

## George Lillie Craik (1798-1866)

*Sketches of the History of Literature and Learning in England, with specimens of the principal writers* (1844-45); Vol. v, 1845, p. 99 ff.

The same article on Mandeville appeared also in Craik's *Compendious History of English Literature* (1861), vol. 2.

### "Mandeville.

But the most remarkable philosophical work of this time, at least in a literary point of view, is Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*. Bernard de Mandeville was a native of Holland, in which country he was born about the year 1670; but, after having studied medicine and taken his doctor's degree, he came over to England about the end of that century, and he resided here till his death in 1733. His *Fable of the Bees* originally appeared in 1708, in the form of a poem of 400 lines in octosyllabic verse, entitled *The Grumbling Hive, or Naves turned Honest*, and it was not till eight years afterwards that he added the prose notes which make the bulk of the first volume of the work as we now have it. The second volume, or part, which consists of a series of six dialogues, was not published till 1729.

The leading idea of the book is indicated by its second title, *Private Vices Public Benefits*; — in other words, that what are called and what really are vices in themselves, and in the individual indulging in them, are nevertheless, in many respects, serviceable to the community. Mandeville holds in fact, to quote the words in which he sums up his theory at the close of his first volume [in *A Search into the Nature of Society*], " *that neither the friendly qualities and kind affections that are natural to man, nor the real virtues he is capable of acquiring by reason and self-denial, are the foundation of society; but that what we call evil in this world, moral as well as natural, is the grand principle that makes us sociable creatures, the solid basis, the life and support, of all trades and employments without exception; that there we must look for the true origin of all arts and sciences; and that the moment evil ceases the society must be spoiled, if not totally destroyed [dissolved].*"

The doctrine had a startling appearance thus nakedly announced; and the book occasioned a great commotion; but it is now generally admitted that, whatever may be the worth, or worthlessness, of the philosophical system propounded in it, the author's object was not an immoral one. Independently altogether of its general principles and conclusions, the work is full both of curious matter and vigorous writing. As it is one of the books more talked of than generally known, we will make room for a few extracts. Our first shall be a part of the exposition of the evil and what is maintained to be also the good of gin-drinking— an English popular vice which, we may just remark, was carried in that day to a much greater excess than at present, whatever certain modern indications, viewed by themselves, might lead us to think: —

*Nothing is more destructive, either in regard to the health or the vigilance and industry of the poor, than the infamous liquor, the name of which, derived from juniper berries in Dutch, is now by frequent use, and the laconic spirit of the nation, from a word of middling length shrunk into a monosyllable, intoxicating Gin, that charms the inactive, the desperate and crazy of either sex, and makes the starving not behold his rags and nakedness with stupid indolence, or banter both in senseless laughter and more insipid jests; it is a fiery lake that sets the brain in flame, bums up the entrails, and scorches every part within; and at the same time a Lethe of oblivion, in which the wretch immersed drowns his most pinching cares, and, with his reason, all anxious reflection on brats that cry for food, hard winters, frosts, and horrid empty home.*

*In hot and adust tempers, it makes men quarrelsome, renders 'em brutes and savages, sets 'em on to fight for nothing, and has often been the cause of murder. It has broke and destroyed the strongest constitutions, thrown 'em into consumptions, and been the fatal and immediate occasion of apoplexies, frenzies, and sudden*

death. But as these latter mischiefs happen but seldom, they might be overlooked and connived at ; but this cannot be said of the many diseases that are familiar to the liquor, and which are daily and hourly produced by it : such as loss of appetite, fevers, black and yellow jaundice, convulsions, stone and gravel, dropsies, and leucophlegmacies.

Among the doating admirers of this liquid poison, many of the meanest rank, from a sincere affection to the commodity itself, become dealers in it, and take delight to help others to what they love themselves. But, as these starvelings commonly drink more than their gains, they seldom by selling mend the wretchedness of condition they laboured under whilst they were only buyers. In the fag-end and outskirts of the town, and all places of the vilest resort, it is sold in some part or other of almost every house, frequently in cellars, and sometimes in the garret. The petty traders in this Stygian comfort are supplied by others in somewhat higher station, that keep professed brandy shops, and are as little to be envied as the former ; and among the middling people I know not a more miserable shift for a livelihood than their calling. Whoever would thrive in it must, in the first place, be of a watchful and suspicious as well as a bold and resolute temper, that he may not be imposed upon by cheats and sharpers, nor out-bullied by the oaths and imprecations of hackney-coachmen and foot-soldiers ; in the second, he ought to be a dabster at gross jokes and loud laughter, and have all the winning ways to allure customers, and draw out their money, and be well versed in the low jests and railleries the mob make use of to banter prudence and frugality. He must be affable and obsequious to the most despicable ; always ready and officious to help a porter down with his load, shake hands with a basket-woman, pull off his hat to an oyster-wench, and be familiar with a beggar ; with patience and good humour he must be able to endure the filthy actions and viler language of nasty drabs and the loudest rake-hells, and without a frown or the least aversion bear with all the stench and squalor, noise and impertinence, that the utmost indigence, laziness, and ebriety, can produce in the most shameless and abandoned vulgar.

The vast number of the shops I speak of throughout the city and suburbs are an astonishing evidence of the many seducers that in a lawful occupation are necessary to the introduction and increase of all the sloth, sottishness, want, and misery, which the abuse of strong waters is the immediate cause of, to lift above mediocrity perhaps half a score men that deal in the same commodity by wholesale ; whilst among the retailers, though qualified as I required, a much greater number are broke and ruined, for not abstaining from the Circean cup they hold out to others, and the more fortunate are their whole life-time obliged to take the uncommon pains, endure the hardships, and swallow all the ungrateful and shocking things I named for little or nothing beyond a bare sustenance and their daily bread.

The short-sighted vulgar, in the chain of causes, can seldom see further than one link ; but those who can enlarge their view, and will give themselves the leisure of gazing on the prospect of concatenated events, may, in a hundred places, see good spring up and pullulate from evil, as naturally as chickens do from eggs. The money that arises from the duties upon malt is a considerable part of the national revenue ; and, should no spirits be distilled from it, the public treasure would prodigiously suffer on that head. But, if we would set in a true light the many advantages, and large catalogue of solid blessings, that accrue from and are owing to the evil I

treat of, we are to consider the rents that are received, the ground that is tilled, the tools that are made, the cattle that are employed, and, above all, the multitude of poor that are maintained by the variety of labour required in husbandry, in malting, in carriage, and distillation, before we can have that produce of malt which we call Low Wines, and is but the beginning from which the various spirits are afterwards to be made.

Besides this, a sharp-sighted good-humoured man might pick up abundance of good from the rubbish which I have all flung away for evil. He would tell me, that whatever sloth and sottishness might be occasioned by the abuse of malt spirits, the

*moderate use of it was of inestimable benefit to the poor, who could purchase no cordials of higher prices ; that it was a universal comfort, not only in cold and weariness, but most of the afflictions that are peculiar to the necessitous, and had often to the most destitute supplied the places of meat, drink, clothes, and lodging. That the stupid indolence in the most wretched condition occasioned by those composing draughts which I complained of, was a blessing to thousands ; for that certainly those were the happiest who felt the least pain. As to diseases, he would say that, as it caused some, so it cured others, and that if the excess in those liquors had been sudden death to some few, the habit of drinking them daily prolonged the lives of many whom once it agreed with ; that for the loss sustained from the insignificant quarrels it created at home, we were overpaid in the advantage we received from it abroad, by upholding the courage of soldiers and animating the sailors to the combat ; and that in the two last wars no considerable victory had been obtained without. [in Remark G]*

This reasoning will probably not seem very forcible either to the moralists or the political economists of our day; and the passage is by no means to be taken as an example of the most ingenious and original strain of thinking to be found in the book. Its interest lies in the vividness with which it describes what is still unhappily a very remarkable feature of our social condition as it presented itself a century ago. The following remarks are more striking for their peculiarity and penetration : —

*Clothes were originally made for two ends ; to hide our nakedness, and to fence our bodies against the weather and other outward injuries. To these our boundless pride has added a third, which is ornament ; for what else but an excess of stupid vanity could have prevailed upon our reason to fancy that ornamental which must continually put us in mind of our wants and misery beyond all other animals, that are ready-clothed by nature herself? It is indeed to be admired how so sensible a creature as man, that pretends to so many fine qualities of his own, should condescend to value himself upon what is robbed from so innocent and defenceless an animal as a sheep, or what he is beholden for to the most insignificant thing upon earth, a dying worm ; yet, whilst he is proud of such trifling depredations, he has the folly to laugh at the Hottentots on the farthest promontory of Africa, who adorn themselves with the guts of their dead enemies, without considering that they are the ensigns of their valour those barbarians are fine with, the true spolia opima, and that, if their pride be more savage than ours, it is certainly less ridiculous, because they wear the spoils of the more noble animal.” [in Remark M]*

*“Whoever takes delight in viewing the various scenes of low life, may, on Easter, Whitsun, and other great holidays, meet with scores of people, especially women, of almost the lowest rank, that wear good and fashionable clothes : if, coming to talk with them, you treat them more courteously and with greater respect than what they are conscious they deserve, they’ll commonly be ashamed of owning what they are ; and often you may, if you are a little inquisitive, discover in them a most anxious care to conceal the business they follow, and the places they live in. The reason is plain : whilst they receive those civilities that are not usually paid them, and which they think only due to their betters, they have the satisfaction to imagine that «they appear what they would be, which to weak minds is a pleasure almost as substantial as they could reap from the very accomplishments of their wishes ; this golden dream they are unwilling to be disturbed in; and, being sure that the meanness of their condition, if it is known, must sink ‘em very low in your opinion, they hug themselves in their disguise, and take all imaginable precaution not to forfeit by a useless discovery the esteem which they flatter themselves that their good clothes have drawn from you.” [in Remark M]*

*“The poorest labourer’s wife in the parish, who scorns to wear a strong wholesome frieze, as she might, will half starve herself and her husband to purchase a second-*

*hand gown and petticoat, that cannot do her half the service ; because, forsooth, it is more genteel. The weaver, the shoemaker, the tailor, the barber, and every mean working fellow that can set up with little, has the impudence, with the first money he gets, to dress himself like a tradesman of substance. The ordinary retailer, in the clothing of his wife, takes pattern from his neighbour, that deals in the same commodity by wholesale, and the reason he gives for it is, that twelve years ago the other had not a bigger shop than himself. The druggist, mercer, draper, and other creditable shopkeepers can find no difference between themselves and merchants, and therefore dress and live like them. The merchant's lady, who cannot bear the assurance of those mechanics, flies for refuge to the other end of the town, and scorns to follow any fashion but what she takes from thence. This haughtiness alarms the court ; the women of quality are frightened to see merchants' wives and daughters dressed like themselves ; this impudence of the city, they cry, is intolerable ; mantua-makers are sent for, and the contrivance of fashions becomes all their study, that they may have always new modes ready to take up as soon as those saucy cits shall begin to imitate those in being. The same emulation is continued through the several degrees of quality to an incredible expense, till at last the prince's great favourites, and those of the first rank of all, having nothing else left to outstrip some of their inferiors, are forced to lay out vast estates in pompous equipages, magnificent furniture, sumptuous gardens, and princely palaces." [in Remark M]*

*"The choleric city captain seems impatient to come to action, and, expressing his warlike genius by the firmness of his steps, makes his pike, for want of exercise, tremble at the valour of his arm : his martial finery, as he marches along, inspires him with an unusual elevation of mind, by which, endeavouring to forget his shop as well as himself, he looks up at the balconies with the fierceness of a Saracen conqueror ; whilst the phlegmatic alderman, now become venerable both for his age and his authority, contents himself with being thought a considerable man ; and, knowing no easier way to express his vanity, looks big in his coach, where, being known by his paltry livery, he receives, in sullen state, the homage that is paid him by the meaner sort of people.*

*The beardless ensign counterfeits a gravity above his years, and with a ridiculous assurance, strives to imitate the stern countenance of his colonel, flattering himself all the while that by his daring mien you'll judge of his powers. The youthful fair, in a vast concern of being overlooked, by the continual changing of her posture betrays a violent desire of being observed, and, catching, as it were, at everybody's eyes, courts, with obliging looks, the admiration of her beholders. The conceited coxcomb, on the contrary, displaying an air of sufficiency, is wholly taken up with the contemplation of his own perfections, and in public places discovers such a disregard to others that the ignorant must imagine he thinks himself to be alone.*

*These and such like are all manifest, though different, tokens of pride, that are obvious to all the world ; but man's vanity is not always so soon found out. When we perceive an air of humanity, and men seem not to be employed in admiring themselves, nor altogether unmindful of others, we are apt to pronounce 'em void of pride, when perhaps they are only fatigued with gratifying their vanity, and become languid from a satiety of enjoyments. That outward show of peace within, and drowsy composure of careless negligence, with which a great man is often seen in his plain chariot to roll at ease, are not always so free from art as they may seem to be. Nothing is more ravishing to the proud than to be thought happy.*

*The well-bred gentleman places his greatest pride in the skill he has of covering it with dexterity, and some are so expert in concealing this frailty, that when they are the most guilty of it the vulgar think them the most exempt from it. Thus, the dissembling courtier, when he appears in state assumes an air of modesty and good humour ; and, whilst he is ready to burst with vanity, seems to be wholly ignorant of his greatness ; well knowing that those lovely qualities must heighten him in the esteem of others, and be an addition to that grandeur which the coronets about his coach and harnesses, with the rest of his equipage, cannot fail to proclaim*

without his assistance.

*And, as in these pride is overlooked because industriously concealed, so in others again it is denied that they have any when they show, or at least seem to show, it in the most public manner. The wealthy parson, being, as well as the rest of his profession, debarred from the gaiety of laymen, makes it his business to look out for an admirable black and the finest cloth that money can purchase, and distinguishes himself by the fulness of his noble and spotless garment ; his wigs are as fashionable as that form he is forced to comply with will admit of ; but, as he is only stints in their shape, so he takes care that for goodness of hair and colour few noblemen shall be able to match 'em ; his body is ever clean, as well as his clothes ; his sleek face is kept constantly shaved, and his handsome nails are diligently pared ; his smooth white hand and a brilliant of the first water, mutually becoming, honour each other with double graces ; what linen he discovers is transparently curious, and he scorns ever to be seen abroad with a worse beaver than what a rich banker would be proud of on his wedding day ; to all these niceties in dress he adds a majestic gait, and expresses a commanding loftiness in his carriage ; yet common civility, notwithstanding the evidence of so many concurring symptoms, won't allow us to suspect any of his actions to be the result of pride ; considering the dignity of his office, it is only decency in him what would be vanity in others ; and, in good manners to his calling, we ought to believe that the worthy gentleman, without any regard to his reverend person, put himself to all this trouble and expense merely out of a respect which is due to the divine order he belongs to, and a religious zeal to preserve his holy function from the contempt of scoffers. With all my heart: nothing of all this shall be called pride ; let me only be allowed to say that to our human capacities it looks very like it.*

*But, if at last I should grant that there are men who enjoy all the fineries of equipage and furniture, as well as clothes, and yet have no pride in them, it is certain that, if all should be such, that emulation I spoke of before must cease, and consequently trade, which has so great a dependence upon it, suffer in every branch. For to say that, if all men were truly virtuous, they might without any regard to themselves, consume as much out of zeal to serve their neighbours and promote the public good, as they do now out of self-love and emulation, is a miserable shift and an unreasonable supposition. As there have been good people in all ages, so, without doubt, we are not destitute of them in this ; but let us inquire of the periwig-makers and tailors in what gentlemen, even of the greatest wealth and highest quality, they ever could discover such public-spirited views ? Ask the lacemen, the mercers, and the linen-drapers, whether the richest, and if you will, the most virtuous, ladies, if they buy with ready money, or intend to pay in any reasonable time, will not drive from shop to shop, to try the market, make as many words, and stand as hard with them to save a groat or sixpence in a yard, as the most necessitous jilts in town. If it be urged that, if there are not, it is possible there might be such people, I answer that it is possible that cats, instead of killing rats and mice, should feed them, and go about the house to suckle and nurse their young ones ; or that a kite should call the hens to their meat, as the cock does, and sit brooding over their chickens instead of devouring 'em ; but if they should all do so, they would cease to be cats and kites : it is inconsistent with their natures ; and the species of creatures which now we mean when we name cats and kites would be extinct as soon as that could come to pass.” [in Remark M]*

Mandeville, it will be perceived, is no flatterer of human nature ; his book, indeed, is written throughout in a spirit not only satirical, but cynical. Every page, however, bears the stamp of independent thinking; and many of the remarks he throws out indicate that he had at least glimpses of views which were not generally perceived or suspected at that day. It would probably be found that the *Fable of the Bees* has been very serviceable in the way of suggestion to various subsequent writers who have not adopted the general principles of the work. The following paragraphs, for

example, are remarkable as an anticipation of a famous passage in the *Wealth of Nations* : —

*"If we trace the most flourishing nations in their origin, we shall find, that, in the remote beginnings of every society, the richest and most considerable men among them were a great while destitute of a great many comforts of life that are now enjoyed by the meanest and most humble wretches ; so that many things which were once looked upon as the inventions of luxury are now allowed even to those that are so miserably poor as to become the objects of public charity, nay counted so necessary that we think no human creature ought to want them."* [beginning in Remark P]

*"A man would be laughed at that should discover luxury in the plain dress of a poor creature that walks along in a thick parish gown, and a coarse shirt underneath it ; and yet what a number of people, how many different trades, and what a variety of skill and tools must be employed to have the most ordinary Yorkshire cloth ? What depth of thought and ingenuity, what toil and labour, and what length of time must it have cost, before man could learn from a seed to raise and prepare so useful a product as linen. —Remark T, vol. i. pp. 182-183 (edit, of 1724). [in Remark P]*

*"What a bustle is there to be made in several parts of the world before a fine scarlet or crimson cloth can be produced ; what multiplicity of trades and artificers must be employed 1 Not only such as are obvious, as wool-combers, spinners, the weaver, the cloth-worker, the scourer, the dyer, the setter, the drawer, and the packer ; but others that are more remote, and might seem foreign to it, — as the mill-wright, the pewterer, and the chemist, which yet are all necessary, as well as a great number of other handicrafts, to have the tools, utensils, and other implements belonging to the trades already named. But all these things are done at home, and may be performed without extraordinary fatigue or danger; the most frightful prospect is left behind, when we reflect on the toil and hazard that are to be undergone abroad, the vast seas we are to go over, the different climates we are to endure, and the several nations we must be obliged to for their assistance. Spain alone, it is true, might furnish us with wool to make the finest cloth; but what skill and pains, what experience and ingenuity, are required to dye it of those beautiful colours! How widely are the drugs and other ingredients dispersed through the universe that are to meet in one kettle ! Alum, indeed, we have of our own ; argot we might have from the Rhine, and vitriol from Hungary: all this is in Europe. But then for saltpetre in quantity we are forced to go as far as the East Indies. Cochenille, unknown to the ancients, is not much nearer to us, though in a quite different part of the earth ; we buy it, 'tis true, from the Spaniards : but, not being their product, they are forced to fetch it for us from the remotest corner of the new world in the West Indies. Whilst so many sailors are broiling in the sun and sweltered with heat in the East and West of us, another set of them are freezing in the North to fetch potashes from Russia. — Search into the Nature of Society (appended to the second edition), pp. 411-413.*

In another place, indeed (Remark Q, pp. 213-216), Mandeville almost enunciates one of the great leading principles of Smith's work : after showing how a nation might be undone by too much money, he concludes, " *Let the value of gold and silver either rise or fall, the enjoyment of all societies will ever depend upon the fruits of the earth and the labour of the people ; both which joined together are a more certain, a more inexhaustible, and a more real treasure than the gold of Brazil or the silver of Potosi.*"

It might be conjectured also from some of his other writings that Smith was a reader of Mandeville : the following sentence, for instance (Remark C, p. 55), may be said almost to contain the germ of the *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* :

— *"That we are often ashamed and blush for others ... is nothing else but that sometimes we make the case of others too nearly our own ; — so people shriek out when they see others in danger : — whilst we are reflecting with too much earnest*

*on the effect which such a blameable action, if it was ours, would produce in us, the spirits, and consequently the blood, are insensibly moved after the same manner as if the action was our own, and so the same symptoms must appear."*