole world confessed the pre-eminence of his fame. He had answered Hulsemann in behalf of the rights of man, and thrones trembled; but he was not President. His dreams ended, and in a few fretful days he slept with his fathers. Calhoun was distinctively a representative man. He was sincere, profound, subtle, and was worshipped by his adherents. He had reached the chair next to the throne, and he had but one step more to realize his single ambition; but he faltered as the chasm widened; he dreamed of ruling over fragments of a dismembered country, and in grand and gloomy perseverance he labored until the shadows gathered into night. Winfield Scott was the chieftain of his age. The hero of two wars, he had reached the topmost round of military glory. The impetuous victor of Chippewa and Lundy's Lane perhaps dreamed only of twin stars, but the Commander-in-Chief and the conqueror of Mexico accepted a higher ideal destiny. The stars paled when they were won, before one bright dream that to him was colossal in its freight of mingled joy and sorrow. At last, after many days of sickening hope deferred, a subordinate swept over him like the simoon of the desert. If you would know how much a child a man may be, summon your generous forbearance and read Scott's autobiography, where he tells why he was not President. One great hope, one great infirmity, and one great grief, sum up the sequel of his great distinction.

"My life has been a failure," were the sad words I heard uttered by Thaddeus Stevens, when he was setting his house in order for the inexorable messenger. He was the Great Commoner of the nation's sorest trial, and had witnessed the triumph of his earnest and consistent efforts for the disenfranchisement of the oppressed. He was content when braving popular ignorance and prejudice against education and freedom; but when he became the acknowledged leader of the House, and saw the substantial success of his cherished principles, his ideal life was not fulfilled. To himself his life appeared as does the statue fashioned to rest upon some high pinnacle. It seems ungainly, ill-proportioned, and wanting in symmetry and harmony; but as it rises to the distance from which it was designed to be viewed, its awkward, shapeless lines disappear, and its grace and beauty win the admiring gaze of the multitude. He had his measure of infirmities, but there have been few so sincerely devoted to their convictions, and who would so willingly forego honors and applause for conscience sake. When posterity shall read of him, it will be as one of the grand central figures in the panorama of a nation's redemption, and his frailties will be unrecorded—the common tribute the historian pays to the fallibility of men whose names are immortal. I thought that he, of all our statesmen, had most nearly realized the hopes which inspired his noblest efforts; but he had learned the lesson that the ideal destiny of every life points to the unattainable. How much he dreamed, and how keenly he lamented that he only dreamed, there are few prepared to tell.

Look out over the countless throng that have dreamed, and are still dreaming, of the Presidency. The time was when only the wisest statesmen looked to the chair of Washington in their ideal achievements, but now, who that worships at the altar of ambition can plead exemption? Not sages and heroes alone now turn their anxious hopes towards the mighty sceptre of the first people of the world. Pretenders of every grade, who have climbed into position through slimy paths, swell their shame by indecent struggles to rule in dishonor. Their ideal is success, and I would not say how many bow before that feeble divinity. A few of them win in their mean struggles, only to find their stolen honors turn to burning ashes on their brows. The broad path to the highest trust of the republic is thickly strewn with skeletons of riven castles, and yet the throng that presses over them to the same sad destiny is countless as before. This one dream has unsettled the best and bravest men, and is the parent of strange misfortune. It has made strong men weak, and estranged mighty leaders from the very devotion they most sought; and it has made the Union the prey of the tempest to gratify mad ambition. It invented the spoliation of Mexico; it destroyed the Missouri compromise; it fashioned the Dred Scott decision; it enacted the fugitive slave law; it consigned the Whig party to a dishonored tomb; it made the Democratic party forget its cunning, and sacrifice its power; it made men in every section and of every shade of sentiment traitors to themselves, to truth, and to their country; it bombarded Sumter; it prolonged the bloody strife to destroy our nationality; and after the storm of battle ceased, it came with horrible discord to lacerate the ghastly scars of war.

Do you answer that there are those whose attainments fulfil their dreams? Turn to the names least linked with disappointment in visible aspirations, and learn how the sweet ideal vanishes before the gnawing tooth of the actual. Buchanan's dream was the Presidency. Long he hoped and patiently waited through various discomfitures, until at least the fruition came. The nation never loved him, but it freely gave him its trusts and its honors. He was able, experienced, personally blameless, and honest in his purposes. The world envied him the felicity of realizing, in its fullness, his dream of power; but his triumph only dated the culmination of his woes. He may or may not have ruled wisely, but his reign was one broad, angry sea of disappointment. He possessed the threshold of power amidst the hosannas of those who worship the rising sun, and was greeted with the sober confidence of honest men. He returned in a few brief years with his brow more rudely furrowed, with the life of earthly hope gone out, and his garlands withered before the fierce breath of his country's displeasure. Lincoln dreamed the same

dream. Unschooled in political management, he was made the choice of a party that confessed another as its leader. The inscrutable power that sets at naught the wisdom of men made the ideal seem to open its richest garnered wealth to bless him. You hear how merrily he wore the cares of state, and the lovers of the marvellous tell how the ribald jest mingled with Cabinet councils. Yet he was the purest, the sincerest, and the saddest of men. He reached the Executive chair only to learn that his dream of happiness pointed far beyond, through deep tribulation and the tempest and flame of battle. The strange unrest that ever springs from fruitful hope was made deeper and keener for him by the devouring care he could not escape. But in the midst of the anxious labors and sacrifices he had won, in the name of honor, he dreamed the one bright dream of a reunited people. "I would like to be the acknowledged President of the whole Union before I retire," was the quaint but earnest utterance he made when he was awkwardly seeking to shape political action so as to prolong his power, that he might complete his work. He had the profoundest faith in the cause of his country, but he feared his own overthrow, with nothing but the record of war's desolation to mark his rule, and he knew not how devotedly and justly he was loved and trusted by the people. And when his grand ideal seemed to reach fruition, peace came only to mock him with the fiendish legacies of civil strife. Still, far beyond, more dimly distant than before, it pictured its haven of contentment. He died just when his name could be recorded as most sublimely immortal; but his history is but the simple, repeated, and ever-repeating story, that the ideal, fruitful as it is of vital blessings, has no ripened harvest for mortals to gather. Pierce was President. He plucked the green laurels from the veteran Scott, and men judged that his ideal life was realized. Not so, however, for he came bereaved in his affections, to reign in sickening turmoil, and he saw discontent and strife spring up to mock him in the records he sought to write. Discarded in the name of Peace, he retired and lived unloved and unappreciated, and died without touching the nation's sorrow. Taylor was borne into the Presidency by the tidal wave that avenged Mexico. He dreamed, as do other men, that power is happiness; but, like the eagle caged in bars of polished gold, he fretted his life away. Fillmore found the dazzling cup of his ambition full, but it turned to bitterness as he drank the coveted draught. He surrendered power amidst public convulsions and personal discomfiture, and faded from the affections and well-nigh from the memories of the people. He spoke recently, and like sorrowing Rip Van Winkle, after the throes of revolution had whirled the world a generation past him, he discussed the problems of twenty years ago. The ever-faithful ideal still sweetens his isolation, and shields him from himself. Johnson's ideal destiny was the theme of his wireless speech. He reached the throne through the flood-tide of a nation's tears, and in his rule he rode upon the storm. He was nothing if not tempestuous. He sowed to the wind, and reaped bountifully of the whirlwind. In hopeless strife he fought out his power, and went home amidst public rejoicing. And so the chapter might be continued through all the struggles and triumph of men—through all the honors, crowns, and titles lost and won.

Look at the group of heroes that adorns the early histories of our late war. Not one of the faces there engraven on finest lines of steel for an admiring people appears in the later group that is to be found near to the chapter on Appomattox. How stars brightened only to fade in popular distrust or reproval! An obscure tradesman stubbornly carved his way from Donaldson, Shiloh, and Missionary Ridge—throughout meanness and mightiest malice—to the head of the army. Thenceforth, the nation trusted not in vain. He returned from his crimsoned battle-fields with victory and peace, and the saved republic, in mingled wisdom and gratitude, made its great warrior its great pacifier. Another untried officer, subordinated by the War Department as of unbalanced mind, dazzled the world with the daring and success of his matchless genius, and is now general-in-chief; and a name unknown until wreathed in un fading laurels by his gallant troopers in the valley, is second in command. These have been successful; it may be far beyond their early dreams; but think not that they can claim exemption from the rude tempests which ever break in fiercest fury upon the towering monarchs of the forest. Alexander conquered the world—his great ideal destiny was achieved—and he thrust the empty bauble away, with his own life, as his subordinate wrangled for his crown. Napoleon dreamed of empire and happiness. He humbled every flag that confronted him, to die at last on an inhospitable isle of the sea, without sceptre, home, or country. "Everything that I love, everything that belongs to me, is stricken," were the sad words with which he summed up his destiny. Demosthenes became the great orator of Greece; but the bright ideal of his early manhood was dissipated, as the people that once honored him drove him into a strange land. In the Temple of Neptune he mixed the fatal poison that promised him rest. Cicero was hailed by Cato as the Father of his Country, and public thanksgivings in his name were voted to the gods. Soon after he was banished, an alien and a wanderer, until he bowed his head to the sword of Antony. Pitt was Prime Minister at twenty-four; but Austerlitz came, and the gold was dimmed, and the bowl was broken. Disraeli's grand ideal was attained when he became Premier; but if you would learn how empty was the realization, read the marvellous aphorisms of "Lothair." "One's life changes in a moment," is the trite history of human hopes he gives in one chapter; and he tells what success is, when he says that "the feeling of satiety, almost inseparable from large possessions, is a sorer cause of misery than ungratified desires."

How Walter Scott dreamed, and how the honors and riches of the world clustered around him, but at last he wrote: "The best is, the long halt will arrive at length, and close all." Campbell, in the dream of youth, gave us "The Pleasures of Youth," and how happily his exquisite lines accord with the ideal life; but he toiled through his allotted years to tell "how hopes are blighted," and that fame is a "bubble that must soon burst." How sweetly and sadly have Young and Burns and Moore and Mrs. Hemans sung; and with what bitterness of soul did the perverted genius of Byron write—

"And know, whatever thou hast been,
"That something better not to be."
"Cast your eyes across to uneasy Europe. Her unstable map seems about to be recast in deep lines of blood. Whose of all the countless dreams of ambition, which plunge subjects into war, are to be realized in hollow grandeur? The tottering Man of France forged his crown in perjury and usurpation. His dream seemed to be realized when he became Emperor; but the ideal pictured an enlarged and invincible France, and a perpetual Napoleonic dynasty, as his work. Fretful dreams of a strange succession have studded his throne with thorns, and he wickedly breaks the peace of the Old World. King William, impiously claiming to rule in harshest despotism, by divine right, accepts the challenge, and a million of men are hurrying to the harvest of death. All Europe is appalled, for none can measure the limits the sword shall set for its cruel arbitrament. Russia will dream of Constantinople; Italy of Rome; France of Belgium; Prussia of a strengthened Confederation; Hungary and Poland of deliverance; England of enlarged power in the council of nations; Austria of restored prestige and position; and Spain of rest and peace. And when the shock shall be over, and empire shall be lost and gained, victor and vanquished will realize how vainly they have struggled for the impossible.

The ideal is unbounded in its kind ministrations. The child looks upon the beautiful rainbow as an actual arch of tinted substance, resting upon the hills close by. "When the dream is gone, and the vanishing lens of the little dreamer may be gathered up to fashion the next sweet delusion that fringes the tempest. Through every condition of human life; through all the strange mutations of every destiny; from the most opulent to the most humble, and the most sacred to the most profane, the ideal is an attendant angel of mercy. It ever aims to bring our poor lives into harmony with some better being, and when our grovelling ambition, or unworthy purposes, ripen into misfortune, it whispers its bright promise, and we are wretched when most undone." It carries with us to the deep valley of humiliation we all must tread, paints the silver lining to the cloud, and tempers the rude storms which fling their horse melodies around us. It brought its rich store of happiness as the handmaid of the firm faith that enabled Abraham to sojourn "in the land of promises as in a strange country," and that was the sure stay and comfort of the Hebrew saints who "all died in faith, not having received the promise."

It pervades all the manifold theories of sacred things fashioned by man. Look at our earliest creeds—they are but the dreams of earnest Christian men, who mingle their frail judgments with the divine teachings. They tell us widely different stories of the creation, of the fall, of the atonement, of the resurrection, and of the unexplored eternity beyond. Each dreams blissfully of his sacred dogmas. We are taught how a fallen world must be saved by man's interpretation of election, or of free agency, or of baptism, or of an unknown Trinity. All teach from a common Bible, and all find the same salvation, but each ideal points to a different path, and in our feebleness we close the gates of God's truth against those who differ from us. There is no range of prophecy or revelation it has not invited the Christian to explore, and, when explored, we find that it is but the restless, throbbing, fruitless search for the unattainable. Volumes have been written, after years of patient research, to mark the past, present, and future fulfillment of prophecy, to master revelation, and to open the very seals of the fulness of time. They are but romances; the ideal struggles of the frail finite mind to comprehend the infinite. All that man can know of the Creator and His salvation is made so plain that the wayfarer cannot err therein. The ideal may turn back through all the recorded and the unrecorded past, and look out through all the boundless future, to paint the harmony that delights our brief prison life; but when man seeks to comprehend God and His prophecies, and His purposes, and His rewards and punishments, he rushes where angels do not tread. I have never read Faine's "Age of Reason," but I can understand how such a crime was possible. Had he entitled it the "Age of Human Reason," it would have been a faultless reflex of its name. He impudently assumed to reason upon equality with God; not understanding God, he could do no more than reject the infinite. As well bid the prattling infant measure the millions of stars above us, and define their courses and seasons, as ask the creature, born to fallibility even in earthly things, to define the purposes and attributes of Jehovah. Behold mankind as they are; scan intelligent creation from the degraded heathen, through all the stages of human progress to the most enlightened and reasoned; how such beings are to promote the glory of an infinite Creator, and you will be lost in unbelief. How it is, the ideal may picture in varied and ever-pleasing fancy, but we cannot understand; yet it must be so, for so it is written where every line shall be fulfilled. Our little ray of reason, tottering on its narrow throne, will ever dream of the things which eye hath not seen and man cannot know, but our sense of sin and helplessness is the repeated realization of each fleeting day, and the learned and unlearned alike recognize the infinite mercy that strive to them to redemption by simple faith and repentance. What is beyond, poor mortals can only learn when the Actual comes with its deathless destiny. Of it, the ideal whispers fond foretastes, but when we shall see it as it is, then, and not till then, shall it reach fruition. Here the actual crosses our paths only to disturb our dreams, and dissipate our hopes. At times it comes like the fitful cloud that shadows the sunlight for a season, and then passes away; and again, it sweeps like the hurricane with its terrible thunder, breaking over our heads, but when we shall resign this feeble frame that frail nature lent us for an hour, the "painless birth of life unending" will bring us to the Actual Being, whose time shall be eternal, whose knowledge shall be perfect, and whose happiness or woe shall ever press toward fulness, and yet through all the ceaseless years of God be never fall.