

**NOTES OF AN OUTLOOK ON
LIFE: BEING SELECTIONS FROM
PRIVATE MSS. OF ALEXANDER
GARDINER MERCER (1817-1882)**

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Notes of an Outlook on Life: Being Selections from Private Mss. Of Alexander Gardiner Mercer (1817-1882) by Manton Marble

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MANTON MARBLE

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ON LIFE

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BEING SELECTIONS FROM

PRIVATE MSS. OF

Alexander Gardiner Mercer, S.T.D.

(1817-1882)

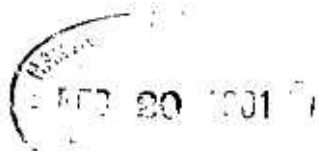


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PREFACE.

FROM the manuscripts of the late Dr. Alexander G. Mercer, of Newport, Rhode Island, at the request of his executrix, Mrs. Duncan C. Pell, to whom they were bequeathed, I have selected the following passages as characteristic of his outlook on life. Readers who perceive their quality and desire further knowledge of their author, will find some excerpts from a slight memoir of him, in the Appendix. But his own pages, his gift of the bust of Coleridge to Westminster Abbey, his bequest of the bulk of his estate, first to some few cherished friends whilst him surviving, then to Harvard and Yale to provide higher training for the pick of public school students too poor to go on, and to the great hospitals in Philadelphia and Boston and the London Hospital in Whitechapel to provide the aid of science for the suffering—these denote him truly.

M. M.

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NOTES OF AN OUTLOOK ON LIFE

IF I am made in His image, what endless curiosity to find Him out in myself, and to find myself out in finding Him! What interest to know such an ancestor!

To feel keenly and vividly in morals as in art—to appreciate quickly—to be emphatic in like or dislike, as in tasting nectar or gall—is a matter of sensibility, and in itself a gift of life. But to temper all this with a sense of our own frailty; or upon finding that our conclusions, if not mistaken, are excessive, to turn many of our moral judgments into clear intellectual perceptions of scale or gradation, and, where wrong is, to be quick to meet return; to be wide and look all round; in short, not to gainsay our own moral sentiments, but to learn throughout their heat to diffuse the cool of those thoughts and feelings which allay—this is wisdom. Moralists will set up a temperament for a moral model, and usually will select the temperament which errs least—for example, the cool and judicial—as the ideal, though that which loves much, and to which much is forgiven, is often the better.

Many a heart not yet noble perhaps, but kindred with all nobleness, will when meeting nobleness turn to it with loyalty deeper than design or duty.

When I hear judgments of character, when I read deliberate estimates of it, and when I listen in an atmosphere filled with the reputations of public men, I am sure that the objects which men least know are each other, and that we see men only as trees walking. A certain amount of obvious truth there is always and of course, as when we describe one man by dark complexion and regular features, and a woman as a blonde. And this is nearly all.

The slowest learning is unlearning.

To know the things in which he ought to be perfect, and those in which he ought to know enough to keep alive and widen his interest and sensibility,—so to increase the power on his speciality, yet withal to prevent the incrustation of habit and its blindness, is a man's best sort of foreknowledge.

We lose the power of pain as well as of pleasure, and as to many things it is a sad compensation. But when to the loss of our delight in goodness we add the loss of pain for duty disregarded, this is no compensation, but the saddest loss of all. Agonies, stings, remorse, depart not, ye angels: depart not hence from my spirit; smite on, ye healing powers, that I may feel I live.

Democracy itself, thought so great an advance, is but the choice of a less evil, and, were it not so, would be but a great wrong. What is it? It is to give political equality to those in all other respects unequal; and in the state of men to place the sceptre in the