

**HAIR SPLITTING AS A FINE
ART: LETTERS TO MY SON
HERBERT. MORE LETTERS TO
MY SON HERBERT, PART II**

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Hair Splitting as a Fine Art: Letters to My Son Herbert. More Letters to my Son Herbert, Part II
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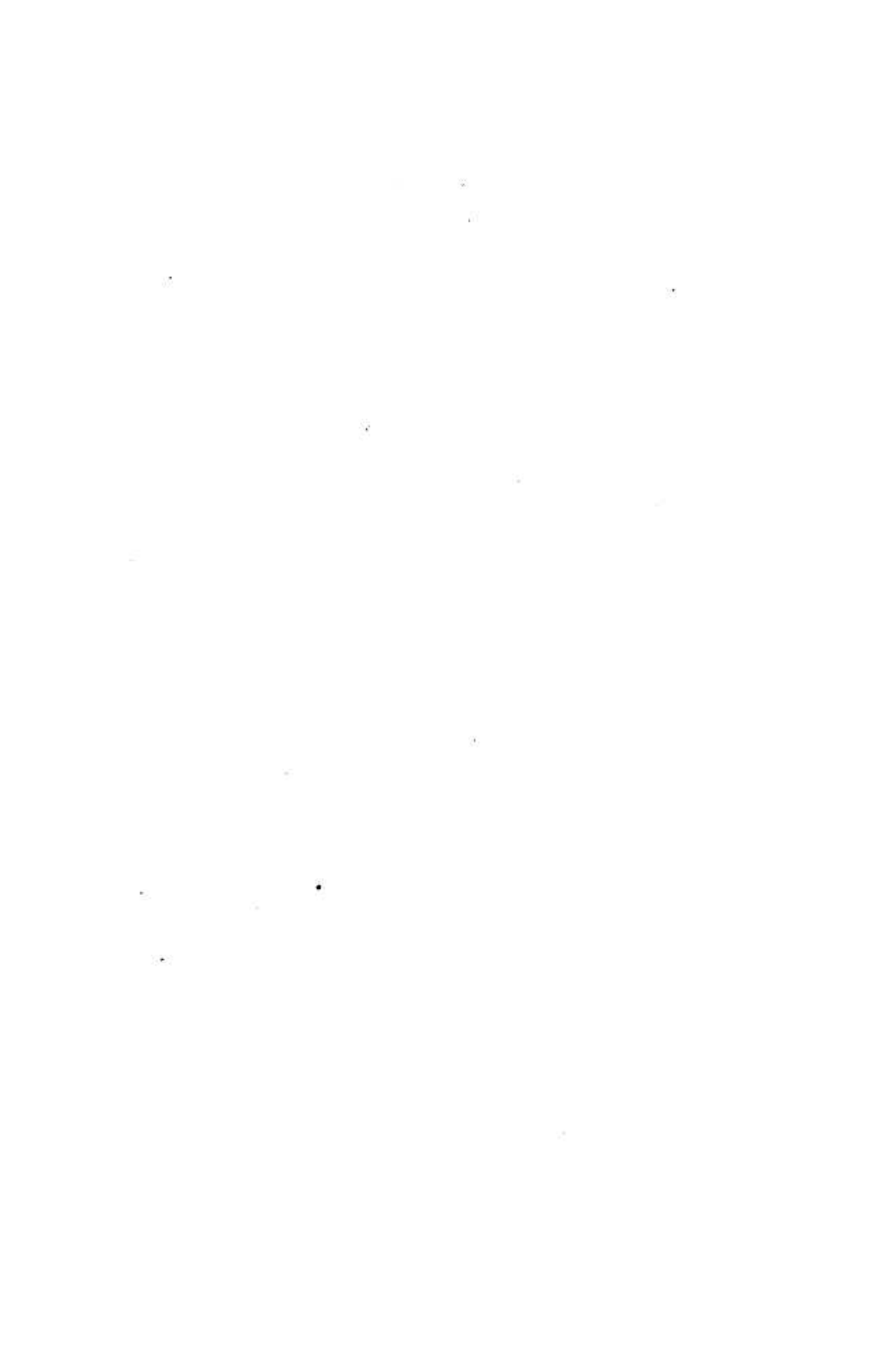
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LETTERS TO MY SON HERBERT



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FOURTH THOUSAND



London

TINSLEY BROTHERS, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND

1882

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LETTERS TO MY SON HERBERT.

MY DEAR HERBERT,

Though not yet, I trust, within measurable distance of the great Issue, I may yet indulge a father's affection in leaving to you—alas! I have little else to bequeath—some words of precious counsel. I always feel a touch of pathos stealing on me as I give advice, and somehow it seems insensibly to take the shape of valediction. It is not for me, my dear boy, as I said on a late occasion, 'at my time of life, to anticipate those future years of strength and service which you are good enough to desire on my behalf;' but I am transferring to you for the moment what was addressed to a larger and more important audience. Your ear, my dear Herbert, is the one I have chosen into which to drop these words; because I think, as was said in a pleasant metaphor by the public, you are 'a chip of the old block'—not that I am so old, or a block, though as to yourself the expression is fairly correct; but because I have noticed in you what my old friend and countryman, Sir Pertinax, calls 'that modest cadence of body and a conciliatory co-operation of the whole man,' which is invaluable in politics. Something, I fancy, can be made of you. With your brother, W. H. G., alas! I can do little or nothing. There are trees which will turn the edge of the finest American axe. I am free

to confess—a favourite phrase of mine—that I am hopeless about him. He lacks *finesse*; he is heavy in touch; he calls a spade a spade. *I* never do! A spade for *me* may be, or may become such shape of tool as the occasion calls for. And this leads me at once to the single point I would impress on you, to the secret of success. TRUTH—that is, what *I* call truth.

You will see that I do not exactly mean the hackneyed sense imputed by the vulgar. That there is an elasticity in the words 'the whole truth and nothing but the truth' is well enough; but the 'naked' truth, as it is called, is often naked falsehood; because what *is*, is so curiously intermixed with what is *not*, that without due distinction or limitation it is impossible to predicate absolutely of anything. In political conduct, the blurring out the naked truth in this sense is utterly destructive. My dear Herbert, had I the powers of the 'Hallelujah Cornet' of the Salvationists, I would never cease performing that one simple tune. Hold by a generous unstinted measure of the TRUTH, in the sense I have laid it down; and, as I have ever held that a grain of illustration is worth a bushel of theory, I purpose in these few pages to distil for you the very essence of a life's experience, not unmarked, too, by a slight modicum of success. There is nothing, indeed, within the space of human action that may not be illustrated in my own person and actions.

§ 1. *The Art of Saying Nothing in Many Words.*

In this I am a master, and a single perfect specimen, unmatched in the language, will do more to convey what I mean—perhaps what I DON'T mean, for I am nothing if not nebulous—than a volume.

Some time before I came into office a *communiqué* from me was sent to the papers, its purport being to show that I had been reported unfaithfully by certain French 'interviewers.' An ordinary political personage might convey his ideas somewhat after this fashion: 'The report in the *Figaro* and *Gaulois* is in the main accurate, though in some remarks on public men, etc., my meaning has been mistaken.' This would be far too general and gross. Something more obscure is required by the laws of my nature. I fancy it was a case of peculiar delicacy, where the meaning could only be conveyed subject to great qualifications and refinements akin to the division or sub-division of intellectual hairs. Here is my guarded protest, and I call on you to admire it:

We are requested by Mr. Gladstone to state, with reference to certain interviews had on the part of French journals with him in Paris, that, while the reports given of those interviews in the French language bear testimony to the remarkable tact as well as accuracy of the reporters, there are certain passages, particularly some relating to public men and to contingencies in English politics, where, by deviations such as from the reporters' point of view appear insignificant, an effect is produced not in full harmony with Mr. Gladstone's intention.

Now let us analyse this together. There were, first, 'certain,' *i.e.* hazy, interviews. What the journalistic