INTRODUCTION

The first question for all rational beings when choosing for themselves, or following under the guidance of others, a certain course of action is this:—What is the object of it? What do we definitely aim at and expect to obtain by it, in return for the sacrifices of time, inclination, and leisure which it involves? Unless we set before ourselves this definite aim of our exertions, and can measure by this fixed goal our rate of progress towards its attainment, our action ceases to be intelligent, and becomes a mere blind plodding, like that of animals driven by their masters they know not whither, or drifting on the tide of circumstance at the mercy of any chance current. What should we think of any one setting out on a journey without knowing where he was going, or why he was going in one direction rather than in another? I once met just such an one a great many years ago,
INTRODUCTION.

when continental travelling was not so common as it is now. He was an Englishman, with a wife and sister, who crossed from Dover in the same boat with us to Ostend, and whom we met again the same evening in the dining-room of the hotel. After observing our party for some time, and apparently discerning signs of knowingness about us, he astonished us by begging to be informed what place we were in. On being told it was Ostend, he then proceeded to ask where he should go to next? We naturally replied that we could not tell him unless we knew where he wanted to go. ‘Oh, I don’t know,’ he said; ‘we thought we should like to come abroad, so we got into the steamer; but we didn’t know where she was going, and we don’t know where to go now.’ This seems an incredibly foolish proceeding, and yet, if for travelling on the Continent you put travelling through life, I am afraid we shall find a very large number of people quite as vague as to the object of their journey and the way they should take to reach it, as the benighted Englishman at Ostend.

Now you are all travellers, setting out on the journey of life, and you all must travel it. So far you have no option. All of you also
are embarked on that portion of it which makes up school-life, and probably you had no option in that either. God sent you into the world, your parents have sent you to school; so far you have had no choice, and therefore no responsibility. But those of you whom I specially address, the elder ones who are of an age to look beyond this school-life to the wider life it is leading them to, are bound to ask and answer the questions: Where are we going? What is the use and object of all this school work? How shall we know that we have attained the purpose for which we were sent first into the world and then to school? The questions are not altogether so easy to answer as they may seem to you, and yet upon your answering them rightly will depend whether your life shall be a failure or a success; whether it shall be, as I have said before, a blind passive drifting as chance and circumstance may direct, or a steady course through well-ordered means to a deliberately chosen end.

My purpose is to help you, if I can, to find the right answer. To be adequate it must cover the whole of life, and be true for you all, however different your indivi-
dual circumstances. There are, I need not tell you, a great many subordinate objects which have to be considered, just as, to return to our simile of a journey, there are the preparations for it, the choice and arrangements as to routes, the intermediate stages, each in turn becoming the object for the time being, but at the same time each having a definite relation to the ultimate object of the whole journey. And supposing that a great many people are all starting for the same place, but from many widely separated quarters, and under widely different conditions as to means and strength, their subordinate objects will differ as widely. Their preparations, choice of route, of intermediate stages, will have reference to their individual positions and wants. The one thing common to all will be the ultimate goal they are tending to.

It must be clear enough to all of you that the immediate object of this school stage of your journey of life is preparation. The youngest among you is aware that she is sent to school to learn what will be necessary for her to know in after-life. Let me add what perhaps is not so universally understood,—that it is also to gain through the discipline of school those
habits of thought and conduct, which make up character, and will decide whether you live to any purpose or to none. So far there is unity of object even in this intermediate stage. But the word ‘purpose’ brings us back to the ultimate object we are seeking. You are preparing in school—for what?

I will at once give you my answer: You are all, from the youngest to the oldest, the poorest to the richest, the dullest to the most brilliant, preparing—do not start at the word—for service. The highest that ever trod this earth said to His followers, ‘I am among you as he that serveth;’ and at another time, ‘Let him that would be first among you be the servant of all.’ Service, then,—the making of our lives as valuable, each in its own place, as it is in us to do—that is the ultimate and governing object to which all others should be subordinate as means to an end.

Do not be repelled by this naked statement, or fancy that I am laying down a rule of ascetic self-denial and self-sacrifice, leaving inclination, natural ambition, and desire for happiness out of count. Nothing can be further from my meaning. God gave us our human nature, of which our affections, our desire for happiness, for success, are indestructible elements. To
seek their gratification is perfectly legitimate. But it is the A B C of morality that this gratification must not be sought at the expense of doing wrong, that it must, on the contrary, be often sacrificed for the sake of doing right. Self must take the second, not the first place, because we are parts of a whole, and the welfare of the whole must come before the welfare of the individual. No human being can stand alone as a solitary unit. Such isolation, under any circumstances, whether of greatness or insignificance, is impossible to us. We are born members of a family, of a society, of a nation, and, most universal relation of all, including and covering all the rest, we are born members of the human race, and into human brotherhood. If we are Christians, we acknowledge this brotherhood as the fundamental doctrine of Christ's teaching, and express it in our daily prayer to 'Our Father, which is in heaven.' And quite apart from any direct and conscious obedience to Christian influences, this doctrine of the equality of human rights is the foundation of modern political society.

This great whole, of which we, each of us, constitute a part, may be compared to some huge, complicated machine, worked by wheel
INTRODUCTION.

within wheel fitting into each other by cogs. If even the most minute of these cogs gets displaced or out of order, there follows a hitch in the working, which, however individually insignificant the cause, affects the movement of the whole. The effect of one useless cog may be infinitesimal, but the accumulated effects of these infinitesimal disturbances determine the results of the whole machinery. Each of us may be represented as one of these cogs in the great machine of human society, but the difference between the latter and the machinery to which I have compared it, a difference never to be lost sight of, is that the machine consists of dead matter, wood or iron, and its several parts work as they are fitted by the mechanician's hand, and get broken or out of gear by mechanical forces, under which they are absolutely passive, while human society is a living organism, its component parts are intelligent moral agents, brought indeed into certain relations with the other parts by forces over which they have no more control than the wood and iron over the hand of the mechanician, but within which they have power to behave well or ill, to do or leave undone their share in the common action. Never lose sight of this fact, nor deceive your-
selves as to this power over your own conduct, nor forget that it is this which gives you your superiority over the lower animals, which constitutes the worth and dignity of your human nature, and also its solemn responsibilities. Here comes in that supreme sentence, ‘I ought,’ and with it the question, What ought I, placed as I am in the human family, of which I am a member, to do in order to help and not hinder it?

Let us pause for a moment to consider that word ought. It is the most weighty word human lips can utter, for it expresses the fact and the obligation on which all human conduct rests:—the fact that there is a right and a wrong set before us, and the obligation that we are under to choose the right and reject the wrong. It is also one of the first words that children understand or rather feel the meaning of, as soon as they are old enough to be conscious of any control over their actions at all.

A very little child can be made to understand that some things are naughty and some are good, and that it ought to be good and ought not to be naughty. This is the awakening of conscience—the foundation of all law, of all dignity in human conduct, raising it above the impulses and blind instincts of animal life to
INTRODUCTION.

free choice and responsibility; it is the sense of duty. Whenever we use the word *ought* we acknowledge an imperative obligation which nothing can release us from. And let me impress on you the very essence of the thing, *i.e.* that the obligation is from within, not from without; that it is laid upon us by something within ourselves, not by any fear of punishment from without. What we do from fear of punishment, from the sense of irresistible compulsion, is expressed by the word *must*, which has no concern with the moral character of the act. The horse must obey the whip; so must we very often obey those whom we cannot resist. But when we say ‘we *ought* to do so and so,’ we acknowledge that we have no *right* to resist; that we are bound to obey because we feel disobedience to be,—not dangerous as entailing punishment by others,—but wrong, entailing the condemnation of the judge within us,—conscience:—‘Duty, stern daughter of the voice of God.’

To return, then, to our question, What *ought* we to do with our lives? How can we serve and not injure the society of which we are members? The answer to this question is not always easy to find in the complicated relations
INTRODUCTION.

of human life and interests, and in some cases would involve the previous question: What is the real good of society towards which I ought to help it? But for you it is simple enough, for yours is the age not of action but of preparation, and hence the governing purpose of your school life is to prepare you by its teaching and discipline for the service society will demand of you after school.

To sum up what I have said: There are three leading ideas I would have you start with:—1st. That you are members of a body in which you have a place and work to do; 2nd. That you are intelligent and moral agents, and as such, live under a supreme law of duty; 3rd. That your duty at school is to prepare yourselves for the duties of life, the bounden service you owe to your family, to society, to your country, to humanity.

My aim in the first part of the following pages is to take you with me through each portion of your school teaching and discipline, and to show you how it bears upon this preparation for your after-life. I want you to understand, and understanding, to become intelligent and active co-operators in the work of education, which your teachers will vainly
labour to perform for you unless you perform your part in it for yourselves. I want to show you how the habits of thought and action are formed which will determine your future conduct; the meaning and value of the studies you are called upon to pursue; the means by which your faculties are to be cultivated and strengthened, and your mastery over them attained as that of a workman over his tools. In the second part I shall try to help you towards the solution of the many questions which will arise when you take life into your own hands, and have to answer practically the supreme question:—What ought I to do with it?