

# **THE QUEST OF HAPPINESS**

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The quest of happiness by Philip Gilbert Hamerton

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**PHILIP GILBERT HAMERTON**

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QUEST OF HAPPINESS

BY

PHILIP GILBERT HAMERTON

AUTHOR OF "THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE," "THOUGHTS ABOUT ART,"  
"A PAINTER'S CAMP," "ETCHERS AND ETCHING,"  
"HUMAN INTERCOURSE," ETC.



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## INTRODUCTION

IN the "Journal Intime,"—that Thomas à Kempis of our century,—we are told that "the unfinished is nothing." Was not this the explanation of Amiel's ineffective life? Did he not glance too disdainfully over the lower world, forsooth because it was "unfinished"? Did he not sit, a too scornful guest, at the bountiful table of the actual, leaving its viands untouched and its wines untasted, dreaming always of a nectar and ambrosia which only the gods on Olympus may taste?

According to the dictum of the gentle Swiss pessimist we ought to reject Dürer's famous crayon sketches, Coleridge's weird "Christabel," and Buckle's magnificent fragment, "The History of Civilization." Nor would modern lovers of fiction be permitted to relax their minds over Stevenson's "Weir of Hermiston," or Pater's "Gaston de la Tour."

Indeed, Amiel carried this philosophy of "the unfinished" so far as to give up most of the ordinary sources of happiness in life; he felt their imperfections too intensely; and no one of them exactly corresponded to his own lofty ideal.

The unfinished work of the world's great men is, however, to many readers, fraught with a peculiar interest and charm. The sketches in some great artist's portfolio may be more suggestive than his masterpiece; and the imagination may be more stirred by a head, in outline, than by a carefully finished portrait.

Amiel's quest for happiness was a quest for an ideal, which he tried to impose upon the outer universe, but which really existed only within his own pure mind. It was this attitude of his mind which was largely responsible for much of the melancholy of his life. He could not or would not see, with the clearness of Philip Gilbert Hamerton, that "the Ideal, when it transforms itself into a hope for the present life, is a sure forerunner of disappointment."

To see the Ideal, and to realize the impossibility of attaining it, and then deliberately to set about the task of contenting one's self with