THE SWEARING HABIT.

A CURIOUS volume has recently been published in London, entitled "A Cursory History of Swearing," by Julian Sharman. The author has lightly sketched the annals of swearing, whether legal or irreverent, from the dawn of civilization to the present day. He has traced back many English oaths that by natives are commonly thought to be original contributions to the English vocabulary of imprecation and malediction, to French, Roman, and even Greek sources. We are so defective in our scholarship, as far as it relates to the art and practice of profanity in all nations and all times, that we hardly dare to question some of the results of his investigations, because the "comparative method," however successful it may be in its applications to various forms of religion, has not yet succeeded in giving to blasphemy the precision and sureness of a science.

It would seem that the habit of using oaths adapts itself to almost all classes of character, from the lowest nearly to the highest. The profane use of sacred words slides naturally into the expression of mere animal rage, but it also sometimes bursts out in the utterance of righteous wrath at fraud, oppression, and wrong. The most repulsive phase of profanity, however, is that which is most common. A man of refinement cannot walk the streets of any city, or the lanes of any country village, without having his sense of decency shocked by senseless oaths and imprecations, whether coming from the lips of a hack-driver cursing his horses, or a farm laborer cursing his oxen. Any impediment, no matter how inevitable, is the occasion for bestowing upon it a torrent of the dirtiest and most sacrilegious terms that the language contains. In some cases this profanity among uneducated men is the result of a very limited command of words to express their feelings of impatience, anger, jealousy,

spite, and hatred; in others, mere levity of mental and moral constitution leads them to adopt the common and accredited forms of blasphemy, without any thought of their import; but in too many cases the words express the real passions of coarse, hard, dull, envious, and malignant natures, indifferent to religious or moral restraints, finding a certain delight in outraging ordinary notions of decorum, flattering themselves with the conceit that in ribaldry and blasphemy they have some compensation for the miseries brought upon them by poverty or vice, and indulging in outward curses as a verbal relief to their inward "cussedness" of disposition and character.

From the houses of all these classes issue a crowd of children that have breathed an atmosphere of blasphemy from their birth, who are proficient in the language of execration and malediction learned at the parental hearth or den, whose every third word is an oath, who are educating themselves in that form of "self-culture" which may eventually lead them to the penitentiary or the gallows, and who, in the energetic words of an old divine, "seem not so much born as damned into the world." It does not require any deep sense of religion in the man that threads his way through a group of these infantile tramps, these childish ruffians,— spawned on the sidewalk before their wretched habitations,— to feel a thrill of horror, as he hears the oaths that spontaneously leap forth in their little shrill voices. Well, they have been born and brought up in households in which the "wet damnation" of bad whisky in the stomach has found its appropriate expression in the hot damnation of execrations rushing to the lips. But then the "pity of it," the horror of it, when you think of the desecration of childhood. Everybody imbued with the least tincture of literature is aware of a certain sacredness that ideal minds, especially minds of a poetic cast, attribute to children born in happy circumstances! There is a feeling that the child, in its innocence, is nearer to its Maker than the grown-up man, brought into direct contact and conflict with the practical facts of life. If we disregard Wordsworth's sublime ode, "Intimations of Immortality, from Recollections of Early Childhood," we still must have some respect for the emotion that uplifts the imagination and affections of such an apparent worldling as Thomas Moore, in his exquisite representation of the child in "Paradise and the Peri." What a picture is that of the hardened ruffian, as he gazes on the innocent

boy playing among the roses of the vale of Baalbek! Then, as he hears it,

"— the vesper call to prayer,
As slow the orb of daylight sets,
Is rising sweetly on the air,
From Syria's thousand minarets.
The boy has started from the bed
Of flowers, where he had laid his head,
And down upon the fragrant sod,
Kneels with his forehead to the South,
Lisping the eternal name of God,
From Purity's own cherub mouth."

Now contrast this with the way "the eternal name of God" is bandied about by the reckless urchins and the unsexed girls that line the streets to every railroad station in every city in the United States. The merely respectable man shudders as he passes by these outcasts, and congratulates himself, perhaps, that he has hidden his offspring in some country nook, where such words are unheard. But he is mistaken. The disease of profanity is infectious. It spreads like the measles, the scarlet fever, and diphtheria; and ten miles of space cannot preserve his own little innocents from the contagion. The great mystery of life, if considered in the light of what is called God's Providence, is the solidarity, the essential union, of mankind, so that every wickedness and corruption in the low and degraded populations mount up into the higher and more educated ranks, just in proportion as the higher in rank, wealth, and cultivation neglect the lower sunk in poverty, ignorance, and vice. There is no apparent reason why their offspring should have a share in the contamination of the little outcasts they shrink from in the streets. The Sunday-school, the genial home, the academy, the college, the exclusive social position they enjoy, these will keep them from the dismal fate of the wretched "lowest classes" they pity but make only ineffectual attempts to raise. What is the result? It is seen almost daily in funerals, where pious fathers and mothers, who have worked and prayed to shield their children from the talk of the profane and the practice of the vicious, have vainly striven, in scrutinizing the features of their dead and dishonored sons, to call back in memory "the smile of cradled innocence on the lips of the coffined reprobate." The tragedy of life and death is there. You should have known that you cannot preserve your own protected children from contamina-

tion, unless you labor to protect the neglected children of improvidence, carelessness, and vice from what seems to be their inevitable doom. Self-protection, dissociated from mutual protection, is the imminent danger that our present civilization is called upon to meet.

So far the practice of swearing has been condemned on what the reader might call religious or sentimental objections. Still, even those that ignore or deny the existence of God, or have only a faint traditional sense of religious obligation, are impelled by their common sense and regard for common decency to stigmatize profanity as at least vulgar. The conventional gentleman, though fifty or eighty years ago he might consider an oath as an occasional or frequent adornment of his conversation in all societies, now reserves it for "gentlemen" alone, and is inclined to deem it slightly improper in the society of ladies. The improvement has been gradual, but it is still growing, and in ordinary society blasphemy is banished from the polite tattle and prattle of good company, on the ground that it indicates a coarse nature, or a very limited command of the resources of the English language to express sterility of mind and vacuity of heart.

But there is a coarse fiber in the physical and moral constitution of the English race, which was early indicated by its habit of profane swearing. Curses were accepted as the signs of manliness. The author whom we have taken as our guide makes a desperate attempt to defend his countrymen in this respect. He shows that a profane use of sacred words is common to all races and nations, barbaric as well as half civilized. This fact must be admitted; but, in regard to modern times, one must think that the English have excelled all other nations in the meaning and emphasis they have put into their words. The Latin races swear more constantly and more volubly than their Teutonic brethren, but their execrations are trivial in comparison with the deep-mouthed and fierce-hearted oaths of the Anglo-Saxon people. The imprecations of the Italian, especially, seem to be mere outbursts of physical irritation, without any solid purpose in them; but in the ordinary English soldier and sailor profanity expresses character. It is needless to go farther back than the invasion of France in the fifteenth century. The English were called by the French peasants, who did not understand their language, "the Goddams." The heroes of Agincourt were thus named, after their favorite oath. When, afterward, the last step to make

France an English province, or to make England a province of France, was thwarted by the genius and faith of Joan of Arc, it is curious that this wonderful peasant-girl was accustomed to name the English, as distinguished from the French, "the Goddams." This is the more to be noticed because she had an utter horror of profanity. When she took command of the six thousand soldiers that, under her lead, threw themselves into Orleans, she first required that the profane and dissolute French men-at-arms who marched under her sacred banner should entirely banish from their minds, as well as from their lips, their copious stores of ribaldry and blasphemy. La Hire, one of the bravest and coarsest of her captains, growlingly consented to talk like a decent human being. Yet she always spoke of the English by the name they had doubtless acquired by the profusion with which they lavished their national imprecation on their enemies. Her knowledge of the English language was probably confined to this single phrase. When she was preparing her assault on one of the strongest forts that the English had erected against Orleans, she was asked by a French soldier to partake of a breakfast of fish, before she set out on her hazardous expedition. "In the name of God," she exclaimed, "it shall not be eaten till supper, by which time we shall return by way of the bridge, and I will bring you back a Goddam to eat it with." And in her lonely dungeon, after she had been captured and imprisoned, she proudly said to the Earls of Warwick and Stafford, "You think when you have slain me you will conquer France; but that you will never do. No! although there were one hundred thousand more Goddams in this land than there are now."

English culture, as we have said, may have banished from polite society the favorite oath of the English race; but the rough, stout soldiers, sailors, and pioneers of the race have carried the name that Joan of Arc bestowed upon them in the fifteenth century, to every savage and civilized clime in which they have appeared. It is four hundred years since their distinguishing imprecation was heard by Joan on the walls of Orleans, yet it is uttered now with equal emphasis on our own Western plains, by those pioneers that use, or rather misuse, the English tongue. After New Mexico was organized as a Territory of the United States, a gentleman of our acquaintance was sent there to occupy an official position. When he arrived at the point from which

the wagon-train of oxen and mules was to set forth for the place of his future residence, he noticed that recent rains had made the miserable roads seemingly impassable. He asked a wretched-looking Indian savage, lounging about the station, if he thought the train would get through. "The ye-hoes may," he answered, "but I don't believe the Goddams will." These terms he considered the English names of the animals he pointed out; for he had never heard their drivers mention them as oxen and mules, but he so understood their exclamations and execrations as to discriminate between the designation given to the patient and forbearing ox, and that plentifully bestowed upon the obstinate and resisting mule. In fact, he had only taken his first lesson in the English language, as taught by our boasted pioneers of civilization.

Mr. Sharman (if that be his real name) attempts to trace the oath to a French source. He declares that at the time of Joan of Arc, "dame Dieu!" was common on the lips of Frenchmen, that the word *Dieu* could not be pronounced by the rough Englishmen, and "that they were accordingly forced to anglicize it to fit it to the remainder of the oath;" but this derivation fails, because it is easy to prove that the English never were driven to borrow such sulphurous expletives from any nation they invaded. Their "morning drum-beat" does not more certainly circle the earth daily with their martial airs than with their martial blasphemies. The French wits and satirists have never wearied of fastening anew on the Englishman the name by which he was called four centuries ago. Voltaire, in his mock-heroic poem of *La Pucelle*, makes Talbot die, after a hard struggle, with an intense utterance of the favorite English malediction foaming from his lips. Beaumarchais, in the *Mariage de Figaro*, laughingly extols the beauty and compactness of the English language; you only need, he says, one expression (quoting that we have so often mentioned), and it will go a great ways. There are other words, he adds, used occasionally by the English in conversation, but the substance and depth of the language is in that magical oath. In 1770, Lord Hailes gives it as his experience, that in Holland, when the children saw any English people they exclaimed, "There come the —— ——"; and that the Portuguese, when they see an English sailor, accost him with, "How do you do, Jack? dash you." Captain Hall, many years ago, told us that when a Sandwich Islander wished to propitiate a British

crew, he exhibited his knowledge of the language they spoke by exclaiming, "Very glad see you! Dash your eyes! me like English very much. Devilish hot, sir! —— ——." We have a faint remembrance of a French comedy, written about a century and a half ago, in which a French imitator of English manners has contrived to express his Anglican tendencies by swearing, "Dieu-moi-dam." In 1789 a farce was played in Paris, in which one Williams enters a cabaret, with the oath that betrayed his nationality. The person addressed repeats the curse, and instantly adds, "Monsieur est Anglais apparemment." Indeed, this vice of profanity is so common in the English race that historians of manners, all playwrights and novelists, have emphasized it. From the time of Henry VIII. to the time of George IV. it has raged with the virulence of an epidemic. As the English race and language seem bound to possess the greater part of the earth, it is a pity that British soldiers and sailors should have heretofore preceded its missionaries in the conquest of savage or what are called pagan nations. It is said that there are certain barbarians in whose limited dialects every word is associated with some obscene or profane idea, and that the missionary is utterly unable to convey to them a spiritual truth or dogma, because the Bible, translated into their language, becomes a support to their degeneration, rather than affords an impulse to their regeneration. It is probable that the civilized people that first meet with them for the purpose of conquest or trade, only add new words to their restricted resources of expression in native obscenity and profanity. It is to be regretted that the great colonizing enterprises of Britain, if we except the persecuted nonconformists that settled New England, carried English coarseness, and brutality, and profanity, to the same shores to which they introduced British civilization. How could the followers of Drake, Raleigh, and Cavendish regard blasphemy as a serious offense, when they must have known that their maiden queen, the hot-tempered, despotic Elizabeth, swore as lustily as they did? Even grave historians tell us of a bishop who, when he muttered some reluctance to obey, in one instance, her imperative command, was stunned by her passionate answer: "Do it, or, by ——, I will unfrock you!"

In noting the connection of British profanity with British colonization, the disastrous attempt of the Scotch to colonize the Isthmus of Darien must not be overlooked. The expedition

carried a goodly company of clergymen to convert the heathen natives, and Christianity was intended to consecrate commerce. The colony failed as miserably in its theological as in its commercial aim; and the historian tells us that "the colonists left behind them no mark that baptized men had set foot on Darien, except a few Anglo-Saxon curses, which, having been uttered more frequently and with greater energy than any other words in our language, had caught the ear and been retained in the memory of the native population of the Isthmus."

But to return through the reigns of James I. and Charles I., the habit of swearing continued in the higher as well as the lower classes. It was checked somewhat in the despotic domination of the Puritan Commonwealth, but broke out again, at the restoration of Charles II., with a fury that nothing could withstand. Macaulay tells us that, in the reaction from the austerity of the Commonwealth, the generation that succeeded delighted in doing and saying whatever would most shock their defeated enemies. As the Puritan "never opened his mouth except in scriptural phrase, the new breed of wits and fine gentlemen never opened their mouths without uttering ribaldry of which a porter would now be ashamed, and without calling on their Maker to curse them, sink them, confound them, blast them, and damn them."

"The Glorious Revolution of 1688," whatever it did for constitutional liberty, did not do much to make profanity unfashionable. Lawrence Hyde, Earl of Rochester, did not swear in his cups more lustily than Sir Robert Walpole, the astute Whig Premier, in his orgies at his country seat. Pelham, and his brother, the Duke of Newcastle, afterward the heads of the great Whig connection, were not famous for profanity, neither was Chatham; but the plays of the period, and the novels of Fielding and Smollett, prove that profanity was quite an ordinary exercise of the English lungs. To "swear like a lord" became, with the rustic as well as the city populace, as much an object of admiring wonder, as "to get as drunk as a lord." Even women of rank did not hesitate to imitate—of course, at a respectful distance, befitting their inferior sex—the more masculine profanity of the acknowledged lords of creation. It is difficult to say how long they availed themselves of their precious privilege. Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, who did not die—much to the regret of her relatives—until 1744, once called at the house of an

eminent judge on business. Learning from the footman that he was not at home, the old harridan departed, in one of her furious fits of irritation, without condescending to mention her august title. The servant, when questioned by the judge on his return to the house as to the name of his visitor, could only answer that she had not mentioned her name, but that "she swore like a lady of quality."

There is, unhappily, a class of men who, in different degrees of depravity, seem possessed by the devil. They experience a strange delight in exalting their own wills above all moral law. They are sufficient to themselves. They despise what they call the poor weaklings of superstition, who are ruled by such abject sentiments as wonder, reverence, and awe. They disbelieve in them because they have never felt them. They are under the delusion of a moral and mental color-blindness, and have no vision of spiritual facts that are plain to humbler mortals. It is difficult to assert that they have souls, either to be saved or to be exposed to the other alternative; but if beneath the thick scum of evil experience that has settled on their minds and characters, there remains a faint, unextinguished spark of immortal fire, their souls are of a kind that "rot half a grain a day," and promise to go on rotting until they reach the appointed term of their earthly lives. These creatures find a strange pleasure in showing their superiority to common folk, by disgusting all decent people whose ears unfortunately come within reach of their tongues, by their ribaldry, and shocking by their blasphemy all devout people that are placed in the same predicament. The world has been sufficiently sermonized on the sin of self-righteousness; but neither preacher nor satirist seems to have emphasized the opposite vice, namely, self-unrighteousness, though it is but too common. The self-righteous man is ever self-complacent, when he views the multitude of trembling sinners that have not, as he has, a through ticket to pass from the tomb to the Celestial Kingdom, signed by the proper authority; the self-unrighteous man, scorning all consideration of the possible life beyond the grave, laughs at the fears of those whose cry is, "What shall I do to be saved?" and by his conduct and conversation seems to be eager to mock the supplication of penitent hearts by defiantly substituting for it that other question, "What shall I do to be damned?"

It is curious how many men of eminent ability, or eminent frivolity, have asserted their self-unrighteousness in this fashion. The frivolous do it to astonish their fellow-coxcombs by a display of what they call courage, with probably little deeper feeling than that of the good boy, brought up to reverence holy things on the mechanical method adopted by his self-righteous parents, who accordingly hated in his heart all the uncomprehended words they had lodged, by a machine process, in his memory, and who sulkingly confided his secret skepticism to a companion of his own age and degree of theological culture, as they returned one Sunday from church, in the words that he "didn't care for God, nor Christ, nor any of 'em!" But this desecration of what is essentially sacred is connected, even in the most frivolous natures, with a certain perversity, which Edgar Poe thought, or said he thought, inherent in the constitution of human beings. It certainly seemed in him to be inherent; it doubtless in many cases comes, like the gout or any other transmitted physical disease, by inheritance; but, as to the mass of human beings, perversity is generally the perversion of qualities originally intended for good. When it appears in shallow minds and hearts, this perversity is expressed in the fundamental dogma of profligacy, that vice and profanity confer distinction. Consequently, a rivalry springs up among the professors of this school of licentiousness and blasphemy, and lies are told by these aspirants for an infamous reputation, not for the purpose of denying the crimes against society that they have actually committed, but for the purpose of circulating monstrous rumors of their success in blasting the reputations of virtuous wives whom they know only by name, and of unspotted maidens they may have chanced to meet in a drawing-room. So great a poet as Byron stooped to this ignoble ambition. The published "Memoirs" that relate to the social manners and ethics of both France and England during the last and the first quarter of the present century, are full of details respecting this detestable race of shallow-hearted, feather-brained, and thoroughly depraved coxcombs. The creatures still survive, often in the highest circles of fashionable society. To do them justice, it must be admitted that they are commonly physically brave. The English Guards, at the battle of Waterloo, maintained their reputation for valor better than the Imperial Guard that "dies but never surrenders"; and their gallantry

forced from Wellington the curt remark, "The puppies fight well." In the Crimean War the "dandy" officers exhibited the same English pluck, with, we trust, a higher regard for morality.

It may be said that those who have contracted the habit of using oaths to give force, emphasis, or audacity to their conversation, are roughly divisible into two classes, the reclaimable and the irreclaimable. The first class is composed of men that swear from the surface and not from the substance of their minds, who, provided they have a sufficiently strong motive, can cure themselves of the habit, as they can cure themselves of the habit of smoking or drinking, by means of reflection and volition. It is difficult, however, to rouse careless and heedless natures to a sense of the folly and indecorum, not to say the wickedness, of their flippant blasphemies. Charles Lamb, when once asked why he did not give up the practice of smoking, humorously replied, "Because I cannot find an equivalent vice." It is in some such light way that practitioners in swearing are apt to evade the remonstrances of friends whose sense of decency their easy and voluble stream of profanity disgusts or shocks. Still, these men are reclaimable, though after conquering the habit they may occasionally show that they once allowed themselves to be conquered by it. Thus, we knew a man of talent and energy who had cultivated the art of swearing from his youth upward, but who, in mature age, had married, had become a father, and had to some degree "experienced" religion. Still, in moments of high emotion, when he was off his guard, an oath would slip into the beginning of a sentence that ended in something like a prayer. Thus, on one occasion, when he was dilating to us on the theme of his happiness in his new life, he rapturously exclaimed, "By ——! my friend, when I look at that child of mine, and think of what he may become to me, I feel thankful to God that he has vouchsafed to me such a blessing!"

The second class of swearers we have called the irreclaimable, for the reason that profanity has become a part of their organism. About thirty years ago an Englishman, who had been lessee and manager of Drury Lane Theater, and in that capacity had had an altercation with Macready, which resulted in a prosecution against the actor for a personal assault, came to the United States for the purpose of lecturing on the stage. His memory was full of recollections of distinguished actors, and his power of mimicking their great "points" was remarkable. His imita-

tions of the elder Kean were specially notable, in respect both to voice and gesture. But his seemingly unconscious profanity astonished even those whose oaths were about one in ten or fifteen of the words they used in familiar conversation. He swore as instinctively as he breathed. At a dinner to which he had been invited, the present writer sat on the right side of him and a clergyman on the left. The latter was introduced to him as Doctor C. Mr. B. began to talk fluently of his experience with actors and of the drama, sprinkling his sprightly narratives with so many unnecessary expletives that his right-hand neighbor had to whisper to him that Doctor C. was not a doctor of medicine, but a doctor of divinity. The scene that ensued was supremely ludicrous. Mr. B. turned, with extreme earnestness and politeness, to the clergyman, professed his great regard for "the cloth," dashed his eyes, body, and soul to everlasting perdition, declared if he had known the profession of his auditor he would not have used such words as might be offensive to his sacerdotal ears, and in three minutes contrived to condense into his apology more blasphemies than he poured forth in the original offense. Everybody present must have been impressed with the fact that in him, as in many similar swearers, profanity was a secretion in the throat.

We have only space to devote a little consideration to what may be called executive swearing. Though this may be more or less effective as a means of menace and intimidation, as it comes from the mouths of resolute, aggressive, strong-minded, coarse-grained men, who are habitual swearers, it has still the greatest power when occasionally employed by the strict economists of the language of profanity. The rarity of an oath increases its force. General Lee felt the truth of this when Washington, at the battle of Monmouth, discharged upon him a series of maledictions for his misconduct, which owed their smiting force to the fact that he had been selected from all the subordinate generals of the Revolutionary army to call forth such unaccustomed words from the lips of the general-in-chief. "Beware," says the poet, "beware the anger of a patient man." Fortitude and self-command are not virtues of cold natures, but are really powers fused into intrepid character by an inward fire, the external expression of which is sternly repressed; but there are occasions in war — though General Grant seems never under any circumstances to have been provoked into profanity — when

folly, stupidity, disobedience to orders, or treachery, is so plain that the hidden heat in the heart of the commander rends, for a time, all obstructions to its seemingly profane utterance, and blazes out in words that strike the person at whom they are aimed with the effect of blows. In the lives of most eminent men, specially distinguished for their fortitude, we notice these infrequent escapes of moral wrath, though the terms in which they are clothed may be such as disgust us in the language of a pot-house belcher of oaths. Shakespeare, who has touched almost every phase of human character, has not overlooked these occasional outbursts of passion in men that are noted for coolness, self-possession, and self-command. Take this passage from the third act of "Othello":

> *Iago.*— Is my lord angry?
> *Emilia.*— He went hence but now,
> And certainly in strange unquietness.
> *Iago.*— Can he be angry? I have seen the cannon
> When it hath blown his ranks into the air;
> And, like the devil, from his very arm
> Puffed his own brother; and can he be angry?
> Something of moment, then; I will go meet him;
> There's matter in't indeed, if he be angry."

This parsimony in the use of profane expressions is specially noticeable in men of business, when the merchant or banker is a man of integrity and of high business capacity. There is, of course, a large number of traders, whose natures are irritable, petulant, and passionate, who seize every opportunity to exercise their proficiency in profanity; who swear jocosely when they have made a good bargain, and fiercely when they have made a bad one; who pester the ears of their clerks and shopmen from morning to night with their resounding execrations, and impartially curse their Maker whether they have failed or succeeded in cheating others. Such shops and counting-houses are kindergartens for the practical teaching of blasphemy. But able men of business rarely indulge in this license of the tongue. A number of years ago we knew intimately a Boston banker of exceptional capacity, who in all conditions of the money-market, especially in periods of financial panic, was ever imperturbably calm. It happened that, on one occasion, he had joined in a moderately successful speculation with an outside operator, and his partner for the time was to come at ten o'clock

in the forenoon to claim his share of the profits. At nine o'clock the banker had placed in his hands proofs that the other party had played false in the whole transaction. The would-be swindler entered the office of him whom he considered his dupe, in an easy, confident manner. The banker looked not so much at as through him, subjected him to a few stern, searching questions, and the scamp's confused and hesitating answers confirmed his guilt. Then came out the hoarded wrath of the banker, in terms that seemed to force their way into the very soul of the detected trickster. His fit reply would have been, in the words of an old English dramatist:

> "I have endured you with an ear of fire;
> Your tongue has struck hot irons on my face!"

but failing in these forcible expressions, which so well indicated the appearance of his ears and cheeks, he stumbled down the office stairs with the gait of a man consciously bound for the place to which he was wrathfully consigned. We do not remember having heard the banker swear either before or after this supreme occasion.

Some arbitrary rulers have a tendency to assume a certain grandiloquence in their oaths. William the Conqueror swore by "The Splendor of God"; Henry II., by "God's Eyes"; and Charles the Bold by "the hundred thousand devils of hell,"—in this phrase indicating how accurate a census he had taken of those inmates of pandemonium who most had possession of himself. Other rulers, gifted with a strong sense of religious duty, have denounced terrible punishments against the profane. Saint Louis of France ordered that the tongue of the utterer of oaths should be branded with a red-hot iron; and his gay courtiers were driven to ingenious contrivances of verbal arrangement, by which they might express the substance of swearing without using the words. At the period of the English Commonwealth, the soldier was compelled to abstain from profanity by fear of the penalties attached to its use. In 1649 a quartermaster was tried by a council of war for the offense, declared guilty, and sentenced, not only to have his sword broken over his head, and to be dismissed from the service, but to have his tongue bored with a red-hot iron. In the old drama of "The Witch of Edmonton," the author cautions, through the mouth of the devil him-

self, the passionate blasphemer against what may be the result of his callings on the devil:

> "Thou never art so distant
> From an evil spirit, but that thy oaths,
> Curses, and blasphemies pull him to thine elbow."

Indeed, in hearing some men swear, the hearer is almost converted to the old doctrine of demoniac possession. What most impresses us, is the utter senselessness, the pure insanity, of his curses and maledictions. For it is the Almighty that this "aspiring lump of animated dirt" blasphemes. The folly of it can only be fitly described in that energetic and vivid passage in which Dr. South draws the contrast between the power of the offender and the divine object of his puny wrath: "A man so behaving himself," he says, "is nothing else but weakness and nakedness setting itself in battle array against Omnipotence; a handful of dust and ashes sending a challenge to all the host of heaven. For what else are words and talk against thunderbolts; and the weak, empty noise of a querulous rage against him who can speak worlds, who could word heaven and earth out of nothing, and can when he pleases word them into nothing again?"

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