PRESENTIMENTS.

There is something strangely fascinating in the discussion of matters which admit of no explanation. Utilitarians would, perhaps, look on it as a waste of breath, or censure it even more as leading to rash conclusions. Many men, as we too often see, insist on making up their mind on everything, and will have a consistent theory for every subject under the sun. The result of this is that they waver backwards and forwards with every new fact that is produced on one side or the other. If they could be content to suspend their judgment till all the facts were known, to accept each new fact as having a certain relation to the whole aspect of the case, and not as settling the whole, they would have to forego the satisfaction of laying down the law, but when they established a law it would be more generally received. It cannot be pleasant to feel that you are always contradicting yourself, that your great enemy of to-day whom you crush with such vehement sarcasm is yourself of yesterday. And though the confession of ignorance or indecision seems humiliating at first, it comes with peculiar grace from those who really endeavor to learn and to form their judgment. A Hallam can say that he has not read some book, when other critics of not half his learning and not a tenth of his ability would never dream of such an avowal.

It is true that rash conclusions are more often formed in regard to subjects which lie partly out formed in regard to subjects which lie partly out of the world, and which we can only know in part, than in regard to those that may be decided. But is this any reason for not discussing them? Or is it a waste of breath to accumulate all we can know, in order to guess at or infer what lies out of the sphere of knowledge? If it be, I am atraid many other kinds of discussion are to be classed with it. Some slight link fails us in many a chain of causes, and till, we get this link our chain must needs be imperfect. But we make the best of it. The link may be faulty when it comes, or it may support our reafaulty when it comes, or it may support our reasoning. All we can do is to make the rest as strong as we can, and allow for the possibility

I have not the slightest wish to form a theory on the subject I have placed at the head of this paper. If I attempted it. I should probably sum up my conclusions in the line which Milton applies to Socrates:—

"To know this only, that he nothing knew." "To know this only, that he nothing knew."

What can we know for certain about presentiments? We have some evidence that they do exist, and we have proof that a great many people believe in them. But we do not know how far the evidence we have is trustworthy, and we do know that the people who believe in presentiments very seidom act on their belief. When something has been done or leit undone, you often hear it said, "Well, now, I had a presentiment that I ought to do or not to do this thing, and the resuit shows that I ought to have acted on that I ought to do or not to do this thing, and the result shows that I ought to have acted on my presentiment." But this is merely negative evidence, and, moreover, it is after the event. It would be of some value if it had been told before. It would be of more value still if the presentiment had been obeyed, and the result had been satisfactory. But if none of these three tests have been applied, or none of them have answered, the value of that presentiment is small indeed.

Thackeray says, "Surely some of the presentiments some people are always having must come true." They can hardly fail to come true pretty often if they are ex post facto. If all your pretty often if they are expost facto. If all your natural feelings are interpreted as the secret voice of nature—if on leaving a dear friend or relation you make up your mind that the grief of parting forebodes your never meeting again, your presentiments may sometimes come true, though they were really no presentiments at all. But it is this habit which makes all evidence on these subjects so unsafe and insufficient. All the evihabit which makes all evidence on these sub-jects so unsafe and insufficient. All the evi-dence we have on them has been suggested by the event, and there is often ground to fear that it has been inspired by the event. We hear of all the presentiments that bear fruit, but do we ever (I mean in the cases where people are always having them) hear of those that bear none? Yet if these are not taken into account, and the value of all presentiments diminished by them, the evidence is one-sided. On the by them, the evidence is one-sided. On the whole, therefore, it is best to leave the people who are always having presentiments out of the

question, and confine ourselves to the more authenticated instances which may to some extent bear out a theory.
We may safely lay it down as a rule that the essence of a true presentiment is that it shall be spontaneous. It must come at a time when you have no reason to look for it, when you are not under the influence of any fear or anxiety from known causes, when perhaps you have some difficulty in its interpretation. You must not be ill, and think you have a presentiment that you will not recover. You must not be away from home, and have a presentiment that some calamity has happened there. You must not know that a friend is in danger, and have a presentiment of his death. You must not have reason to suspect a man, and have a presenti-ment that he will cheat you. And why? Be-cause in all these instances there is a simple natural cause for fear or uneasiness. In all matters where there is a natural cause we give more weight to it than to another, which may be the real cause, but is beyond the bounds of probability. If a man who suffers from heart disease is found dead on a roadside or in his bed, we at once attribute his death to his complaint though it provides the suffers of the plaint, though it may afterwards appear that he was murdered. But if the man was perfectly healthy, and was known to have an implacable healthy, and was known to have an implacable enemy, we should be more apt to think of murder. And so it is with presentiments. If they can be accounted for in any natural way, we must hesitate to receive them. Even where a natural solution covers some of the facts, it does not always cover them all, and very often when we have argued aways the main points of the story, there is just so much left that we are forced to say, "Whether the presentiment be genuine or not, this is something that no science can explain." Call them by what name you will—presentiments. something that no science can explain." Call them by what name you will—presentiments, coincidences, or anything else—there are many cases which you can settle to a certain point, but no further. Many of these are admitted into the class of presentiments because they are too strange to be explained by natural laws, though they are not really presentiments. As an instance of these, I would take the story of the Jamaica planter who was ordered to England for his health, but was loth to leave the delicacies of the West Indies. At last he took a passage in a brig, but showed great uncasiness about sailing in her, telling a friend that ne was convinced he would be thrown overboard. After he had sailed, all the negroes on his was convinced he would be thrown overboard.

After he had sailed, all the negroes on his
estate came one day in a body to this
friend, and said, "The brig has been lost;
Mr.— is drowned." They had no reason
to give for their impression, but sure
enough the brig was not heard of, and everybody concluded that she had been lost. Some body concluded that she had been lost. Some time after one of her men was discovered, and he conlessed that Mr. — had been thrown overboard, at the very time when the negroes were seized with the impression that the brig was lost. Mr. — had been a fierce enemy of the Baptists in Jamaica, and the captain of the brig, though Mr. — did not know of it, was a Baptist. There was a violent religious controversy between them one day, the captain suddenly appealed to his men, and they threw Mr. — overboard. Now, at first sight this case seems complete, but there is a serious flaw in it. Mr. — had been a violent partisan, and knew that he had made deadly enemies. It was quite possible that some of his enemies might be on board the ship he satled in; if there were many Baptists in Jamaica it was more than probable; and if he had excited them against him to a certain point, it was very likely that they would and if he had excited them against him to a certain point, it was very likely that they would take vengeance. It he had known that the captain was a Baptist, he would no doubt have chosen another ship. But that an unhealthy man, who did not want to leave Jamaica, and had made seadly enemies, should look forward with fear to a lonely voyage is nothing unnatural, nor does the fact of his fear coming true entitle it to the lock of a presentiment.

rank of a presentiment.

This, then, is one of the instances which we must exclude from our list. It is not the less curious, from the circumstance of the impression which seized on the pegroes just at the time of their master's death. But there are sion which seized on the negroes just at the time of their master's death. But there are plenty of other cases to which no such objection can be made; many of them are fully authenticated, and cannot be explained away. Mrs. Growe's "Night Side of Nature," and a small book called "Communications with the Unseen World" (which I should judge, from internal evidence, to be written by the Rev. J. M. Neale), are brimful of such stories. It is true that In all of them we have to take the writer's word. In all of them the original narrator may have departed a little from the inflexible exactness which should mark such statements. The writer in taking down the account may have imparted to it some slight inaccuracies. And imparted to it some slight inaccuracies. And the only means of detecting these slips is crossexamination, which is he one thing denied us. But allowing for all this, the stories are almost marvellous. If we grant that one of them is true, we have enough for our purpose. One is sufficient to show that there is more in heaven and earth than is dreamt of in material philoso-phy, and to make us think many times before we bound the world by the evidence of our

It would be superfluous to quote any of the stories given by these two authors, except in rare cases where I have anything to allege against them. But it is unfortunate that the record of presentiments should be confined to books which profess to treat that class of subjects alone, and that general history should furnish so few corroborations. Poetry gives us more. Shake-peare's treatment of presentiments is one of the most curious points in the psychology of his plays. There is something on the sublect in Schiller's Waltenstein, and Wordsworth has devoted to it one of his minor poems. He talks of presentiments as heaven-born instincts, which shun the touch of vulgar sense:—

"The tear whose source I could not guess, The coop sign that seemed fatherless."

Some busy fees to good, he says, lurk near them, and taint the health which they infuse; but faith proceeds from them, and bodings unsanctioned by the will, which teach us to beware. He talks of the bosom weight which no philosophy can lift, and says their instruments

"A rainbow, a sunbeam
A subtie smell that Sprins unbinds,
Dead pause abrupt of midnight winds,
An echo or a dream."

We know full well what are the busy foes to good. One of them is the love of torturing every feeling into a presentiment. Another is the quack who has his nostrum of spiritual manifestations always at hand, and who wavers between occult science and open knavery. Another is the conviction that every one, who has had a presentiment, and found it true, is a sort of seer or prophet for all time to come. The man easily persuades himself that he is waited man easity persuades himself that he is waited on by mysterious agencies, and he forces himself into presentiments, as the man who has once dreamed forces himself to go on dreaming. The scene in Watenstein is in this respect peculiarly significant. "Wallenstein" was just the man to be impressed by dreams or omens. He was a firm believer in the stars, and "Seni" came to warn him of immediate danger. He had taken a perilous wen the stars, and "Seni" came to warn him of im-mediate danger. He had taken a perilous step, had seen his best friends fall away from him, had found that his new iriends did not trust him fully. Yet when the "Countess," his sister-in-law, tells him of her dreams and forebodings, he tries to explain them away. He says that her mind was occupied with the subject, and therefore she dreamt about its the subject, and therefore she dreamt about it; that the foreboding was not spontaneous, but prothe foreboding was not spontaneous, but produced by her own fears. She asks if he does not believe in such warning voices, and he replies, "Yes, there are such voices; there is no doubt of that. Yet I would bardly call those warning voices which only announce what is inevitable. As the appearance of the sun paints itself on the atmosphere before it rises, so the spirit of great events strides on before them, and to-morrow walks in to-day. Thave always and to-morrow walks in to-day. I have always had strange musings on what one reads about the death of the Fourth Henry. He felt the ghost of the dagger in his breast long before ghost of the dagger in his breast long before the murderer Ravaillac armed himself with it. Rest fied from him, the thought seized on him in his Louvre, drove him into the open air; the coronation feast of his consort sounded to him like a funeral; he heard with beding ear the footsteps that sought him through the streets of Paris," "Does the inner boding voice say nothing to you?" asks the Countess. "Nothing," he replies; "be calm." And then the "Countess" tells of another dream, in which she saw "Wallenstein" going before her through a long passage and never-ending halls, doors slamming all the time, till at length a cold hand touched her, and on looking to see whose it was, she found that it was "Wallenstein's," while over them both a red cover seemed to be laid. "That is the red carpet of my room," says "Wallenstein," interrupting her. A little later, and the doors are burst open by the murderers, and "Wallenstein's" body is carried across

the stage wrapped in a red carpet.

Here we have the true law about presenti ments laid down by a firm believer in them, "Wallenstein" knew that neitner he, nor any of his train, could be impart at at such a moment Anything of the nature of a warning must be suspected as springing from native apprehen-sion. Though he bimself was calm at the thought of qutting the Imperial service and joining the Swedes, his followers were full of the regrets and possibilities which a man who has resolved on a great step generally dismisses as idle, but which his friends feel strongly for him, and urge upon him. But the man himself may well feel nervous, and what is easier than to interpret his nervousness as a warning! Many of the presentiments we have in history are tainted by this blemish. In the history of Luther we hear of Meiancthon being ill, and having a "presentiment" that he would die; Luther came and prayed at his bedside, and he recovered. Evidently in this case the presenti-ment was nothing but the natural fear of the sick man; but if this had not yielded to the stronger faith inspired by Luther's prayer, the presentiment would probably have come true. Again, when Luther left his wife on his last journey, she had a presentiment that he would never return. He never did return. Yet how can we tell that her presentiment was not a woman's natural un-easiness at seeing her husband start on a journey, and was interpreted after his death into a presentiment?

Mozart's presentiment of his approaching death was of the same class as Melancthon's, only, from not being properly combated, it came true. He was convinced that some one had given him poison; he said he had the taste of death on his tongue, and that he smelt the grave. There can be little doubt that all this was occasioned by overwork, and an intensely nervous tem-perament. As soon as the composer's work was taken away from him he began to get oy overwork, and an intensely nervous temperament. As soon as the composer's work was taken away from him he began to get better, but he returned to work too soon, and a relapse was the consequence. Compare with this what seems the most genuine case of a presentiment, an event occurring to Czar Paul four or five days before his assassination. He was riding, and he turned suddenly to his grand Muster of the Horse, saying:—'I felt quite suffocated—I could not breathe—I felt as if I was going to die. Won't they strangle me?" The incident was related to the Russian general officer, in whose papers it is recorded, the very same evening by the Grand Master himself. It was no doubt natural that a Czar should expect to be strangled, but why should he have had this feeling of suffocation, and why should it have come to him so few days before he was actually strangled?

why should it have come to him so few days before he was actually strangled?
The definite nature of this instance places it far above others which were also realized. The story of Luther's wife is paralleled in Motley's "History of the Rise of the Dutch Republic," by the presentiment which occurred to the wite of William the Silent as soon as she saw his assassin. She asked anxiously shout the man, and added in an undertone that she had never seen so villanous a countenance. she had never seen so villanous a countenance. But William did not share her feeling. He made a careless reply, and conversed with his usual cheerfulness. An hour and a half afterwards William was dying in the arms of his wife, and Baithaxar Gerard was caught as he ran for the ramparts. The presentment had come true; but was it a presentment? William's wife was struck by the "agitated face" of the stranger.

His countenance was villanous, or at least bighly His countenance was villanous, or at least highly unpreposessing, for he was "low of stature, meagre, mean-vianged, muddy-complexioned."

And, moreover, within the last two years there had been ave attempts to assasinate William of Orange. All these facts combined give us the result of natural fear on the subject of assasination, and natural repugnance at the sight of the assasin. What we want to establish a presentiment is something preternatural, an in-voluntary and unaccountable feeling.

voluntary and unaccountable feeling.

A good instance of this was communicated to me by a near relation:—A young lawyer, who had chambers in the Temple, had a nodding acquantance with an old gentieman hving on the same staircase. The old man was a wealthy old bachelor, and had a place in the country, to which he went for a week every Easter. His servants had charge of the place while he was away—an old married couple who had lived with him for twen y-seven years, and were types of the fine old English domestic. One Easter Tuesday the young lawyer was aston shed to find the old gentleman on his Temple staircase, and the old gentleman on his Temple staircase, and made some remark about it. The old man asked him into his room, and said he had received a jearful shock. He had gone down as usual to his country place, had been received with intense cordishty, had found his dinner cooked to perfection, and everything as it had been from the beginning. When the cloth was removed his faithful butler put his bottle of port on the table, and made the customary inquiries about master's health, hoped master was not fatigued by the journey, had enjoyed his cutlet, and so on. The old gentleman was left alone, his hand was on the neck of the bottle of port, when it suddenly flashed across his mind:—"Here I am, a lonely old man; no one cares for me; there is no one near to help me if anything should happen to me. What if my old servant and his wife have been cheating and robbing me all this time? What if they want to get rid of me, and have poisoned this bottle of wine?" The idea took hold of him so strongly that he could not touch his port. When the old gentleman on his Temple staircase, and strongly that he could not touch his port. When the man came in again he said he did not leel

strongly that he could not touch his port. When the man came in again he said he did not teel well, would have a cup of tea; no, he would have a glass of water and go to bed. In the morning he rang his bell, and no one answered. He got up, found his way downstairs; the house was empty, his two faithful old servants had vanished. And when he came to look further he found that his cellar, which ought to have contained two or three thousand pounds' worth of wine, was empty, and the bottle they had brought him last might was poisoned.

I have told the story at length, because it has not appeared in print before, and because it seems to answer all our requirements. The only place in which you can find a flaw is one which, after all, does not affect the whole. It is this:—Did the butler, in putting the wine on the table, betray the slightest discomposure? If he did, there might be good cause for the suspicions of master being aroused. But if master suspected a servant of twenty-seven years' standing, is it not likely that he would have remarked it openly? A look, a tone, a sign of trepidation or uneasiness, would hardly have suggested such a train of reflections. There is also a remarkable accuracy about the train of reflections which leads one to a preternatural cause. Granting that suspicion was aroused, the solution arrived at was neither the easier nor the most likely. The singular thing is that the tion arrived at was neither the easiest nor the most likely. The singular thing is that the master should have yielded so readily to the impression, and that it should afterwards have proved account to the control of the sound and that it should afterwards have proved accurate in the most minute details. Another point in this story is remarable. It so

Another point in this story is remarable. It so seldom happens that presentiments of any kind are acted upon, that Wallenstein may well deny them the name of warnings. Yet when, as in this case, they have been acted upon, it is shown that they do not merely predict the inevitable. In the case of Wallenstein, indeed, we see no possibility of e-cape. But was there none in that of Henry IV. Sometimes a presentiment seems; to warn a man of an impending fate, in order to lead him to a better course of life; the death or calamity does not come. of life; the death or calamity does not come, but it leads him to life and fortune. Or when something strange or unlikely is about to happen, the man is enabled to avoid it by a warning which points to something probable. There are curious examples of both these rules in the life of William Wilberforce. To take the latter first, be relates that he was once reading on a camp-stool, close to the brink of a river latter first, be relates that he was once reading on a camp-stool, close to the brink of a river. Something whispered to him that he might be overcome by drowsiness while reading, might fall off the camp-stool, and tumble into the water. Obeying the warning, he moved the camp-stool away. He had scarcely sat on it five minutes longer when it broke suddenly, and he fell flat on the grass as if he had been shot. If this had happened by the river side he must have been drowned. But it anything had whispered to him that the camp-stool might break it is a question if he camp-stool might break, it is a question if he would have heeded the suggestion. Again, we find him writing in his diary for 1817:—"Let me put down that I have had of late a greater de-gree of religious feeling than usual. Is it an omen, as has once or twice shot across my imagination, a bint that my time for being called away draws nigh?" It was not; his life had sixteen years longer to run. But was it not a gain to a man of ardent religious feeling to have it in a greater degree than usual, even though it foreboded nothing? Some men shrink from an access of such feeling, be-cause they think it forebodes death. Others, again refuse to talk of their childhood, because it is "unlucky." But 11 such feelings forebode death, it is hopeless to escape death by stiling them. It a presentiment warns you of any thing, you do not escape if by lefusing to lister

to the presentiment; on the contrary you make it inevitable. This, I think, is the moral of the presenti-ments given us by Shakespeare. In all that he gives us, the warning is neglected and the fate comes. The simplest of them all is "Hamlet's," and it is the strongest proof of Shakespeare's

"Hamlet. Thou would'st not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter,

"Horatio. Nay, good my lord—
"Hamlet. it is but foofery; but it is a kind of gain giving as would perhaps trouble a woman.
'Horatio. It your mind dishke anything, obey it; I will forestall their repair nither, and say you are

"Hamlet. Not a whit, we defy augury: there is a special providence in the fall of a soarr w. If it be now 'tis not to come: if it be not to come it will be now; if it be not now yet it will come; the readiness At first we might think "Hamlet's" feeling was natural. He had detected the king's villany, and

he knew his own counterplot would not long be secret. But it is plain that he suspected no-thing in the challenge to lence with "Lacrtes," He never once examined the foils, or measured them, but picked up the first that came to hand, and took the length on trust. Just before, when "Horatio" warned him, he had said, "The interim is mine," and he clearly looked forward to having things his own way till the next news from England. "Desdemonas" presentiment does not bear the same tests. She had no reason to apprehend a violent death, but she had enough to apprehend from "Othello's' anger. He had struck her, and called her the vilest names. To her assurances of innocence he had answered by faunts when they were alone, and by coldness in public. Coming from a man she loved, these unkindnesses would have the utmost effect on a woman, and would throw her into a deep state of depression. "A sort of gain-giving" would naturally trouble her, and exclude every chance of real present

Undoubtedly the most curious cases in Shakespeare are those of "Romeo" and "Hastings." And what makes them so curious that any man desirous of overthrowing Shake "Heare's oclief in presentiments would naturally appeal to them. "Hastings" has just been dwelling on the smoothness and cheerfulness of "Gloster," and interring from "Gloster's" openness and sincerity that he is offended with no man there, when "Gloster" sends him to execution. "Romeo" has just said:—

"If I may trust the flattering truth of slee",
My dreams presage some lovin news at hand.
My bosom's lord rus lightly on his throne;
And all this day an unaccustomed spirit.
Lafts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts."

The next moment his servant returns with news of "Juliet's" death. From these two cases an opponent of presentiments would argue that Shakespeare was on his side. He evidently believed that an unusually jeyous mood was

the forerunner of disaster. The Scotch cousider that a man in very bigh spirits is on the brink of a calamity, as the servants in Gay Mannering said the gauser was fey. Wordsworth says that when our minds have mounted as far as they can in delight, it sometimes chanceth that without any apparent cause they sink equally low in dejection. Shakespeare supports both these theories. Now if we look a little closer into the matter, we shall find that the presentiments which seem to deceive are even more genuine in reality than those which are most simple and straightforward. "Hastings" presentiment was not the favorable view he took of "Gloster's" mood; though he persuaded bimself into thinking that it was. His real presentiments, as we learn afterwards, were unfavorable, but he would not listen to them. He had made up his mind that all minst go well, and in consequence, he restarted. He had made up his mind that all must go well, and, in consequence, he neglected every sign that bore against his view, and dwelt too strongly on whatever seemed to support it. Presentiments being involuntary and unaccountable moods of the mind, it is utterly impossible for what you observe in another man's bearing to inspire you with such a feeling. You may distrust him involuntarily, or not be able to account for your distrust; but at the best your feeling is instinctive. And this was not the feeling of Hastings, for he was able to explain his confidence in Gloster. Instead of yielding to impressions, whose source he could not divine, but which were too strong for him, he reasoned himself into other impressions, and found his mistake too late. "Romeo's" presentiment is of another character, but is even stronger. If he had known the truth he had the best reason to be cheerfol. By feigning death "Juliet" had freed herself from restraint, and had sent a message to him that he might bear her away. How was the presentiment to know that her message would miscarry, that "Romeo" would hear another account, and act without waiting? Had he but trusted to the presentiment instead of his own rach integrant He had made up his mind that all must go well, without waiting? Had he but trusted to the pre-sentiment, instead of his own rash judgment, his tragedy would not have had a tragic ending. As it was, the presentiment did all in its power. It warned him of something good, and he re-jused to believe it. But it was because he refused to believe the good that evil came on him, because he thought himself deceived that he insisted on deceiving himself. You cannot blame your guide for misleading you, if you will not follow his guidance.

Notably enough, none of the characters in Shakespeare do follow that guidance. They did not believe in present the statement of the characters.

did not believe in presentiments as their creator did. After all, the question of obedience to such warnings would seem to be decided by considerations quite apart from their genuineness. In the story I have told the only trial of the old gentleman's faith was a bottle of port, and he made the sacrifies of it. But when a man runs the risk of being ridiculous in the eyes of the world, of seeming a prey to idle fears, of breaking up the Senate till another time when ot breaking up the Senate till another time when Cæsar's wife shall meet with better dreams, he flinches from the ordeal. And thus, as preachers are always telling, the world is too much for us. We listen to the supernatural voice so long only as the natural voice is silent. To a great extent this is true; but I hope I have shown in this paper that we have some justification. We cannot safely be guided by presentiments till we have the means of knowing when they are genuine. And this we cannot know. But we can do something towards knowing it, and by means of that we may steer our course between the dangers of blind subservience and blind mistrust. We can examine our reasons for any feeling, and when we can find no cause, or shadow of a cause, for jey or sorrow, we may conclude that something unseen moves us. Whether we obey it or not is another question.—
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