

and we are standing unconcernedly over it, on a hollow and dangerous marsh of neutral ground, which, in the end, if God open not our eyes, must assuredly give way under our feet."

"To what, father," inquired my friend, who sat listening with the deepest and most respectful attention, "do you attribute the change?"

"Undoubtedly," replied the old man, "there have been many causes at work; and though not impossible, it would certainly be no easy task to trace them all to their several effects, and give to each its due place and importance. But there is a deadly evil among us, though you will hear of it from neither press nor pulpit, which I am disposed to rank first in the number, — the affectation of gentility. It has a threefold influence among us: it confounds the grand, eternal distinctions of right and wrong, by erecting into a standard of conduct and opinion that heterogeneous and artificial whole which constitutes the manners and morals of the upper classes; it severs those ties of affection and good-will which should bind the middle to the lowers orders, by disposing the one to regard whatever is below them with a too contemptuous indifference, and by provoking a bitter and indignant, though natural jealousy in the other, for being so regarded; and, finally, by leading those who most entertain it into habits of expense, — torturing their means, if I may so speak, on the rack of false opinion, disposing them to think, in their blindness, that to be genteel is a first consideration, and to be honest merely a secondary one, — it has the effect of so hardening their hearts that, like those Carthaginians of whom we have been lately reading in the volume Mr. Murdoch lent us, they offer up their very children, souls