

**THOUGHTS IN THE CLOISTER  
AND THE CROWD: AND  
COMPANIONS OF MY  
SOLITUDE**

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Thoughts in the cloister and the crowd: and Companions of my solitude by Sir Arthur Helps & A. R. Waller

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**SIR ARTHUR HELPS & A. R. WALLER**

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*Sir Arthur Helps.*

THOUGHTS *in the* CLOISTER  
& *the* CROWD      ✕      ✕      *and*  
COMPANIONS *of my* SOLITUDE

*By*  
Sir Arthur Helps

*Edited by*  
A. R. Waller



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## Thoughts in the Cloister & the Crowd



**W**E all seek happiness so eagerly, that in the pursuit we often lose that joyous sense of existence, and those quiet daily pleasures, the value of which our pride alone prevents us from acknowledging.

It has been said with some meaning, that if men would but rest in silence, they might always hear the music of the spheres.

Those who never philosophised until they met with disappointments, have mostly become disappointed philosophers.

The unfortunate *Ladurlad* did not desire the sleep that for ever fled his weary eyelids with more earnestness than most people seek the deep slumber of a decided opinion.

The business of the head is to form a good heart, and not merely to rule an evil one, as is generally imagined.

*Themistocles* said that he could not touch a lute,



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but that he could make a small town a great state. Did any one think of suggesting to him, that to touch a lute skilfully, required the innocent labour of a life; but that one act of unscrupulous wickedness, one act which Aristides might admire but could not approve, would raise a small state to pre-eminence, and enable it to tyrannise with impunity? Oh, the world's especial heroes!—find me anything more contemptible. How often are they men who throw the mantle of vigorous intellect over the falseness, the heartlessness, the restlessness, which especially characterise a vulgar mind. *The calf to which the Israelites bowed down, was it not made of the trinkets of the common people?*

There is hardly a more common error than that of taking the man who has *one* talent, for a genius.

The world will find out that part of your character which concerns it: that which especially concerns yourself, it will leave for you to discover.

They tell us that “Pity is akin to Love”; if so, Pity must be a poor relation.

The step from the sublime to the ridiculous is not so short as the step from the confused to the sublime in the minds of most people, from want of a proper standard of comparison. If you hear a fine sentence from Æschines, you may remember one still more noble from Demosthenes: but when a person comes up to you and exclaims, “I have put my hand into the hamper; I have looked upon the sacred barley; I have eaten out of the drum; I have drunk and was

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well pleased ; I have said *kanx ompax*, and it is finished !”<sup>1</sup> you are confounded, and instantly begin to admire. We always believe the clouds to be much higher than they really are, until we see them resting on the shoulders of the mountains.

There is no occasion to regard with continual dislike, one who had formerly a mean opinion of your merits ; for you are never so sure of permanent esteem as from the man who once esteemed you lightly, and has corrected his mistake—if it be a mistake.

A friend is one who does not laugh when you are in a ridiculous position. Some may deny such a test, saying, that if a man have a keen sense of the ridiculous, he cannot help being amused, even though his friend be the subject of ridicule. No,—your friend is one who ought to sympathise with you, and not with the multitude.

You cannot expect that a friend should be like the atmosphere, which confers all manner of benefits upon you, and without which indeed it would be impossible to live, but at the same time is never in your way.

It appears to be the opinion of a celebrated geologist, that the former changes of the earth’s surface may in a great measure be referred to causes similar to those now in operation. The history of nations is analogous to that of the earth on which they acted their part. The earthquakes have been chronicled—the siege, the battle, the revolt, have been chronicled ; and when men have

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asked for causes, the historian has answered by an appeal to these convulsions of the world. The silent progress of arts, of civilisation, of religion, like the perpetual action of the sea, has often been neglected altogether.

We ask how the soil became so fertile, and the historian points to a landmark.

The proverbs of a country are often the proverbs of that country, and cannot be translated without losing some of their meaning ; but there is an eastern proverb which rightly belongs to the western world :

“ People resemble still more the time in which they live, than they resemble their fathers.”

It would often be as well to condemn a man unheard as to condemn him upon the reasons which he openly avows for any course of action.

The apparent foolishness of others is but too frequently our own ignorance, or what is much worse, it is the direct measure of our own tyranny.

The extreme sense of perfection in some men is the greatest obstacle to their success.

Emulation, sometimes but a more plausible name for envy, is like the Amreeta cup: it may be the greatest blessing—it often proves the greatest curse. When a youth is taught to feel emulation, not of putting further and further back the bounds of science, not of comprehending the mighty minds of olden time, not of benefiting the state by profound policy, but of *being* a great mathematician, a distinguished scholar, a