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**Title:** "Misanthropy," by Clement E. Babb

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## Misanthropy.

Society is the law of the universe - Above us, the air is filled with the cloud-like swarms of its inhabitants - birds screech & feed upon the plains around us - and shoals, like islands, cut with flashing fin the briny deep beneath. And the voracious teaching trackings, which steal into the soul from the silent about us, speak the same great truth - Each rock has pillars on some kindred stone - trees in forests wave - rills meet & gather into rivers - rivers to their broad sea and land - & the stars in constellations gird the blue-arched sky. This is man's nature too,

"The best affections, like earth's living streams,

"Must flow in channels - or like light in beams -

"If once self-centered on their course they turn,

"Like pools they stagnate - or, like meteors, burn."

And such spirits there are & have been, who have cast from them in scorn the fetters of society - have disclaimed all interest or sympathy in their fellows - gaze, have hated their own & their maker's image.

Some, hideous of form, have fled into solitude from the gaze of vulgar curiosity; & the frowns of thoughtless insolence, or the more humbling glances of those, who would pity while they must abhor. - Cursing man for that deformity which Nature gave, they have made lone glens & secret caves their home; & there in silent gloom have cherished dark thoughts, until the maniac's wildness find their eyes; & there they have howled to the rude rocks & wild winds the madness of their spirit; or vented their hatred of man on the senseless objects around them.

Others stung by the smearing wounds of injury, loaded with the unjust execration of the deluded or the deluded, & not having the magnanimity to stand in conscious innocence erect, like the proud old ocean cliff, that seems the waves which lash its base with fury spite, instead of opposing have bowed to the power of wrong, & easily have fled their foes, & menfully hated all mankind -

Others again, the victims of crime, have cursed society, because it created the crime

of their headlong passions & desires, & have crossed against this fellowship. Because they were not like themselves, all vile - because across the gloom of fallen humanity they still played some faint streaks of brightness, & of heaven: & everything good or noble aroused at once the demons of this world.

These are the men, from the unnatural daring of whose phantasies does the world start back in horror & dismay - the Titans of iniquity, who heap an mountain upon mountain of transgression until the mass towers darkly to the skies; & from the blackened summit they can scoff at the poor world above them, & dare in reckless impiety the thunderbolt of heaven. They have cruelly torn & flung from them every tie of nature; & with such feelings of vindictive hate as shame the dark bosom of this "mis-called the morning star", they see beheld mankind - as the king of Hyems his prey.

And these are no masters of fable. Such men have lived & do live, to pollute the sunniest plains of the globe, & stain the bolomy breezes that blow over them. And their characters are but the natural result of headlong passion unrestrained.

But there is a power whose unrestrained action is more hateful still than this. Imagination heaven's brightest gift to man, is when properly controlled the source of his purest pleasures & sublimest aspirations. But when the sceptre of judgment is broken, he is shut out from his throne within; & this mighty magician of the mind is left untrammelled in all the magic of his power - he waves his wand of dominion over the soul, & all that is gay & beautiful & good sinks beneath its withering sweep. For they, on whose souls the Poetic flame spark of genius has fallen, have ever an innate tendency to excess. When fancy is bright & strong there is ever a struggle between her & reason; & of the impulsive & exciting faculty the more powerful than the restraining, it will gather strength from every contest, until it finally triumphs; & then the victim under its guidance is driven as by a tempest over the sea of life. He sees not everything through a distorted medium; and his spirit in its lightning course will not pause to consider of the mirror he consults, but rings the false image & hurries on - Hence a casual word - a look - alone, which others would not deign or heed, is to his fevered fancy the slender basis on which to build a mountain of conjecture; & in the dark chambers of thought he builds over it, & may rife as the woods, sleeping from deduction to deduction, swift as the maniac's incoherent argument, until from a mere nothing, to which his mind alone had given "a local habitation & a name", he arrives at startling conclusions, & hugs the monster to his heart as though they bore the impress of reality. And thus his mind becomes "suspicion's sanctuary"; & with an eye as keen as that

of jealousy jealousy, he scans the world around him, "trifles light as air" flash over his soul with all the clearness of conviction that that his heart is vile, & that he strains to hate his fellowmen, but that the brightness of his own spirit dazzles him; and ——— "with eternal flames

He is both kindled and blasted".

As the bird of Coraby is consumed in the blaze its own bright wings have made. And hence his heart becomes like the lightning scattered ruin of some gorgeous temple; or else like the burning crater of one of earth's internal fires, where is the hot furious contest of element with element — And when at times are heard low thunder-mutterings, which tell of the strife within; & at times the fiery ferment breaks forth into violent eruption.

The "self-torturing sophist" of Herwood was untaught & friendless & intolled, because the brightness of his own spirit shows over everything a glare, which dazzled & blinded. And he whose ~~heart of~~ Manfred's heart, if not his story, was his own, spoke of the star of his own destiny when he said,

"It was a world as fresh & fair

"As ever rooled round sun in air.

"Its course was free & regular;

"Space bore not a lovelier star."

But I may imagine wild & passion unrestrained arose, & struggled, & triumphed. for

—— "And that bright star became

"A wandering mass of shapeless flame —

"A pathless comet & a curse —

"The menace of the universe —

"Still rolling on with innate force,

"Without a sphere — without a course.

"A bright deformity on high.

"The monster of the upper sky." Such emphatically was

England's great poet of passion. The works of these men are before the world — the dark streams from that dark fountain a misanthrope's heart.

But there are others, who have learned to write for the kind they have despised, but

have smothered. within their own breasts the fire, which might have lighted up a continent; there it has  
burned & raged until it has consumed them; they have died, like the bloody stubborn  
wolf, in silent hate - no other & wasted by the wild action of that eternal essence, which  
if properly restrained might have made them the ornament of this country - the pride of  
this age - & the admiration of the world.

But why is it ever thus that glory dwells so near to gloom? that light is ever  
bordered by darkness? that the dearest pleasures & the brightest joys are so often but the  
short prelude to wretchedness & despair? that the victims, when

"Trilled by fancy's meters say  
"By passion driven," must still have the painful  
conscience that  
"The light, which led astray,  
"Was light from heaven" &c.

From the day on which tolled in Edwin's bowers the death-knell of man's purity -  
in which the golden chain of intercourse, that linked him to his maker, was ruined by  
sin the human soul has been a lute jarring & discordant; whose tones are at times  
as soft, & low, & thrilling sweet as the "aereoph" swept its strings, & again as loud & hoarse  
as the "aereoph" hand palled rudely over it. And no one but he, who found the  
instrument, can return its chords to their pristine harmony.

Oration

By

Clement Edwin Peabody.

July 1840.

Commencement Oration of Clement Edwin Babb, Class of 1840  
Transcribed by Sarah Skalak, June 2008  
Edited by Tristan Deveney, July 2008

## Misanthropy

Society is the law of the universe – Above us, the air is filled with the cloud-like swarms of its inhabitation – herds scower & feed upon the plains around us – and sharks, like islands, cut with flashing fin the briny deep beneath. And the voiceless ~~teaching~~ teachings, which steal into the soul from the silent about us, speak the same great truth. Each rock his pillowed on some kindred stone – thus in forest wave – rills rush together into rivers – rivers to their broad second home - & the stars in constellations gem the blue-arched sky. This is man's nature too,

“The hearts affections, like earths living streams,

“Must flow in channels – or like lights in [heaven?].

“ If once self-centered on this source they turn

“Like pools they stagnate – or like meteors, burn.”

And such spirits there are & have been, who have cast from there in [service?] the fetters of society – have disclaimed all interest or sympathy in their fellows yea, have hated their own & this [marked?] imaged.

Some, hideous of form, have fled into solitude from the gaze of vulgar curiosity and the jus of thoughtless insolence, or the more humbling glance of those who would pity while they must abhor. Cursing man for that deformity which nature gave, they have made lone glens & secret caves their home, and there in silent gloom have cherished dark thoughts, until the maniacs wildness find their eyes; & thus they have howled to the [rude?] rocks & wild winds the madness of their spirit; or vented their hatred of man on the senseless objects around them.

Others stung by the smarting wounds of injury, loaded with the unjust execration of the [one word illegible] worthless or the deluded, & not having the magnanimity to stand in conscious innocence [one word illegible], like [one word illegible] the proud old ocean cliff, that scorns the waves which lash its base with puny spite, instead of opposing have bowed to the torrent of wrong, & ~~basly~~ basely fled their foes, & meanly hated all mankind.

Others again, the [rotaries?] of crime, have cursed society, because it curbed the liscence

of their headlong passions & desires, & have warred against their fellowman because they were not like themselves all vile because across the gloom of fallen humanity there still played some faint straks of brightness & of heaven: if everything good or noble aroused at once the demon of this land.

These are the men, from the unnatural daring of whose phrenzied deeds the world starts back in horror and dismay – the Titans of iniquity, who heap mountain upon mountain of transgression until the mass towers darkly to the skies; & from its blackened summit they can scoff at the pure world above them, & dare in reckless impiety the thunderbolt of heaven. They have rudely torn & flung from them every [hi?] of nature, & with such feeling of vindictive hate as heave the dark bosom of him “miscalled the morning star,” they too behold mankind – as the hungry hyena his prey.

And these are no monsters of fable. Such men have lived & do live. To pollute the sunniest plains of the globe, & [taint?] the balmy breezes that blow over them and their characters are but the natural result of headlong passion unrestrained.

But there is a power whose unrestrained action is more baleful still than His. Imagination – heaven’s brightest gift to man is when properly controlled the power of his purest pleasure & sublimest aspirations. But when the sceptre of judgment is broken, & he is hurled from his throne within; & this mighty magician of the mind is left unfettered in all the magic of his power he waves his wand of dominion over the soul; & all that is gay & beautiful & good sinks beneath its withering sweep. For they, on whose souls the Promethian spark of genius has fallen, have ever an innate tendency to excess. When fancy is bright & strong there is ever a struggle between her & reason; & if the impulsive & exciting faculty be more powerful than the restraining, it will gather strength from every contest, until it finally triumphs; & then the victim under its guidance is driven as by a tempest over the sea of life. He now sees everything through a distorted medium; and his spirit in its lightening course will not pause to consider if the mirror be correct, but seizes the false image & hurries on. Hence a casual word – a lark – a tone, which others would not observe or heed, is to his fevered fancy the slender basis on which to build a mountain of conjecture; & in the dark chambers of thought he broods over it, & magnifies as he broods, leaping from deduction to deduction swift as the maniacs incoherent argument, until from a mere nothing, to which his mind alone had given “a local habitation & a name”, he arrives at startling conclusions & hugs the monsters to his heart as though they bow the impress of reality. And thus his mind becomes “suspicion’s sanctuary”, & with an eye as keen as that

of ~~jealousy~~ jealousy, he scans the world around him, & “trifles light as air” flash over his soul with all the clearness of conviction. Not that his heart is vile, & that he strains to hate his fellowmen but that the brightness of his own spirit dazzles him; and \_\_\_\_\_ “with eternal flame  
He is both kindled and blasted”.

As the bird of Araby is consumed in the blaze its own bring winds have made. And hence his heart becomes like the lightening scathed ruin of some gorgeous temple; or else like the burning crater of one of Earth’s internal fires, where is the hot furious contest of element with element – And whence at times are heard long thunder-mutterings, which fell of the strife within; & at times the fiery ferment brake forth into violent irruption.

The “self-torturing sophist” of Geneva was wretched & friendless - & insulted, because the brightness of his own spirit threw over everything a glare, which dazzled & misled, And he whose [~~three words illegible~~] Manfred’s heart, if not his story was his own, spoke of the stars of his own destiny when he said,

“It was a world as fresh & fair

“As ever revolved around sun in air

“Its course was free & regular;

“Space bosomed not a lovelier star.”

But imagination wild & passion unrestrained arise, & struggled, & triumphed.

“And that bright star became

“A wandering mass of shapeless flame

“A pathless comet & a curse -

“The menace of the universe -

“Still rolling on with innate force,

“A bright deformity on high.

“The monsters of the upper sky.” Such emphatically was England’s great poet of passion. The marks of these men are before the world – the dark straws from that dark fountain a misanthrope’s heart.

But there are others, who have seemed to write for the kind they have despised, but

have smothered within their own breasts the fire, which might have lighted up a continent, & there it has burned & raged until it has consumed them; & they have died, like the bloody stubborn wolf, in silent hate – withered & wasted by the wild action of that eternal essence, which of properly restrained might have made them the moment of this country – the pride of this age – & the admiration of the world.

But why is it ever thus that glory swells so near to gloom? that light is ever bordered by darkness? That the dearest pleasures & the brightest joys are so often but the short prelude to wretchedness & despair & that the victim, when

“Misled by Fancy’s meteor rap

“By passion driven,” must still have been painful consciousness that

“- the light, which led astray.

“was light from heaven.”

From the day on which tolled in Eden’s bowers the death knell of man’s purity – in which the golden chain of intercourse, that linked him to his maker, was riven by sin the human soul has been a lyre jarring & discordant; whose tones are at times as soft, & low, & thrilling sweet as tho’ a seraph swept its strings & again as loud & hoarse as though a demon’s hand passed rudely over it. And no one but he, who formed the instrument, can return its chords to their pristine harmony.