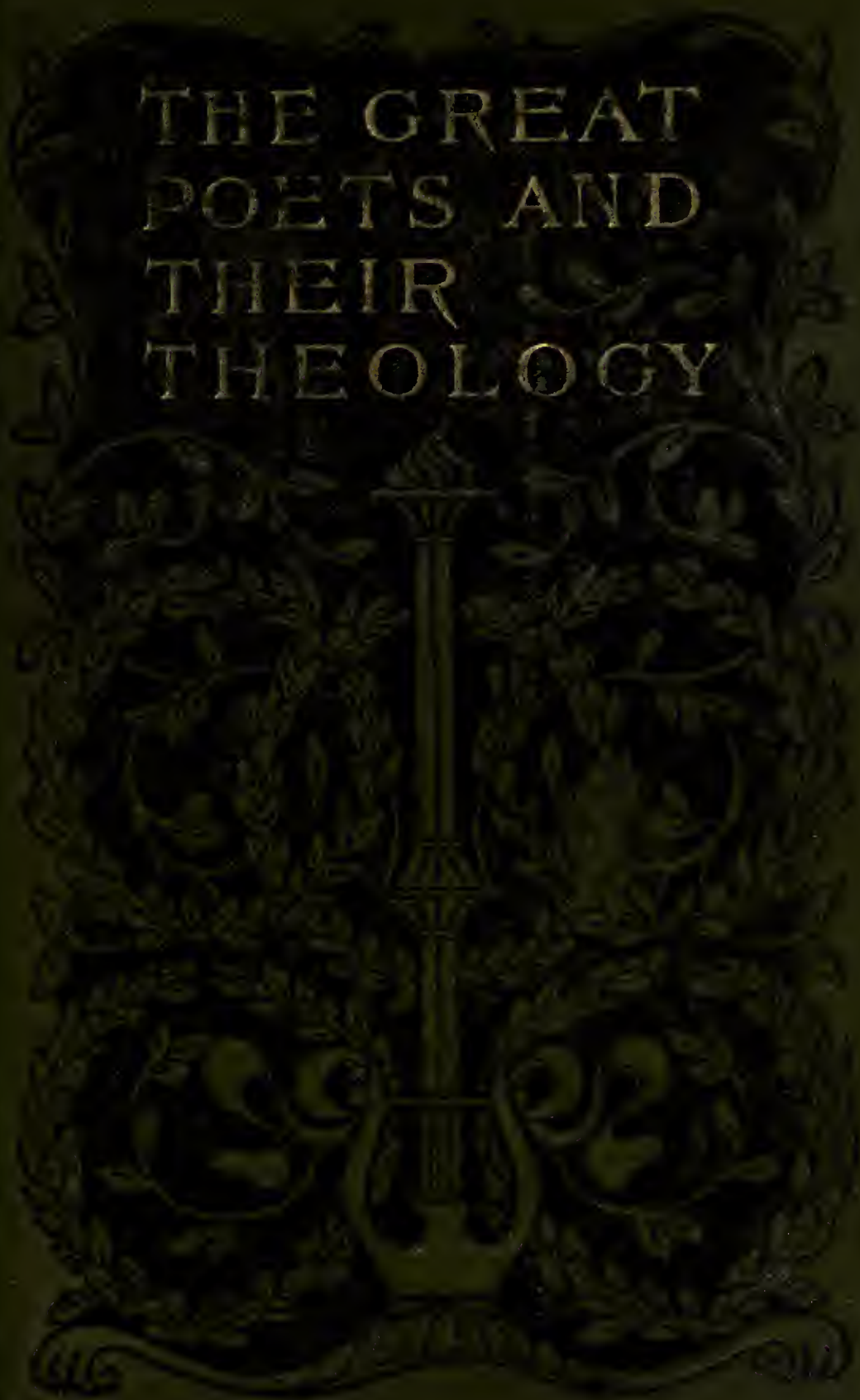




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THE GREAT  
POETS AND  
THEIR  
THEOLOGY





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THE GREAT POETS AND THEIR THEOLOGY





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# THE GREAT POETS

AND

## Their Theology

BY

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To My Wife



## PREFACE

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THE essays which follow are summer recreations. The author is well aware that he does business on small capital, and that most of the capital is borrowed. He only hopes to repay what has been lent him, with the addition of some moderate interest.

It is not maintained that the poets are conscious theologians. In their vocation as seers, however, they have glimpses of truth in theology, as well as in philosophy and physics. From their higher point of view, indeed, they sometimes descry truths which are yet below the horizon of other thinkers. Poetical expressions of these truths are all the more valuable, because they are clothed in the language of feeling, and appeal to our sense of beauty.

The author is inclined to believe that the great poets, taken together, give united and harmonious testimony to the fundamental conceptions of natural religion, if not to those of the specifically Christian scheme. This testimony is cumulative, and it follows the law of evolution, by advancing from vague to clear. Even poets like Goethe, who proclaim another gospel, witness in spite of themselves to the truth as it is in Jesus.

There may be question what names deserve to be counted among those of the great poets. The author at first intended to include in the list only Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton. Further study

has convinced him that Wordsworth, Goethe, Browning, and Tennyson must be admitted to the company of the immortals.

Whatever judgment may be passed upon this point, he anticipates no dissent from the opinion that the study of all these poets is of the greatest advantage to theologians and preachers, as well as to the general seeker after truth. With the hope that old truths may gain new interest and brightness from an unfamiliar setting, the author submits to the public the fruits of his vacation work for the past thirteen years.

It remains only to be said that the first part of the paper on Browning was printed in "The Examiner," of New York, in December, 1887; that on Milton, in "The Watchman," of Boston, in March, 1897; those on Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, have appeared in "The Standard," of Chicago, at various dates from 1887 to 1897; those on Goethe and Tennyson, together with the latter part of that on Browning, appear now for the first time.

A. H. S.

ROCHESTER, August 1, 1897.

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HOMER



# HOMER

## THE HOMERIC QUESTION AND THE HOMERIC THEOLOGY

### I

HOMER'S "Iliad" has been called "the most famous among poems." Bryant speaks of its author as "the greatest of epic poets," and says that "the common consent of the civilized world places the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' at an unapproachable height of poetical excellence." Shelley declares that "as a poet, Homer must be acknowledged to excel Shakespeare in the truth, the harmony, the sustained grandeur, the satisfying completeness of his images." Keats, ignorant of Greek, looks into Chapman's translation and describes his impressions in one of the finest of English sonnets:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken ;  
Or like stout Cortez—when with eagle eyes  
He stared on the Pacific, and all his men  
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent upon a peak in Darien.

*Cuique in sua arte credendum*—we may trust the poets in matters pertaining to their own art. And the popular verdict bears out that of the poets. Homer is translated into every tongue that makes pretension to be civilized. The rector of the German Gymnasium

tells his pupils that there are two things which they are expected to learn thoroughly: the first is the Bible, and the second is Homer. He speaks wisely, for these are the two great records of the early world; Homer gives us the secular record, as the Bible gives us the sacred.

Matthew Arnold has summed up for us the general characteristics of Homer's poetry. He makes them to be: first, rapidity of movement; secondly, plainness of thought; thirdly, simplicity of expression; fourthly, nobility. Ballad poetry lacks the last of these—nobility. As the writer of the article in the "Britannica" has said: "The old English balladist can stir Sir Philip Sidney's heart like a trumpet; but Homer can do more—he can refine and transmute the raw natural man." Virgil, Dante, Milton, lack the first three of the elements of Homer's greatness—rapidity, plainness, simplicity. They seem artificial and self-conscious beside Homer. Virgil has always for his underlying motive the exaltation of Rome; Dante is bent upon expounding the political and religious philosophy of his time; even Milton, in the "Paradise Lost," is the Arian and the Puritan. But Homer seems free from subjective motive. No strong antipathy of race or of religion moves him. He is himself absorbed, and he absorbs us, in life. Like Shakespeare and Browning, he can say: *Humani nihil a me alienum puto*—everything human delights me. With wonderful ease and simplicity he depicts to us, in noble metrical form, the whole world of human action and feeling.

Homer reigns by right of possession, and both the poets and the people recognize his authority. But the critics are a peculiar race, and for a century past they

have been suggesting serious doubts whether the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" are by the same author; whether either one was as a whole composed by Homer; whether in fact such a man as Homer ever lived at all. Before we attempt to form a judgment for ourselves, it may be well to have before us a brief sketch of the history of what is known as "the Homeric Question."

Antiquity has often been called uncritical. Yet antiquity was critical enough to separate the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" from the other so-called Homeric productions, and to recognize these two as the genuine work of Homer, while it attributed the Hymns and the Cyclic poems to other authors. There were but two exceptions to the unanimity of this judgment. About the year 225 B. C., Xeno and Hellanicus of Alexandria detached the "Iliad" from the "Odyssey," and held to a dual authorship. For this reason these two otherwise obscure Alexandrian writers were called *Chorizontes*, or Separatists. They never went so far as to suggest that the "Iliad" might be a congeries of poems by different authors, or that the "Odyssey" was a composite production. That was left for the skepticism of a far later time.

The close of the last century was an era of disintegration, of revolt against settled beliefs and institutions. Then "a man was famous, according as he lifted up axes upon the thick trees." Wolf, in Germany, published his "Prolegomena to Homer" in 1795. He held that the Athenian tyrant Peisistratus, about the middle of the sixth century B. C., finding current in his time many separate and independent lays which had for their common subject the siege of Troy, compiled these into

one poem and first committed them to writing. Wolf, however, regarded the nucleus of the "Iliad" and the nucleus of the "Odyssey" as composed by Homer, or by two Homers—to this nucleus in each case Peisistratus added other lays.

Thus the long tradition of single and Homeric authorship was broken, and one modern critic set at naught a belief which, with two unimportant exceptions, had been held *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*. The breaking of the dam was followed by a flood of destructive criticism. The German Lachmann resolved the "Iliad" into sixteen distinct and clearly defined lays. Grote, in England, considered it as an Achilleid enlarged into an "Iliad" by the addition of nearly half the poem—the "Odyssey" being a later production by a different author. Still more recently, Paley has maintained the same view, and has compared the two poems to pictures of stained glass, made up by an artistic combination of handsome bits of older windows which fortune and time had shivered.

We are fortunately able to set over against the names of these great critics another set of names, at least equally great, of men who, in spite of all the learning brought to bear in dismembering the Homeric poems, still defend their substantial integrity. It is the more interesting to observe that some of these defenders were at one time persuaded to adopt the views of Wolf and Lachmann. Goethe was one of these. He gave up at first the unity of the Homeric authorship; but afterward his juster poetical insight asserted itself and he set himself to oppose the critical theory. So it was with Nitzsch, though he continued to believe in large interpolations and additions to the primitive poems. Mure,

in like manner, was first a Wolfian; but after twenty years of study he reversed his judgment and became a zealous advocate of the unity.

Gladstone also defends the Homeric authorship, and brings to the defense what the learned Germans so often lack—a statesmanlike common sense. The latest contribution to the discussion is the article of Monro in the last edition of the “Encyclopædia Britannica,” and this too holds to the unity of each poem, though the writer regards the “Odyssey” as composed by a different and later author than the “Iliad.” So the combatants are as to numbers pretty evenly balanced, while genius and learning, though at one time they seemed mainly to favor the theory of disintegration, are of late more and more arraying themselves on the side of the traditional view that both poems are substantially by the same author and that this author is Homer.

But it is desirable that we should look into the matter for ourselves. Let us briefly review the critical theory, and in reviewing it let us reverse the common order of discussion. I ask the reader to adjourn for a little the question whether the “Iliad” and the “Odyssey” are each a unity, and, granting this for the sake of the argument, I ask him first to consider with me whether these two are works of the same author. There is abundant evidence, as it seems to me, why this latter question should be answered in the affirmative: the “Iliad” and the “Odyssey” are by the same hand. I argue this mainly upon the ground that the two poems exhibit a similarity of structure impossible to explain in any other way, especially when we take into account the fact that this peculiar structure is found only here

in all classic literature, and that it is at the same time characteristic of the highest genius.

Jevons, in his admirable "History of Greek Literature," has pointed out that Homer's method of "painting in his background" is entirely unique yet incomparably artistic. The test of a poet's ability is his method of putting his hearer or reader in possession of the preliminary facts needful to the understanding of the action. There are three ways of doing this. Euripides is an illustration of the first: one of his characters appears upon the stage and describes the situation before the play opens; but this method forewarns the hearer or reader that the play is not reality, whereas the poet's object is so to absorb his audience that they will for the hour regard the performance not as illusion but as real life. Virgil gives us an instance of the second method: the hero of the "Æneid" relates the preceding history to Dido; but here the speaker is too evidently talking not so much to Dido as to the reader, and so again the illusion is dispelled. The third method is that of constructing scenes necessary to the development of the plot, and yet, in the midst of the forward movement, making these very scenes explain what is behind. This is reality; this is the highest art; and this is the method of Homer.

Observe how all that is presupposed in the action of the "Iliad" is disclosed by the plot itself. The action lasts only some forty or fifty days. But these forty or fifty days have been preceded by nine long years of siege, during which the Greeks have shut up their enemy in Troy and have occupied themselves in ravaging the surrounding country. Some knowledge of all



this must be communicated, but only incidentally. The poem begins with the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon. It is the father of Briseis, the subject of the quarrel, from whom we learn that these chiefs are beleaguering Troy. Why, we learn from Achilles, when he says that it is for no advantage of his own, but to gain recompense for Menelaus and Agamemnon. How long the siege has continued, we learn from Agamemnon, when he tests the spirit of his men after the defection of Achilles. Just before the first engagement, Hector upbraids Paris with the remark: "Thou mayst see what sort of a warrior he is whose lovely wife thou hast." Paris is vanquished and flees to his mistress. Then first the guilty cause of the Trojan war appears in the person of Helen.

In precisely similar manner does the author of the "Odyssey" paint in the background of his story. The first four books are called the Telemacheia, and they depict the state of things which precedes the action of the poem. Telemachus, the youthful son of Odysseus, is set before us as suffering continual wrong. The insolence of the suitors for the hand of his mother is shown by bringing in Athene, a candid judge, in the guise of a stranger. Hoping to win the mother, the suitors even plot the death of the son. Thus, at the beginning, the long distress of twenty years is unfolded before us, yet all by way of incident and as a part of the plot itself. The news about Odysseus, vague at first, becomes more definite, till it stops just where the real action of the "Odyssey" begins. When Telemachus has set sail for Pylos the preparations are complete, and we enter upon the narrative of Odysseus' wanderings and of his return.

Now I submit that this similarity of structure goes far to prove the two poems the work of one author. Here are intuitive discernment of a law of literary composition and successful working in accordance with it which evince the highest genius. That two great poets should have arisen simultaneously in that early age, and that both should have constructed their poems so completely in accordance with this law of the human mind, this law of human thought, that later writers can imitate but never surpass them, this surely is a far greater demand upon our believing faculty than is the hypothesis of one author for them both.

This conviction will be strengthened by considering the development of the plot in the two poems, as we have now considered the preparation for it. We must remember that the epic appeals to wonder, just as the drama does. After the situation is set before us, there must come an entanglement which rouses our curiosity. The more complex the plot, so long as it is not confused, the more difficult the knot, so long as its intricacies can be seen, so much the greater is the interest which is raised in the reader, so much more intense is his demand for the *dénouement*, the untying, the resolution of the theme. We have seen with what art the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" propose their subjects to us—the concrete before the abstract, synthesis before analysis, the problem before the explanation. Do they also show a common genius and follow a common principle in the evolution of their respective plots?

The full answer to this question would require an elaborate statement of the argument of each. This is obviously impracticable in the present essay. I must

content myself with citing a few of the curious correspondences of the two poems. In the "Iliad," Achilles is absent from the end of the first book to the beginning of the eighteenth—so in the "Odyssey," Odysseus is absent most of the time. In both the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," matters grow from bad to worse. In the "Iliad," the Greeks suffer untold woes, although they have for nine years confined the enemy within the walls of Troy. Achilles' absence now enables the Trojans to drive them behind the rampart they have been forced to build, and even to fire their ships; then Achilles comes forth to avenge Patroclus, the tide of battle turns, and the hero carries death and dismay before him.

So, in the "Odyssey," the servants and suitors grow reckless of duty and fearless of punishment—successive outrages intensifying our indignation—until the many-wiled Odysseus, after enduring incomparable toils and dangers, appears upon the scene, proves his might by stringing his ancient bow, and from it rains upon the guilty crew the shafts of a just retribution. In both the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," the plot leads step by step to a crisis of moral grandeur; in both poems this climax is followed by soothing scenes which relieve the long strain upon the feelings of the reader. We claim that the poems are too much alike in this great matter of structure to have been by different authors. Imitation will not account for the similarity; if it were so, we should have "Iliads" and "Odysseys" in plenty through the after ages. No, this secret of structure is an instinct of genius; it works spontaneously and unconsciously in the great artist; only in later times does philosophic analysis penetrate and name the mystery.

The argument from structure is so conclusive that we can afford to leave unnoticed many other evidences of a common authorship, such as the facts that each poem begins with an invocation to the Muse, and that at least two thousand lines of the "Iliad" are found also in the "Odyssey." We need only mention some of the objections to the view that one poet composed both poems. Minstrels appear in the "Odyssey," it is said, but never in the "Iliad"; we reply that minstrels belong to the court and not to the camp. The gods, it is said, are at bitterer warfare with each other in the "Iliad" than in the "Odyssey"; yes, we answer, but in the "Iliad" there are greater strifes among men to call forth their anger.

There are differences of style and spirit between the poems, but these differences are perfectly consistent with unity of authorship when we remember two things: first, that the "Odyssey" is a sequel to the "Iliad," depicting the subsequent fortunes of the heroes of Ilium, and having its scene in European Greece and the Ionian Isles, as the scene of the "Iliad" was in Asiatic Greece and the Isles of the Ægean; secondly, that the "Iliad" is the work of the author's youth, while the "Odyssey" is the production of his later age. Hence the hero of the first is a youthful warrior, the hero of the second an older wanderer; hence the geographical knowledge of the second is more extended than that of the first; hence the gods, in both poems a medley of vices and virtues, are on the whole more sober and moral in the "Odyssey" than in the "Iliad," as befits the more mature reflection of the author. The differences between the two poems are not greater than those

between the "Paradise Lost" and the "Paradise Regained" of John Milton, or, to take more modern instances, between the earlier and the later writings of George William Curtis or Thomas Carlyle.

But my learned readers are by this time fancying that I have been choosing an easy controversy with a man of straw, while the real antagonist has been unattacked and unchallenged. I proceed, therefore, to discuss the more important question whether the "Iliad" or the "Odyssey" is in itself a unity. Was either poem the work of a single author, or are both the products of a gradual evolution, remains of a varied collection of hymns on the war of Troy and the after adventures of its heroes? Was there one Homer who composed these great epics, or are the poems we now possess a skillful combination of many ancient heroic lays? Is the present unity, or seeming unity, of each poem due to the genius of one great poet who struck out the plan of the whole at the first, or is it due to critical selection and careful compilation in subsequent ages? For the consideration of these questions I trust that what has been already said has prepared the way and has indicated the method. I would still call attention to structure, and would maintain that in the structure of each poem there are evidences of unity so marked and admirable that they point indubitably, not to many authors, but to one.

The unity of the "Iliad" has sometimes failed to be perceived for the reason that the critic has mistaken the theme of the epic. That theme is not the fall of Troy nor the fate of Achilles; for neither of these is described in the poem. In the first line of the first book we are forewarned against such misapprehensions, when the

subject announced is Achilles' wrath. The first book, crowded with incident as it is, yet unembellished by a single simile, sets before us the cause of this wrath and the promise of Zeus to avenge the son of Thetis. It is only the death of the Trojan hero at Achilles' hands that sates this wrath, and therefore the climax of the poem is the slaying of Hector. All that follows after this is simply the letting down of the reader's excited feeling, and the poem ends with the line: "Such burial the illustrious Hector found," simply because the reader, without this knowledge, would have been left in painful anxiety. To this death of Hector, the sacrifice that appeases Achilles' wrath, the "Iliad" moves forward and onward from the very start. The reverses of the Greeks and the transient successes of Odysseus and Diomedes, both and alike prepare the way for the day of reckoning when the son of Peleus comes to his own once more.

And yet with this note of triumph there ever mingles a sorrowful minor strain. The hero of the Greeks was the object of sympathy as well as of admiration. An evil fate hung over him. "Whom the gods love die young." Though the death of Achilles does not form the proper subject of the poem, it is yet intimated prophetically. When, in the first book, the hero appeals to Thetis, it is with a reference to his "brief span of life." In the ninth book again he says: "My returning home is taken from me." In the eighteenth, Thetis, shedding tears, admonishes him: "Straightway, after Hector, death is appointed for thee." In the nineteenth, we hear Achilles yet again: "Well know I that it is appointed me to perish here, far from my father dear and

mother." In the twenty-first: "Under the wall of Troy I must die by the swift arrows of Apollo." And, finally, in the twenty-second book, Hector, with his dying breath, predicts the death of his fierce enemy: "In the day when Paris and Phœbus Apollo slay thee, for all thy valor, at the Scæan gate." Here in the successive books of the "Iliad" is the gradual unfolding of a prophecy. It reminds us of the far nobler progress in the Old Testament from the protevangelium in Genesis to the clear predictions in Micah and Isaiah. It has been well said that funeral notes mark every appearance of Achilles, and that they grow in intensity with every repetition, like a *motif* of Wagner's.

Now all this is indicative of an underlying design—a design which belonged to the first conception of the poem. It cannot be an afterthought, for it is part of the very warp and woof of the "Iliad." As each feature of a great picture must be in the artist's mind before he puts his brush to canvas, so the ideas of Achilles' wrath and of his fateful triumph must have been from the first in the mind of some composer of the "Iliad." In a true sense the whole antedates the parts, not the parts the whole. Each subsequent part presupposes the parts that have gone before and is unintelligible without them.

This is markedly true of that very portion of the poem which has been often held to be a mere episode—the Doloneia, or the episode in which Odysseus and Diomedes made their brilliant night foray upon the camp of the Trojans. When we remember that this follows upon Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's embassy and offer of reconciliation, and especially when we remember that it lifts the Greeks from profound discouragement and

prepares the way for the new onset which brings the whole story to its culmination, it will be plain to us that the development of the plot makes indispensable the Doloneia. And so with every other extended passage which the critics have sought to detach. The whole "Iliad" is an Achilleid, and it is vain to seek within the poem for any nucleus which has unity in itself and to which other short productions were added to make up the present whole. Even Wolf never dared to specify what the precise nucleus is. Try to separate any such part from the rest, and you find such a network of mutual reference that you are compelled to stop; there are multitudinous connections, like bloodvessels, which prevent you from cutting off any single limb without destroying the life of the whole.

If the unity of the "Iliad" is demonstrable, that of the "Odyssey" is much more so. Indeed, I do not propose to enter into the detailed proof of it. I prefer to shorten my discussion by adopting as my own the conclusion of Monro, the latest writer on the subject, when he says: "The unity of the 'Odyssey,' as a whole, is beyond the reach of existing weapons of criticism." In both poems, besides this matter of structure to which I have adverted, there is a consistent delineation of character, which sets before us the greatest variety of gods and men, yet with never a slip or mistake in the way of confounding the traits of one with the traits of another—each character preserves his peculiar identity whenever and under whatever circumstances he appears. There is a composite language—the archaic Ionian is mixed with the later and less flowing speech, leaving it flexible enough for purposes of adaptation, yet like the tongue



of Chaucer marking a period of transition and incapable of reproduction at any later time. There is a dignity of style which belongs only to the work of a lofty mind; the adjective "Homeric" has a meaning as well defined as the adjective "Miltonic." Like every one of the greatest poets, the author of the "Iliad" and of the "Odyssey" is master of all the knowledge of his time, and this conscious mastery breathes everywhere through his verse—*incedit regina*. I suppose it was the convergence of all these proofs which moved Aristotle—one of the most sagacious thinkers the world has seen—to declare that the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" constitute the standard of epic unity.

Consider, for a moment, what demands the opposite hypothesis makes upon our credulity. Instead of one Homer, or even of two Homers, we are to believe in many Homers, each equal to the production of a poem which may ultimately constitute a part of the "Iliad" or the "Odyssey." Are great poets, then, so plenty in human history? The critics seem to think them thick as blackberries in August. But even the Elizabethan age has but one Shakespeare; we may count ourselves well off if one such star of poesy rises in each five hundred years. Granting that a whole galaxy of poets rose at once, is it probable that they would all choose for their theme the war of Troy, the last year of that war, Achilles among all the chiefs, and, more narrowly still, the one incident of Achilles' wrath? Would they all, with one accord, ignore the story of Troy's fall, and passing over the fates of all the other heroes, devote their genius to depicting only the wanderings and the return of Ulysses?

Or, if this is credible, can we believe that out of these independent lays a consistent whole could be constructed, with parts so nicely balanced, and with such unity of effect as to make it a paragon of art? As well believe that the Parthenon is the work of a multitude of successive builders, each beginning where the last left off, but without architect or plan: the rambling incongruities and incompleteness of some English cathedrals show the results of such a method. Or is the genius of the poems the genius of the patient bookmaker—some critical and selecting and combining Peisistratus, or servant of Peisistratus, five hundred years after the original composition of the separate lays? Then we have a double problem to deal with: first, why such genius should have occupied itself with work so mechanical and inglorious; and secondly, why the composer of the nucleus should not have been equally competent at the first to organize his material into the finished poem. Whatever proves such genius in the separate parts, proves ability to construct the whole; whatever proves genius in the compiler proves that compiling would never satisfy his poetical ambition.

Professor Mahaffy, in his "Problems of Greek History," has well said that, while the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" are made up of many different legends, their co-ordination is the work of one great poet. Even the great German critic of Homer calls the "Iliad" "the Greek Bible." Yet he denies the unity of its authorship, and would break it into its component parts. He represents the innovating and destructive tendency of the modern criticism in general. Now that the same method is applied to the Hebrew Bible, and only the nucleus of the

Pentateuch is accepted as the work of Moses, we can see somewhat more clearly both the nature of the method and its results.

It would rob us of every great name of literature. It would give to the late and inferior talent which can only patch together the works of others the praise that belongs to supreme creative genius. The large design and simple elegance of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" are not the natural product of an artificial age like that of Peisistratus; they belong to the mighty childhood of the race. Moses and Homer were possibly added to and supplemented as their work passed down through generations following; Ezra in the former case and Peisistratus in the latter had doubtless a part to play in determining what was canonical and genuine. The "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" probably supplanted other and earlier poems which ceased to be read or recited and so were lost forever. But the former supplanted the latter because the former possessed a unity and majesty in which the latter were lacking.

It was a case of the survival of the fittest. Homer himself, granting that our doctrine of a single authorship is correct, may have taken many years for the complete elaboration of his poems, and during those years versions of various degrees of perfection may have been set in circulation. Some such hypothesis fully accounts for ancient diversities of reading and provides abundant work for Peisistratus, while it saves the integrity of the poems. Goethe, in one of his letters to Schiller, cites different versions of his own poems to refute the theory we are considering. He had at various times amended and enlarged them, but he did not propose on that

account to concede that there was a second Goethe, or many Goethes. Wolf's "Prolegomena" itself, treated in this way, would furnish evidence that the one Wolf was many Wolfs instead. "The London Spectator" sums up the argument none too forcibly when it says: "It is as impossible that a first-rate poem or work of art should be produced without a great master-mind to conceive the whole, as that a fine living bull should be developed out of beef sausages."

Here we must consider a most plausible objection proposed by Paley, the latest English representative of the Wolfian theory. He denies the original unity of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" upon the ground that it is impossible to preserve intact so long poems unwritten, and that written they could not have been. Let us take these two points in the reverse order from that in which they are stated. Both assertions are without warrant. We meet the first with the counter-assertion that the poems could have been, and probably were, written. All arguments for the unity and the internal vital connections of the poems are also arguments for the writing of them. The burden of proof rests upon those who deny that they were originally written, and the proof of such a negative as this will be found a very considerable burden.

We do not choose, however, to avail ourselves of our privilege in this matter. We rather desire to state all the important facts which make against our own view, as well as those which favor it; let the balance then be struck, and let the reader decide for himself. What was the date of Homer? or, if any dislike to put the question in that form, when was the substance of the "Iliad"

and of the "Odyssey" composed? We answer, Homer lived, or the poems were composed, many years after the Trojan war. This we infer from the fact that the poet speaks of the superior size and strength of the warriors who fought before Troy, as of a generation long since passed away. If then we take 1050 B. C., the traditional date of the Trojan war, as approximately correct, we may put Homer, or the rise of the Homeric poems, at 850 B. C., or four hundred years before the time of Herodotus. The question before us is therefore this: Is it probable that the Greek language was committed to writing and was used for literary purposes so early as 850 B. C.?

We must grant that no actual literary remains, unless it be the poems of Homer, have come down to us from that time. The earliest specimens of Greek epigraphy do not antedate the middle of the seventh century before Christ. The fragmentary inscriptions of Thera, of Crete, and of Naucratis, may be assigned to 650, 640, and 630, respectively. Those of Melos and of Abou Symbel come later still, and probably within the sixth century. As the last of these is peculiarly interesting and significant, I dwell upon it at greater length.

Far up the river Nile, in modern Nubia, and at the very confines of ancient Egypt, still stand the remains of the temple of Abou Symbel. On its front is the famous row of colossal statues, seventy feet high, though each is sitting with hands upon the knees. They are awe-inspiring in their solitary grandeur. But to the archæologist one of the most curious things about them is an inscription cut long after the statues themselves were carved out of the solid rock. That inscription is

in Greek. It is upon the left leg of one of the gigantic figures, and below the knee. It is just such an inscription as an American Vandal will occasionally cut into a famous statue or edifice abroad. It records the names of certain Greek mercenaries in the employ of a certain Egyptian king, Psammeticus. The Greek characters are of antique style. The letter Omicron answers both for Omicron and Omega, and so we are assured that its date must be before the year 540—for from this time inscriptions have the Omega—Omega being the last in order of the Greek alphabet, simply because it was the last—the last letter invented and added.

If we can only learn the date of this Egyptian King Psammeticus, we can fix more narrowly the time of the inscription. There were unfortunately four Psammeticuses who might possibly be referred to. But Herodotus mentions an expedition to Ethiopia by Psammeticus the Second, and it was probably this expedition on which the Greek mercenaries were employed. Now Psammeticus the Second reigned from 594 to 589 before Christ. Sometime before 589 B. C., therefore, this specimen of Greek epigraphy must have been written. Of the mercenaries some were Ionians and some were Dorians, yet all of them used the Ionic form of the alphabet. This presupposes time for the Ionic alphabet to become generally used in Greece, and makes it certain that writing was a common art by the middle of the seventh century.

The argument is far stronger than this mere statement of dates would seem to indicate. We have been adducing the evidence of inscriptions upon stone or metal. But these imply the long-continued previous

existence of the easier writing upon leather or parchment. Archilochus, a poet of about 700 B. C., speaks of "a grievous *scytale*"—the *scytale* being the staff on which a strip of leather for writing purposes was rolled slantwise, so that the message inscribed upon the strip could not be read until the leather was rolled again upon another staff of the same size; since only the writer and the receiver possessed staves of the proper size, the *scytale* answered all the ends of a message in cypher; so we get back a hundred years earlier and still find writing among the Greeks. Hesiod dates from about 750 B. C., and Hesiod enjoins that children be not taught letters before seven years old; and yet we are a hundred years later than the time of Homer.

How can we bridge that gulf? Shall we consult Homer himself? Shall we infer from the tablet which Homer represents Bellerophon as carrying from King Proetus to Iobates, that the author of the "Iliad" at least was familiar with writing? When we read that there were "written in the folded tablet many soul-harassing things," it seems difficult to believe that any mere signs or picture-writing can be meant. Yet this is the clearest allusion to writing in the Homeric poems, and of itself it would be far from proving that the poems themselves were written. Even though this were the case, it would be rather for the help of the composer than of the reader, and the poet would not be any more likely to tell us about the mysteries of his art than the modern extemporaneous preacher or orator is apt to speak of the elaborate writing which precedes his public efforts.

We frankly confess, therefore, that we have no great

amount of direct testimony to the existence of writing among the Greeks so early as 850 B. C. But there is an indirect argument from what we know of other peoples with whom the Greeks had intercourse. The Latin race was by no means so quick-witted as the Greek, yet Niebuhr tells us that there were written books under the Tarquins, that is, about 750 B. C., although the oldest Latin inscriptions are several centuries later. The most ancient Hebrew epigraphy, the inscription on the Moabite stone, does not date back farther than to two hundred years after David and seven hundred years after Moses. Yet Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and during the Egyptian nineteenth dynasty, which covered Moses' time, there were "houses of books," that is, there was literature enough to fill whole libraries.

The recent excavations of Tel el-Amarna have brought to light a multitude of clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform characters which record the correspondence of an Egyptian with a Babylonian king. We learn from them, to quote the words of Professor Sayce, that "in the fifteenth century before our era—a century before the Exodus—active literary intercourse was going on throughout the civilized world of Western Asia between Babylon and Egypt and the smaller states of Palestine, of Syria, of Mesopotamia, and even of Eastern Cappadocia. This intercourse was carried on by means of the Babylonian language and the complicated Babylonian script. This implies that all over the civilized East there were libraries and schools where the Babylonian language and literature were taught and learned. Babylonian appears to have been as much the language of



diplomacy and cultivated society as French has become in modern times."

But after all, the common language of Egypt was Egyptian, and this use of Babylonian in the fifteenth century B. C. may be characteristic of the period of the shepherd kings, during which the old Semitic stock got possession for a time of the wealth of the Nile valley. Mr. Petrie, in his recent excavations in the Fayum, eighty miles southwest of Cairo, has unearthed a town of the nineteenth dynasty, or of the thirteenth century B. C. On the pottery of this town Cypriote or Greek letters are incised. Another town of pyramid builders, belonging to the twelfth and thirteenth dynasties, yielded pottery marked with similar Cypriote letters. He declares that all the evidence points to a use of this alphabet before 2000 B. C.

Dr. Howard Osgood, in his article entitled "The Oldest Book in the World," published in the "Bibliotheca Sacra" for October, 1888, takes us back to an earlier time, at least three thousand years before Christ, and gives the translation of a book of proverbs which might almost have formed the model for Solomon. The Proverbs of Ptah-hotep are in Egyptian. Renouf, in his "Hibbert Lectures," declares that in the fourth dynasty, as early as 3124 B. C., there was in Egypt "a universally diffused system of writing and a common use of papyrus." While Professor Hommel of Munich has found proofs of high civilization in Arabia as far back as 2000 B. C., the recent explorations of Professor Hilprecht of the University of Pennsylvania have brought to light at Nippur in Babylonia an inscription which he regards as earlier than 4000 B. C.

Yet there are Old Testament critics who tell us that Moses, who lived about 1500 B. C., and who was educated in the court of the Egyptian king, could not possibly have known how to write; Solomon, who lived about 1000 B. C., could not possibly have been enough in advance of his time—the time required by the hypothesis of natural evolution—to write a book of proverbs. Professor Sayce, referring to those who have formed opinions adverse to the historical character of the Pentateuch, says well that “the Tel el-Amarna tablets have already overthrown the primary foundation on which much of this criticism has been built”; and Professor Hommel declares his conviction that “Arabia itself will furnish us the direct proofs that the modern destructive criticism of the Pentateuch is absolutely erroneous.”

Let us apply all this to our present subject. The age of Homer was six hundred and fifty years after the time alluded to by Professor Sayce; eleven hundred and fifty years after the time mentioned by Professor Hommel; twenty-two hundred and fifty years after that spoken of by Monsieur Renouf; and thirty-one hundred and fifty years after that given us by Professor Hilprecht. The Greeks were a seafaring people, who inhabited not only the Argive peninsula with its manifold harbors, but also the islands of the Ægean and the Adriatic; records lately recovered seem to prove that Ægean Greeks visited Egypt as early as three thousand years before Christ; in the nature of things the winds and the waves must have driven Greeks over the sea to Egypt and Egyptians over the sea to Greece; the Homeric poems themselves speak of such intercourse, besides intimating that there was a coastwise commerce by way of Phœ-

nicia; tradition declares that a certain Phoenician, Cadmus by name, long before the Trojan war introduced into Greece the use of letters; the letters of the Greek alphabet are substantially the same with those of the Semitic languages, Alpha being only Aleph, and Beta being only Beth in disguise; and yet, merely upon the ground that no Greek writing remains to us of demonstrably earlier date than B. C. 650, we are asked to believe that at 850 B. C. the composer of the Homeric poems could not possibly have put them into writing. This, as it seems to us, is to attribute to the Greeks a physical inertia, as well as a mental incapacity to apprehend and to appropriate, which are the precise opposites of all we know of that eager, curious, colonizing race.

We find it difficult to believe that it took two thousand years for letters to come around the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea from Egypt to Greece. We prefer to think that there was some foundation for the belief of the Greeks themselves that letters among them belonged to the ante-Homeric age. Before the dawn of history the Egyptian Cecrops came, it was said, to Athens, and the Egyptian Danaus to Argos. The time of the driving out of the shepherd kings from Egypt corresponds quite well with these Greek traditions. And how can we explain the universal knowledge of reading and writing among the Greeks two hundred years after Homer's time, unless a very long period of instruction had gone before? In the days of Solon, six hundred years before Christ, there were laws forbidding the erasure of public inscriptions, and the practice of ostracism prevailed—the marking of a “yes” or a “no” upon a pebble of stone.

At the very time of Peisistratus, there were in existence actual commentaries upon the Homeric poems. Who ever heard of written commentaries upon an unwritten poem? The idea that Peisistratus, three centuries after Homer, first committed these poems to writing seems to us amazingly improbable. Grant that writing in Homer's time was a mystery known only to the few; that it was in possession, not of a reading public, but of a poetical and literary guild; that it was used as a private help to the bard in composing and memorizing, rather than as a means of communication to others; still the argument in favor of Homer's use of letters seems to us far to outweigh the argument against it. If the patchwork theory of the Homeric authorship takes it for granted that writing was unknown or unused among the Greeks of Homer's time, it rests upon an utterly unproved and an extremely improbable assumption.

We do not stop here, however. Even if it could be proved that Peisistratus first secured the writing out of the Homeric poems, we should not surrender the doctrine of their unity. Our adversaries declare that poems so long as these could never without writing be composed in the first place, nor afterward be transmitted intact to future generations. Here again we are compelled to meet each part in the declaration with a stout demurrer. The epic, as its very name intimates, is a poem narrated or recited, while the lyric is one sung to the accompaniment of the lyre. As the epic is intended for public recitation, so in manifold instances it has been composed without writing, preserved only in the mind, recited from memory, and, to mix metaphors, orally handed down to posterity.

The Old German epic entitled "Parsifal," is a poem of twenty-four thousand eight hundred and ten lines, very much longer than the "Iliad"—for the "Iliad" has only fifteen thousand six hundred and ninety-three—yet "Parsifal" was composed by Eschenbach, who could neither read nor write. The weird poems of the Icelandic Skalds were for two centuries transmitted without writing. The Greek festivals have to this day their blind singers who depend on memory alone to keep the thread of their story. Composition is quite possible without writing, as every public speaker can witness. Homer, even if he were blind when he composed his poems, might still have been quite equal to his task. And what was once mentally put into form could also have been mentally preserved.

To us, who in these later days depend upon books to keep our treasures for us and use our memories so little, the retention of a whole "Iliad" or a whole "Odyssey" without break or error, seems to savor of the miraculous. Memory does little for us because we give memory so little to do. We have come to cherish a sort of mild contempt for the memorizer, and we doubt the mental grasp of the man of facts and dates. Not so in the early days. Mnemosyne was then one of the Muses. Memory was cultivated, cherished, trusted, honored. Of Alexander and of Cæsar it was said that they knew all their soldiers by name; the story at any rate proves that they thought such ability no disgrace to them. There were educated men in Athens who knew the whole "Iliad" and "Odyssey" by heart and could recite them straight on from any point where they were asked to begin.

And such power is not entirely wanting in recent

times. Macaulay could repeat, at fifty, long poems which he had never glanced at since he read them for the first and only time at fifteen. And Scaliger, that modern wonder of learning and scholarship, committed the whole of Homer to memory in twelve days, and all the extant Greek poets in three months. If we only now consider that in prehistoric times this composing and reciting of epic poetry was a regular trade, so richly rewarding with gifts and honors those who were its masters that memory was stimulated to put forth its highest powers, we shall rid ourselves of the last vestige of doubt whether poems as long as Homer's could have been composed without writing and then handed down substantially intact for several centuries.

We ought not to miss here the incidental advantage of our present study in furnishing a parallel to the oral transmission of the Gospel narratives. All competent investigators now agree that from twenty-five to thirty-five years intervened between the death of our Lord and the putting into its present written form of each of the Synoptics. And there are not wanting those who declare that even in that brief time the stories of Christ's life might become so altered as to be untrustworthy.

But these critics are strangely forgetful of some very common facts. A sacred narrative, which has assumed stereotyped form and which passes from lip to lip, may be submitted to a constant process of verification. Just as many an aged saint who knows her Bible mentally corrects the slips in a young preacher's quotations, so the first disciples, we may believe, were evermore conning and correcting the oral narratives which they heard, purging them of excrescences when such appeared, and

bringing them back to the standard form. A narrative upon which the church was founded and for which Christians had to answer with their lives might conceivably have been handed down, not simply for twenty-five or thirty-five years, but for a century, without serious loss or change. The Gospel problem seems an easy one when we have once granted that the Homeric poems could have been transmitted intact for more than three hundred years.

And yet we are not quite through with the objections of Paley. To all that have been mentioned he adds this last of all: Homer, he says, could not have composed poems so long as the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," for the reason that there was no reading or hearing public to be addressed by such poems. It is the old evolutionary theory in a new guise. The simple must come before the complex. Early times have patience and attention only for poems that are brief and fragmentary. The complicated epic whole must be the result of the constructive and combining genius of later times.

Unfortunately for this theory the facts are all against it. There was just such a public as the full-fledged "Iliad" or "Odyssey" requires. It was found in the halls of the petty kings or chieftains of early Greece. There every comer was welcome and there were many guests. The numerous retainers of the household constituted of themselves a sufficient audience, and the songs of the bard were the chief amusement of the evening, as athletic games and sports were the amusement of the day.

Minstrelsy was a recognized and honored profession. In the simple days when society has emerged from bar-

barism, but has not yet taken on the conventional refinements of an advanced civilization, nothing so stirs the blood and rouses enthusiasm as the story of martial deeds. In "Ivanhoe," Sir Walter Scott has given us a glimpse of such entertainment in the rude halls of our Anglo-Saxon ancestry. So it was among the Greeks. Evening after evening the singer was assured of one constant audience. Instead of being compelled to tell his whole story in a single night, he was the best poet who could longest spin his tale. Provided only that part was connected with part, that there was development of plot, and all tended to a fitting climax, he might sing on for a thousand and one nights, like Queen Scheherezade.

The genuine epic, then, being only a metrical kind of story-telling, naturally has its place at the beginnings of civilization. It is history and mythology and poetry and music all in one. As the incentives to its cultivation are then the greatest, and as original genius is then most free from the fetters of precedent, it is only natural that we should find in these primitive times some of the greatest masters of spontaneous song. Patriarchal monarchy and family life afford the typical field for the development of epic poetry.

Lyric poetry just as naturally belongs to the later day of aristocracies, when a privileged class takes the place of the large family life we have described. Now, the one great house and gathering place is replaced by many and smaller mansions; meetings are of the few; we find the exclusiveness of good society; there are other means of entertainment as well; the song must be elegant, conventional, and brief.

Last of all comes the time of democracy, when power



has gotten into the hands of the people. Then the whole free population of a city must be amused. It is an audience that does not long hold together; it is the time of the rhapsodists or reciters of select portions of the old songs; the new poetry is all dramatic, suited to the entertainment in the open air of large numbers at once. This progress from epic to lyric and from lyric to dramatic poetry was a matter of actual history in Greece. When Paley tells us, then, that a reading public did not exist in Greece before the year 430 B. C., we do not simply content ourselves with denying the fact, we claim that it makes no difference to our thesis whether there was or not. There certainly was a hearing public, and precisely such a one existed in the two centuries after the Trojan war as might furnish the best opportunity and incentive to the epic genius of a Homer.

The reader has doubtless concluded long since that this argument is endless, and I am myself pretty nearly of his opinion. There are a score of points, all of them important and interesting, which I might have embraced in my treatment. I have confined myself to a few which can be popularly stated. The result of the investigation may well remind us of that not too learned English student, who, being required on examination to give the present state of the Homeric question, said: "The old view was that both the poems were written by Homer, but it is now concluded that they were written by another man of the same name." However learned and plausible the theories of a later putting together of ancient poetical fragments may be, they all suffer shipwreck on this single rock—the necessity of finding in the early time of the petty kings some commanding

genius capable of gathering the traditional material, organizing it about one central theme, and determining its poetical form. This genius must have been one, not many; and it is not credulity, but simple common sense, to take for our own the well-nigh unanimous consent of antiquity, and to call that genius by the name of Homer.

## II

I have been treating of the Homeric Question. But I have not been

Presenting Thebes and Pelops' line,  
Or the tale of Troy divine,

entirely for its own sake. I have intended it to prepare the way for a succinct account of the Homeric Theology. To this latter theme I now address myself. I wish I could relieve my reader's fears by assuring him that the temple to which I introduce him is, like the temple at Jerusalem, far smaller than the portico at its entrance. But I cannot so easily part company with the principles of rhetoric. The Homeric Theology is as noble a subject, and it requires as long a treatment, as the Homeric unity. This latter question, indeed, derives much of its importance from its connection with the former. If Homer is only a name for many bards scattered in space and time, then the Homeric theology can hardly be expected to have consistency and unity. If, on the contrary, there was one Homer, and the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" were both his work, then from the poems of this great genius of the early world we may hope to learn something about that early world's religious doctrines and beliefs. That there was one

Homer, and that he composed both of the poems which after times have ascribed to him, with the possible exception of unimportant interpolations, I propose henceforth to take for granted, and I would now ask only about his theology.

It is perhaps unnecessary to say, and yet to prevent any possible misconception it may be well distinctly to declare, that I do not profess to find in Homer a characteristically religious poet. Homer never heard of the word "theology," nor did he ever write the "Iliad" or the "Odyssey" with the conscious aim of setting forth theological ideas. Not the epic poets, but the tragedians, were the religious teachers of the Greeks. The tragic stage, upon which Æschylus produced his "Prometheus Bound," and Sophocles brought out his "Antigone," was the Greek pulpit, and there we are to look for appeals to conscience and threats of the gods. The Athenian archon, under whose charge these plays were represented, was clothed for the purpose with priestly dignity, and the whole office was an office of religion. The epic, on the other hand, was more nearly a means of amusement, when instruction and amusement went hand in hand. Its place was the court of the petty king, its time the hours that followed the games and the banquet. If we could conceivably have a tragedy from the time of Homer, we should doubtless have more of religion and more of theology than Homer has given us.

Yet Homer had his theology, notwithstanding; for every poet puts together in more or less complete form the facts which he has apprehended about Deity and the relations of Deity to the universe. *Se moquer de la philosophie, c'est vraiment philosopher*—to mock at

philosophy is to philosophize; and even when Homer satirizes the gods he shows that he has ideas about them. Theology may popularly be defined as the doctrine of God, of man, and of their mutual relations. I propose simply to ask what are Homer's ideas about God and what are his ideas about man's relations to God. God, sin, atonement, a future life—these are the determining elements of every theological system; if we can learn what Homer thinks of these, we shall have the substance of his theology.

Perhaps the first thing that strikes the thoughtful reader of the Homeric poems is their undertone of monotheism. This may surprise some who have regarded Homer only as a polytheistic poet, yet it is nevertheless true. Though there are many gods in the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," yet they constitute a hierarchy in which Zeus is supreme. Very often we read of "the god," in the singular number, without the mention of any definite name, and in connections which seem to show that it should be translated simply "God"; in other words, it is an expression of an ineradicable belief that deity is one.

Of this god, whose name is Zeus when any name is given him, the other gods are in some sense manifestations. Some of them are his children and derive their life from him. Two of them, Athene and Apollo, are hardly more than hypostases, or personifications, of his energy; with Zeus these two constitute an inner circle and faintly remind us of the biblical Trinity—Athene being the divine wisdom and Apollo the executor of the divine will. Here, Ares, Hephaestus, Hermes, Artemis, and Aphrodite had a second rank. Then, thirdly, come

Poseidon, Hades, Dione, and Letona, and after them the whole multitude of inferior gods who preside over the forces of nature or are identified with particular rivers, winds, and groves.

And yet, even of Zeus, the head of this imposing hierarchy, as well as of all the other gods, it is true that he is but a magnified man. The only absolute distinction between gods and men is that of immortality. But this immortality of the gods is a physical immortality. They have bodies like the bodies of men, bodies dependent upon physical nutriment. Their food is ambrosia indeed, and their drink is nectar; but they must perpetually partake of these if they would not die. So they are not self-subsistent, like the God of the Bible; the ground of their being is in something outside of themselves. As this endless continuity of physical being is the only characteristic difference between gods and men, it is a bar that may be broken over. Odysseus would have become a god if he had accepted Calypso's invitation and had eaten of her promised ambrosia instead of confining himself to the food of mortals. Etymologically and symbolically, ambrosia is itself immortality, so that the gods feed on immortality, even as they wash themselves in beauty. Hence the oath by the Styx, the river of the world of the dead, is the only oath that irrevocably binds them; for physical death would be the end of their godhood.

The bodies of the gods are of great size. When Athene smites Ares with a stone on the plain of Troy, it is said that "seven roods he covered in his fall." They are of great voice; the battle-cry of Ares and Poseidon is loud as the united shout of a myriad of the Greeks. They

have their fixed abodes—Poseidon in the depths of the sea at Aegae, and Ares in the land of Thrace; the temples consecrated to them are only occasional haunts; Hephæstus has built for the family of Zeus permanent habitations upon Mount Olympus. Though they are subject to these limitations of space, their movements are very rapid; Hermes, it is true, tires of his long journey to Ogygia, yet one spring of the horses of Here takes them through the haze into the distance upon the open sea. Theoretically, the gods know all things and can do all things; practically, they are ignorant of some of the matters that most concern them; can be most egregiously deceived; are obliged to take counsel before they know their own minds; have their wishes thwarted by other gods and even by mortal men, as when Poseidon's son Polyphemus is blinded by Odysseus.

This antithesis between the theoretical and the actual is one of the most significant things in Homer. Either as the remains of a primitive revelation handed down by tradition, or as the result of man's own religious nature which ever prompts him to "seek God, if haply he may feel after him and find him," the poet is continually declaring the omniscience and omnipotence of the gods, and yet, almost in the same breath, is most inconsistently attributing to them all the weaknesses and limitations of men. Again and again they are called "the blessed gods," and yet we read of their stains and pains, of their wounds and weeping and fear. Thetis sheds bitter tears over the fate of her son Achilles, and Zeus is sorely troubled about Here's anger, even when the nodding of his dark brow makes Olympus quake and assures victory to the Greeks.

There is a similar duality in Homer's representation of Fate and of Jove's relation to it. At times Zeus and Fate are one; the same things are ascribed to Zeus and to Fate; Zeus is the dispenser of the Fates. But at other times Fate appears as a Will side by side with that of Zeus, and even *over* Zeus and all the other gods; they must passively submit to Fate, when they are unwilling actively to employ themselves in its accomplishment. Zeus is the head of an Oriental council, the master of an Oriental harem: that is Homer's method of representing the manifoldness of the divine manifestations. Fate is one, inevitable, binding both gods and men: that is Homer's effort to supplement polytheism with the inalienable consciousness of the unity and absoluteness of God. But this Fate, though it stood for the highest Homeric conception of the Godhead, never was worshiped, never could be worshiped, for it was devoid of mind and heart, and could hardly be distinguished from blind and inexorable necessity.

The idea of something done beyond that which is ordained, something surpassing Fate, is certainly, though only rarely, found in Homer; it seems once more to open the door that had been closed against divine and human freedom, and to relieve the sternness and arbitrariness of Fate. But both Fate and that which is beyond it are equally abstractions; they have no eye to pity and no arm to save. Homer's doctrine of the Godhead shows us two things: first, that human nature demands a deity free from limitations and lifted above the finite; secondly, that human imagination is utterly unable to construct for itself such a deity, and when it attempts the task succeeds only in making a huger finite

being like itself. God created man at the first in his own image; the heathenism of which Homer is the noblest representative can only create a god in the image of man.

This becomes still plainer when we examine the poet's conceptions of God's moral attributes. There can be no exacter measure of the chasm that separates the Homeric from the biblical theology than the way in which they respectively treat God's attribute of holiness. The Scriptures bring this characteristic of God's nature before us more frequently than any other; this is the fundamental attribute that conditions all others; this it is that chiefly makes God to be God. But in Homer the gods never even once have this quality expressly ascribed to them—they are constantly called blessed and immortal, but they are never once called holy.

The gods have a sort of moral perception, indeed, but this is exercised only in estimating the character and acts of men. They are like some men we know of, who have a very keen conscience for other people, but very dull for themselves. The noble swineherd, Eumæus, tells Odysseus that "it is not froward deeds that the gods love, but they reverence justice and the righteous acts of men." One of the wooers declares that "the gods, in the likeness of strangers from far countries, put on all manner of shapes and wander through the cities, to watch the violence and the righteousness of men." When the suitors have suffered their deserts, the aged Laertes can say: "Father Zeus, verily ye gods yet bear sway on high Olympus!" Zeus sends floods upon the people whose judges deliver unjust judgments.



The gods are displeased because Achilles pitilessly retains the body of Hector at the ships and will not take ransom for the dead.

But now observe how in this last instance Homer takes back again all that he has given to the gods in the way of praise. How came this pitiless spirit into Achilles' heart? Ajax tells us when he addresses the hero: "The gods have put within thy breast a spirit implacable and evil." And so the gods appear again and again as tempters to perjury and adultery, as in the violation of the truce which Zeus himself suggests, and in the unfaithfulness of Helen which Aphrodite inspires. It is not enough to say that the gods permit these things—they actually bring them about by their direct and efficient causation. How devilish, it has been well remarked, is the deception which Athene in the form of Deiphobos practises upon Hector in the hour of his extremest need, when she flatters him with a brother's voice and lures him to destruction!

The truth is, that God and devil are confounded in Homer. The suitors look to the gods for help in their iniquities. The gods regard only their own honor and pleasure in the government they exercise. They are envious—Poseidon envies the Greeks their rampart, because it rivals the wall he had built for Troy, and he envies the Phæacians their prosperous voyages, because these voyages seem to make the Phæacians instead of himself the lords of the sea. Not only crime, but happiness also, is punished by the Furies.

The gods are revengeful. Here and Athene never cease to hate and to afflict the Trojans on account of the judgment of Paris, and Poseidon never ceases to

pursue Odysseus even though Odysseus' only fault was this, that he had rid the earth of a monster. The gods are placable sometimes, but at other times neither a just cause nor manifold offerings can remove their anger. The Zeus of Homer is only an immortal man. The gods are only projections into space and formal embodiments of human feelings, impulses, and passions. Aphrodite is little more than a name for illicit desire; Hermes for the disposition to falsehood. So Athene at times is but a figure for the better judgment of Odysseus or Achilles; Ares stands for the warlike spirit; Apollo for presages of the future.

This brief survey has been sufficient, I trust, to convince the reader that Homer's conception of God is that of a nature-deity, who includes in himself all the forces of the physical and moral world, whether these are good or whether they are evil. Homer's God is God, world, man, and devil, all in one. God is the sum of all hidden causes. Different names are given to his various manifestations and appearances—and so we have the nine great Olympians and the whole retinue of minor gods besides. Personality belongs to him—but then in his aspect as Fate impersonality belongs to him also. He is moral and is the source of all law among men—but then he is immoral also, and his law is an arbitrary thing, having no fixed abode in his nature and not always enforced on earth.

It is a most interesting question how such a conception of the godhead could have originated. Are these "fair humanities of old religion," so called, the offspring only of a mythologizing tendency inherent in the childhood of the race? Some writers would have us believe this.

The Greeks, they say, were natural poets. Imagination conceived of nature as alive ; each natural phenomenon, each movement of the spirit within, seemed due to a separate will ; supernatural beings were thought to find in human affairs everywhere a field for their activity ; the artistic instinct unconsciously wrought over this material ; the innocent result was the gods of Greece. Alas for the theory, Homer himself furnishes the refutation of it. There is enough of the divine unity, spirituality, and righteousness left in his representations to show that these growths were not wholly imaginative and poetic. Ever and anon we hear the deep consciousness of God uttering its protests against the impieties with which sense and art seek to drown its voice.

This god-making was not innocent. It began in the desire of fallen humanity to rid itself of the thought of a moral God who would challenge its impurity and punish its transgressions. It transformed the one holy Will into many wills, sometimes conflicting, often malignant, but never unalterably righteous, until at last all things, without the soul and within as well, whether evil or good, were ascribed to them. Art proceeded to clothe these creations with beauty, but it was a meretricious beauty, and it led to further debasement of the idea itself ; the statues of the gods became an object of idolatry. This is the genesis of heathenism. The Apostle Paul has given us the only philosophical as well as the only authoritative account of it. It is not the result of natural evolution, but of guilty degradation. It presupposes a primitive knowledge of God. The heathen are "without excuse : because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks,

but became vain in their reasonings and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."

And so we come naturally to examine the Homeric doctrine of sin. It is evident that with such a doctrine of God, the poet's idea of sin must equally diverge from the truth. If God is a spiritual and personal being whose will is that we be like himself in holiness, then sin will be a self-chosen unlikeness to God in character and conduct. But if God is the sum of all natural tendencies and forces, both good and evil, as Homer represents him, then sin can at its worst be only the short-sighted following of evil impulses, the origin of which can in the last analysis be ascribed to God himself. And this is actually the prevailing conception of sin in the "Iliad" and in the "Odyssey."

There is no idea in these poems more striking to the practical moralist than that contained in the word Ate. By derivation and in its practical use, it signifies a fooling. And this is the chief element in sin. Sin is not a matter of will,—the self-assertion of freedom in opposition to the will of God,—it is the error or mistake of foolishness, and this foolishness is due to the gods themselves. Agamemnon, when he gives account of the fault he committed against Achilles, declares that Zeus had bound him with might in grievous blindness of soul.

In the noble address in which Phœnix, the instructor of Achilles, labors to turn the hard heart of his old pupil,

there occurs so remarkable a description of this Ate, or Sin, that I quote it entire :

Therefore, Achilles, rule thy high spirit ; neither beseemeth it thee to have a ruthless heart. Nay, even the very gods can bend, and theirs withal is loftier majesty and honor and might. Their hearts by incense and reverent vows and drink-offering and burnt-offering men turn with prayer, so oft as any transgresseth and doeth sin. Moreover, prayers of penitence are daughters of great Zeus, halting and wrinkled and of eyes askance, that have their task withal to go in the steps of sin. For sin is strong and fleet of foot, wherefore she far outrunneth all prayers, and goeth before them over all the earth making men fall, and prayers follow behind to heal the harm. Now whosoever reverenceth Zeus' daughters when they draw near, him they greatly bless and hear his petitions ; but when one denieth them and stiffly refuseth, then depart they and make prayer unto Zeus the son of Kronos, that sin may come upon such an one, that he may fall and pay the price.

Let me quote, also, the words of Agamemnon, after Achilles had renounced his wrath. He is speaking of his own fault which had roused that wrath. He says complacently :

It is not I who am the cause, but Zeus and Destiny and Erinyes, that walketh in the darkness, who put into my soul fierce madness on the day when in the assembly I, even I, bereft Achilles of his meed. What could I do ? It is God who accomplisheth all. Eldest daughter of Zeus is Ate, who blindeth all, a power of bane ; delicate are her feet, for not upon earth she goeth, but walketh over the heads of men, making men to fall, and entangleth this one or that. Yea, even Zeus was blinded upon a time, he who they say is greatest among gods and men ; yea, even him Here, with female wile, deceived.

Then, after describing how Ate deceived even Zeus himself, Agamemnon tells us how the father of gods and men awoke from his illusion :

Sharp pain smote him in the depths of his soul, and straightway he seized Ate by her bright-haired head in the anger of his soul, and swore a mighty oath that never again to Olympus and the starry heaven should Ate come, who blindeth all alike. He said, and whirling her in his hand, he flung her from the starry heaven, and quickly came she down among the works of men. Thus also I, what time great Hector of the glancing helm was slaying Argives at the sterns of our ships, could not be unmindful of Ate, who blinded me at the first. But since thus blinded was I, and Zeus bereft me of my wit, fain am I to make amends and recompense manifold for the wrong.

So we read of Zeus himself falling into sin, and then in revenge leading men into it. Again we see that Zeus is both God and Satan.

The result is that we have no deep confessions of sin, and no deep penitence, either in the "Iliad" or the "Odyssey." How can there be either, when the blame of sin is shifted from man to Ate or Zeus or Fate? The later Greek tragedy shows much more of the workings of remorse than we find in Homer, yet even in the later Greek tragedy Œdipus declares that his evil deeds have been suffered, and not done. It was the terrors of a guilty conscience that first led men to turn the moral God into the unmoral gods—then they reaped the fruit of their error in a new depravation of their moral consciousness; the unmoral gods became so far the authors of men's sins that the sense of guilt well-nigh disappeared.

Well-nigh disappeared, I say, but not altogether. Just as we recognized an inconsistency in Homer's representations of God, so we must recognize an inconsistency in his representations of sin. Through the mist of this self-excusing theory there gleam again and again

the inextinguishable lights of the earlier and truer faith. Conscience now and then asserts herself. Hector, when urged by Andromache not to enter the fight, speaks of the sore shame he will feel, if, like a coward, he shrinks from the battle; yet, when at last he ventures to undertake the combat with Achilles, he fears lest he has undone the Trojan host by his wantonness. Not only the desire for fame, but the sense of honor, keeps from evil deeds and prompts to bravery. Self-respect is a power in the Homeric poems; and in the assertion of the better self against the seductions of ease and pleasure, we find a remnant of fidelity to conscience.

It is true that this self-respect not unfrequently becomes exaggerated and perverted. The conscience that has no standard outside of self sometimes applauds self-seeking. Yet overweening pride and self-assertion are not only objects of dislike, but they are charged to men's account and are visited with unmistakable punishments. These are the faults of Achilles, and the fact that Zeus imbues him with pitiless revenge is not regarded as destroying his responsibility. Giving place to one's own hardihood and strength is a crime before both gods and men. Men can yield to wantonness, being the fools of their own force. Ajax might have escaped his doom at the hands of Poseidon had he not let a proud word fall in the fatal darkening of his heart, when he said that in the gods' despite he had escaped the great gulf of the sea.

Here then we have a partial corrective applied by Homer himself to that very superficial and immoral conception of sin which prevails in his poems. Sin is, after all, not wholly a deception from without, a work of

the gods in which man is simply passive. Sin is also man's own act, the expression of his selfishness. It is pride and self-will, infatuated with the conceit of independence, and despising alike the ordinances of the gods and the rights of men. While sin is deception, it is self-deception also. And so, side by side with the common disposition to excuse sin and throw the blame of it on the gods, we find an occasional word of self-reproach. In Helen, the great sinner of the Homeric story, even while she attributes her faithlessness to Fate and to Aphrodite, there ever lives a feeling of guilt and remorse; she calls herself a hateful wretch, a shameless bitch. And there is definite expectation of punishment for sin; at times "a fearful looking for of judgment."

The whole course of the two poems is proof that the unsophisticated moral sense of mankind demands reparation for wrong-doing. On the one hand, Achilles' inordinate anger is punished by the slaying of Patroclus, his dearest friend; on the other hand, the sin of Paris and of his countrymen who abetted it meets its just retribution in the death of Hector and the predicted fall of Troy. Through ten years of outrage and insolence at the hands of the wooers, Telemachus has no resource but his trust in the avenging righteousness of the gods. Warnings only harden these evil-doers. They have fearful premonitions of their doom, but they only banish them with laughter. The gods are represented as arranging circumstances in such a way as to bring their iniquity to a head and to occasion its most flagrant manifestation. Their sin is punished by involving them in more aggravated wickedness, until at length persuasions and entreaties are useless, for their appointed



day of vengeance has already come. When the arrows of Odysseus strike the suitors at the very culmination of their villainy, those arrows are the very thunderbolts of Zeus. The hero proclaims himself to be the executor of the divine judgments when he says: "These hath the destiny of the gods overcome and their own cruel deeds."

Sin is ill-deserving; sin puts the sinner in antagonism to God; sin is sure to be punished; the infatuation of sin is itself a part of its punishment—these great truths stand fast in Homer, in spite of the easy shifts by which he commonly relieves the conscience and dims the holiness of God. The doctrine of Scripture is purer than Homer's, for while Scripture tells us that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, it does not fail, in close connection therewith, to tell us that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, and so to intimate that the divine operation is not immediate or causative, but only permissive and indirect, through the circumstances which God ordained and the means of enlightenment which he gave, but which Pharaoh's evil disposition seized upon as an occasion for the manifestation of his own heart's iniquity. There are no permissive decrees in Homer, and this is the chief defect in his doctrine of sin. At the best, the responsibility for transgression is divided between man and God, and conscience has the force of her accusations partly broken. Yet even Homer teaches that sin deserves death, and that punishment is a debt due to the gods. The "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" are everlasting witnesses to the fundamental postulates of natural religion.

Homer, as we have seen, recognizes that sin deserves death and that punishment is a debt due to the gods.

Can there be remission of penalty and pardon of the guilty? Is there any way by which man may be just with God? Has God ever made himself known as the Helper and Saviour of sinners? These are questions which we have still to ask our poet. The answer to them will constitute the Homeric doctrine of atonement.

There are burnt-offerings and sin-offerings in both the "Iliad" and "Odyssey." The most striking of them all occurs in the first book of the former poem. The fatal shafts of Apollo are falling thick and fast in the Grecian camp, and men are everywhere dying under the infliction. The god is angered at the insult offered to his priest and temple, by the capture of Chryseis, the priest's daughter. Reparation must be made. Odysseus is made the captain of a ship of twenty oarsmen, in which Chryseis is taken to her father, and with her an offering to the god. When they reach Apollo's temple they purify themselves and cast the defilements into the sea, and sacrifice unblemished hecatombs of bulls and goats, and the sweet savor arises to heaven eddying amidst the smoke. Then speaks Odysseus to the priest: "Chryses, Agamemnon, king of men, sent me hither to bring thy daughter, and to offer to Phœbus a holy hecatomb on the Danaans' behalf, wherewith to propitiate the king that hath now brought sorrow and lamentation on the Argives." So Chryses lifts up his hands and prays aloud for them: "Hearken to me, god of the silver bow, that standest over Chryse and holy Killa, and rulest Tenedos with might; even as erst thou heardest my prayer, and didst me honor, and mightily afflictedst the people of the Danaans, even so now fulfill

me this my desire: remove thou from the Danaans forthwith the loathsome pestilence." Thus he speaks in prayer, and Phoebus Apollo hears him.

The object of this sacrifice is expressly said to be propitiation, and propitiation is the turning away of anger. The anger of the god has been incurred by sin, and this sin has involved guilt and defilement. The defilement is symbolically put away by the washing of Odysseus' company and by the casting into the depths of the sea of the water that has removed their stains. The guilt is atoned for by the shedding of the blood and the burning of the flesh of animals offered in sacrifice. Satisfaction is in this way rendered to the offended majesty of the god, and pardon is secured for the offenders. No one can read Homer without perceiving that this element of satisfaction to the deity enters into every sacrifice of every sort.

In the sacrifices of the Bible there is another element of equal importance—that of substitution. Satisfaction by substitution makes up the full conception of the offering there. Is this element of substitution found in Homer? Not so plainly, we grant, as it is found in later Greek poetry, where Hermes declares to Prometheus that he shall not be released until some god appear as a successor to his sufferings, one willing to go down to Hades and Tartarus for him; not so plainly as the Latin poets declare it, when Ovid bids the gods take the heart and flesh of the victim for the heart and flesh of the offerer, and Virgil says of the sacrifice: "One head shall be given for the many." But even in the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" there is evidence that the idea of substitution is by no means wholly absent. The

shedding of the blood of the brute is an alternative set over against the shedding of the blood of the sinner.

When Agamemnon has slain the lambs before the single combat of Paris and Menelaus, he pours forth wine with their blood before the gods, and the Achæans pray: "Zeus, most glorious, most great, and all ye immortal gods! which folk soever be first to sin against the oaths, may their brains be so poured forth upon the earth even as this wine, theirs and their children's." All through the "Odyssey" there is the continual premonition of coming doom in the declaration that the evil deeds of the suitors are unatoned for; the offerings which they make are devoid of any power to avert or postpone their fate; when they die at the hands of Odysseus, they themselves pay to the gods the penalty which they fain would have escaped by sacrifice.

The Old Testament shows us a system of sacrifice much more fully developed, and one which enables us to understand the offerings of the Homeric poems. In the scapegoat, we have the analogue of the defilements which Odysseus casts into the sea; while the burning of the slain beasts is in both cases the same. The Hebrew conception of God as holy and of man as personally guilty, made the bloody offering of the Old Testament a recognized picture of the ill-desert of sin and of vicarious satisfaction for it; the death of the animal took the place of the death which the offerer had incurred by his transgression and restored him to the divine favor. We are persuaded that the sacrificial language of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" can never be explained except by supposing that it is the relic of an age when the race had a better understanding of God and of sin.

Men in Homer's time have forgotten God's holiness and have blinded themselves to the fact of their own guilt, so that at last much of the meaning of the sacrifices which they traditionally offer has dropped out; at times they seem to be regarded as in themselves a sufficient compensation for the offense committed; at times the sensuous gratification of the god appeases his anger. But the outward forms still remain, and, whenever conscience revives, it puts into them more or less of their old significance. Sacrifice is evermore a vivid, because a divinely appointed picture, of sin's desert of death and of the divine intention that man's guilt shall be removed by the laying of it upon another and so make perfect satisfaction to the law and justice of God. Homer retains the element of satisfaction to God's justice; he only occasionally, and then vaguely, suggests substitution.

Let us not blame Homer too much. Those were the times of ignorance, which God in his forbearance overlooked. Christ had not yet come. Not even the Jew was yet aware that God himself was to provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, and that all this paraphernalia of sacrifice was only a mute prophecy of the atoning work of the Son of God. To the Homeric age the gods were far away. They had mingled with men long before the war of Troy, but that intercourse had ceased. There were no present communications either in the way of teaching or command. The will of the gods could be learned only by inference from the history of the past, or by the obscure leadings of natural insight. As the Scripture declares, God suffered men to walk in their ways and to demonstrate the inability of human nature, left to itself, to find the way of peace or holiness.

Homer's doctrine of sacrifice can give no peace to a guilty conscience, for it is a merely human offering ; none can say whether the gods will accept it ; they may indeed be moved to pity and forgiveness, but then they may not ; the result is wholly arbitrary and uncertain. Hecuba offers an embroidered robe, if perchance she may induce the goddess to spare Hector, but Pallas Athene denies the prayer. Odysseus slays the ram to secure pardon for his killing of the Cyclops, but Zeus heeds not the sacrifice. These are examples of attempted expiation that accomplish nothing. The most Homer can assure us of is the possibility of forgiveness. The gods determine arbitrarily the limits of their anger, and humanity lives without the certainty of mercy.

Let this examination of the Homeric doctrine teach us the immeasurable superiority of the Christian scheme. Here we have what natural religion and philosophy cannot give—a sure word of God, a voice from out of the darkness and the silence, declaring that there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared ; that if the wicked will forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and will turn unto the Lord, he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, he will abundantly pardon. And if this assurance seem, in view of God's holiness and our sin, too great to be believed, we have made known to us the immutable foundation upon which the promise is based, the provision of grace in accordance with which God can be just and yet justify the believer in Jesus.

In the Christian system there is an atoning sacrifice provided not by man but by God himself, a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than any offered upon

heathen or Jewish altars, even the sacrifice of the Son of God himself. God has come down to earth again and has joined himself to humanity in more perfect manner than ever Homer fabled of Aphrodite or of Zeus, in order that he might lift man up to heaven in more perfect manner than Homer fabled of Hercules when he married Hebe, the daughter of eternal youth. Aye, God in the person of his Son has put his own great shoulders under the burden of our guilt and has himself suffered as an atonement to his own violated holiness, in order that the sinner may be saved. Heathenism tells us that the gods have certain favorites whom they love, sometimes without regard to morals or to justice, but it never tells us that they love man everywhere, even in his sins, and that they love him so greatly that they are willing to die, and actually die, in his behalf. Christianity alone shows us that the glory of God is in self-sacrifice, that the lifting up of the Godhead above humanity and the coming down of the Godhead into humanity are one and the same thing. Heathenism is the vain attempt of man, by self-moved and self-dependent works and sacrifices, to lift himself up to God. Christianity is God's coming down in mercy and grace, to do what man can never do for himself, namely, to redeem man from his sins and to lift him up to God.

A few words with regard to Homer's ideas of the future life must complete our view of the Homeric theology. The reader will be able to anticipate the most that we can say, if he will but remember how far Homer is from recognizing the independence of the human will, and how completely he makes immortality depend upon the continued existence of the body. After the

soul has left its earthly tenement, it wanders desolate on the shores of the other world, but being bodiless, it is destitute of full personality. Memory and hope are alike obliterated. Only when the shadowy dead drink the blood of the sacrifices to which Odysseus invites them, do they recover their recollection of the past and their ability to recognize the living.

In all this we have testimony to great truths, though these truths are most dimly apprehended. That the *eidolon*, or shade, continues to exist after death, even although separated from the body it once inhabited, shows that Homer was no materialist after all; at the risk of an inconsistency, he will recognize the spiritual nature of man. But this shadowy existence is hardly to be called existence—it is devoid of all that renders life desirable. When Odysseus in the house of Hades assures the shade of Achilles that the Achæans give him honor with the gods and count him a prince among the dead, the hero only answers: “Nay, speak not comfortably to me of death, great Odysseus. Rather would I live upon the soil as the hireling of another, with a landless man who had no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead that are no more.”

And the longing for the renewal of physical life explains the strange eagerness with which the ghosts crowd about Odysseus, and clamor for the draught of blood which will even momentarily reanimate their powers and give them back again the consciousness which death had taken from them. It is Homer's way of telling us that man is a two-fold being; that an intermediate state in which the soul is sundered from the body is an abnormal state; that the truest life is



impossible except in a state where soul and body are joined together. As there is only a shadow of man's being in that other world, so that world itself is but the shadow of a world. Orion drives the wild beasts over the mead of asphodel, and Minos wields a golden sceptre, giving sentence from his throne to the dead; but both the mead of asphodel and the golden sceptre, like Orion and Minos themselves, are shadows.

Yet in that under-world, on the other side of Oceanus, in the sunless West, there are those who punish men, and the heavier crimes meet their just desert. How all this is possible in a world where the bodiless soul is incapable of thought or memory, we must not too narrowly inquire. The spirit at any rate still lives. It is regarded as in some sense freed from the limitations of sense. Invisible, its existence is somewhat like that of the gods. It can have libations made to it, and can be addressed in prayer. In the last book of the "Iliad," Achilles draws wine from a golden bowl and pours it forth upon the earth, calling meantime upon the spirit of hapless Patroclus. In the last book of the Odyssey, Odysseus makes a drink-offering and entreats with many prayers the strengthless heads of the dead. The reader cannot fail to perceive that we have here, not in Scripture, the origin of the invocation of the saints. The *divi manes* became in the Roman Catholic church the canonized departed, and this very term *divi* was used to characterize them. The apotheosis which lifted Leucothea and Ganymede from earth to heaven was held to have its Christian counterpart in the act by which God makes men partakers of the divine nature and causes them to sit with him upon his heavenly throne.

Yet this idea of future reward for the righteous has very narrow and meager expression in Homer. Of Menelaus alone is it declared that he is not ordained to die, but that the deathless gods will convey him to the Elysian plain and to the world's end where life is easiest for men. No snow is there, nor yet great storm, nor any rain ; but alway ocean sendeth forth its breezes to blow cool on men. As there is no distinct statement of punishment for all the wicked, but only for the most outrageous transgressors, so there is no distinct promise of happiness for the good, but only for a few exceptional favorites of the gods. The doctrine of future rewards and punishments was in later times far more fully developed—only the germs of it do we find in Homer. Indeed he cannot develop it, for the one means by which, in accordance with his general system, blessedness could be assured to the departed has never occurred to him. Consciousness and happiness are dependent on the possession of a physical organism. True life can be ours only by joining body and soul once more together. But Homer nowhere tells us of a resurrection ; he knows no way of rescue from the power of the grave ; life and immortality have not yet been brought to light by the gospel. Here is another truth which Moses knew, and the Egyptians long before him, but which became so lost out of the beliefs of the Greeks, that when Paul proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection to the men of Athens, they only mocked at him, and thought his story too silly for a hearing.

And as for hope in death, Homer has nothing of this either. The golden fabric of life is shot with many a thread of sorrow. Outwardly the world is fresh and

young, and it rejoices in its youth, but the joy is superficial—listen intently and you will hear a sound of wailing over the instability and brevity of earthly things. Age finds death welcome, for death puts an end to pains of body and the caprice of fortune ; but, when death comes, it only ushers the soul into a cheerless region of wandering and retribution, where there are indeed bitter punishments for the wicked, but no sure rewards for the righteous. There is no rest for the weary in this present world, and there is still less rest for the weary in the world to come. How strangely incongruous with the whole tenor of the “ Iliad ” and the “ Odyssey ” would be an interpolation of that verse from John’s Gospel, “ I am the resurrection, and the life ; he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die ” ; or this from the Apocalypse, “ Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth ; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors ; for their works follow with them.”

If there is any one lesson which, more than any other, is taught us by this study of Homer, it is man’s need of a special divine revelation. We see humanity blindly groping after the truth with regard to God, sin, atonement, the future life, but utterly unable to reach it. These great poems do not teach us so much of divinity as they do of humanity. They set before us in vivid pictures the ideas of courage and endurance which make the ideal man, when once God’s ideal of humanity has faded out of sight. It is this human interest which makes both the “ Iliad ” and the “ Odyssey ” great ; in each there stands forth a living man ; Achilles represents

the grandeur, as Odysseus represents the virtue, of the heroic character. In each poem the hero is made to speak out, and to act out, an inner life peculiarly his own: the fiery wrath of Achilles and the fiery love that conquers it, the patient faithfulness of Odysseus and his many devices—these, and not mere external incidents, are the subjects which the poet is intent upon developing. How different from the Christian standard of humility and mercy is the warlike grandeur of Achilles! How different from the Christian standard of simplicity and truth is the wily wisdom of Odysseus! Heathen doctrine has begotten heathen morality—the stream cannot rise higher than its fountain.

Yet these natural virtues, half-barbaric as they are, have a splendid vigor in Homer's pages, and they will never cease to captivate the world. And Homer's women, with what slight touches, yet how masterly and sure, are these selected types painted upon the canvas! I do not speak of Helen, whose imperishable beauty through all the vicissitudes of war and conquest subdues both friend and foe, even though alternate self-reproach and easy indifference reveal the shallowness of her nature. I do not speak of Nausicaa, that picture of pure girlishness, in which *naïveté* and dignity, sagacity and modesty, innocent curiosity and womanly promise, so exquisitely blend. I speak rather of Andromache, the heroine of the "Iliad," the tender wife and mother, whose grief at Hector's loss so crushes her that she has not even one word of anger or reproach for those who slew him. And I speak of Penelope, the heroine of the "Odyssey." As Andromache is the model of passive, so Penelope is the model of active, suffering. Here is

marital fidelity, which through the long and lonely years solaces itself indeed with weeping, yet ever weaves anew the web of hope and planning for her lord's return. In the depicting of these characters, so individual all and so distinct, Homer, more than any other poet except Shakespeare, absorbs himself; the creator is lost in his creations; we know much about Ajax and Thersites, about Circe and Eumæus, but we know very little about Homer himself.

There is a spontaneity and exuberance of imagery, moreover, an endless fertility of invention, a largeness and roundness of conception, a dewy sparkle and freshness of phrase, that befit the early morning time of history. How unconventional and yet how graphic, how ornate and yet how simple, how definite and yet how sublime, is the poetry of Homer! Physical health breathes through it; more than any other epics, these are the poems of out-of-doors. The earth, the sky, and the loud-resounding main are here. On the plain of Troy we catch the dazzling gleam of the innumerable bronze, as the serried ranks of the Greeks move forward to the fray. On the waters we hear the shrill west wind whistling through the cordage and singing over the wine-dark sea. By day the Achæans fight like unto burning fire, saying that one omen is best, to fight for one's country. By night the watch-fires of the Trojans are countless as the stars when the air is windless and all heaven opens to the view and the shepherd's heart is glad. Apollo is made known by the dread clanging of his silver bow; the lame Hephæstus hobbles about to dispense the nectar amid the unquenchable laughter of the blessed gods. Upon their hinges groan

the gates of heaven whereof the Hours are the warders, to whom are committed great Heaven and Olympus, whether to throw open the thick cloud or to shut it to. The persuasive words of Odysseus are like the snowflakes of the early winter, so softly do they fall; there is something awe-inspiring in every word of Achilles, as when he opens his mouth to say: "Hateful! to me as the gates of hell is he that hideth one thing in his heart and uttereth another." Is it wonderful that Xenophanes called the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" "the primary source of all education," and that Æschylus called his own tragedies but "fragments from the great banquet of Homer"?

Whether for good or evil, Homer has been one of the world's chief teachers. Every later poet has formed his poetic style more or less upon Homer's model; where the influence has been unconscious, it has been none the less real. Like the Colosseum at Rome, the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" have been a quarry, from which later builders have drawn a large part of their material. Subtract from the "Æneid," from the "Divine Comedy," from the "Paradise Lost," what of substance or expression they indirectly or directly owe to Homer, and you would hardly recognize your Virgil or Dante or Milton. We cannot doubt that Providence ordained these poems to be a great factor in the education of mankind.

Hegel makes the godlike Achilles fierce but brave, impulsive but generous, the type and incentive of Greek civilization. Who can measure the influence which Homer has exerted, not only on the literature and liberty of Greece, but on the literature and liberty of

the world! His poems have in them an inexhaustible vitality, and no device of criticism can tear from his brow "his crown of indivisible supremacy." Even now, as we look back upon the past which poetry has peopled with heroic figures, we descry far in the distance, but still towering above the rest, the form of great Achilles, and "through the music of the languid hours we hear, like Ocean on a western beach, the surge and thunder of the Odyssey." A single poet in a narrow sphere has succeeded in catching the ear of all generations, and we learn the lesson that man's influence is not measured by his small surroundings, and that this world and the drama enacted here may be the source of good to all the universe. God would seem to have given the death-blow to the whole theory of impersonal and atheistic evolution by ordaining at the very dawn of human history that the greatest of epic poets should also be the first.





VIRGIL



# VIRGIL

## THE POET OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

ROME had conquered the world and the victors were scrambling for the spoils. Two great civil wars naturally followed the earlier wars of conquest. In the first of these civil wars, Marius and Sulla measured their strength against each other. After seven years of bloodshed, Sulla entered Rome in triumph and was made dictator just eighty-one years before Christ. Then followed thirty-seven years of exhaustion and peace, broken only by Pompey's overthrow of Sulla's constitution in the year 70, and Cæsar's overthrow of Pompey and the republic in 48.

The second civil war began just so soon as there arose two new leaders able to continue the fight. Those leaders were Antony and Octavian, the former Cæsar's legal heir, the latter Cæsar's personal heir. As in the first civil war Sulla had represented the aristocratic party against Marius, so in the second civil war Octavian represented the popular party against Antony. The civil wars were in part a contest of principles—the principle of senatorial aristocracy on the one hand and the principle of democratic rule on the other.

But they were still more a contest of ambitious men, each bent on making himself the foremost man of all this world. As Sulla defeated the plebeians only to

make himself dictator, so Octavian defeated the senatorial party only to make himself supreme. His assumption of the title of Augustus was the beginning of the Roman Empire, and Augustus was none the less emperor because he clothed his power with the old forms of the republic. When, after thirteen years of anarchy and carnage, the battle of Actium in 31 left Caius Julius Cæsar Octavianus Augustus the sole authority in the State, the world heaved a sigh of relief, and welcomed peace even at the cost of liberty.

It has been said of Milton that if it had not been for the civil war in England he never would have written "Paradise Lost," with its account of rebellion in heaven and the downfall of the prince of darkness, but would have commended himself to posterity only by such poems as "Comus" and "The Nativity." It must be still more evident that the greatest of the Latin poets was the product of his time, and that both his earlier and his later work can be interpreted only in the light of contemporaneous Roman history.

Virgil had his birth and his education during those thirty-seven years of comparative peace and exhaustion when the Roman world was recovering from the first, and was gathering strength for the second, of the great civil wars. Here was a lull in the noise of battle, in which a pensive and imaginative nature might nourish dreams of Arcadian happiness and rest. The results we find in the "Eclogues," and the "Georgics," which, though written after the second civil war began, and taking a plaintive tone from the sorrowful surroundings of the time, are yet a reflection and expression of the quiet and seclusion of Virgil's earlier years. After the

civil war is ended, after the world is unified, after Augustus is enthroned, a grander spirit of confidence takes possession of the poet, and he sings in the "Æneid" the new beginning of national life, the actual reign of universal peace, and the promise of perpetual dominion, which fate and the gods have given to Rome.

Freeman, the historian, dates the beginning of modern times from Cæsar's conquest of Gaul. Then first the Southern races were brought into contact with the lands where lay the scene and the forces of future history. But we must remember that Northern Italy was Cisalpine Gaul, and that it became an integral part of Rome only after Virgil reached his manhood. Born in the center of this Northern Italy, and possibly himself of Celtic descent, or as others have suggested, connected with the Tyrolese over the mountains, he did not become a Roman citizen until his twentieth year. Well-nigh a century later, a certain Roman tribune in Palestine declared that with a great sum he attained this freedom. In Virgil's youth, from the country beyond the Po, still subject to arbitrary confiscation and partition at the nod of the Roman master, and overrun with the legionaries returning from the Eastern wars, Rome and Roman privilege and Roman power must have loomed up as the greatest things on earth. All love for the place of his nativity, and all hope for its future, must have connected themselves in his mind with Rome. The modern element in Virgil's poetry is the product of these two factors—the fresh new life of Northern Italy and the all-encompassing grasp of the imperial city which had brought the whole world to its feet.

But we must know something more of the poet's early

surroundings, and something more of his personal traits. The modern Lago di Garda, the greatest lake of Italy, fed by the snows of the Tyrolese Alps, sends out from its southern extremity the last and largest affluent of the Po. This river is the Mincio—"the smooth-sliding Mincius" of Virgil—as the Po was once Padus, and the lake Benacus, by name. The Mincio, not more than fifty miles long with all its windings, grows broad and sluggish as it comes down into the plains until, about twelve miles above its junction with the Po, it fairly encircles the city of Mantua, whose towers and walls rise as from an island in the midst of the swampy and reedy lagoons of the lakelike river.

Mantua has until recently been one of the most formidable fortresses in Europe. Sixty miles west from Venice, seventy southeast from Milan, eighty northwest from Florence, ninety northeast from Genoa, and one hundred and eighty northwest from Rome, the city holds a strategic position that is commanding, as both Napoleon I. and Napoleon III. well knew. Here Giulio Romano built for the Gonzagas his *Palazzo del Te*, with its *Sala dei Giganti*, or Hall of the Giants, where, by a combination of mechanical with artistic devices, as one describes it, "the rout of the Titans, still contending with artillery of uptorn rocks against the pursuit and thunderbolts of Jove, appears to rush downward on the spectator." In the city of Mantua, Sordello, the precursor of Dante and the hero of Browning's mysterious story, was born and sang. And in the same city, or on the hilly slopes not far away, a greater than Sordello, the precursor of modern poetry and civilization, the poet of Rome, the most complete literary representative of

the Latin race, and the best-read poet of all time, was born also.

It was seventy years before Christ when Virgil first saw the light. He was a shy and gentle spirit, sober and unworldly, diffident of his own powers, modest even to rusticity in his manner, melancholy, yet kindly in temper. He could never arrange his toga to please men of fashion, and he always wore shoes too large for his feet. Virgil never married; he was accessible only to intimate friends; he was a man of books, as Horace was a man of the world. After he had won friends and fame, and audiences in the theatre rose to salute him as they did Octavian, he yet stole along the streets in trepidation lest he should be recognized, and a single whisper, "There goes Virgil!" would drive him into the next house for refuge. It is possible that his bashfulness and reserve were due in part to ill health, for though tall and dark he is said to have been a victim to chronic asthma and headache. Augustus, sitting between Virgil and Horace, who suffered from an affection of the eyes, said jocosely that he was between sighs and tears.

Like many another poet, in his youth Virgil seems to have known little of youthful sports. He never bore arms, as Horace did under Brutus at Philippi. He was a man of contemplation rather than of action. Yet he inspired affection. He was the friend of Mæcenas, the patron of art and Augustus' great minister; he knew Augustus himself before Horace did, if he did not actually make Horace known to Augustus. In an age when decorous vice was almost universal, Virgil by his temperance and purity gained the title of Parthenias. A sort of virgin sanctity seemed to envelope him. He

was wrapped in loftier thoughts than the men who lived and wrought around him.

It was an age of criticism and of unbelief. Heroic days were getting to be matter of jest, and religion was mostly an affair of the rabble. But Virgil saw beneath the surface. He had the poet's eye for reality. The heroic stirred him—he was a hero-worshiper. The *nil admirari* spirit of his time did not infect him. He saw that men live by admiration, hope, and love. So he tried to combine the later science with the primitive faith, to bring back the age to a belief in the higher powers, to inspire in a generation that was self-seeking and partisan some sense of the greatness of the State, of the duty of patriotism, of the dignity of labor, of the value of peace; in short, he would make Rome secure by investing public virtue with religious sanctions.

The father of Virgil, the well-to-do proprietor of an extensive farm, though not himself a man of education, seems to have spared no expense or pains in the education of his son, accompanying him at the age of sixteen to Cremona, as the father of Horace accompanied his son to Rome. Virgil had probably read Homer from his childhood, for Cicero tells us that Northern Italy was at this time especially noted for its study of Greek. At the age of eighteen we find him in training at Rome. His endless industry is praised by his biographers. Science of all sorts attracts him. Like every great poet, he masters the learning of his time. Siron initiates him into the secrets of philosophy, to such extent that at one time he vows to devote his life to abstract thought; and, in many subsequent hours of despondency over what seems to him his ill success in his



real vocation, he regrets that he did not fulfill his early vow. Even to the end of his days his love for philosophy never leaves him, and both Plato and Epicurus seem to speak again in portions of his verse.

But to Virgil, *dulces ante omnia Musæ*. To poetry he early consecrates himself. He has the sense of a mission. He sets himself as deliberately to become a poet as Cicero sets himself to become an orator. The labor of years seems short, for the love he has to the Muse. Seven years he gives to the composition of his first poem; seven years to the second; ten years to the third; and then he wishes to destroy this third, because, forsooth, his life is too short to furnish the three additional years needed to complete it. So, revolving long his several themes and working them over and over before he gives them to the public eye, he at last produces works of such incomparable artistic excellence that the world will not willingly let them die—indeed, they seem endowed with an inherent immortality.

If other things are equal, poetry lives in proportion to the perfection of its artistic form. As the productions of the poet are borne downward on the stream of time, those which have angularities of structure are caught and stopped upon their way—only the rounded and innately beautiful pass by all obstacles and sail on to the ocean of eternal fame. And Virgil was pre-eminently the artist. He, perhaps, more fully than any other of the sons of men, had the literary instinct, the discernment of form. Not so much a creator as a shaper of material, he regarded thought as a means of producing literary effects.

He was a rhetorical poet, if the phrase be permissi-

ble. But as the true rhetorician knows how to choose great themes, because only great themes will bear the richest garb, so Virgil never wastes his gifts on empty words. Beginning with lighter subjects, probably because he seems to himself more equal to them, he gives the maturity of his powers to the greatest subject possible to his time,—he celebrates the rise of Rome's political dominion; and, by linking her present grandeur to the heroic past, he blends patriotism and piety together. And "the silent spells held in those haunted syllables" have done more than any other single influence to give a humane and gracious aspect to the hardness and sordidness of Roman life. Latin before the Christian era would seem the language of a heartless race, and Rome would seem only incarnate power and law, if it were not for the sweetness and pathos of Virgil.

In this matter of artistic form Virgil was an originator. He carried the music of words to a higher perfection than it had ever reached before. Other Latin poets had preceded him, but in their hands the strength of the language had hardly been tamed—it was sonorous, but it was harsh; it had majesty, but it lacked melody. Ennius, the Calabrian, was a half-Greek, and he aimed to reproduce in Latin the Homeric hexameters; but Ennius, though he had a lofty genius, was deficient in art, and it was left to Virgil to make that verse "the noblest metre ever molded by the lips of man." Ennius died just a century before Virgil was born. He was the father of Latin poetry. His "Annals," a curious mixture of history and song, unquestionably furnished Virgil not only with his metre, but with the

theme of his great epic—the origin, greatness, and destiny of Rome. Whole lines from Ennius, indeed, are said to remain embedded in the “Æneid,” and to give archaic simplicity and force to portions of Virgil’s poem.

Lucretius was born 100 B. C., while Virgil was born in 70. Catullus preceded Virgil only fifteen years. Both Lucretius and Catullus were in the zenith of their fame during the years when Virgil was getting his training. He was profoundly influenced by both of them. Lucretius was the most original and profound thinker of the Roman race. His doctrines of the uniformity of nature and the reign of law became a part of Virgil’s system of thought, while Virgil, unlike Lucretius, continued to believe in a will of the gods which expressed itself in nature and molded the wills of men. From Lucretius, moreover, Virgil caught an impassioned earnestness, a condensation and vividness of expression, which constitute one of the most marked characteristics of his verse.

Catullus furnished Virgil with an example of sweet sadness and graceful melancholy; but the later poet improves upon the tender cadences and the pathetic simplicity of his predecessor, by adding to them dignified refinement and just bounds. To put it all in a word, Virgil has absorbed in himself and has combined into one all the great merits of the Roman poets that preceded him.

If Virgil had contented himself with drinking in and reproducing the general characteristics of the earlier poets, no fault could ever have been found with him. If, like Milton, he had recalled without copying, he would have had only praise. But Virgil is the greatest

of imitators. Whatever suits his purpose, whether in Greek or Latin verse, he appropriates without a qualm of conscience, and with an air of happy self-complacency. True it is that whatever he touches he adorns. When he was charged with using Homer's similes as if they were his own, he merely replied: "Only the strong can wield the club of Hercules." He has made others' work his own so perfectly that what is original with him can hardly be distinguished from what he has appropriated. So Molière said boldly: "I take my property wherever I find it." Even in Shakespeare we have a somewhat similar phenomenon. Plot and incident, thought and phrase, our greatest poet often borrows with perfect unconcern. His early dramas are apparently only others' tragedies made over, but made over so wonderfully that even their original authors had more reason for admiration than for complaint.

Virgil is no plagiarist in the ordinary sense. As Dr. Wilkinson has well said, he looked upon Homer and the elder poets, both of Greece and Rome, as a great treasure-house, like that of nature itself. He does not seek to conceal his indebtedness—he rather desires it to be recognized. Like the Spartans, he would have us admire the art with which he steals. Just as Charles Sumner sometimes introduced into his speeches imitations of noble passages from Demosthenes, and was only delighted when you noticed and praised them as a proof of his scholarship and taste, so Virgil would only have felt complimented if you had pointed out how ingeniously he had made his own poems an anthology of all the poets that had gone before him. An echo, says Miss Wedgewood, may be sweeter than the sound that

awoke it, and we may be thankful that Virgil has echoed down to our time a thousand voices of the past that would otherwise be lost.

We may say something more about this matter of originality, after we have considered what Virgil actually wrote. As we have already intimated, there was progress in his work, corresponding to the breadth of his experience and the maturity of his powers. As we think of the "Eclogues," the "Georgics," and the "Æneid" succeeding one another, first the graceful pastorals, secondly the didactics of industry, thirdly the great political epic, we are reminded of Tennyson—the linked sweetness and indecisive touch of his youthful poems such as, "Airy, fairy Lilian," the philosophic depth and moral energy of his manlier work in "In Memoriam," and the broad freedom and epic swing of his later "Idylls of the King."

The earliest work of Virgil was naturally the "Eclogues." He had been dispossessed of his country home by Cæsar's veterans. But Pollio, the Roman governor of the district beyond the Po, had introduced him to Augustus, had interceded for him, and had secured a decree of restoration. When he went to take his estate however, he found that *de jure* ownership was one thing, and *de facto* ownership was another. The old soldier in possession attacked him with such passion and vigor that Virgil was forced to swim the Mincio to save his life. It is doubtful whether he ever really recovered the farm. Some say that Augustus preferred to permit his legionary to retain what he had so stoutly defended, and that Virgil was compensated in some other way, possibly by the gift of a residence in Naples.

In the city and not in the country the "Eclogues" were probably written. Blessings brighten as they take their flight, and most poetry in praise of country life is written in the town. Shut out from his home, a thousand sweet illusions gather about the memory of it. The poet feels the tender grace of a day that is dead. Tityrus, who had worked the farm on shares and had enabled Virgil of old time to play the gentleman farmer while he gave his thoughts to poetry, is now exalted into an Arcadian shepherd. The tending of flocks is the only real work of life; love-making and contests of verse and song are its solaces and delights.

That such a poem could have been published in the year 37 before Christ, in the midst of the second great civil war, shows not only the idealizing powers of the true poet, but also the large fruitage of Virgil's previous years of calm. There is a *naïveté* and a liquid flow to the "Eclogues" which witness to the rise of a new force in literature. Pollio is said to have pressed the poet to the writing of them, and Theocritus is said to have furnished the model and the inspiration. But no one who has in imagination reclined with the writer *sub tegmine fagi* can ever banish from his mind the delightful freshness of the verse, the charm of the Italian landscape which pervades it, and the impression of Virgil's wonderful love for nature. Nature seems actually to live and speak. She mourns for the dead Cæsar, as in Greek poetry she mourned for the dead Daphnis. "In the last Eclogue," as another has said, "all the gods of Arcady come to console the poet when his faithless lady has forsaken him to follow his rival to the wars. This passage suggested the august procession of

the superhuman mourners of Lycidas, which in its turn suggested to Shelley the splendid fragment of Adonais."

In the "Georgics," published in 30 or 29 B. C., after the great victory of Actium had made Augustus sole ruler of the Roman world, we have a more sober and lofty poem, whose temper of chastened hope and serene endeavor, to use the phrase of Prof. Sellar, befits the time of settlement. The word "Georgics" might be translated "Field-work." It is a glorification of industry. The country is not now the scene of perpetual holiday, as it was in the "Eclogues." Work is to be done, and the four sorts of work give their themes to the four books, which successively treat of tillage, trees, herds, and bees. Here too, Virgil had his model, and the model was Hesiod's "Works and Days." He had his prompter also; for Mæcenas, the generous patron and encourager of timid genius, urged the writing of them.

There was reason enough for the advice. The long wars had been times when regular government was almost suspended. Rapine and corruption had stalked in the track of the advancing armies. There was danger that the old virtues of the republic would be buried in the republic's grave. What could arrest the decay of Roman life? Nothing but a revival of the principles which at the first had made Rome great. Industry, frugality, simplicity, love of home, and reverence for law—these must take the place of strife and luxury, of ambition and greed. With a true poet's insight and with a true patriot's hope, Virgil seems to have risen to the occasion. He clothes with a halo of imagination and invests with a tender beauty all the homeliest details of country labor and country life. The "Georgics"

would be the greatest of didactic poems if they were meant to be a didactic poem at all. But this is a mistaken notion; they were never intended to answer for a book of instruction to the farmer. Their object rather was to elevate men's conceptions of the arts of peace, to dignify humble toil, to teach the love of country, to inspire reverence for nature's laws.

These poems give us, more plainly than any others, Virgil's ideas about nature and about government. Nature to him means universal law. The same authority which in the "Æneid" appears as Fate, appears in the "Georgics" as Nature. "Thus Nature," he says, "at first imposed these laws, these eternal ordinances, when Deucalion first cast stones in an empty world, whence the hard race of men arose." But Nature, to Virgil's mind, does not exclude intelligence, or prevent the care and purpose of the gods. Hear him once again: "Incessant labor conquers all things"; "for gods there are"; "Jove hurls the lightning"; "therefore venerate the gods"; "may they now save the Saviour of the State!"

And so Virgil's doctrine of divine government leads to his doctrine of human government. That too has divine sanctions. Augustus, who had pacified the world and saved the State, was the very embodiment at once of the will of the gods and of eternal law. It is not necessary to regard Virgil as a mere court poet, who flatters Augustus as a matter of trade. Nor was the deification of the emperor a piece of sycophancy. Perverse and idolatrous though it was, it was still in large part, as I shall hope to show, the blind exaggeration of a noble sentiment—the sentiment of loyalty and of



reverence for divinely appointed powers. As the Hebrews of old called human judges "gods," because they were appointed by God to stand in his place and administer justice in his name, so the apotheosis of the Cæsars and Virgil's declaration that Augustus would be exalted to heaven, as a new star filling the gap between the Virgin and the Scales, were in some degree a poetical recognition of the fact that the powers that be are ordained of God, and that his faithful representatives shall partake of God's own immortality.

There is a promise in the "Georgics" which indicates the consciousness in Virgil's mind that the time was near when he could venture upon a larger task than any he had yet achieved. He declares that he will yet wed Cæsar's glories to an epic strain. The "Æneid" is the fulfillment of that promise. Ten years of work he spent upon it. In the "Eclogues" he had followed in the track of Theocritus; in the "Georgics" he had imitated Hesiod; now in his last great poem he mounts higher, and aspires to produce a work like those of Homer.

The "Æneid" indeed is intended to be an "Odyssey" and an "Iliad" in one, the first six books with the wanderings of Æneas aiming to be an "Odyssey," and the last six books, with their battles on land, aiming to be an "Iliad." The hero, however, as befits the unity of the epic, is in both halves of the story the same, the pious Æneas; and the great object of the poem is to show how the universal empire of Rome, which the gods had willed and Fate had decreed, was first established on the Italian shores. Virgil will write a poem that reflects the genius and the destiny of the Latin race; he will dignify the history of Rome by linking it to the heroes

of antiquity and the counsels of heaven; he will clothe his theme with all the splendors of legend and song; he will reproduce the Homeric poems in Italy; he will himself be the Homer of Rome.

How fully this magnificent project was realized we have now to inquire. There seems every reason to believe that, till within a few hours of his death, he was hopeful of accomplishing his task. In the year 19 B. C., he read to Augustus and to Octavia, the sister of Augustus, the second book of the poem with its account of the destruction of Troy, the fourth book with its tragic story of Dido, and the sixth book with its description of Æneas' descent into the underworld. It is said that when Octavia heard the splendid eulogy upon her son, the dead Marcellus, the mother's heart within her gave way; she fainted both for grief and joy; and she revived to make the poet glad with a great gift of gold.

But the "Æneid" was not yet ready to leave the author's hands. The whole poem lacked revision; in the latter part especially there were lines still incomplete; Virgil counted three more years as necessary to finish his work. He set out for Athens, in order on the voyage to get the local color needed for his description of the wanderings of Æneas. At the capital of Greece he met Augustus. The emperor persuaded Virgil to return with him to Italy. The burning sun of Megara made him ill. He continued his voyage notwithstanding. At Brundisium he died, and he was buried at Naples.

All the great Latin poets died young. Neither Catullus nor Lucretius reached middle age. Virgil, when he died, had just passed it, for he was fifty-one. He died

despondent, because he thought his work undone. He begged that the "Æneid," since he could not complete it, might be burned; he called it a piece of lunacy that he ever consented to undertake so great a task; he valued the "Georgics" more highly, because they were within the compass of his powers. So Milton thought his "Paradise Regained," as respected its subject, a greater poem than his "Paradise Lost."

It is well for us that Virgil's dying injunctions were not carried out. Augustus knew too well the poetical and political value of the "Æneid" to permit it to be destroyed. Instead of burning it, he ordered it to be most carefully preserved; he commanded that it should be neither amended, added to, nor altered, in any way; through his influence it gained at once a circulation and fame entirely unexampled in ancient times. It remains the most complete picture of the Roman mind at its highest elevation. It is the noblest contribution to pure literature that has ever been made by the Latin race.

And yet we must not rate Virgil too high. Among ancient poets he is the second, not the first. We must grant that he is not a Homer. For while Virgil has talent—prodigious talent, Homer has genius. And the difference between the two is this: Genius is spontaneous, unconscious, free from the thought of self, working from an inner impulse that makes labor both a necessity and a delight. Talent, on the other hand, works with self-consciousness and effort. Virgil has prodigious talent. Whatever labor and skill can do, he accomplishes. But the *vivida vis*, the creative power, the original insight into the heart of things, he has not, as Homer has.

Virgil does not set before us great characters, as Homer does. Achilles and Ulysses, Homer's heroes, are creations so distinct and yet so natural, that the passionate courage of the one and the wily wisdom of the other are almost historical realities to us. But it is not so with the hero of Virgil's poem. Æneas is more of a saint than a hero, more of a monk than a warrior. Saints are not necessarily uninteresting, but pious Æneas hardly excites in us a ripple of enthusiasm. Even his saintship is not decided, for everything seems right to him that will further his interest.

If Virgil has given us any wholly original character, it is that of Dido. Her figure is lifelike and complete. The gradual rise of her fatal passion for Æneas, and her throwing away of life when she finds herself abandoned, have in them more of the spirit of modern romance than can be found in all classical literature besides. *Non humilis mulier*—there is nothing small about her grief; and nothing so becomes her in her life as the grand air with which she leaves it:

My life is lived, and I have played  
The part that fortune gave,  
And now I pass, a queenly shade,  
Majestic to the grave.

And yet it is said that Apollonius Rhodius furnished Virgil with the outline of this picture of Dido. Yes, and even Homer had his predecessors. There were brave men before Agamemnon, and there were doubtless poets before Homer. To all men of genius it can be said: "Other men labored, and ye have entered into their labors." So the greatest literary productions of

all the ages are inextricably intertwined with one another. Milton could never have written if Dante had not gone before; Dante presupposes Virgil; Virgil would have been impossible without Homer; Homer himself was probably the interpreter and unifier of a whole cycle of rhapsodists who glimmered like stars in the early morning of poetry before his own great epic sun had risen.

Still it is true that the power to set forth great personalities belongs to Homer in far larger measure than to Virgil. Homer can use his materials creatively, and out of them can fashion new forms, as Virgil cannot. The powerful invention, the dramatic instinct, the insight into character, which belong to the greatest poetry, are lacking in Virgil's work. The Germans distinguish between the *Naturepos* and the *Kunstepos*, between the epic poetry that is spontaneous and the epic poetry that springs from art. While Virgil gives the best specimen of the one, Homer must evermore be the noblest example of the other.

The interest of the "Æneid," unlike that of the "Odyssey" or the "Iliad," is not so much in the main story as in the episodes. The former poem is much more capable of partition. It may be doubted indeed whether Augustus and Virgil might not better have compromised matters by burning the last six books of the "Æneid" while the first six were preserved. No revision could ever have turned those last six into an "Iliad." In spite of the fact that Dante seems most moved by the closing scenes of the poem, and in spite of the fact that the Roman and imperial element is stronger in the last half than in the first, it still is true

that Virgil's literary fame would have been greater if that last half had not been written. This Latin Homer begins to nod when he gets half way through his task.

Yet Turnus, a character of much more heroic fibre than Æneas, would be lost to us if the last six books were lost, and the noblest type of Latin chivalry with him. How much we should lose if we lost the episode of Camilla, the virgin warrior, the Amazonian queen, whose onset is like the wind :

Nay, she could fly o'er fields of grain  
Nor crush in flight the tapering wheat ;  
Or skim the surface of the main,  
Nor let the billows touch her feet.

Macaulay, in his "Lays of Ancient Rome," has no more effective couplet than that in which he describes the rush of another army, that moves

Like swift Camilla o'er the corn,  
Camilla o'er the main.

And how could we part with that exquisite episode of Nisus and Euryalus, who occupy in ancient poetry the place which Damon and Pythias occupy in ancient prose? Here one noble youth dies to save another :

Love for his friend too freely shown,  
This was his crime, and this alone.

It is the heathen confirmation of Paul's words : "For a good man some would even dare to die." But Virgil witnesses to "the rarity of this human charity," by predicting the immortality of fame which he will give it in his poem :

Blest pair ! if aught my verse avail,  
No day shall make your memory fail  
    From off the heart of time,  
While Capitol abides in place,  
The mansion of the Ænean race,  
And throned upon that moveless base  
    Rome's father sits sublime.

Yet in spite of these brilliant and pathetic episodes, and the great constructive skill which Virgil has shown in weaving them into his story, the "Æneid" has developed passions rather than created persons, and in reading it we get no such impression of sustained and majestic power, as is made upon us when we enter the charmed circle of Homer.

When we have said this, however, we have said the most that can be said in disparagement of Virgil. He has merits of his own which Homer cannot equal, simply because Homer was born too early in human history. In all that pertains to moral earnestness, to refinement of taste, and to human sympathy, Virgil is superior to Homer. Certain historians of Latin literature complain that Virgil has always a divided mind; his spirit belonged to the ages of faith, and yet he sought to reconcile that faith with science. Let us rather say that Virgil takes the naïve and unquestioning beliefs of Homer and turns them into rational convictions, adds to them the knowledge of a later day, clothes them with the very perfection of literary workmanship, interprets them to the new age, and hands them down to posterity.

Virgil feels the mystery of the unseen world more than Homer does; he cannot like Homer talk sportively

of the gods. With a deeper reverence, he has a deeper sense of justice; he believes more in moral law; conscience and sin are greater realities to him; the idea of sacrifice is more fully developed; the offerings to the gods are both propitiatory and vicarious: *unum pro multis dabitur caput*. Poet as he is of the Roman Empire, and believer as he is in its divine mission to embrace the world, he is notwithstanding conscious of the crimes that have marked those hideous years of foreign conquest and of internal strife; he fears divine judgment; he counsels piety and a return to the ways of virtue and peace. So it is not without a meaning that his hero is the pious Æneas—pious, not only toward the gods, but toward his father and his race. The mission of Æneas is to bring the Trojan gods to Italy, and to find for them a lasting home.

All this is a distinct advance on Homer. Virgil has sounded depths in the human soul that Homer knew not of. Neither courage nor adventure can for Virgil any longer give sufficient charm to character. The true man is one who identifies himself with institutions, and builds his life into the life of his time. In both the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," the interest is chiefly personal; the author is not specially on the side of the Greeks. But, in the "Æneid," the interest is chiefly national; Virgil is always and everywhere on the side of Rome. He makes fidelity to Rome a sort of religion. He clothes the Empire with an imaginative halo that impressed men's minds for ages after.

It is certain that the Roman people would never have endured the rule of such monsters of cruelty and license as Tiberius, Nero, Caligula, and Domitian, if the



Empire had not seemed to be the manifestation in human affairs of invisible powers, and the emperor himself to be in some sort divine. In the apotheosis of the emperors, accompanied as it was by temples and sacrifices and worship in their honor, we have indeed a most convincing proof of man's forgetfulness of the true God and of his disposition to worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. Though the Hebrews called their judges "gods," because they were God's representatives, they never identified them with God, or called them immortal, or paid them worship. These very judges were told that they should die like men, and they were bidden to fall down in worship before Jehovah. The very climax of heathen sacrilege and idolatry was thought to be reached when the images of the emperor which the Roman legions carried upon their standards underneath their eagles of bronze or silver, and which every soldier of the legion was required to worship, were set up in the holy place of the temple at the final siege of Jerusalem; that was "the abomination of desolation."

But Virgil lived in the times of ignorance, which God winked at, and which we ought to wink at too. The words *deus* and *divus* did not mean so much then as they mean to us. In Homer the *Manes* of the departed had been invoked in prayer; in Virgil's time these *Manes* were commonly called *divi*, or divine. It was not so great a thing to be a god, when popular belief held that there were many gods, instead of one. A half-pantheistic confounding of the world with God had made it easy to regard the actual ruler of the world as divinity made visible.

Alexander the Great had claimed not only a divine parentage, but also a divine nature, and had sent an order to the Republic of Greece to recognize his divinity. The answer of the Lacedemonians shows just how much meaning they attached to it. "Since Alexander desires to be a god," they said, "let him be one!" So among the Romans, Romulus had been deified, and Julius Cæsar after his death had been similarly exalted. Virgil applied all this to Augustus, even before his earthly life had ended. He invested the Roman Empire with divine sanctions. It is doubtful whether the existence of that Empire in form at least until 1806, when the last Roman emperor, Francis, king of Germany, permitted it to die, can be explained without taking into account the influence of Virgil.

In thus making the motives of his epic a larger justice and a larger humanity, Virgil did not depress the tone of poetry, he only enlarged its sphere. So he has been truly called a precursor of modern civilization. He is the most feminine of all the great poets; he first acknowledges and does reverence to the feminine in true manhood. Courtesy, pity, love, sympathy with misfortune, resignation in suffering, have almost no place in the "Iliad," but they are marked traits in the principal characters of the "Æneid." Triumph in defeat, success in apparent failure, the judging of life not by what it accomplishes but what it aims at, these ideas, of which Robert Browning is the great modern representative, are already hinted at by Virgil.

Homer has a joy in battle; he delights to chronicle the most ghastly wounds; compassion to a fallen foe he regards as only weakness. Of Zeus he sings:

Apart from the rest he sate, and to fill his eyes was fain,  
With the gleam of the brass and the fate of the slayers and them  
that were slain.

Virgil too, out of deference to Homer, gives us more than one battle scene. But his heart is evidently not in it. Touches of pathos and of pity light up the cloud of war, and the interest lies, not so much in the bloodshed, as in the tender emotions that mitigate its ferocity. When Pallas slays the twin sons of Danaus, as a reviewer has pointed out, Virgil thinks of their parents, who, "sore perplexed, each for the other took, nor wished the sweet uncertainty resolved." When Æneas slays Lausus, his weapon "rent the vest his mother's hand had broidered o'er with gold." Virgil has pity for the vanquished and the sorrowful. He thinks it worth his while to justify his hero's desertion of Dido by the stern compulsion of fate, and to recompense the love-lorn queen by reuniting her to her husband in the world of shades.

Here, indeed, is another mark of theological progress. Homer punishes the bad in Hades, but he gives only the faintest intimations that there are rewards for the good. Virgil believes in an Elysium :

Here sees he the illustrious dead  
Who fighting for their country bled ;  
Priests, who while earthly life remained  
Preserved that life unsoiled, unstained ;  
Blest bards, transparent souls and clear,  
Whose song was worthy Phœbus' ear ;  
Inventors, who by arts refined  
The common life of human kind,  
With all who grateful memory won  
By services to others done :

A goodly brotherhood, bedight  
With coronals of virgin white.

Virgil is an imitator of Homer, but Dante was almost equally an imitator of Virgil. Each improved upon his predecessor, while he drew without stint from his stores. Dante does well in the "Inferno" to take Virgil for his guide, for Virgil had mapped out the ground for him long before. He copies from Virgil the approach of night in the underworld :

Another sun and stars they know,  
That shine like ours, but shine below.

From Virgil he gets the cue for his limbo of infants :

Whom portionless of life's sweet bliss,  
From mother's breast untimely torn,  
The black day hurried to the abyss  
And plunged in darkness soon as born.

From Virgil he takes his hopes for those who die in youth :

Towards the ferry and the shore  
The multitudinous phantoms pour ;  
Matrons and men, and heroes dead,  
And boys and maidens yet unwed,  
And youths who funeral pyres have fed  
Before their parents' eye,  
Dense as the leaves that from the trees  
Float down when autumn first is keen,  
Or as the birds that thickly massed  
Fly landward from the ocean vast,  
Driven over sea by wintry blast  
To seek a sunnier sky.

It would almost seem as if Dante had taken from Virgil his ideas of purgatorial suffering, though in the

“Æneid” purgatorial suffering prepares, not for entering into paradise, but for returning once more to the life of earth. Here in Virgil is a transmigration of souls which is found neither in Dante nor in Homer. Homer had regarded the body as more important than the soul; without the body the soul was but phantom and shadow; Achilles had rather be a slave on earth than the monarch of all the dead. But to Virgil the soul is the superior thing; the body is its place of imprisonment and source of defilement; only when it escapes from its earthly prison will the caged eagle soar into its native air. Æneas wonders that Anchises, after he had tasted the repose and the liberty of Elysium, should ever desire to return to earth.

Evidently, Pythagoras and Plato have contributed to Virgil’s theology quite as much as Homer has. Homer puts his hell far away—Ulysses has to go to the extremity of the immense ocean to find it. Virgil’s underworld is much more accessible—the grottos of Lake Avernus in Southern Italy, with their sulphurous odors and volcanic aspect, furnish gateways to it. Not only in point of space, but in point of meaning, is Virgil’s Hades nearer to us than Homer’s. Virgil’s is the Hades of philosophy, as well as of poetry. The spiritual at last overtops the physical. All souls indeed are but forms of an *anima mundi* that breathes through all things.

Know first, the heaven, the earth, the main,  
The moon’s pale orb, the starry train,  
Are nourished by a soul,  
A bright intelligence, which darts  
Its influence through the several parts  
And animates the whole.

Thence souls of men and cattle spring,  
 And the gay people of the wing,  
 And those strange shapes that ocean hides  
 Beneath the smoothness of his tides.  
 So penal sufferings they endure  
 For ancient crime, to make them pure :

· · · · ·  
 All these, when centuries ten times told  
 The wheel of destiny have rolled,

· · · · ·  
 The voice divine from far and wide  
 Calls up to Lethe's river-side,  
 That earthward they may pass once more,  
 Remembering not the things before,  
 And with a blind propension yearn  
 To fleshly bodies to return.

I have for once, and only once, given a long specimen of Conington's translation. The ballad metre, though it is flowing, does not represent the stately sweetness of Virgil's hexameters; Dante's "Purgatory" is the best literary analogue to the Hades of the "Æneid." The early part of the passage I have quoted has a sound very like Lucretius, but the latter part witnesses to a doctrine of immortality and of penalty at which Lucretius scoffed. Dante learned from Virgil that a heathen might realize the depth of the abyss into which transgression brings the soul, without being able to discover the way of escape from it. And yet we should miss one of the chief aspects of Virgil's genius if we failed to consider him in his character as a prophet of Christianity. To a certain extent Virgil did predict the way of escape, when he wrote his fourth "Eclogue." Let us remember that this was composed a whole half-century before Christ's work was accomplished, and we shall at least be struck with

its remarkable correspondence with the future facts and its equally remarkable likeness to Hebrew prophecy.

The poet begins by calling on the muses of Sicily—that is, those who have inspired the genius of Theocritus—to aid him now in work higher than any he has yet attempted. A virgin is coming, and the reign of Saturn; the earlier ages are to return. The chaste Lucina, whose emblem is the moon, is invoked in behalf of the babe soon to be borne. Pollio himself, to whom the “Eclogue” is dedicated, shall see the opening of the glorious time now foretold. Under his guidance, if any vestiges of human wickedness remain, they shall at least cease to cause terror to the world. The coming child shall overthrow the age of iron and shall found a golden race; he shall take on himself a divine nature; he shall see heroes mingling familiarly with the gods; he shall himself be one of them. Under his mild government men shall recover their ancestral virtues. The timid flocks shall no longer fear the lion. Serpents shall perish and poisonous herbs disappear. From the very cradle of the babe shall spring living flowers; the earth everywhere shall be alike fruitful; the soil shall not need the harrow, nor the vine the pruning-hook; the plowman shall release the ox from the yoke. Best of all, the Fates declare that this age of peace shall endure forever.

When Constantine recited a part of this “Eclogue” to the assembled fathers at the Council at Nice, it was with the view of showing that heathenism had predicted its own downfall, that the deliverer it looked forward to was nothing less than divine, and that this Desire of all nations had come. So Virgil came to be enrolled, like Balaam, among the prophets. His statue was placed among them in the cathedral of Spanish Zamora in the Middle Ages, and he was invoked as “prophet of the Gentiles,” at Limoges and Rheims in France. “*Sancte Socrate, ora pro nobis,*” we hear at one time; and Buddha is canonized as St. Josaphat at another.

Whence did Virgil derive his idea of the coming deliverer? Lactantius and Augustine thought him the organ of a prophetic inspiration which he did not himself understand. But it is more probable that here, as elsewhere, Virgil was only an imitator. The Sibylline books had repeated the Greek representations of a golden age. The Jews scattered among all nations after the Exile were a proselyting race; in every large city they had their synagogues; the Roman world had been leavened with their hope of a Redeemer. Virgil only echoed a longing which, originally springing from Jewish prophecy and from divine inspiration, had gradually permeated every civilized nation.

The hope of a deliverer did not come from heathenism. That was skeptical and hopeless rather. Cicero thought the course of all things to be downward. Horace mentions the idea of a golden age, only as a dream never to be realized on earth. But Virgil had the piety and the faith that could welcome truth so far above men's common thought, and could welcome it even though coming from a Jewish source. The years of conscription and slaughter through which Rome had just passed were to him a reign of terror. All that was worst in the world seemed to have been uppermost; surely the turn of the righteous must come. This marvelous hope settled on the new-born or expected child of Augustus and Scribonia, and Virgil expresses it in language which more than anything else in classic literature reminds us of Isaiah.

Virgil's prophecy did not come precisely true, for the world's deliverer was born, not in the consulship of Pollio, as he predicted, but some forty years later. Yet his



religious teaching had wonderful effect. The "Æneid," published with the special sanction of Augustus, had a send-off, if I may use the term, such as no other of the world's great poems ever had. We must not push back into the Augustan age ideas of the fewness of copyists and the large price of books which belong only to the dark ages that came after.

In Virgil's time there were publishing houses at Rome in which the new work of a poet could be put into circulation almost as quickly, though not with the same number of copies, as it can be to-day. There were great rooms filled with the desks of scribes; from an elevated pulpit or platform the poem was dictated word for word, and if need be, letter by letter; fifty or a hundred copies were made at once; the scribes were slaves, and slave labor was cheap. Martial, a century after, tells us that the first book of his "Epigrams" could be bought for five denarii, or for less than a dollar. Imagine, now, the rapidity with which Virgil's "Æneid" was multiplied, with all the prestige of imperial favor to give it a start in the race for fame. It attained at once a circulation and an influence entirely unexampled in ancient times. It was the means of bringing about a marked change in the beliefs of all classes of the Roman people.

The nature of that change will be understood if we compare the times of Cicero, just before Virgil wrote, and the times of the Antonines, two hundred years after. Though Cicero had talked publicly and officially of the gods and of immortality, he was by no means sure of either. He wrote the "*De Natura Deorum*," yet privately and at heart he was a skeptic. In his letters

there are no allusions to the gods. Nor does he in his letters, even when he is in greatest affliction, draw any consolations from the life to come. In "*De Senectute*," it is true, he finds the discomforts of old age relieved by the anticipation of speedy reunion with lost friends. Yet in another place he says: "Upon this subject I entertain no more than conjectures." When he reads Plato's argument for immortality he seems to himself convinced, but when he has laid down the book he finds that all his doubts have returned.

Cicero is the type of his time, a time when Epicurus is the reigning philosopher and Lucretius is the reigning poet. But before two centuries have passed, Marcus Aurelius, the type of his time also, writes letters full of religious sentiment; in almost every sentence he recognizes the gods; the future life gives him hope. Virgil, more than any other single influence, brought about this revival of old religion; showed how much literature could do to change the course of human thought and feeling. It showed how much literature could do, but it also showed how little literature could do. It could quicken conscience; it could inspire hope; it could not give certainty; it could not impart life. Neither Virgil's legal nor his prophetic utterances could do the work of the gospel, but they could and they did do something in preparing the world to accept the Christian faith.

It is not wonderful that the Middle Ages came to regard Virgil both as a saint and as a wizard. *Magister Virgilius* came to be not only master of all human science—mathematics, mechanics, architecture, and medicine—but also master of evil spirits, conjurer,

necromancer, and magician. Tunison has shown that these stories are not a sort of folklore that grew up spontaneously in Italy. Naples, the city of Virgil's chief residence, has none of them. They were the fruit of conscious invention. They had an exclusively literary origin. They came from the North, not from the South. We must remember that the poems of Virgil became the school-reader of all the world. For nineteen hundred years his influence has been continuous.

Homer was lost to the Western world for centuries—only the bringing of Greek books from Constantinople, and the revival of Greek learning after the Crusades, brought back Homer to his place of power. But from the day that the “Æneid” was given to the public until now, no ingenuous youth has had a liberal education without being compelled to read Virgil. What Aristotle became in logic and philosophy, Virgil always was in the more elementary training—the text-book of supreme authority.

Grammarians wrote such commentaries on his works that, if those works should themselves be lost, every line could probably be recovered from their citations. Noble ladies had their Virgil clubs, and injected mysterious meanings into his words, even as now they sometimes deal with Robert Browning. The “Æneid” was used to conjure by, and in the time of Hadrian fortunes were told by the *Sortes Virgilianæ*, or by seizing upon the first word that presented itself *ad aperturam libri*, just as the Bible is used by some superstitious people to-day. As the Latin language gradually was displaced by the popular corruptions of it, it came to be regarded

as a mystery, both in church and school. To the vulgar, "*hoc est corpus*" became "*hocus-pocus*." A magical efficacy was attributed to learning. Friar Bacon and Dr. Faustus alike, when they dived too deeply into science, were thought to be in league with the devil.

The chroniclers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had no very clear ideas of the dividing line between history and fable, and they too often fed the popular appetite for the marvelous with concoctions of their own imagination. Because Virgil had risen at a bound from a modest fortune to wealth and the favor of princes, it was inferred that something more than natural agents must have been at his bidding. Because he was master of all the learning of his time, the conclusion was drawn that the spirits of evil instructed him. Italy, to those far-away mediæval gropers, seemed a fairy-land, and classic times were the early ages of enchantment.

About this period, moreover, the returning Crusaders brought back from the East the wonderful tales of Constantinople and Cairo and Bagdad, which, a century or two after, took form in the "Thousand and One Nights." The German, French, and English romancers wrought over the same raw material with which Moslem sheiks were entertained in the desert. The genii of the East became the demons of the West, Virgil became a classic Friar Bacon and Dr. Faustus all in one, and all the stories of magic art crystallized about him.

Like Aladdin, Virgil found a demon in a cave and pressed him into his service. He imprisoned familiar spirits in bottles, like the Arabian fisherman. At Naples he had a magic garden, wherein grew all manner of plants for healing and for charming men. This

garden was protected by an immovable atmosphere, as by a wall ; and upon a bridge of air Master Virgil could pass at will, and in a moment, whithersoever he would, even to the most distant lands. Petrarch tells us that in his time Virgil was thought to have excavated the grotto of Posilippo by his spells. There was a bronze statue which he set up to watch Vesuvius and to check its eruptions. Whenever the mountain began to groan and to threaten the town, the statue shot an arrow at it and compelled it to cease its throes, or to pour forth its ashes and lava in the opposite direction.

But Virgil's *chef-d'œuvre* as a magician was the tower or palace which he constructed at Rome. As Amphion of old had, by the music of his lyre, compelled the very stones to build themselves into his city wall, so Virgil used his poetry with similar effect to raise an edifice for the protection of the imperial city. John Desborcke, the chronicler, gives the story as follows :

The emperor asked of Virgilius how that he might make Rome prosper, and have many lands under them, and know when any land would rise against them ; and Virgilius said to the emperor : "I will within short space that do." And he made, upon the Capitolium, what was the town-house, made with carved images, and of stone, and called the *Salvatio Romæ* ; that is to say : This is the salvation of the city of Rome ; and he made, in the compass of it, all the gods, that we call idols, that were under the subjection of Rome ; and every one of the gods, that there were, had in his hand a bell ; and in the midst of the gods made he one god of Rome ; and whensoever there was any land would make war against Rome, then would the gods turn their backs toward the god of Rome ; and then would the god of the land that would stand up against Rome clink his bell that he hath in his hand, till the senators of Rome heard it ; and forthwith they

go there and see what land it is that will war against them, and go against them, and subdue them.

The tale went on to say that Virgil declared that this magic tower should stand until a virgin should bear a son; and that, in accordance with his prophecy, it fell into ruins when Christ became incarnate. It is a striking proof of the persistence of men's craving for the marvelous, that this story of the "Salvation of Rome," and of Virgil's connection with it, should have been hawked about in English chap-books so late as the beginning of the present century, and should have died out of popular belief only when the Roman Empire itself expired.

Goldwin Smith declares that the victories of Rome were victories of the intellect. He regards the first settlers at the mouth of the Tiber as a commercial rather than a warlike people, who were able to keep the marauding tribes of the hills in check only by maintaining a discipline superior to theirs. So the necessities of traders gave to the Roman State its bent to military art, as the necessity of harmonizing the customs of the varied peoples whom it subdued compelled its attention to organization and to law. Greece treated strangers as barbarians, and even the Greek colonies were never Greece. But wherever a Roman went, there Roman sovereignty and citizenship went with him. Rome incorporated every conquered people; adopted their gods; and made both gods and people Romans. It is this incorporation and reconciliation of all nations by the decree of heaven under the ægis of Rome that constitutes the one great motive and subject of Virgil's song.

In his "*Convito*," Dante speaks of "the allegory of

the ages of man, which Virgil imagined in the 'Æneid.'” It was not so much an allegory of the ages of man, as an allegory of the ages of mankind. Written when the people of Italy first attained the sense of complete and secure nationality, and the whole circle of the earth recognized the authority of Rome, it most fully expressed the bounding hope of the Augustan age.

As the victory over Persia ushered in the splendid triumphs of art and oratory in the time of Pericles; as the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the humbling of papal Spain was immediately followed by the culmination of English literature in the days of great Elizabeth; so the unity of all mankind under Roman sway roused the soul of Rome's greatest poet. After the horrors of civil war, no wonder that Augustus seemed to him the Saviour of the State. With the world subdued, no wonder he could believe that the Empire was peace. We may smile at his idealization of the Empire, and we may frown upon his apotheosis of the emperor, but we cannot deny that his great poem drew its greatness from some of the noblest springs of human emotion, and constituted an unconscious prophecy of a greater kingdom than Rome, and a greater King than any of the Cæsars.





DANTE



# DANTE

## AND "THE DIVINE COMEDY"

ONCE upon a time, as the story-books would say, or, to speak more historically and exactly, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and eighty-six, and in the month of August, a little company of fairly intelligent people determined to put their vacation to use. The scene and the surroundings were propitious. We were upon the banks of Canandaigua Lake, the loveliest of those parallel sheets of water which so diversify the landscape of Central and Western New York. From the veranda where we assembled after breakfast, Bear Hill loomed up across the lake, like Vesuvius over the Bay of Naples. The quiet summer mornings, the shade of the great elms, and the deep blue sky invited us to something more serious than *vers de société*.

Some one spoke of "The Divine Comedy," and wondered if anybody had ever read it through. It was a revelation, a challenge, and an admonition. Most of us had read the "Inferno," but had been so ill-pleased with Dante's Hell, that we had never cared to try his Purgatory, or even his Paradise. But a new resolve was taken. We would begin and finish. Forthwith were produced the translations of Cary, Wright, and Longfellow. Two of us knew something of Italian, and had with us the original poem. We brought to our help the

English version of Dr. Carlyle and Mr. Butler, with the Italian original on the same page. Best of all, we read by way of introduction and of comment, "The Shadow of Dante," by Maria Francesca Rossetti, from which I take much of value in the composition of this paper.

An hour and a half each morning for four weeks sufficed to accomplish our task. Indeed it was no task; the pauses for discussion were numberless; its beauty grew upon us; when we finally closed our books, the four weeks seemed four days for the love we bore the poet and the poem. I have since read the essays of James Russell Lowell and of Dean Church—the former very learned and thoughtful, though conceived from a literary point of view; the latter strong and eloquent, the work of a moralist and a preacher. I undertake now to give the condensed result in my own mind of this bit of summer study—not however without the expectation and acknowledgment that pieces of others' learning will here and there shine through my writing, as through a palimpsest. I have let my reader into the secret of its origin, if by any means I may tempt him to go and do likewise.

Dante Alighieri was born in Florence in the year 1265, so that my story takes us back more than six hundred years. The Middle Ages were coming to their end. The Crusades had wakened Europe from the sleep of centuries; the classic literature had begun to attract its devotees; the free cities had established themselves; there was everywhere the stir of new political and religious life. But it was a time of strife. The Guelphs, the party of the popes, and the Ghibellines, the party of the emperors, were hotly contesting every

point of vantage in city and country ; although in Italy the Ghibellines were strong in the provincial districts, while the Guelphs were strong in the towns. To the Guelph party Dante's family belonged. He does not appear to have been of noble birth, for he afterward held office ; and the constitution of Florence at the time forbade this to nobles. But he does appear to have been born to wealth ; he certainly possessed the means of the highest education the age could give ; he was ever in the front rank of his contemporaries, both in society and in politics. Of his youth we have but a single incident—fortunately that was the most important incident of his life. It was his meeting with Beatrice.

At the age of nine years he first saw the lady of his dreams. It was at a festival at the house of her father, Falco Portinari. She was but a little damsel, no older than himself, but she was habited in crimson, and the sight of her was the awakening of his spirit. The next meeting of which we have record was nine years after, and that seems to have been a casual encounter on the street, leaving only a glance and a gentle word to be remembered. We do not know that Dante ever sought Beatrice in marriage ; she was a star apart, to be looked at from afar ; she married another, and she died at twenty-four ; she probably never knew of the influence she exerted ; and yet, from the day of that festival at her father's house, she was the ruler of Dante's soul.

Sense did not mingle with his passion. Beatrice became to him the symbol of all spiritual beauty. When he reaches paradise, he is lifted from each lower sphere of heaven to the next higher simply by gazing into the transparent depths of Beatrice's eyes. "The thoughts

of youth are long, long thoughts," and the resolves then formed prove often the strongest resolves of a lifetime. So the loves of youth may be long, long loves. A true affection never dies, and the psalmist never spoke more truly than when he said, "Your heart shall live forever." That meeting at the festival was not the first time, nor the last time, that the sight of a little damsel in pink or blue has turned the head of some great man, and so has changed the face of the world.

I wish we could say that Dante was absolutely faithful to the memory of Beatrice. But history and his own acknowledgments are too much for us. There was a little time when, possibly to distract his mind after her death, he plunged into a skeptical philosophy and yielded to the attractions of sense. A rival, whom he calls the adversary of Reason, and whom he pictures as a woman at a window, temporarily absorbed his thoughts. But the spell could not last. Let us adapt and use the lines of Tennyson :

Faith in womankind

Beat with his blood, and trust in all things high  
Came easy to him, and though he tripped and fell  
He could not blind his soul with clay.

How noble a lesson there is in the fact that the breaking of the evil spell is coincident with a second vision of Beatrice! As there rises before his imagination the fair form of his lost love, still habited in crimson as he had seen her so long ago, yet now invested with a purity and glory that belonged to heaven rather than to earth, the chains of sense and of unbelief seem to fall away from Dante's soul.

So the new life begins, of which the "*Vita Nuova*" is the history. Beatrice, who has rescued him, becomes to him God's angel and minister, the perfect combination of nature and grace, the symbol and embodiment of that heavenly wisdom which alone can free man from the anguish of doubt and the degradation of sin. Henceforth he identifies her with divine philosophy, and in token of his renewed and perpetual allegiance to his first-beloved, he writes these words :

There appeared to me a marvelous vision, wherein I saw things which made me resolve to say no more of this blessed one until I could more worthily treat of her. And to come to this I study as much as I can, as she knows in truth. So that if it be the pleasure of Him by whom all things live that my life shall last somewhat longer, I hope to say of her that which has never yet been said of any woman. And may it then please him who is the Lord of lovingkindness that my soul may go to behold the glory of its lady ; that is, that blessed Beatrice who gloriously gazes upon the face of Him who is blessed forever !

"The Divine Comedy" is Beatrice's monument. It was the labor of a lifetime. It was prepared for by profound and extensive studies. What is true of every great poet was especially true of Dante—he was master of all the learning of his time. It was easier then than now to compass all human knowledge. Thomas Aquinas had written, and from his immense "*Summa*" the poet had learned theology. Aristotle furnished him with his philosophy. Homer and Virgil were his masters in poetry. He was deeply read in history, both sacred and profane. Whatever of physical science had then been discovered, whatever of medicine or of law was taught in the schools, all the culture that music, painting,

architecture, and sculpture could give, all these were Dante's possession.

But more than this, he was a man among men, a citizen, a diplomatist, a statesman. Grave yet eloquent, composed yet capable of heroic decisions, an ardent lover of his country and a soldier in her defense, he had that large knowledge of affairs and that experience of human nature which fitted him to speak to the very heart of his generation, and indeed to the human heart in all ages and everywhere. He had moreover the sublime self-confidence of genius. He entered unabashed into the company of the greatest poets, as he met them in the world of spirits; and, even in Florence, when it was proposed to send him on an embassy to Rome, he replied: "If I go, who remains? and if I remain, who goes?"

But neither study nor political life alone would have qualified him to write his great poem. It needed the heavy blows of exile, poverty, and suffering to forge the argument of "The Divine Comedy." In the year 1300 Dante was elected one of the chief magistrates of Florence, and perceiving that his native city could have no peace unless the leaders of its factions were banished, he used his two months of brief authority to send these leaders beyond the borders of the State. It was a patriotic and unselfish act, for among them, and in either party, were certain of his personal friends. It was abstract justice without regard to consequences, and when the tide turned and his enemies returned to power, they gave to him the same measure which he had meted out to them.

In 1302 a heavy fine was imposed upon him, and



when he refused to pay, his entire estate was confiscated, and it was decreed that if he should be found again in Florence he should be burned alive. Henceforth Dante became a wanderer upon the face of the earth. In 1310, he appears to have gone to Paris, perhaps to Oxford. After his return he was offered amnesty, upon condition of paying fine and acknowledging criminality. But he scorned to enter Florence except with honor. "The means of life will not fail me," he said. "In any case I shall be able to gaze upon the sun and stars, and to meditate upon the sweetest truths of philosophy."

Let us enter in imagination into the fortunes of this son of Florence, her truest patriot and her greatest man, cast out by an unloving mother, though every stone of her streets and every foot of her soil were sacred to him as they could be to no other. He became a Ghibelline in hope that the emperor's coming would restore just authority and would right the wrong. Poor, and exposed to all "the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune," he wandered from one petty Ghibelline court to another, illustrating all too well the words of his own prophecy:

Thou shalt have proof how savoreth of salt  
The bread of others, and how hard a road  
The going down and up another's stairs.

The lines of sweetness in his youthful portrait hardened and deepened into the sad, stern countenance of his later years. The very dignity of his nature, that forbade outward complaint, threw him inward upon himself.

Seldom he smiled, and smiled in such a sort  
 As if to scorn his nature that could be moved  
 To smile at anything.

Yet morose and despairing he never did become. As the outward darkness of his lot deepened about him, a "light that never was on sea or land" "so much the more shone inward." As he walked up and down in Northern Italy, leaving traditions of his sojournings connected with many a ruined castle and mountain torrent, there were opening before his vision great truths with regard to God and his judgments; he was gathering vast knowledge of nature and of the human heart; aye, he was mapping out heaven, earth, and hell for the generations to come. There can be no doubt that he regarded himself as a sort of prophet. From the heavenly spheres he looked down upon this earth of trial and sifting and saw the meaning of it:

The threshing-floor that maketh us so proud  
 To me, revolving with the eternal twins,  
 Was all apparent made from hill to harbor.

And so, revolving "The Divine Comedy" and bringing it into form, he passed nineteen years of sorrowful exile, until at last, far from home, at Ravenna, in the year 1321, and at the age of fifty-seven, Dante Alighieri died.

Before speaking of the great poem in detail, it will be desirable to say something about the end which Dante has in view and the means which he uses to attain it. The first of its hundred cantos is a sort of introduction to the whole, and we may well avail ourselves of the hints it gives us. Its first line,

In midway of the journey of this life,

has doubtless a personal reference to the history of the writer, and fixes the date when its composition began at 1300, when Dante had just reached the age of thirty-five, having passed half-way through the threescore years and ten allotted to man.

On the first day of that new year and that new century, he describes himself as wandering, half asleep, from the right path, and becoming entangled in the mazes of a dark wood. Before him rises a hill, to which he makes his way and up which he essays to climb, until he finds himself withstood and repelled in succession by three wild beasts, a swift leopard, a raging lion, and a greedy wolf. These well-nigh drive him back upon the sunless plain, when suddenly he becomes aware that he is not alone. A gracious and majestic figure approaches and offers succour and conduct :

Follow thou me, and I will be thy guide,  
 And bring thee hence by an eternal place,  
 Where thou shalt hearken the despairing shrieks,  
 Shalt see the ancient spirits dolorous  
 That each one outcries for the second death.  
 And thou shalt then see those who are content  
 Within the fire, because they hope to come  
 When that it be, unto the blessed race.  
 To whom thereafter, if thou wouldst ascend,  
 A soul there'll be more worthy this than I :  
 Thee will I leave with her when I depart,  
 Seeing that Emperor who above there rules,  
 Because I was rebellious to his law,  
 Wills to his city no access by me.  
 In every part he sways, and there he reigns ;  
 There is his city and the exalted seat—  
 Oh, happy he whom thither he elects !

It is Virgil who thus offers himself as Dante's conductor through hell and purgatory; it is Beatrice who has sent him for Dante's deliverance, and who is to be his guide through paradise after Virgil has led him through the two lower provinces of God's empire.

Many have been the interpretations put upon the great poem. The true interpretation is that which finds in it a combination of meanings. Dante himself has told us that there are four separate senses which he intends his story to convey. There are the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical. In Psalm 114 : 1, we have the words, "When Israel went out of Egypt." This, says the poet, may be taken literally, of the actual deliverance of God's ancient people; or allegorically, of the redemption of the world through Christ; or morally, of the rescue of the sinner from the bondage of his sin; or anagogically, of the passage of both soul and body from the lower life of earth to the higher life of heaven. So from Scripture Dante illustrates the method of his poem. We have his own warrant for beginning with the literal meaning, and then superadding the spiritual.

Nothing can be more plain than the personal element that runs through the poem; Dante's own life and spiritual struggles furnish the basis for all the rest. We cannot be far wrong in maintaining that the beginning of the poem describes Dante's own entanglement in the thickets of sense and unbelief, his early efforts to make his way up the mount of knowledge and virtue by strength of his own; the demonstration of his inability to cope with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—the three adversaries which like

wild beasts would drag him down; the offer and the acceptance of superior aid, in order that he may know the truth and the truth may make him free; and then his gradual growth in knowledge and holiness, as one after another the sins and infirmities of the soul are revealed and are put beneath his feet, until at last he rises to communion with God and to the society of the holy. In other words, and yet more briefly, "The Divine Comedy" is an autobiographical "Pilgrim's Progress," written from the point of view of the Middle Ages and the Romish Church.

But this is only the beginning. Around and upon this core and foundation, is built up a wondrous symbolic structure in which Dante has sought to express his ideas of God's relations to humanity. It has been well said that the ancient epic never rose above the individual. "Arms and the man I sing," said Virgil. Dante sings, not of himself, nor of any particular man alone, but of man in the largest sense: "His subject is man, as by merit or demerit, through freedom of the will, he renders himself liable to the reward or punishment of justice." Man, in this large sense, has two sides to his nature, an earthly and a heavenly, a temporal and a spiritual. In each of these relations he needs authority. God has therefore provided upon earth two rulers, the pope to be his vicegerent in spiritual, the emperor to be his vicegerent in temporal things; the former like the sun giving forth the light of God's truth directly, the latter like the moon reflecting that of the former; each has his sphere, and each, being directly responsible to God, is to a certain extent independent of the other. There is therefore a political sense in which "The Divine

Comedy" must be taken, and the constant interweaving of political incident and philosophy, which has struck so many as beside the purpose of the poem, is only a sign of its larger completeness and unity.

Miss Rossetti has beautifully traced the working of this idea into the introduction of the poem. The darksome wood is the distracted and hopeless political condition of Italy. The hill of virtue and reason that arose before the mind of Dante, was the scheme of a stable and righteous commonwealth. But there was no material to build a city. The Guelph powers beset him. Factious Florence, proud France, avaricious Rome, are respectively the leopard, the lion, and the wolf, that set themselves against all order and all progress. Dante sinks back almost into despair of his country, when Virgil, the symbol of science and philosophy, appears for his deliverance, and brings him to a right understanding of the divine will, so far as the light of nature can go; and when that has done its utmost, divine grace, in the person of Beatrice, discovers to him the very consummation of God's plans for the temporal good of humanity.

Whatever we may think of the details of this interpretation, there can be no doubt that in Dante's soul there had dawned the idea of a free State, as well as that of a free Church. He was immeasurably grieved and angered at the insane jealousies and enmities that tore his country in pieces. His prose essay, "*De Monarchia*," shows that his advocacy of Ghibelline doctrine in the latter half of his life, was based upon the conviction that only the supremacy of the emperor could deliver Italy from the wiles of the papacy and give her a strong

and solid government. Italian unity and the independence of Church and State both found their first great advocate in Dante—or rather, shall we say, first found germinal expression in his writings. No stronger bond than love for Dante has for centuries, in spite of all her political divisions, preserved a moral unity in Italy. And now at length even Dante's dream of political unity has worked its own realization. The pen has proved mightier than the sword, because it has led men to wield the sword in securing and in defending the unity of Italy.

So far, as to the temporal or political aim of Dante's poem, the settlement of the true principles upon which civil society should be built. This, however, is not its chief aim. The spiritual side of man is more important than this. He would set forth the nature of man as a subject of God, free to obey or to disobey, and bound to answer to his own conscience and to Him who made him. And here we must remember that, with all Dante's reverence for God's spiritual vicegerent upon earth, he never fails to distinguish between the office and him who held it, between the papacy and the individual popes.

He held loyally to Roman Catholic doctrine—indeed there was none other in his day to hold to; but he held to it in no slavish way. He abhorred the temporal power of the papacy; he regarded it as usurpation of the prerogatives of the State, treachery to the spiritual calling of the vicar of God, and cause of all the divisions and miseries of Italy. He has denounced the pride and venality of many a pope, and he has put some of them, heels upward, in hell. We cannot think him lacking in

courage, when we hear him calling the rulers of the church Antichrist :

Your avarice o'erwhelms the world in woe.  
 To you Saint John referred, O shepherds vile,  
 When she, who sits on many waters, had  
 Been seen with kings her person to defile ;  
 (The same, who with seven heads arose on earth  
 And bore ten horns, to prove that power was hers,  
 Long as her husband had delight in worth).  
 Your gods ye make of silver and of gold ;  
 And wherein differ from idolaters,  
 Save that their god is one, yours manifold ?  
 Ah, Constantine ! what evils caused to flow,  
 Not thy conversion, but those fair domains  
 Thou on the first rich Father didst bestow !

In Dante's expositions of Scripture he has given us independent judgments ; widely read as he was in sacred and patristic learning, we find him ever applying the Bible to matters of common life ; as we unconsciously get something of our theology from Milton, many an educated Italian only quotes Dante when he thinks he is quoting the Bible. The whole range and compass of man's spiritual being is the subject of Dante's treatment. He intended nothing less than to set forth the whole process and philosophy of man's fall and man's restoration. Not simply the outward means for the cure of souls, but the great array of spiritual agencies that work for the punishment of the lost and the recovery of the penitent, constitute the subject of his story.

Let us put ourselves again, then, with the poet, in the dreary wood. The poet is only the image of humanity, straying away from God and miserably perishing in its



sin. There is left only the voice of conscience to urge it up the steep hillside of knowledge and virtue, and this upward impulse is more than counteracted by the arts and devices of the great adversary. Humanity needs all the help that can come from both earth and heaven. God sends human teachers, and these show men the nature and the consequences of their sins and the means of purification from them. Virgil is the representative of the highest earthly wisdom. He can lead us to a terrestrial paradise; but if we would pass beyond, we must have a higher guide. Beatrice is divine science, the teaching of the Spirit, God's highest gift to men. He who yields to the lower teaching shall have the higher. Dante's taking Virgil for his guide is symbol of the whole race of man putting itself under God's elementary tuition, that it may learn the truth which will deliver it from hell and lift it to heaven.

So the poem, which has autobiography for its center, embraces not only the doctrine of the State, but widens out until it takes in universal humanity and the true relations of that humanity to God. "The Divine Comedy" is an attempt to put all theology and all philosophy into poetical form, that man may have before his eyes an interpretation of the universe of things, a concrete representation of eternal truth, a justification of the ways of God to men. It is the loftiest conception ever framed by any earthly poet, and the execution is worthy of the theme. "The Divine Comedy" was the first Christian poem; it seems to us also to be the greatest.

So much for Dante's aim; let us consider now the means he used to attain it—I mean his scheme of the

universe, and the external vehicle by which he communicated his thought; or, first, his cosmology, and secondly, his verse. We must remember that Dante lived before Kepler; his system was not the Copernican, but the Ptolemaic. To understand his poem without knowing this is as impossible as it would be for a schoolboy to learn geography without a map. Ptolemy did not hold to a flat, but to a spherical, earth; yet he did hold that the earth was the center of all, and that sun, moon, and stars all revolved around it. There were two hemispheres—an eastern hemisphere of land and a western hemisphere of water. In the center of the hemisphere of land is the city of Jerusalem, directly over the hollow pit of hell; in the center of the hemisphere of water is the island-mount of purgatory, up whose steep sides all penitents must climb to heaven.

Neither hell nor purgatory was created where they now are; this is the result of Satan's fall. When the rebel angel was cast out from heaven, his immense mass and weight crushed through earth's surface to the very center of the planet; gravity prevented him from going farther and held him there fast bound. The very substance of the globe fled from him in horror as he came hurtling down, and with these three results: First, the great pit of hell was excavated, at the bottom of which Satan lies; secondly, the waters of the eastern hemisphere were transferred to the western, so that the eastern hemisphere is now laid bare; thirdly, the portion of earth's substance displaced to form hell, since it must go somewhere, was thrust up under the ancient Eden and so the terrestrial Paradise was made the summit of the

purgatorial mountain in the midst of the waste of western waters. Ulysses is the only mortal who has seen that mount, and there it was that he met his fate. Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" is only a reminiscence of Dante. The mount of purgatory is therefore "exactly at the antipodes of Jerusalem, and its bulk is precisely equal and opposite to the cavity of hell."

Hell and purgatory belong to this planet. Earth alone is the abode of sin and the place of penance. But as we leave earth and go upward we find nine several heavens, one above the other, each a hollow revolving sphere, enclosing and enclosed. These are at once solid and transparent; in them the planets are fixed, to give light by day and night. First comes the heaven of the moon; beyond this the heaven of Mercury; then the heaven of Venus; fourthly, the heaven of the sun, which Dante, after the fashion of his time, regarded as a planet revolving around the earth; fifthly, the heaven of Mars; sixthly, the heaven of Jupiter; seventhly, the heaven of Saturn; eighthly, the heaven of the fixed stars; ninthly, the starless, crystalline heaven, or *Primum Mobile*, which moves most rapidly of all, and by so moving communicates movement to all the rest. Beyond all these nine heavens is a tenth, the motionless empyrean of God and his saints. There the elect spirits of all time, arranged in ranks like the rising seats of an amphitheatre, surround a lake of light formed by the reflection of the divine glory from the convex upper surface of the *Primum Mobile*. It is the Rose of the Blessed, whose petals expanding on every side are made up of countless intelligences, all bright with the purity and the love of the highest heaven.

Such is Dante's scheme of the universe. Let us ask now about his verse. He called his work "The Comedy"; the title "Divine" was given to it by admirers belonging to the next generation. He tells us that the designation "Comedy" was given to it, because, though beginning in gloom and sorrow, it has a happy ending; it takes the reader through hell and purgatory, but it brings him to paradise. The average reader, I fear, does not give to Dante's work the benefit of the poet's own explanation. He reads only the "Inferno," and insists on judging the whole by this single part. Here the grotesque and the revolting so fasten his attention that he declines to proceed farther. He does not penetrate to the deep philosophy of Dante's treatment; does not see that Dante's aim is to portray the folly and the monstrosity of sin; does not appreciate the poet's aim of making all this a contrast and a foil to the sweetness of penitence and the joy of the redeemed. But he who has the grace and the patience to read the Purgatory, and the Paradise as well, will find that Dante was right in not calling his poem "The Divine Tragedy." Dante is no pessimist. To his mind "all things work together for good"; and so his poem, which was meant to be an interpretation of the universe and a philosophy of history, rightly calls itself a "Comedy," for it describes the uplifting of humanity from sin to holiness and from eternal sorrow to eternal joy.

But there was still another reason for the cheerful title. The work is written, not in the stately and sonorous Latin with its classic elegance and coldness, but in the humble Italian of common speech, the newly emerging product of a new civilization, the language of

the shop and of the home, rather than the language of the schools. And yet it is too much to say that this language existed before Dante wrote. Dante was rather its creator; for the Italian language, with all its sweetness and purity and beauty, the language of love, of poetry, of philosophy, sprang complete from Dante's brain.

There is something almost awe-inspiring in the sudden appearance of such a work as his, as new in its literary vehicle as it was in conception and in theme. It did more to fix the language of Italy than the French Academy ever did to fix the French, or the English Bible to fix the English, tongue. Six hundred years ago a language was spoken in France which no common Frenchman can understand to-day; six hundred years ago a language was spoken in England which no common Englishman can understand to-day. But Dante's Italian is the Italian of modern speech. It is well worth while to learn a little Italian, for even a little will enable one to appreciate to some degree the sweet severity of Dante's verse; the marvelous compression which never wastes a word; the fascination of the *terza rima*, or triple rhyme, whose endless reiterations seem like the recurrent melody, at one time of funeral, and at another time of marriage, bells.

There is scarcely a more striking example of this fitness of phrase than in the solemn music which records the inscription over the gate of hell:

*Per me si va nella città dolente :*

*Per me si va nell' eterno dolore :*

*Per me si va tra la perduta gente.*

*Giustizia mosse il mio alto Fattore :*

*Fecemi la divina Potestate,  
 La somma Sapienza e il primo Amore.  
 Dinanzi a me non fur cose create,  
 Si non eterne, ed io eterno duro ;  
 Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate !*

Let us now compare the Italian with the English, and mark how the liquid and intense quality of the original well-nigh disappears in the translation :

Through me ye enter the abode of woe ;  
 Through me to endless sorrow are ye brought ;  
 Through me amid the souls accurst ye go.  
 Justice did first my lofty Maker move ;  
 By Power almighty was my fabric wrought,  
 By highest Wisdom and by primal Love.  
 Ere I was formed, no things created were,  
 Save those eternal—I eternal last :  
 All hope abandon—ye who enter here !

The gate is "closed to none, being reft of all its fastenings since the day when the Conqueror of Death, fresh from the cross, forced through it his resistless passage." So Dante, following Virgil as his guide, pursues the deep and savage pathway and enters the Inferno. Let us enter with him. Hell, as we have seen, is a pit within the earth, a hollow inverted cone, growing narrower as it descends; in which, as space contracts, torment is intensified. The outermost borders of the pit constitute an ante-hell, rather than hell itself. It is the abode of the Neutrals, those who are not good enough for heaven, and who have not character enough for hell.

Here are confined the angels who at the first great rebellion in the spirit-world stood neither for God nor

for his enemies, but only for themselves. Here is confined a large part of the human race, even as the circuit of this uppermost region of the Inferno is the widest. These feeble and cowardly souls, stung by flies and wasps, the image of a reproving conscience, chase a hurrying standard, while worms in the dust beneath their feet absorb their blood and tears. So Dante punishes those who only ignored God, but did not have force enough to rebel against him. He crosses the River Acheron, the joyless river, with Charon for his ferryman, who grimly drives the reluctant souls out of his boat with the blows of his oar. So they reach hell proper, a pit of nine circles, each furnishing a landing-place, on one side of which is the wall of solid earth, on the other the abyss.

The first circle of the Inferno proper is called Limbo—the home of infants who died unbaptized, and of non-believers who had no knowledge of a Saviour. Here once dwelt the saints of Old Testament times; but when Christ descended into the underworld after his resurrection, he rescued them and led them forth in triumph. Here still, and forever, dwell the heathen sages whose ignorance was invincible. There is no outward infliction. Their pain is the pain of loss, of unsatisfied yearning. Within a castle of sevenfold walls and gates they lead their shadowy life, neither sad nor glad, grave and subdued in aspect, conversing still with regard to the problems of existence, knowing nothing of the present, but only of the past and future. It is the highest point of attainment for unbelievers. Here Virgil points out “the luminous habitation of the poets.” Homer and Horace receive Dante into their company,

and show him Socrates, Plato, and other master-spirits of antiquity. When they leave him, he re-enters the domain of darkness; passes before Minos, the infernal judge; and now at length descends into the hell of positive sin and of real punishment.

It will be worth our while here to pause a moment and consider the three great divisions under which Dante classifies the sins punished in the eight circles which we have still to visit. There are, to his mind, three great types and gradations of sin. They are incontinence, bestiality, and malice. But neither incontinence nor bestiality is precisely what these words would seem to indicate. Incontinence includes all sin of mere emotion and desire, of affection and feeling. Lasciviousness, gluttony, avarice, and anger all belong to this category. They are sins of impulsive passion, exaggerations of principles of our nature which are themselves innocent, but which are indulged in manner or measure opposed to the will of God. It is significant that all these sins are punished in darkness, as befits the nature of them, committed as they have been with mind beclouded by passion.

And the respective punishments are punishments in kind. Carnal sinners are swept along by a violent hurricane, as if to intimate that they who have sown the wind must reap the whirlwind. Gluttons lie prostrate on the ground beneath a pelting storm of rain, snow, and hail; while Cerberus, a sort of personified belly, devours them. The avaricious and the prodigal crawl in two bands in opposite directions, pushing before them great weights which clash together as they meet, the one band howling to the other: "Why did ye



keep?" and the other howling in return: "Why did ye give away?" The wrathful and gloomy are immersed naked in a lake of mud, and in this lake they strike and tear each other. There is an impressive lesson here. Anger and melancholy are punished together. Too much indignation and too little indignation are equally sins. The wrathful and the wrathless both transgress God's law. "Be ye angry, and sin not," says the Scripture. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." Not to be angry at unrighteousness, smoothly and indolently to condone wrong-doing, this to Dante is sin against God, and they who commit it are imbedded in the dregs of the Stygian pool.

We have been dealing with sins of feeling. How solemn a truth does the poet teach us when he makes sins of the thoughts to follow these! For this is what he means by bestiality, the next great class of transgressions. The bestial man is the man who is besotted in mind, and who gives himself over to infidelity or to heresy; who either says with the fool: "There is no God," or says with the errorist: "God is different from what he has revealed himself to be." Here, in the flaming city of Dis, where the walls are of iron and the darkness is mingled with fire, the arch-heretics are confined in red-hot tombs; as if to show the living death of the soul that cuts itself loose from faith in God and his revelation.

Notice that this sin of bestiality or unbelief follows, and grows out of, the sin of wrong desire. The heart first departs from God, and then the intellect follows in its train. It is only an anticipation of Goethe's *dictum*: "As are the inclinations, so are the opinions." When

man gives loose rein to evil affections, the eyes of his understanding are darkened. But there is something worse even than sin of the feelings and of the intellect: it is sin of consciously evil will; and so the third great class of iniquities in Dante's hell is that of malice, in its ever-deepening forms, now of violence, then of fraud, and finally of treachery. The sin of unbelief cannot maintain itself against the accusations of conscience except by becoming the sin of positive hatred and opposition to God. First the heart, then the intellect, and lastly the will, sets itself against him who made it.

Malice is punished after its kind also. The violent, such as tyrants, murderers, and marauders, are sunk in a boiling river of blood, and as often as they emerge are shot at by the Centaurs. Such the fate of those who commit violence against others—they have their fill of blood. Suicides, or those who are guilty of violence against themselves, are turned into trees, whose living branches are plucked away by harpies only to grow again. Blasphemers, or those who have done violence to God, are exposed to a slow shower of fire upon a plain of burning sand. Below the circle where violence is punished, at a vast depth indeed beneath, fraud in its ten sub-divisions has its place of doom.

Here are seducers and flatterers, the first scourged by demons, the second immersed in filth. Simoniacs, who have purchased high places in the church with money, are fixed in circular holes, like purses, with their heads down, their legs only appearing, and the soles of their feet burnt with flames. Sorcerers or diviners, as they endeavored to pry into the future, have their heads twisted around so that they have to walk backward now.

Barterers and peculators are plunged into a lake of boiling pitch. Hypocrites wear cloaks and hoods which are gilt outside, but are lined within with lead, whose heavy weight they try with groans to carry. Thieves are persecuted with a swarm of serpents. Evil counsellors are tormented in wrappings of flame that fit them as a garment. Slanderers and schismatics have their limbs miserably mangled. Alchemists and forgers are visited with an itching leprosy.

Last of all comes the well of the primeval giants, the mythical demigods who rose against Jove in arms. They are representatives of the last and deepest intensity of sin, the malice that becomes ingratitude, and that betrays kindred and friends, king and country, and finally its very God and Saviour. Treachery is in Dante's scheme the utmost malignity of sin, its most complete and dreadful expression. The lowest pit is called the Judecca, because it holds Judas, who betrayed his Lord. And here Judas is tormented by Satan, to whom for thirty pieces of silver he sold himself.

We have reached hell's lowest point. Let us gaze at Satan there. He is a creature of monstrous size—Dante gives us the means of estimating very accurately his dimensions. The primeval giants are each seventy feet tall; Satan is twelve times as great—eight hundred and forty feet therefore in height. At the very center of the earth he sits forever flapping his vast and batlike wings in effort to escape, while these very movements chill the air and turn everything about him to frost and ice. He tries to escape, but every effort only freezes him more solidly into his place of imprisonment. He has three heads and three faces, red, white, and black,

to correspond with the three divisions of the human race which he has succeeded in leading to perdition; in each one of his three mouths he is cravching and devouring a traitor, and of the three traitors Judas is chief.

The center of hell is not fire but ice—fit type of the hardness and coldness of the heart that is past feeling. The sin of sense has become the sin of malice, and malice has deepened into treachery and positive hatred to God. Feeling led the way in transgression, but the intellect followed, and then the will gave in its conscious adhesion to wrong, until there came the spurning of the very mercy that would save, and the sin against the Holy Ghost that hath never forgiveness, either in this world or in that which is to come.

Before we leave the "Inferno," it is important to note three things. The first is that the grotesqueness and monstrosity of Dante's punishments are intended to teach a moral lesson—this namely, that sin is something essentially vile and contemptible. "The Divine Comedy" gives a very different picture of Satan, for example, from that with which we have become familiar in the "Paradise Lost." Milton's Satan is "the archangel ruined," but the emphasis seems rather to lie upon the "archangel" than upon the "ruined"; Satan has been called, indeed, the hero of the "Paradise Lost." But Dante is resolved that no illusive glamour shall surround the great enemy. He will picture him in all his native cruelty and hatred and malignity, a creature loathsome and loathed.

Milton, it is true, has passages in which the adversary confesses to an inward torment. Those three

words, "Myself am hell," contain the very essence of the doctrine of future punishment. But as we see Satan striding over the burning marl, asserting himself in rebellious pride, daring the Almighty to crush him with his thunderbolts, we are forced to admire the unconquerable will that had rather rule in hell than serve in heaven. And in all this Milton is false to Scripture. Though Dante goes beyond the Bible in his grotesque physical images, he expresses more of the spirit of the Bible than does Milton. Sin and sinners he holds in derision. Even in the story of "Francesca da Rimini" we do not lose sight of the serpent that lies beneath the flowers; guilty love has in it moral corruption and eternal despair. All Dante's demons are hateful; no man through him shall be seduced into calling darkness light or evil good. He declares that, just as surely as the righteous shall rise to everlasting life, the wicked shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt.

A second lesson which Dante teaches us is that sin is the self-perversion of the will. If there is any thought fundamental to his system it is the thought of freedom. Man is not a waif swept irresistibly downward on the current; he is a being endowed with power to resist, and therefore guilty if he yields. Sin is not misfortune, or disease, or natural necessity; it is willfulness, and crime, and self-destruction. "The Divine Comedy" is, beyond all other poems, the poem of conscience, and this it could not be if it did not recognize man as a free agent, the responsible cause of his own evil acts and his own evil state.

Dante is a lover of God and of holiness. He puts himself on God's side in the great moral controversy

of the ages. He explains suffering, by guilt; he sees the whole race under the load of just penalty; hell is to him only the sign of God's estimate of sin. Is there anything that our age needs more than this strengthening of conscience, this assertion of the claims of righteousness, this declaration that the soul that sinneth, it shall die? Would that our soft and easy-going time, soothed almost to sleep as it is by the tempter's voice, "Thou shalt not surely die," and inclined to compound with Almighty justice for indulgence in all sorts of pleasurable wickedness, would that our age might listen to the awful voices of self-accusation and despair that sound out from Dante's hell to proclaim the voluntariness and the damnableness of sin!

Still another lesson from the "Inferno" is that penalty is not in its essence external to the sinner. Here I know I shall contradict the impressions of many of my readers. "Dante not a believer in material and physical punishment?" Ah, I did not say that. I said that to Dante the material and the physical were not the essence of punishment. I most earnestly believe that, with all the material imagery of Dante's hell, he never meant us to take one of these physical punishments merely in its literal sense. He believed indeed in a body, and believed that God would destroy both soul and body in hell; doubtless he expected that sins of the flesh would be punished in the flesh. But his view of sin as having its source and center in the soul forbade him to put upon the mere body the main stress of penalty.

People have made the same mistake about Jonathan Edwards. Because he speaks of the sinner as shrivel-

ing like a worm in the fire of God's judgments, some have supposed that he regarded hell as consisting mainly of such physical torments. But this is a misinterpretation of Edwards. As he did not fancy heaven to consist in streets of gold or pearly gates, but rather in the holiness and communion with Christ of which these are symbols, so he did not regard hell as consisting in fire and brimstone, but rather in the unholiness and separation from God of which fire and brimstone are symbols. He used the material imagery, because he thought that this best answered to the methods of Scripture. He probably went beyond the simplicity of the Scripture statements, and did not sufficiently explain the spiritual meaning of the symbols he used; but I am persuaded that he neither understood them literally himself, nor meant them to be so understood by others.

What is true of Edwards is true of Dante. In how many ways does he show that sin is essentially a condition of soul, an alienation of the heart from God, an inner conflict and agony! It is shown by the fact that living men are represented as already in hell; as eternal life is already present in the souls of the good, so eternal death is already in the souls of the evil. It is shown by the fact that the sinner is made to punish himself; the wicked is holden in the cords of his own sins; sin is its own detector and judge and tormentor. Dante's doctrine is ever this: "The responsible agent, man, does to himself whatever he does, and his deeds return to the doer." The material symbols are nothing more than symbols—symbols of the corruption and death which are involved in sin itself—symbols of the fact that sin tends to permanence; that sin at last is stamped upon

the soul as its eternal form; that the free-will becomes at last enslaved to evil; that the sinner, apart from divine grace, tends ever downward in an ever-increasing intensity of selfish will, and an ever-increasing intensity of punishment.

It is pleasant to emerge from the Inferno, even though we have learned from it so many lessons. Dante emerges under the guidance of Virgil. Having passed the center of the earth in his descent, he takes his upward way to the opposite side of the globe from that at which he entered. But the force of gravity is against him now. "*Facilis descensus Averno*"; and we may add, *Difficilis ascensus Cælo*. By what road does he ascend? Ah, there is a channel worn through the solid earth by the stream that flows downward from the Mount of Purgatory. That stream is made up of the tears of the penitents who make reparation on the mount, and whose guilt and depravity, as fast as it is purged away, flows downward to Satan from whom it came and with whom it now abides forever.

As our toilworn pilgrim emerges from the bowels of the earth and plants his feet upon the Mount of Purification, the day begins to break, and the sorrow of his soul gives place to joy. He sees an angel-piloted bark approaching the island-mountain, a bark which brings to purgatory, from the banks of the Tiber, all souls which have died at peace with the church, and who only need to be freed from the remains of sin to be fitted for heaven. Here we need to remember that in Roman Catholic doctrine, purgatory is only a temporary abiding place. Purgation may last for hundreds of years, but it cannot last forever.



All who enter hell go there to stay. In purgatory none ever stay. And yet none wish to depart. They desire only to be cleansed. They bear willingly, yes even gladly, the chastisements of God, which are meant for their correction in righteousness. The reeds with which the shores of that island are fringed, yielding ever as they do to the swaying of the waves, are the symbol of the will of the mountain's habitants, bending ever to the slightest movement of the will of God. On this mount they bemoan their sins. It is a sweet and holy dwelling-place, irradiated by the southern cross, a constellation unseen in our cold northern climes; the grassy slopes are kept green by the tears of the penitents; angels visit it to encourage them, admonish them, guide them upward, in their toilsome striving; hymns and prayers to God are continually ascending from its terraces, as from altar-stairs; its summit is the terrestrial paradise, from which by a short step the soul, with the temporary shade-body which it wears till the resurrection, can rise from earth to heaven.

There is an ante-purgatory, just as there was an ante-hell. This ante-purgatory is under the wardenship of Cato of Utica, that model of ancient self-control. Here at the base of the mountain are detained those who deferred repentance during their former life; they are compelled to wait outside of St. Peter's gate a hundred years for every year of that former delay—that is, are compelled to wait unless their stay is shortened by the pious prayers of friends whom they have left behind, one moment of whose intense intercessions has power to deliver from years of purgatorial sorrow. Voltaire

said rightly that in purgatory the church had found what Archimedes vainly longed for, a  $\pi\omicron\tilde{\omega}$   $\sigma\tau\tilde{\omega}$  upon which he might plant his lever to move the world.

The souls in this place of preliminary trial chant the *Miserere* and the Compline Hymn, and so get help against the Adversary. At St. Peter's Gate, purgatory proper first begins. They approach it by a threefold stair, symbolic of the confession, contrition, and satisfaction which the church requires. An angel with flaming sword keeps the door, charged to err by admitting, rather than to err by excluding, those who seek admission there; and yet there is a safeguard—he who after entering should look back, would again find himself without.

Upon the brow of each one so admitted the angel with his sword of flame marks seven times the letter P, which means *Peccatum, Peccavi*, and indicates that there are seven capital sins which must be successively purged away. There are seven terraces, each devoted to the purgation of one of these sins of pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, lasciviousness; and when the purgation of any one of these is complete, the corresponding mark of shame vanishes from the brow. So the process goes on until the forehead is pure as at man's first creation; and, as the soul leaps up in freedom and regains once more its lost estate of innocence, the whole Mount of Purgatory shakes for joy.

In the Inferno sin grows in intensity as the circles narrow and we go downward. In purgatory the rule is just the opposite; the greatest sins are first purged away, and the mountain narrows as we ascend. Progress upward is at the first slow and difficult, and the heights

are great. But each sin removed gives new freedom; the distances grow smaller and the ascent more rapid; for "to him that hath shall be given," and when the sins that so easily beset are all laid aside, the soul "mounts up with wings as eagles"; nothing now is left to separate between it and God.

There is another relation between the structure of the purgatory and the hell—sins in both are classified under three general divisions. In the Purgatory, however, the classification is that of the mediæval theologians, into love distorted, love defective, and love excessive. Under love distorted, pride, envy, and anger are ranged—each being regarded as loving evil to one's neighbor. Love defective is represented only by sloth—this loves too little the highest good. Love excessive has three divisions—avarice, or the excessive love of money; gluttony, or the excessive love of food; lasciviousness, or the excessive love of sensual pleasure. The seven terraces around the mountain are but eighteen feet in width, for "narrow is the way that leads to life." On the one side of each is the precipice; on the other the rocky wall, up which there is but one long and steep ascent, by stairs, to the terrace next above.

Let us delay for one moment to glance at the chastisements of the Mount of Penitence. In the first circle pride, the primal sin and root of all other sins, is made to suffer. The proud are bowed to the earth by heavy weights of stone placed upon their backs; and as they move onward in long procession, their eyes lifted up no longer, they look sideways at wonderfully sculptured representations of humility upon the rocky

wall, or downward at wonderfully sculptured representations of pride upon the pavement beneath their feet, while spirit voices chant the Lord's Prayer and "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

In the second terrace the envious are punished by having the eyes that looked askance on others sewed up with iron thread, while mantled in prickly haircloth they are compelled to sit shoulder to shoulder, leaning upon one another and recognizing their mutual obligation and dependence. The eyes that have transgressed are not permitted now to see, and so instruction is communicated to them by spirit voices that record the various historical instances of love or of envy. "Blessed are the merciful," and "Rejoice, O Victor," are the salutations that signalize release.

The third circle is devoted to the chastisement of anger. This too is punished in kind, by a dense fog, symbolic of the passion which blinds the eyes of the wrathful. The fog is bitter as smoke and black as night, and it is only in ecstatic vision that the angry souls are reminded of noble examples of forbearance, and of the murderous fruits of the opposite vice. The souls here suffering pray to the Lamb of God for mercy, and the beatitude that celebrates the completion of their purging is "Blessed are the peacemakers."

But we must hasten up the mount. The slothful are punished in the fourth terrace by being forced against their nature to run races with each other; while they exercise the virtue opposite to their own failing by shouting out to each other shameful illustrations of lukewarmness and inspiring instances of diligence. Avarice, in the circle next above, is bound hand and

foot; and, as it has refused to look upward to higher good, so it is now made to grovel on the earth. "My soul cleaveth unto the dust," is the cry of the penitent; and "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness" is the sign of their victory over this their besetting sin. Then comes the circle of the gluttonous, tormented by the tree of Tantalus, a tree that entices by its wealth of fragrant fruits, but that widens upward instead of downward, and evermore withholds the means of gratification from the famished soul. Haggard and emaciated, the gluttonous crowd about it, casting eager eyes upon its precious burden, but only to elicit from its branches urgent admonitions to temperance.

In the seventh and last circle lasciviousness is expiated by long lines of penitents who pass through a fierce flame proceeding from the rocky wall beside them. Dante and Virgil both enter into this flame. Only here, and in the third terrace where anger is punished, does Dante himself suffer with the penitents. Of two sins only he seems to himself to need purging. And the penal fire does its work. His soul is purified from its last remaining sin. He is now master of himself, and as a crowned and mitred sovereign, with the lost image of God restored, he enters the terrestrial paradise, the Eden from which man was expelled for his sin. Virgil now can no longer be his guide, and Beatrice comes to take Virgil's place, after Dante has drunk of the waters of Lethe, which extinguish the memory of the past, and of the waters of Eunoë, which bring back the memory of the good.

Amid the living verdure and the fragrant flowers, the

pleasant zephyrs and the singing birds, we would gladly linger. There are two remarks, however, which I must make with regard to Dante's purgatory, before I leave it. And the first is that, like the hell, Dante does not regard it as a place, so much as it is a process. Doubtless he believed in the place, and sought to give an imaginative picture of it. But much more he believed in the thing—the necessity of purification. "Without holiness no man can see the Lord"; "put to death the deeds of the flesh"; "cleanse yourselves therefore from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit"; these are the essential truths which were in Dante's mind. The Christian doctrine of sanctification is put into verse in Dante's poem, and so far, both Protestant and Romanist may find in it a source of great religious incitement and profit.

Indeed the purgatory comes nearer to our common life than either the hell or the paradise. The former is too far beneath us, and the latter is too far above. But every man can recognize resemblance to himself in the penitents of purgatory; that is, if he has even a spark of the hatred of sin and longing for holiness which God's regenerating Spirit has inspired. The tender and humble confessions of the sufferers, their submission to the divine chastisements, their eager appropriation of all helps to their restoration which are bestowed by the word or the Spirit of God, are full of subduing beauty. Nowhere in literature, outside of the Bible, have we so nobly portrayed "the blessedness of him whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered."

This first remark about the purgatory has had to do

with that which Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have in common. My second remark has to do with the differences between them. There are two respects in which Protestants must regard Dante's representations as painfully erroneous. On the one hand he errs, as the Roman Catholic Church has erred, in extending the period of purification beyond the confines of death. The literal interpretation is better—purgatory is only ✓ on this earth and in this life. "After death" there is, not purification, but "judgment." For multitudes the Romanist doctrine is a doctrine of second probation. Men are content here with being at peace with the church, while they are not yet at peace with God. The real controversy between themselves and their Judge is adjourned to the future world. Purgatory, with all its sufferings, becomes the basis of false hopes; distant suffering is chosen rather than immediate renunciation of sin; a fatal trust is put in what the sinner can do by way of reparation, rather than in what Christ has done by way of atonement.

And this leads me to notice another error intimately connected with that which I have just mentioned, and which Protestants must ever most strenuously oppose. I refer now to Dante's error in making the process of purification a penal one. If there is any truth of Scripture more vital and precious than another, it is that of the completeness of Christ's sacrifice. Our sins, and all of them, were "laid on him"; he "has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us"; "there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." God chastises his children; but it is in love, and it is for their

good. There is no anger and there is no penalty, since

Nothing, either great or small,  
Remains for me to do ;  
Jesus died and paid it all,  
Yes, all the debt I owe.

The notion that the sufferings and calamities of the present life are of the nature of punishment is contrary to the whole doctrine of the New Testament, and constitutes "a bridge to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatorial fires." Neither in this world nor in the world to come can any mortal add by penance of his own to the efficacy of that sacrifice of Christ which was offered once for all. Dante was not in advance of his age, nor was he yet possessed of the spirit of the Lutheran Reformation. Justification by faith alone had not yet dawned upon him as God's only way of salvation. The "mass" to him was still a repetition of Christ's death, and the pains of purgatory voluntarily endured by the penitent were still needed to supplement what Christ had done upon the cross.

So at last we came to Dante's Paradise, a creation in some respects loftier and more wonderful than either the Hell or the Purgatory, but, for the reason that it is so lofty and wonderful, less attractive than either of these to the ordinary mind. Yet, as I read the poet's sublime meditations upon the greatest truths of religion and philosophy, I am impressed with the self-sufficiency of his genius. Never, even in its highest soaring, does the wing of his imagination seem to flag. Or, if ever earthly pictures seem to fail and earthly words are incapable of expressing the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory," piety and worship furnish what



art cannot supply, and the glowing heart of the poet shows itself most manifestly lost in adoration and in joy.

Heaven, we must remember, is to Dante's mind the state of the perfected will; or rather, the state of the will that has been freed at length from earthly and sensual desires. But while perfection in the sense of sinlessness belongs to all the inhabitants of the blessed realm, perfection in the sense of capacity is ever enlarging. All are as full as they can hold of the love and purity of God, yet one can hold more than another. To use the mediæval illustration, "A king may clothe all his children equally with cloth of gold, yet the amount of the cloth apportioned to each may vary according to their size." In heaven too, as well as in the lower realms, each soul goes to his own place. Outward surroundings are simply the fit accompaniments and evidences of character. As the soul laden with sin experiences a downward, so the soul possessed of purity experiences an upward, gravitation; and each one can say with King Richard, in Shakespeare's play: "Mount, mount, my soul—thy seat is up on high!" As we pass upward then from one heavenly sphere to another, we are to remember that we are not among the race of sinners any longer—we are rather among those whose varying native gifts and whose varying degrees of faithfulness in the exercise of these gifts constitute an ever-varying receptivity for the life and love of God.

Beatrice, the symbol of heavenly wisdom, is now Dante's guide. As he gazes upon her face, the light of the terrestrial paradise is lost in another light. "Suddenly day seemed added unto day, as if Omnipotence had lit up the sky with another sun." The poet is

lifted up from earth to heaven. And yet it is the lowest heaven which first he visits—the heaven of the moon, with its waxing and waning, the proper home of those whose wills on earth were imperfect through instability. Here are nuns, who, being constrained to marry, did not return to their vows when they had opportunity. This sphere is revolved by the angels. The next sphere is that of Mercury, and archangels have it in charge, turning it in due order around the earth and the sphere of the moon which it encloses. In this sphere of Mercury abide those whose wills were on earth imperfect through love of fame—men of great activity and eloquence, who lived on the whole for God, yet at the same time had some regard to the praise of men.

Then comes the sphere of Venus, revolved by the Principalities, and fitly made the home of those whose wills on earth were imperfect through excess of human love, even though that love was in itself lawful. Here Dante is led to

Admire the Art that turns to good  
Such passion, and the Wisdom manifold  
Whence earthly love by heavenly is subdued.

Thence he is lifted to the sun, the fourth heaven, revolved by the Powers. Here, in this chief light of the material universe, I am happy to observe that he places the abode of doctors of divinity and philosophy, probably because they have themselves been sources of light to the church.

The sphere of Mars, to which the poet next ascends, is revolved by the Virtues. Here he sees the forms of

distinguished warriors, confessors, and martyrs for the faith, not drawn up in the order of an earthly army but ranged together in the shape of a cross. Then comes the sphere of Jupiter, of which the Dominations have control. Here rulers eminent for justice are disposed, in the shape of an eagle; and wonderful to tell, the eagle, collective representation of earth's noblest kings and potentates, itself finds a voice, and speaks to Dante of the greater things of the divine kingdom. In the planet Saturn, or seventh heaven, revolved by the Thrones, are found contemplative spirits, or those who have furnished the most illustrious examples of the monastic life. The cold sphere of Saturn is peculiarly adapted to the monks and hermits, who have resigned the warmth of the fireside and the fervors of civic life in order to give themselves to prayer and to the study of heavenly truth.

The heaven of the fixed stars comes next; for Dante knew of no planet beyond Saturn. Here the cherubim move the sphere, and the apostles and saints of the Old and of the New Testaments have their dwelling. And here, before he is permitted to ascend higher, Dante passes an examination on the subject of faith, hope, and love—St. Peter, St. James, and St. John successively conducting it. When he has shown himself expert in these prerequisites to heavenly bliss, the poet is carried up to the ninth or highest heaven, revolved by the seraphim. This sphere is called the *Primum Mobile*, because its motion is most rapid, and is the cause of motion to all the spheres which it encloses. This highest heaven is starless and crystalline; and here "the nine orders of the celestial hierarchy circle in fiery rings

around the Light which no man can approach unto, manifested as an Atomic Point."

Dante has reached the summit of being, and is permitted to gaze upon its uncreated Source. A stream of light proceeds from God himself. In that light the multitude of saints and angels find their blessedness.

And as a cliff looks down upon the bed  
Of some clear stream, to see how richly crowned  
With flowers and foliage is its lofty head ;  
So all from earth who hither e'er returned,  
Seated on more than thousand thrones around,  
Within the Eternal Light themselves discerned.

It is the "Rose of the Blessed"—the great company of the redeemed, circling like petals of a rose, rank beyond rank, around the mystical lake of light which reflects that "Light which no man hath seen or can see." The saints of all ages are here, from Adam to St. Paul, and from the Virgin Mary to Beatrice. All the praises which Dante has hitherto lavished upon the lady of his love fail now, he says, to give any adequate conception of her loveliness, as with him she ascends to the highest heaven.

But his love is now no merely earthly love—he has learned the lesson that "our loves in higher love endure." Love for God draws him nearer to Beatrice, and conversely love for Beatrice draws him nearer to God. His eyes, and all eyes, are supremely set on the Highest of all—the triune God, into partnership with whom our humanity has been taken, in the person of the Son, and whose Trinity in Unity is now unfolded to the adoring contemplation of his creatures. At the

intercession of St. Bernard, Dante is enabled with purified sight to gaze directly upon the supreme Jehovah, and is moved to pray that grace may be given him so to utter what he sees that generations to come may catch some glimpse of the sublime vision :

O sovereign Light ! who dost exalt thee high  
 Above all thoughts that mortal may conceive,  
 Recall thy semblance to my mental eye,  
 And let my tongue record the wondrous story,  
 That I to nations yet unborn may leave  
 One spark at least of thy surpassing glory !

But the sight transcends all powers of description. Only one thing is made plain,—and that the greatest thing of all,—in God, Light and Love are one :

The glorious vision here my powers o'ercame ;  
 But now my will and wish were swayed by Love—  
 (As turns a wheel on every side the same)  
 Love—at whose word the sun and planets move.

So ends “The Divine Comedy.” The translation of Wright, which I have generally used because it best represents the rhythm and rhyme of the original, is in these last lines in one respect defective ; it does not put at the end the word with which Dante meant his poem to close. That word is the “stars.” With this word ends the “Inferno” :

Emerging, we once more beheld the stars.

With this word he ends the “Purgatorio” :

And with a will endued to mount the stars.

With this word he ends also the "Paradiso":

The Love that moves the sun and the other stars.

We can now see how narrow and unintelligent that criticism is which represents Dante's poetry as savage and grotesque, and regards the poet as capable only of rough effects. The truth is that Dante is the most sensitive of all poets to the changeful aspects of nature; every hour of the day or of the night has to him its peculiar beauty; no poet ever read in the book of nature more spiritual lessons; no poet ever expressed those lessons in more varied and melodious phrase. When the boys of the street saw Dante go by, they said: "There goes the man that was in Hell!" and there was in his countenance a solemn gravity which gave verisimilitude to the popular report. But he did not revel in horrors, as some imagine. It was his instinct of righteousness, and not a morbid disposition to gloat over suffering, that furnished the *animus* of his dark descriptions of the torments of the lost. He had an enthusiasm for justice; but then he had also a soul tremulously sensitive to the least of earth's sorrows and to all those benignant agencies by which God would remedy them. Dante was thoroughgoing. He saw the depth of man's need; he saw the grandeur of the heavenly discipline. He did not waste his fervors on sin or sinners; he reserved those fervors for struggling purity and for God's plan of rescue and restoration. Dante is the most ethical of poets—he measures all things by the standard of the sanctuary. But all beauty that is real or lasting—all moral beauty, in

short—wakes in Dante's soul responsive emotions, and finds a calm and sweet expression in his verse.

Take, for example, the poet's ruling conception of heaven. It is that of light—light qualified by love. No language upon earth has such a marvelous wealth of terms expressive of the varying shades and aspects of light as has the Italian. And the most of these it owes to Dante. He not only pressed into service every word his native Italian furnished, but he revived scores of words which slept in the Latin classics; and, when these would not suffice, he coined yet others from the mint of his own brain. This was no fanaticism of sensuous delight; it was the struggle of a great nature to express moral truth through the poor vehicle of human speech. There rang forever in his ears that sounding and sublime sentence: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." In the "Paradise," when all other earthly images fail him to describe the state of the redeemed, he represents their blessedness under the figure of ever new intensities and splendors of the light. The saints are "light in the Lord"; they have "awaked, and risen from the dead, and Christ has given them light."

So the "light" is the light of truth, of purity, of holiness—the opposite to that "darkness" which is error and impurity and sin. As God himself is light, and dwells in the light which is unapproachable, so each successive rise in the scale of being is a rise from one degree of light to another—not a merely physical and passive elevation either, since it is the mind and heart and will into which and through which "the true light now shineth." No Mohammedan paradise is here, but

only the paradise which consists in holiness and in likeness to God. The poet who could thus resist the sensuous and externalizing influences of the church of his day must not only have drunk deep of a nobler than Pierian spring—even the well of Holy Scripture, but must have been specially guided and enlightened by the Holy Spirit of God.

In another respect Dante's "Paradise" is worthy of the highest praise. It represents nearness to God and service to God's creatures as contemporaneous. Rank in God's creation is determined by the clearness of the soul's vision of God—here the mystical and contemplative element in religion has its rights accorded to it. But the ascetic exaggerations of this truth, which had so infected the life of the church, Dante is almost wholly a stranger to. He writes from the point of view, not of the monk, but of the common Christian. Exceedingly few of the so-called saints of the Roman Catholic calendar does he deign to notice; the more healthful scriptural examples of chastity and faith and endurance are strewn thickly over his pages. And then, most remarkable of all, he has made the nine heavens, with all their upper and lower spheres, only the working-places of the redeemed; while their working-places are below, their dwelling-places are on high, in the mystical White Rose which is above all time and space, around the mystical lake of light, where there is no need of sun or moon because God and the Lamb are the light of it.

All the saints dwell in the light of God's immediate presence, and according to their capacity are made to reflect that light. But just in proportion to the light



which they are able to receive, just in proportion to their nearness to God and the clearness of their vision of him, is the service they are permitted to render others. At the same time that they worship above, they have an existence and perform a service in the universe of time and space. The highest of them can help God's creatures in the heaven of the fixed stars; the lowest of them can help those who are just beginning their course in the heaven of the moon. It is not worth our while to stop here and smile at Dante, until we ponder those words of our Lord from which the poet, it may be, derived the suggestion of his thought: "See that ye despise not one of these little ones, for . . . in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." What is this but to say: Heaven and earth are not mutually exclusive. Angels—and if angels, why not redeemed men?—by so much as they are near to God, by so much do they busy themselves in service to God's creatures. Heaven is no refuge of idleness; no hands hang down, and no lips are dumb. "His servants shall serve him." Knowledge of God and service to men are contemporaneous and interdependent. The nearer we get to God the larger will be our sphere of loving activity; the more shall we resemble him, who, though he was the very Son of God and in the very bosom of the Father, yet was among us "as one that serveth."

So holiness is joined to love, and holiness and love together constitute Dante's heaven. It is beautiful to see how, in the "Paradise," all heaven rejoices over the new joy of each victorious and ascending spirit, and how increasing nearness to God brings its inhabitants

ever nearer to each other. Even the ministrants in the upper temple get new understanding of the wonders of God's grace, and take on a new brightness of holy love, as they see Dante enter heaven.

It was with such thoughts as these that the exile soothed the long years of his poverty and disappointment. Who can wonder that to him the spiritual world became at last more real than the material world that was open to his senses! It is sometimes made cause of complaint against him that his representations were so matter of fact; that his journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven was so real a journey; that its incidents were so like the incidents of actual experience. Ah, this is the wonder and the poetry of it! Imagination and piety created a new world. Just so did John Bunyan, in Bedford jail, turn from the earthly to the heavenly, from the seen to the unseen, from the temporal to the eternal. He not only *saw* Christian making his way from the City of Destruction to the Heavenly City, but he *was* Christian.

So Dante's vividness of description is not mere literary art; it is a deeper process than that—it is a living through the things which he described, so that he too could say: *Quorum magna que pars fui*. It is this intense realism which gives the "Divine Comedy" its chief power. It is the utterance of the greatest man of his time, and one of the greatest men of all times. It is his conscientious and God-fearing attempt to express the truth of God as his generation apprehended it, and so to express it that it might influence all after ages to turn from error and iniquity to truth and righteousness. Thomas Carlyle has called Dante "the mouth-

piece of the Middle Ages." The German Tieck declares that in him "ten silent centuries found a voice." This seems high praise, but Dante deserves higher praise than this. He is the mouthpiece, not only of the Middle Ages, but of all ages. Not twelve centuries, but all the centuries, find a voice in him. He illustrates truths that are true not only then, but now and always—truths of sin and purgation and recovery to righteousness, truths for the expression of which God spread the floor of the universe with its mosaic of constellations, and caused the curtain of night and chaos to rise at the creation.

"The corruption of the will, the purification of the will, the perfection of the will," these are Dante's themes; and, as they are the greatest themes of all, so they are themes the most deeply affecting and permanently inspiring. Like Mary's breaking of the alabaster box, this offering of Dante to Beatrice, wherever the gospel goes, will be spoken of for a memorial of her; but it will be a memorial of something higher still, even of that higher love which spoke through the love of the Triune God to a humanity that was sunk and lost in its sin. For this reason the poem of Dante will never die. Dante's universe has changed. In the midst of the western hemisphere modern discovery has found not the Mount of Purgatory but a vast new continent. Our earth is no longer the center of the solar system—it is a satellite of the sun instead. But the great truths of being remain just what they were in Dante's time; and the "Divine Comedy" will be immortal, because it is the grandest utterance yet given by man to these universal and fundamental principles in the nature of man and the nature of God.



SHAKESPEARE



# SHAKESPEARE

## THE UNIVERSALITY OF SHAKESPEARE

HE who attempts to write about Shakespeare may well feel as Hamlet did: he undertakes a task that transcends his powers. No great name in literature has had so much written about him, and this of itself shows that he is the greatest name. When all the lesser orbs have been circling around this sun and striving in their measure to reflect his light, it may seem hopeless to propound anything that is both new and true.

In dealing with Shakespeare we seem to be dealing with one of the great operations of nature. There is a mysterious largeness about him. He is not merely an individual poet, he is a great elemental force in the world's thought. He has been called the myriad-minded. His own personality is well-nigh lost in his work, and that work absorbs into itself, while it represents and relumes for us all the varied secular life of his time. But his merit is a deeper and more vital one than this. He has struck the fundamental tones of secular human life everywhere and always. His poetry, more than any other, holds the mirror up to nature as it now is, and answers to Aristotle's definition of poetry as "an expression of the universal."

There was a day when schoolboys were set to writing essays on "Virtue." Their wrestlings with the vast

abstract theme were pitiful. Yet to some there was an attraction in the very greatness of the subject, and later years have seen them bending sharper powers of analysis to its comprehension. To write on Shakespeare is like writing on virtue. Success is possible by no schoolboy methods. Only the application of a broad philosophy will bring out valuable results. I propose therefore to preface what I have to say about Shakespeare with a brief statement of the true place and function of imagination, and of dramatic poetry as a means of imaginative expression.

It is a great error to regard imagination as an illegitimate child of reason, to be disowned and kept out of sight as much as possible. This was the view of Plato. He loved knowledge; he desired to see things as they are. Imagination, in his view, coins only fiction, and fiction is untruth; imagination and philosophy are inconsistent with each other; hence he banishes all poets from his ideal republic. Modern narrowness and asceticism have often reproduced the error of Plato, and have put their ban upon the novel and upon the fine arts. The cure for all this is to be found in a proper apprehension of the relation between imagination and other operations of the mind.

Imagination in its most obvious meaning is the image-making power of the intellect. In this sense it is a help and condition of all the more advanced mental processes. Our earliest perceptions of the self and the not-self are doubtless direct contacts, but our later knowledges are really combinations of direct perception with the images which past experiences have given us. I see a bit of red light among the leaves. Only when



I add an image stored up in the mind, can I call it an apple. Memory itself is impossible without imagination; there must be an image of the past, as well as a recognition of that image as representing a former state of the self. All judgment with regard to the new involves imagination, for only imagination can enable us to compare the new with the old. Only the image-making faculty can bring together the present and the absent, the particular thing and the general standard to which it is to be referred.

Brutes have percepts and they can recall them. Even dogs have a low imagination and can dream. Imagination becomes rational and human, only when it is able to distinguish between dream images and the actual percepts of present experience. But there is also a rational imagination which is *free*—a power of recombining the percepts of the past in an order determined by the mind itself. Imagination has a constructive power, as well as a reproductive power. It leaves out the irrelevant; it puts together the essential.

Just in proportion to men's breadth of experience and insight into truth is their use of imagination in construing the world about them and reducing it to order and unity under its typical forms. Napoleon said well that the men of imagination rule the world. Tyn-dall can speak very properly of the scientific use of the imagination: "Nourished," he says, "by knowledge partially won, and bounded by co-operant reason, imagination becomes the mightiest instrument of the physical discoverer." Great inductions, like Sir Isaac Newton's, are only the ventures of the rational imagination into the world of truth that is hidden from the multi-

tude. The hypotheses which precede experiment can never be framed without imagination. Kepler thinks God's thoughts after him, and his discovery is a work of imagination, quite as much as it is a work of reason. Art, as well as science, is man's attempt to reconstruct the universe in its essential ideas, and to set forth the real life of things.

Art then is not imitation, but creation. The creative imagination is the most rational and lofty form of imagination, for it attempts to reproduce, not so much persons and things, as the formative idea of persons and things, the typical thought for which they stand and which gives them all their value. We have indeed a so-called art, like that of Verestschagin in painting and of Zola in literature, which aims to depict simply what *is*, in all its minute detail, whether that be ennobling or disgusting. This realism is not truly realistic, for it does not penetrate beneath the surface. It describes the very nails and hairs of the body, but gives no intimation of its life. It has no belief in the existence of God, and so it sees in the universe no soul, no thought, no dignity, no worthy ends. It does not see that the ideal is the most real element in the real, and so it confounds the real with the actual. Upon this principle, as Hutton has suggested, the picture of a cannibal feast might be a work of art, and poetry might devote itself to descriptions of lust without love.

But there is a God, and the universe is a rational universe. Through this phenomenal world another noumenal world is striving to express itself. God's creative activity indeed is essentially a continuous presentation of the divine ideas to intelligent beings. In his out-

ward creation God gives us illustrations of his truth, that we may be taught to use our own creative powers. And man's creative activity is the discovery by the imagination of these same divine ideas and the putting of them into new combinations and forms. If the forms are merely abstract, we call this work of the imagination *philosophy*; if the forms are concrete, we call the result *art*.

Man has a free will, and he may deny and contradict these ideas both in his thought and in his life. He may imagine error, and devise wickedness. Art will then become artful—it will lend its many hues to the serpent, it will clothe vice with a hideous attraction. But it will still by contrast illustrate the divine truth which was meant to be its stimulus and goal. Do we conclude that the true artist must be a dogmatist and a conscious preacher of virtue? No, we merely say that only the man in whom morality and religion are living principles can ever see deeply enough into the heart of things to become a true artist.

Now poetry is the greatest and noblest of the arts, and that for the reason that, while equally with philosophy it penetrates into the life of the universe, it has power more than any other art to exhibit that life of the universe to the mind and heart of man. I have mentioned Aristotle's description of poetry as "an expression of the universal." I need to add another profound saying of the same philosopher, namely, that "poetry is more philosophic and of higher worth, than history." The reason is not far to seek. History deals with the actual; it has all the defects and limitations of its theme. Poetry, on the other hand, sets before us the

types and truths of which history furnishes only single and concrete illustrations.

Poetry is more universal than history. In it appear the divine ideas purged of excrescences. Compare the characters of Shakespeare's historical plays with those same characters as they appear in the English annals. I do not hesitate to say that Shakespeare has seized the dominant feature of each character, and has presented it more consistently than any historian has; while for grasp of the spirit of those turbulent times, their passionate loyalty and their barbaric cruelty, and for vivid and moving exhibition of the national life and genius, the plays leave, and ever will leave, the histories far behind.

While poetry has these advantages over philosophy and history, there is one kind of poetry which possesses them to the utmost, and that is, dramatic poetry. Here we have life reconstructed, as it were. Great principles of action are set before us, but they animate concrete personalities. Types of humanity are consistently delineated, but with natural surroundings. Each man influences, and he receives influence from others. The network of circumstance becomes a matrix for the development of character. The persons of the drama are not only conceived, but they are made to speak, and in speaking, to reveal themselves. Their own acts, and not the descriptions of the poet, approve or condemn them. As we read or hear the play, the world seems to lay aside its mask and admit us into its secret. Our own hearts and the hearts of others are opened to us. The creative genius of the dramatist has breathed into his characters the breath of life, so that they have

become living souls, and can never die. To multitudes, Othello and Lear, Romeo and Hamlet are more real and powerful factors of mental and moral growth, than are Cromwell and Napoleon and Washington.

The Greek tragedies maintain their hold upon us, even after the lapse of many centuries, because they exhibit in noble artistic form the primary affections and fears of humanity. But in the days of Greece life was simple. The complexity of modern interests and feelings had not yet arisen. Duty to the family and the State was the largest motive to action. The heart of man had not become introspective, and the depths of passion had not been sounded. The love of man for woman and of woman for man was not yet self-conscious, and what we call romance was impossible.

The "Christian Era" introduces us to a larger world. Nature yields in attractiveness to human nature. The State is seen to exist for the individual. Not only man as a race, but each man of the human family, is the object of divine regard and self-sacrifice. The single soul is the scene of conflicts more impressive than any battle of the elements. To dramatize modern life is a greater task than that which the Greeks had laid upon them. To seize upon the great types of character as they live and move in this new world without and within, and to give these types concrete and consistent expression as they interact with one another and shape each other by their interaction, this requires a breadth and vigor of creative imagination such as the Greeks never possessed.

Greek art lives, because it has in it an element of universality. The single idea or feeling which a Greek

statue or poem embodies is an idea or feeling common to all mankind. But Coriolanus and Shylock and Henry V. present to us these same ideas and feelings contending with many others, and hastening on, through infinite complexity of circumstance, to triumph or defeat. It is because our great poet, more than any other, has been able to portray all the secular varieties of human character, in the endless relations they sustain in modern life, that we can speak of the universality of Shakespeare.

It is said of Tennyson that a friend found him one day on the edge of a country brook gazing down into its depths and absorbed in contemplating the endless variety of its subaqueous life. As he lifted his head the poet only said: "What an imagination God has!" But the brook was only the universe in miniature. He who regards the universe as an ordered whole, and sees in it

One God, who ever lives and loves,  
One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves.

will be deeply impressed with the wonders of that divine and creative imagination which constructed the plot of the great drama of history, and which is conducting the play through all its successive scenes to its final dénouement and success.

It is the privilege of the poet to enter into God's plan of the universe and to express God's thought. Not the actual world, but the ideal of which the actual is the shadow, the essence of things disencumbered from the accidents of circumstance, characters clearly unfolded,

doom fixed by human acts, the meaning of events—these are the things with which the poet deals, and in all this he is prophet as well as poet, anticipator of results, interpreter of God. In his creations, God makes himself better known. He lifts us up into the region of eternal truths. Does one man's line of development run on for a while alone, but then suddenly become inextricably tangled in another man's, whose past history has all unconsciously prepared him for the contact? George Eliot will in a similar way give us in one novel both Gwendolen and Grandcourt, and Shakespeare will carry on two separate stories in *King Lear* which only at the crisis of the play merge into one.

Anachronisms are not to be ruled out in poetry so long as they subserve ideal truth. It required a vivid imagination to recognize the two rivals for the throne in Richard III., encamped so close together on the stage that the same ghost could speak alternately to both. But space and time are annihilated in poetry, because poetry is an expression of the universal. Shall we call this a defect in Shakespeare? As well quarrel with Raphael for bringing into juxtaposition the top of the Mount with its transfigured Saviour, and the foot of the Mount with the distressed humanity which he came to save.

Poetry then has in it, not less truth, but more truth than prose. It seizes upon and expresses the deeper facts of life, which the superficial observer neglects. When Milton described poetry as "simple, sensuous, passionate," he meant by "simple" this very conformity to the laws of nature and of mind—simplicity includes the idea of genuine rationality. But if poetry is

an expression of the highest reason, how comes it that poetry and insanity are so connected together in the thoughts of men? Listen to Dryden ("Absalom and Achitophel," 193):

Great wits are sure to madness near allied  
And thin partitions do their bounds divide ;

and to Seneca (*"De Tranquillitate Animi,"* 15): "There is no great genius without a tincture of madness."

In our judgment this is only to say that an alert and active mind may put such a strain upon its cerebral organism as to throw the machine into utter disorder. It is easy to "o'er-inform the tenement of clay," when that tenement is so delicate an instrument as the poet's brain. A slight jar will sometimes stop a delicate chronometer, and the most accomplished performer makes sorry music when he plays on a cracked violin. Ophelia is wrong when she says of Hamlet (3 : 1 : 157):

Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,  
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh ;

for it is not the reason that is out of tune, but the brain. The result, however, is the same, and we speak of a reason overthrown, as we speak of a conscience seared.

The abnormal imagination may link objects together by the most tenuous threads of association. This should not blind us to the dignity of its normal exercise, when it enters into the secret of things and reconstructs the universe in its essential truth and beauty. In "Midsummer Night's Dream" (5 : 1 : 4), Shakespeare himself, with inimitable skill, has depicted both the rational and the irrational use of this wonderful faculty:



Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact ;  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold :  
That is the madman ; the lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt ;  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,  
And, as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

Since imagination, in its higher rational use, is a means of grasping truth not open to the senses, it is a most important coadjutor, if not a necessary instrument, of reason in its loftiest investigations. Neither mathematics nor morals can make known their highest truths to the man of no imagination. The dull plodder within the circle of material facts will discern no connections between them, and will have no science. Although God is apprehended not by imagination but by reason, yet imagination is a most important help to religion, and we may almost say that some men have not imagination enough to be religious.

The poet can express the universal, only as the universal is in him. We must not think of him simply as an individual. He is also member of the race, with the life of the race pulsating in his veins. When he hears "the still, sad music of humanity," it is because humanity" speaks to him and in him. Aye, the greatest poetry expresses a higher life than that of man.

David and Isaiah see divinity in nature and in human affairs, because God in them enables them to see God outside of them. This we call inspiration. I do not argue that every poet is inspired, but I do maintain that there are lower as well as higher forms of divine influence, and that the great works of secular literature would never have been possible had not their authors been enlightened by the "Light that lighteth every man."

God's providence has not left these mighty springs of power without control. As he spoke through Balaam and through Caiaphas in spite of their perversity, interjecting amid their selfish and profane utterances some truths that lived after the falsehoods died, so Goethe in his "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul," and Moore in his "Come, ye Disconsolate," have been made to prophesy against their will. But much more through the greatest poets, Homer, Virgil, Dante, Milton, Wordsworth, must we at times recognize a divine voice speaking. At times the poet is rapt, his words and thought go beyond himself, truth discloses itself to him dressed in a word-garb of supernatural beauty. He wonders at himself, for all this is something not wrought by him but wrought for him. He talks of the Muses, or he gives thanks to God.

These considerations explain what we may call the impersonality of the greatest poets. What is the motive of their writing? Do they write for pecuniary reward? The pressure of poverty, the need of bread for wife or child, the desire to retrieve family misfortune, these have doubtless set many pens a-running, and possibly Shakespeare's among the rest. Do they write for

fame? The love of praise and the handing down to posterity of a work that cannot die, these have been occasions and helps to poetic art, as even Dante confesses to us. Do they write to do good and to teach mankind? Yes, this has been one motive to artistic production, and Milton's "Paradise Lost" seeks to "justify the ways of God to man."

And yet we maintain that no great poetry was ever written with any one of these as its sole, or even its ruling, motive. These may serve as occasions, they may give the pen its start; but, unless the writer is lifted above them, no poem of permanent value is the result. For here is no spontaneity and no joy, but rather external or internal constraint. All great poetry is a work of freedom, as well as of necessity. The poet creates, as God creates, simply to express the world of thought and beauty within. The surging life of humanity becomes self-conscious in the poet's breast. He must "speak forth the things which he has seen and heard" without regard to consequence or reward. The great poets forget themselves in their themes. We know much of Achilles, but little of Homer. And if Shakespeare is the greatest poet of the world, it is not wonderful that this rule should apply to him most of all, and that we should know much about Macbeth, but little about Shakespeare.

We can now perceive the mingled truth and error in M. Taine's contention that our poet was the child of the Renaissance. Every great artist is in part the product of his time, and Shakespeare gathered up and expressed all that there was of rich and rare in that most stirring age. The revival of learning reached distant England

almost a century after it had begun in Italy, but delay only increased the volume and power of the wave. The Reformation had added an ethical and purifying element to what was originally a mere outburst of intellectual energy, and the ferocity of mediæval manners had been somewhat tamed. The defeat of the Armada had freed England from the fear of Spain; the beheading of the Queen of Scots had freed England from internal foes.

It was an age of adventure and discovery. The world had doubled in size, and transatlantic treasures had been poured into the lap of Europe. The Bermudas gave to Shakespeare his "still-vexed Bermoothes," and the heathen cannibal gave him his Caliban. Imagination was provided with material both modern and classical, at the same time that it was emancipated from the superstitions of the past. Elizabeth, the virgin queen, mistress of the seas and commanding the enthusiastic loyalty of her subjects, was a lover and promoter of literature. Never before since the victory of the Greeks over Persia, was a nation so on the top-wave of freedom and achievement. The very breathing of the air was exhilaration, and hope could never hope too much in the breast of the poet.

What an instrument was then made ready to his hand in our English mother-tongue! The Norman had enriched it with all the dignity and sonorous charm of the Latin; the Saxon had furnished its solid foundation of simple, forthright, hearty, pathetic speech. Spenser had subdued its harshness into the melody and harmony of poetry; Sidney had shown how rhythmical and yet how vigorous might be its prose. The language was no hack, with regular, funereal gait, but a colt just put to

harness, a compound of grace and of intense vitality, ready for all manner of sudden excursions from the beaten track.

What we now call word-coining, and occasionally tolerate as poetic license, was the business of the Elizabethan poet, and the new words had all the brilliancy and beauty of counters fresh from the mint. The age had a peculiar feeling for artistic form—form and substance indeed had not yet been divorced. English had not yet acquired the stiffness of Puritanism. To use the words of Lord Bacon, it had the very “sparkle of the purity of man’s first estate.” Dramatic poetry had begun to use it for its vehicle. The coarse and bloody tragedies of an earlier time had given place to plays in which there was at least some effort at rational development of character, and Shakespeare himself, in alluding to Marlowe, could speak of

The proud, full sail of his great verse.

The poet was born indeed in a mighty time, but the time can never wholly account for the poet. Shakespeare was born, not made; nurture did much for him, but nature did more. When M. Taine calls him the child of the Renaissance, he forgets that the Renaissance had other children not so great. Ben Jonson, as well as Marlowe, had more of learning and more of training in the schools. They were children of the Renaissance, but they were not Shakespeares.

The French critic has little faith in personality. His philosophy is the philosophy of materialism: man is the product of his surroundings. Against such a philosophy Shakespeare, like Homer, will ever be an unanswerable

argument. Here is a new force in history, for which the past cannot account. Humanity reaches a new stage of development in him. The characters which he creates do not belong peculiarly to the Renaissance, they belong to universal humanity. Ben Jonson nobly recognized the essential quality of Shakespeare's genius, when he declared his work to be "not of an age, but for all time."

And this suggests the final and sufficient reason why the plays of our great dramatist can never be referred to Lord Bacon as their author. Bacon was the child of the Renaissance. He represents the critical and inquiring spirit. His aim was to bring philosophy down from its ideal heights, and to set it at study of concrete facts. He could doubtless have adopted Luther's characterization of Aristotle as "a damned mischief-making heathen." There is probably in all literature no greater contrast of method and spirit than that between Shakespeare's intuitive grasp of human character and life on the one hand and Bacon's careful gathering of instances and induction of generals from particulars on the other. The "final causes" which Aristotle taught, and which Bacon hated, were the very life-blood of Shakespeare. To fancy Francis of Verulam writing "Midsummer Night's Dream" or "The Tempest" is to imagine a dray-horse soaring like Pegasus.

The education of such a genius must have been a course of liberal training to those who taught him. So active and aspiring a mind, with his manifold questions, must have made trouble for the doctors in the temple. It is by no means certain that he did much of regular study at the Free Grammar School of Stratford, but his

occasional introduction of Latin lines, and especially his use of words derived from the Latin in a new and etymological sense, show that he picked up that language in a very practical way. And though he is said to have had less Greek than Latin, I cannot explain the long succession of questions and answers in single lines of "King Richard III." except by supposing that these monostichs were suggested by the reading of Euripides, or by overhearing the recitation of it in the schoolroom.

When it comes to the writing of "Antony and Cleopatra," or "Troilus and Cressida," we find that Shakespeare has drunk in the very spirit and genius of Greek and Roman times; indeed, in his portraiture of Ulysses, he takes Homer's hints about the man of many wiles, and makes Ulysses reveal himself in speech with a fullness and consistency of which Homer himself would have been incapable.

Schools or no schools, Shakespeare would have appropriated, and he did appropriate, all the secular knowledge of his time. Essays have been written to prove that he must have been at different times a lawyer, a physician, and a soldier. He probably was none of them. May we not reasonably believe that he tells the story of his own mental growth when, in "Cymbeline" (I : I : 43), he makes a gentleman say of Posthumus, that the king

Puts him to all the learnings that his time  
 Could make him the receiver of; which he took  
 As we do air, fast as 'twas ministered;  
 And in his spring became a harvest.

In a similar way we may interpret what seem at first sight to be intimations of a wild and dissolute youth.

They are rather signs of an omnivorous appetite for knowledge. With a poet's delight in every novel experience, he threw himself into life. But he did not throw himself away. Keenly sensitive as he was to pleasure, he had yet the justness of judgment which enabled him to hold his spirit above the temptations and companionships which would have dragged him down. With a largeness of heart like the sand upon the seashore, he could master everything, yet be mastered by none.

Greene might drink himself to death and Marlowe might perish in a brawl, but Shakespeare never. A delicacy of taste was there which revolted from the vile. A conscience yet unseared discerned between the evil and the good. The "Venus and Adonis" does not prove Shakespeare's early manhood to have been swallowed up in sensuality, any more than the "Laus Veneris" of Swinburne proved him to be a youthful reprobate.

Hazardous and guilty as are these edgings toward vice, we might yet in all candor believe that the vice is, like the bacchanalian songs of our college days, rather an ideal than a real thing, a matter of theory rather than of practice. It is the ill-chosen theme for intellectual subtlety to disport itself upon. Real vice is too much absorbed in its own viciousness to be self-observant and poetical. To those who accuse him too harshly, Shakespeare may use Warwick's extenuation of Prince Hal's fondness for wild associates ("King Henry IV.," Part II., 4 : 4 : 67):

My gracious lord, you look beyond him quite :  
The prince but studies his companions,  
Like a strange tongue ; wherein, to gain the language,



'Tis needful that the most immodest word  
Be looked upon, and learned ; which once attained,  
Your highness knows, comes to no further use,  
But to be known and hated. So, like gross terms,  
The prince will, in the perfectness of time,  
Cast off his followers ; and their memory  
Shall as a pattern or a measure live,  
By which his grace must mete the lives of others,  
Turning past evils to advantages.

Another theory, I know, is quite possible, namely, that an early manhood of license was rescued from utter disaster only by disappointment in illicit love, the treachery of chosen friends, and the death of the poet's father and son. Let us unhesitatingly accept the facts, while we reject the inference drawn from them. As to the inference, it is enough to say that it is impossible to suppose even the genius of Shakespeare to have made its steady progress toward the summit of literary and dramatic achievements through years of recklessness and dissipation. Genius needs material to work upon, and that material must be gathered by labor. Disappointment, treachery, and death taught Shakespeare many lessons ; but they never turned sottishness into industry, nor passion into wisdom.

Prof. Dowden, of the University of Dublin, has done more than any or all of the writers before him to give a rational and connected account of the poet's life and work. The year 1600 is marked as the middle point of his productive activity. The ten years preceding 1600 were the years that saw the rise and maturing of his genius. The ten years that followed 1600 were the years of his grandest triumphs. The twenty years between 1590 and 1610, therefore, cover the whole extent

of Shakespeare's writing for the stage. But each ten years of these twenty may be further subdivided into halves, and these minor five-year periods may be roughly yet substantially distinguished from each other. Prof. Dowden has well named these four minor periods: (1) "In the workshop"; (2) "In the world"; (3) "Out of the depths"; (4) "On the heights."

Let us follow this order for a moment, and get from it what help we may toward understanding the development of Shakespeare's genius. We shall see that the poet did not attain his supremacy at once. Universality was not to be reached at a bound. First came the years of apprenticeship, in which imagination almost ran riot. In *Romeo and Titania* there was sweetness in excess. All was regularity and rhyme. Quips and conceits abounded. The play upon words was incessant. Shakespeare was in large part working over the dramas of others.

The three parts of "*King Henry VI.*," and perhaps also "*Richard III.*," were adaptations and improvements of earlier productions, whose original authors, though they were associated with him in the business of making plays, could yet enviously speak of him as an "upstart crow, beautified with their feathers." But these playwrights live now only by virtue of the breath which Shakespeare breathed into them. While the poet used the material they gave him, he so transformed it that the authors could hardly recognize it. Even in those early days of experiment, he put into his work a vivacity, a variety, a truth, and a beauty, which were altogether new in dramatic literature.

The five years "in the workshop" were succeeded by five years "in the world." He began to dispense with

the collaboration of others, and to do wholly independent work. Beginning to write mainly as a matter of trade, he found the trade become profitable, and the more original his productions were, the more money they brought in. The family star, which had been declining, came into the ascendant once more. In 1596 John Shakespeare, his father, who had been prosecuted for debt and had lost his estate, applied for liberty to display a coat-of-arms, and in 1597 the poet purchased New Place in Stratford for a family mansion. In 1598 Francis Meres, in his "Wit's Treasury," bore testimony to the poet's established fame, and gave him the highest place among English poets and dramatists, while declaring him equal to the greatest writers of tragedy or comedy in Greece and Rome.

Success encouraged him to further and bolder effort. He flung away the traditional restrictions of dramatic poetry. End-stopped and periodic lines, with their monotonous uniformity of cadence, gave place to run-on lines, with frequent weak endings, and a wonderful variety in the location of the cæsural pause. The prologue to "King Henry V." illustrates the new freedom and unbounded energy which Shakespeare put into his verse. There the chorus begins :

O for a muse of fire, that would ascend  
 The brightest heaven of invention !  
 A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,  
 And monarchs to behold the swelling scene !  
 Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,  
 Assume the port of Mars ; and at his heels,  
 Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire  
 Crouch for employment. But pardon, gentles all,  
 The flat unraisèd spirit that hath dar'd

On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
So great an object : can this cockpit hold  
The vasty fields of France? or may we cram  
Within this wooden O the very casques  
That did affright the air at Agincourt?

This magnificent passage illustrates not only the new splendor and freedom which Shakespeare gave to dramatic verse; it illustrates equally well the realistic quality of his second literary period. It is as if he had said to himself: "I have done with conceits and fancies; let me deal with real life." The five years "in the world" are represented by the "Merchant of Venice" and by the long series of English historical plays. Eight of these last follow one another in unbroken connection. From the fact that no one play is absolutely complete in itself, we may infer that Shakespeare intended them to constitute parts of one great heroic poem, in which English history, with its shame and its glory, should live again before the eyes of men.

The historical plays are a mirror of kings, it has been said, and they should be a pattern for princes. But he must be a very kingly king who can live up to the dignity and strength of either Shakespeare's "Henry IV." or "Henry V." No warnings against romantic weakness in a monarch can be so impressive as a reading of "King Richard II."; no warnings against pietistic weakness so powerful as a representation of "King Henry VI." It is striking that the plays which depict royal imbecility belong to the earliest period of the poet's development, while those which depict royal greatness and strength belong to the second period of his growing maturity and larger knowledge of the world. He has

so thought himself into the spirit and temper of a king, that he has made the actor's task a hard one. Those parts can be fitly acted only by princes, or by men whose imagination enables them to enter into the universality of Shakespeare.

And now, with the year 1600 and the ripe confidence of his manhood, come vicissitudes and sorrows which turn the poet's thoughts inward and lead him to meditate deeply upon the great problems of existence. The sonnets belong to this period of *Sturm und Drang*. Shakespeare's father and Shakespeare's only son have died. The treachery of a trusted friend has wounded him to the quick. The lightness of spirit which met openly and joyfully every youthful disappointment has given place for the time to a sombre view of life. The capacity of the human heart for grief and anger and fear is opened to him as never before. The third five years are well characterized by the words, "Out of the depths."

1600 to 1605 must be regarded as the most productive half-decade in the history of literature. For during this half-decade were produced "Antony and Cleopatra," "Hamlet," "Lear," "Macbeth," "Othello," and "Coriolanus." Here are the six greatest tragedies of the world. They represent the excessive working of the greatest passions. In "Antony and Cleopatra" we see sensual pleasure dragging down a noble mind and heart; in "Macbeth" it is ambition; in "Othello" jealousy; in "Coriolanus" pride. "Lear" shows us the human spirit driven to insanity by filial ingratitude; "Hamlet" is the impersonation of idealistic wavering in the presence of duty, and of opportunity forever lost.

But how different these embodiments of human passion and weakness are from the shadowy abstractions of Marlowe and Ben Johnson! Those were lay-figures with a mere outside dress of passion. They went through their appointed motions like automata, but they had no real life. Shakespeare's characters have such intense vitality that we discuss their motives and actions as if they were living men. We see the human heart fairly torn by contending emotions. And yet, dark as the colors often are, reflection only convinces us that in these creations nature herself is speaking.

There were also comedies belonging to this third period of Shakespeare's productive activity, but they were not light and mirthful like those of the period preceding. We find no "Merry Wives of Windsor," no "Much Ado About Nothing," no "As You Like It," between 1600 and 1605. "Measure for Measure," "All's Well That Ends Well," and "Troilus and Cressida," are products of this stage of the poet's genius. The comedy is ironical and bitter. It deals with misjudgment and treachery.

It is pleasant to pass from the third period to the last. The five years from 1605 to 1610 were years of restored calm, of forgiveness, of reconciliation. It is the serene Indian summer of the poet's days. "Cymbeline," "The Winter's Tale," and "The Tempest," with their stories of wrongs righted, of repentance for transgression, of sunny and large-minded charity, were the fruit of these later years of Shakespeare. His leaf had not begun to wither; it was not even sere and yellow. He was only in his ripe manhood, for he was but fifty-two when he died.

He had attained a competence and had retired to enjoy it. He was the foremost citizen of Stratford. If there had been estrangement from his family, this came now to an end. His pre-eminence as a dramatist and a poet was universally acknowledged. The shallow criticism of a succeeding age had not yet begun to dim his fame. He seems now to have written little, and what he did write was written rather to satisfy an inner impulse than to meet any outward demand. Prospero, in "The Tempest," might almost seem to be the poet's picture of himself in this golden harvest-time of his life, and many have seen, in the last words of Prospero, Shakespeare's own farewell to dramatic composition ("Tempest," 5 : 1 : 50):

This rough magic  
I here abjure ; and, when I have requir'd  
Some heavenly music (which even now I do),  
To work mine end upon their senses that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,  
I'll drown my book.

Did the poet fully appreciate his own genius? He seems to have taken little pains to correct his plays or to prepare them for the press. In devising to his daughters, Judith and Susanna, the various portions of his estate, there is no mention of his interest in the plays, nor any provision for their editing or publication. We owe the preservation of some of these dramas to Shakespeare's fellow-actors; but for their care the plays might have perished.

It is not correct to say that carelessness on the part

of the author was characteristic of that age, for Ben Jonson spent no end of time in revising and printing his writings. It is possible, of course, that Shakespeare's will expressed only a portion of his mind; when he made it he may not have expected soon to die; still it remains a mystery why he should have disposed of other portions of his estate, yet should have given no thought to this. It is possible that he hoped for still many years to do the work of revision in; in fact, the copies in possession of the Globe Theater, which was destroyed by fire soon after Shakespeare's death, may have borne marks of a revision already begun.

But all this is mere hypothesis. I have already intimated what seems to me the preferable explanation. It connects itself with my special theme. The greatest poets are impersonal. Like John the Baptist they come to regard themselves as voices of a higher Intelligence, and they leave their work to God. Shakespeare appears to have been peculiarly self-forgetful. The most characteristic epithet that has come down to us from his own age is that one which Ben Jonson applied to him when he called him "gentle Shakespeare." The naturally shy and sensitive spirit has an ideal so high that, after its noblest achievements, it only desires to get away from them. Praise tires, because the poet is too conscious of his defects to listen to it. If there is any worth in his song, posterity will discover it and celebrate it without special care of his.

It confirms this view when we find that it was not the plays that Shakespeare prided himself upon, but the measured poems, like "Lucrece" and the "Sonnets." Never did he wholly free himself from the feeling that



dramatic poetry was not poetry at all, but a mere makeshift to amuse the crowd. The writing of plays was closely connected with the acting of them; he had entered upon it in the way of business, but a stigma was attached to the profession; it was relief and luxury when he could break completely the ties that bound him to the stage. He mourns in the "Sonnets" (111) that the actor's calling has infected him:

O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,  
 The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,  
 That did not better for my life provide  
 Than public means, which public manners breeds.  
 Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;  
 And almost thence my nature is subdued  
 To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.

There are no predictions of immortality for the plays. It is only in the "Sonnets" (107) that we read:

Now with the drops of this most balmy time  
 My love looks fresh, and Death to me subscribes,  
 Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,  
 While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes;  
 And thou in this shalt find thy monument  
 When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

I must believe that many palpable defects in the plays were concessions to the taste of the vulgar. The drama before Shakespeare's time had appealed to the savage instincts of human nature. Bloody scenes were enacted. Obscenity and ferocity went hand in hand. The shudder, which some of our modern novelists and playwrights are striving to introduce again into literature, was a test of dramatic art in the ante-Elizabethan times.

I cannot think that the same hand which penned "Venus and Adonis," with its marvelous finish and sweetness, could have willingly written the brutalities of "Titus Andronicus." Yet "Titus Andronicus" is probably Shakespeare's first dramatic production—at any rate he had a hand in the writing of it. It is proof of his constant advance toward ideal standards, that the harrowing and the frightful have a continually smaller place as he gains in experience and wisdom.

Though even in "King Lear," a work of his third and noblest period, Cornwall is made in full sight of the audience to pluck out the eyes of the earl of Gloster, this is the single and exceptional instance of such cruelty in Shakespeare's plays. He sees, in general, how foreign to real art is the appeal to the sensual or the brutal. Through his whole artistic life he is making progress toward that universality of poetic judgment which addresses the deepest, noblest, most permanent emotions of humanity. Shakespeare began by showing to a barbaric time its own likeness; he ended by rising above his time, and by exhibiting to it the ideal truth and beauty which lie at the heart of the universe.

I have taken the word universality as a key to unlock the mystery of Shakespeare. By universality I do not mean the poet's currency or popularity in all places and times—that may depend, not upon the poet, but upon the education and insight of those who read him. By universality I mean something belonging to the poet himself, namely, his grasp of elements which are not individual or local, but which are common to human nature everywhere. There are three great ranges of production in which Shakespeare's imagination stands

supreme. As a creator, first of character, secondly of imagery, and thirdly of diction, he is the greatest of the sons of men. In these three things he holds undisputed mastery, simply because in each case his imagination works with incomparable ease and spontaneity under the law of reason and of truth.

In order to comprehend the universal element in Shakespeare's creation of character, it will be useful to take one of the earlier and one of the later plays, and to observe some of those facts of structure which the common reader only vaguely apprehends, but which after all are their chief sources of power. I take "King Richard III." and "Macbeth," partly because they represent the historical and the ideal drama respectively, but also for the reason that I can here follow and call attention to the suggestions of Moulton, in his admirable work on "Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist."

"Richard III." has probably been the most popular play of the dramatic stage. It never fails to entrance the galleries. Some have fancied this the result of its very violence. So great a critic as James Russell Lowell has thrown doubts upon its Shakespearean authorship, for the reason that it lacks in subtlety of poetic expression, in humor, and in eloquence. We must grant that these qualities of style are not seen at their best in "Richard III." Let us remember, however, that plot is as much a criterion of greatness as is style. The plot of "King Richard" has merits so great that we can attribute the play to none but Shakespeare, while at the same time we see in it only the glow of a morning whose meridian splendor is to be found in such a tragedy as "Macbeth." A comparison of these two

plays will illustrate what we mean by the poet's universality, at the same time that it shows his progress toward this universality.

"King Richard III." is Shakespeare's complete and ideal villain. Richard has no such excuse as Iago has,—the excuse that others have been unfaithful to him. He devotes himself deliberately to villainy as the one method in which, despite his physical deformity, he can show his power. He is a villain, a conscious and confessed villain, at the start. The play shows no development of character; it is only a progressive revelation of character already formed.

There is no complexity of story. No other person of the drama attracts special interest or diverts attention from its one hero. And Richard is a hero only in wickedness. His intensity of evil will, and his almost supernatural skill in the accomplishment of his purposes, fascinate us almost as we are fascinated by Milton's "Satan"; indeed, some have fancied that Milton took from this character of Shakespeare's some of the features of his "archangel ruined." But Richard has elements which belong to Goethe's "Mephistopheles," as well as to Milton's "Satan." He is the sneering, ironical, and humorous, as well as the hypocritical, proud, and malignant, devil.

He glories in his mastery over men, but especially in his deception of women. With unblushing effrontery he can court and win Lady Anne, the widow of Edward Prince of Wales, whom he himself had stabbed on the field of Tewksbury, and he can court and win her beside the coffin of King Henry VI., her husband's father whom he had murdered in the Tower. His conquest

seems a piece of hideous necromancy, but Richard gloats over it. No qualms disturb him. Conscience is laid to sleep. Evil has become his good. He makes merry over crime. He is an artist in iniquity. He says ("Henry VI.," Part III., 3 : 2 : 165) :

This earth affords no joy to me,  
But to command, to check, to o'erbear such  
As are of better person than myself.

Almost to the very end, his course seems an unbroken success. Before his devilish deceit and murderous cruelty every obstacle gives way. "Without remorse or dread," he "wades through blood and slaughter to a throne." Clarence and Rivers, Grey and Vaughan, Hastings and Buckingham, are brought to their deaths, Queen Anne is poisoned, and the young princes are smothered in the Tower. All this would too greatly shock the moral sense, if there were not some premonitions of avenging Justice. The poet could not connect these premonitions too closely with Richard, lest the dramatic pictures of his resistless will and unchecked wickedness should lose a part of their hold upon the imagination. For a long time Nemesis is seen only in the case of the minor characters. Clarence and Rivers, Grey and Vaughan, Hastings and Buckingham, who have played into his hands and have abetted his crimes, each and all successively recognize in their doom the just reward of their past faithlessness or ambition. Their deaths are mutterings of distant thunder which portend a storm.

At last the storm breaks. Richard's very success in iniquity prepares for him a more sudden and overwhelm-

ing ruin. Conscience, kept muzzled in his waking hours, now gnaws his heart in sleep. The ghosts of those whom he has murdered, after having risen to torment him with predictions of defeat, sit heavy on his soul in the hour of battle. After incredible efforts of desperate valor, he utterly succumbs. In his agony of fear he would give his kingdom for a horse. But flight cannot save him. His crimes and the crimes of the house of York meet their recompense. From the dead temples of the bloody wretch the crown is plucked to grace the brows of Richmond, the representative of Lancaster, and settled peace comes once more under his reign as the seventh Henry. Nemesis has come at last. The mills of the gods grind slow, but they grind exceeding small, and "King Richard III." will ever be one of the most impressive of the world's sermons upon the punitive justice of God.

Here is unity of dramatic action, depth of thought, rapidity of movement, and a fiery energy of expression, such as belong to Shakespeare alone. And yet "King Richard III." shows us the poet not yet master of his art, and a study of the tragedy of "Macbeth" will teach us how vast was the interval between the poet's earlier and his later works. Compared with the breadth of "Macbeth," "Richard" is narrow; while the early play is simple, the latter is complex. While in the one the only character is Richard, in the other Duncan, Macduff, and Lady Macbeth are strongly differentiated, and each plays a part in its way as influential as that of Macbeth himself.

Richard is a full-grown monster at the beginning. We know from the first, for he himself tells us, what he

is to be. But in "Macbeth" we see all the dreadful growth of evil from its earliest suggestion to its final and absolute domination of the nature. The inner workings of passion, the stifling of pity, the hell-fire of remorse, are depicted as nowhere else in literature.

In the earlier drama the poet plays, as it were, upon one instrument. The compass and variety are small. In the later drama he has learned to direct an orchestra, to develop a theme, to interlace one musical motive with another, to organize many forms of emotional expression into one grand and overwhelming harmony. We recognize in both plays the same Shakespeare, but in "Richard III." the poet seems to look down upon human nature from the village spire, while in "Macbeth" he stands upon the mountain top and the whole world of humanity is spread out before him.

Let us compare the Nemesis in "Macbeth" with the Nemesis in "Richard." The witches are supernatural agents of evil who can suggest, but who cannot originate, man's evil decision. Macbeth (1 : 3 : 122) has his warning from Banquo :

'Tis strange :

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray us  
In deepest consequence.

But the warning neglected, the temptation cherished, principle undermined, there is a surrender of free-will to Satan, and thenceforth an ever-accelerating course of self-depravation and self-destruction. And sin becomes its own detector, judge, and tormentor.

Up to the moment of his coronation, Macbeth is un-

suspected; his crime seems to have run a successful course. But crime begets crime. To free himself from the penalty of the first, he commits a second. As Schiller has well said :

This is the penalty of evil deed,  
That of new evil it becomes the seed.

And the second crime of murdering Banquo opens to all eyes the first crime of murdering Duncan. The rise of Macbeth's fortunes through the first half of the play is succeeded by decline through successive stages till he reaches his miserable end. Vaulting ambition has o'erleaped itself. Efforts to escape destiny are made the very means of fulfilling it. The wicked man is holden in the cords of his own sins. With awful irony the malignant powers that at the first lured him to evil mock at his calamity, until in his despair he cries (5 : 8 : 19) :

And be these juggling fiends no more believed,  
That palter with us in a double sense ;  
That keep the word of promise to our ear,  
And break it to our hope !

How much more profound and tragic than anything in King Richard's calm and open espousal of evil is this deception and irony of sin in Macbeth ! But even here we have a variety of portraiture. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth present a contrast to which we find no likeness in the earlier play. Here ambition, murder, remorse, are seen working themselves out in two different natures, the one the impulsive and practical man of action, the other the woman of thought and will who has committed herself to her husband's purpose, and who un-



sexes herself in order to nerve him to the deed. He has superstitious faith in the witches, and fear of Banquo's ghost. She has argued herself out of such faith and fear, and sees in supernatural appearances only reflections of ambitious hopes and remorseful feelings.

The man of action cannot bear suspense, and rushes headlong into new crime and into consequent self-disclosure. She can wait and conceal and plan, while he is powerless. But the nervous tension is too great. Nemesis overtakes her in the shape of madness, and her madness is a long confession. "Here's the smell of the blood still," gasps out the night-walking queen; "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand!" And the madness ends in suicide.

But the Nemesis of Macbeth comes in the shape of infatuation. He blindly trusts the oracle, even while his foes are gathering for his destruction. He cries (5 : 3 : 32):

I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hack'd. . .  
Send out more horses, skirr the country round ;  
Hang those that talk of fear. Give me my armor !

And when the falsity of his supernatural tempters is revealed to him, he flings himself desperately into the battle. He meets his death, but his death is virtual suicide, and his suicide is virtual confession.

I do not see how any one can read the tragedies without perceiving that Shakespeare is one of the greatest of ethical teachers. And what is true of these tragedies is true of his work in general, it wakens a response in the deepest heart of man. But not because the poet had any set purpose to be a moral teacher. All this is

incidental. He aims only to depict life, to show man to himself, to exhibit human nature with its love, its hate, its hope, its fear. But all the more powerful is Shakespeare's testimony to the supremacy of conscience in the moral constitution of man.

The same remarks apply to Shakespeare's treatment of religion and doctrine. He has not set himself to propound dogmas. Whether he was Romanist or Protestant no one can surely tell; the most that we can say is that he disliked Puritanism, and made it once or twice the subject of a casual jest. Homer and Virgil, Dante and Milton, had each his heaven and his hell, and each described without hesitation the unseen world. But Shakespeare has no heaven and no hell; he deals only with this present life; even his ghosts and witches tell us nothing of the life beyond—they are forbidden to tell the secrets of the prison house, and only intimate that they "could a tale unfold, whose lightest word would harrow up the soul" ("Hamlet," 1 : 5 : 13). Our great dramatist is the poet of the secular and not of the religious, of the temporal and not of the eternal.

Here is the limitation of his universality. As Scherer has said: "It is on the boundaries of the invisible world that Shakespeare's vision fails." But he has, notwithstanding, the most sane and level apprehension of the relations of this life, and his testimony to Christian truth, like his testimony to the ethical facts of remorse and retribution, is all the more valuable because unintentionally given. Let us inquire what this testimony is, and what doctrines of our faith derive confirmation from it. In treating this portion of my theme I avail myself to some extent of the references given so copiously in

Bishop Wordsworth's excellent book on "Shakespeare and the Bible."

Though Shakespeare does not profess to teach theology, it is not because he has no theology, nor because he regards theology as an impossibility to man. He is not an agnostic. He distinctly maintains the reality and the value, while he confesses the limitations, of our knowledge of God and his relations to the universe. In the second part of "King Henry VI." (4 : 7 : 67), he tells us that

Ignorance is the curse of God,  
Knowledge, the wing wherewith we fly to heaven.

In "Antony and Cleopatra" (1 : 2 : 8) he says :

In nature's infinite book of secrecy  
A little I can read.

He does not hold the naturalistic, any more than he holds the agnostic, view of the universe. In "All's Well That Ends Well" (2 : 3 : 1) he makes Lafeu, the wise man of the play, express himself as follows: "They say miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons, to make modern and familiar things supernatural and causeless. Hence it is, that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear."

We should expect that this poet of secular life would find in human nature the main source of his knowledge of God. And so it is, for he calls man "the image of his Maker" ("King Henry VIII.," 3 : 2 : 440). God is a God of justice. In "Measure for Measure" (2 : 2 : 76) God is called "the top of judgment." Yet

God is also merciful. In "Titus Andronicus" (1 : 1 : 117) we read :

Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods ?  
Draw near them then in being merciful.

Shakespeare's noblest and completest delineation of female character is that of Portia in the "Merchant of Venice." When Portia sits as doctor of laws and legal adviser of the Duke, we hear from her lips the mingled praise of justice and mercy, and we have an unequalled passage in which the conceptions of the two attributes are so combined that the one qualifies and heightens the other (4 : 1 : 175) :

The quality of mercy is not [con] strained ;  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath : it is twice bless'd,  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes :  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest ; it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown ;  
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty,  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings ;  
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings :  
It is an attribute to God himself ;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's,  
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,—  
That, in the course of justice, none of us  
Should see salvation ; we do pray for mercy,  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.

Such is the poet's view of the divine nature. What now is his view of human nature? Is man the victim

of heredity and environment? The only reply is, that man has moral freedom; that he may do the right and avoid the wrong. The citizen in "Coriolanus" (2 : 3 : 3), when told that he may do an unjust thing, replies: "We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do." And in "Twelfth Night" (3 : 4 : 351), Antonio protests:

In nature there's no blemish but the mind ;  
None can be call'd deform'd but the unkind.  
Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil  
Are empty trunks o'erflourish'd by the devil.

As men have freedom, they cannot lay the blame of their transgression either upon nature or upon God. Edmund, the double-dyed villain in "King Lear" (1 : 2 : 108), acknowledges that this is only the insincere apology of the guilty:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeit of our own behavior—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars; as if we were villains of necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on.

In "All's Well That Ends Well" (1 : 1 : 155) Helena declares:

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,  
Which we ascribe to heaven; the fated sky  
Gives us free scope, only doth backward pull  
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull;

and in "Julius Cæsar" (1 : 2 : 135), Cassius says nobly:

Men at some time are masters of their fates ;  
 The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
 But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Dr. Flint in his essay on "Theism" has well said that "Where the will is without energy, and rest is longed for as the end of existence, as among the Hindus, there is a marked inability to think of God as cause or will, and a constant tendency to pantheism." We only utter the complementary truth when we say that where the will is a bounding activity of individual and national life, there is always a strong conviction of the personality of God and the freedom of man. This is peculiarly true of the Elizabethan age, and it is markedly seen in Shakespeare, its noblest writer. Man is capable of good, but he is also capable of freely willing evil.

Robert G. Ingersoll, in his lecture on Shakespeare, represents the poet as holding that crime is only the result of ignorance. Shakespeare holds precisely the opposite. With him, "the wish is father to the thought" ("King Henry IV.," Part II., 4 : 5 : 93), not the thought father to the wish. Says Suffolk ("King Henry VI.," Part I., 2 : 4 : 7):

Faith, I have been a truant in the law,  
 And never yet could frame my will to it,  
 And therefore frame the law unto my will.

And Troilus ("Troilus and Cressida," 4 : 4 : 94) witnesses that

Sometimes we are devils to ourselves,  
 When we will tempt the frailty of our powers,  
 Presuming on their changeful potency.

The angels fell by ambition ("King Henry VIII.," 3 : 2 : 439), and man too "falls like Lucifer" (*Idem*, 3 : 2 : 369).

Sin begins in the abuse of free-will, but by that abuse man makes himself a slave. One sin leads to another. Says Pericles (1 : 1 : 137):

One sin, I know, another doth provoke ;  
Murder's as near to lust, as flame to smoke.

and Richard III. confesses (4 : 2 : 63):

I am in  
So far in blood, that sin will pluck on sin.

This sin may come to be a fixed state of obstinate self-assertion, an apotheosis of self, that defies both God and man. Coriolanus (5 : 4 : 23) "wants nothing of a god but eternity and a heaven to throne in;" "there is no more mercy in him than there is milk in a male tiger."

In "Richard III." and in "Macbeth" we have Shakespeare's representations of *hubris*, the one unpardonable sin of the Greek tragedy. Iago too is a willful hater of all good, and Goneril and Regan show that human nature may consciously and deliberately surrender itself to evil. "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" inquires Lear (3 : 7 : 75). The suggested answer is, that what nature never did, and never could do, man's evil will has done; he has so perverted his nature that it has become utterly unnatural.

And yet while there is danger of reaching a point where the sinner will be too infirm of purpose to strive any longer for the good, there is still in all men a re-

mainder of freedom, and a possibility of change for the better. What the king in "Hamlet" (4 : 7 : 117) says with regard to the evil deed is equally true with regard to the good deed :

That we would do,  
We should do when we would ; for this "would" changes,  
And hath abatements and delays as many  
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents ;  
And then this "should" is like a spendthrift sigh,  
That hurts by easing.

The player-king in the same drama (3 : 2 : 171) declares that

Purpose is but the slave to memory ;  
Of violent birth, but poor validity.

And Hamlet himself advises his mother (3 : 4 : 163) :

Refrain to-night ;  
And that shall lend a kind of easiness  
To the next abstinence ; the next more easy ;  
For use can almost change the stamp of nature,  
And either master the devil, or throw him out  
With wondrous potency.

Here there is recognized a "stamp of nature," an evil taint of blood. No poet of the world has more fully and constantly acknowledged man's congenital depravity. Timon of Athens (4 : 3 : 18) proclaims that

There's nothing level in our cursed natures,  
But direct villainy.

In "All's Well That Ends Well" (4 : 3 : 18) we read :  
"Now, God delay our rebellion! as we are ourselves,  
what things are we! Merely our own traitors!" In  
"Measure for Measure" (1 : 2 : 120) :



Our natures do pursue,  
Like rats that ravin down their proper bane,  
A thirsty evil ; and when we drink we die.

In "Hamlet" (3 : 1 : 117): "Virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it." In "Love's Labor's Lost" (1 : 1 : 149):

For every man with his affects is born,  
Not by might mastered, but by special grace.

Shakespeare testifies that all men are sinners :

Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all,

says Henry VI. (Part II., 3 : 3 : 31);

Who lives that's not depraved or depraves?

says Timon (1 : 2 : 124). In "Othello" we read (3 : 3 : 137):

Where's that palace whereinto foul things  
Sometimes intrude not? Who has a breast so pure,  
But some uncleanly apprehensions  
Keep leets and law-days, and in sessions sit  
With meditations lawful?

Hamlet confesses (3 : 1 : 122):

I am myself indifferent honest ; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me : I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do, crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all ; believe none of us.

And yet our poet will not clear man from responsibility for his inborn depravity. Hamlet compares God's influence to the sun which "breeds maggots in a dead dog, kissing carrion" (2 : 2 : 181); that is, God is no more responsible for the corruption in man's heart and the evil that comes from it, than the sun is responsible for the maggots which its heat breeds in a dead dog. We are not only corrupt by nature but we are guilty. In "The Winter's Tale" (1 : 2 : 69), Polixenes describes his companionship with Leontes, when they were boys together:

We knew not the doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd  
That any did. Had we pursued that life,  
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd  
With stronger blood, we should have answered  
Heaven boldly, Not guilty; the imposition cleared  
Hereditary ours;

that is, provided our hereditary connection with Adam had not made us guilty.

Man's guilt, both hereditary and personal, is real, and it has punishment for its correlate. There is a craving to make reparation for sin. In "Measure for Measure" (5 : 1 : 470), when Escalus expresses sorrow that Angelo should have sinned, Angelo replies:

I am sorry that such sorrow I procure,  
And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart  
That I crave death more willingly than mercy;  
'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.

Posthumus in "Cymbeline" (5 : 4 : 22), thinking he had caused the death of his wife, makes request of the gods:

For Imogen's dear life take mine ; and though  
 'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life ; you coined it.  
 'Tween man and man they weigh not every stamp ;  
 Though light, take pieces for the figure's sake ;  
 You rather mine, being yours ; and so, great Powers,  
 If you will take this audit, take this life,  
 And cancel these cold bonds !

Desired more than constrained ; to satisfy,  
 If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take  
 No stricter render of me than my all ;

that is, settle the account with me by taking my life.

While the conscience of the penitent desires punishment, the conscience of the impenitent man expects punishment.

Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,

says Hamlet (3 : 1 : 83); and the queen in the same play (4 : 5 : 17) breaks out in fear :

To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,  
 Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss ;  
 So full of artless jealousy is guilt,  
 It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

King Henry VI. (Part II., 3 : 2 : 232) exclaims :

What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted !  
 Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just ;  
 And he but naked, though locked up in steel,  
 Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.

Sin may blunt the edge of conscience for a time :

When we in our viciousness grow hard,  
 (O misery on't !) the wise gods seal our eyes ;

In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us  
Adore our errors, laugh at us while we strut  
To our confusion.

(“Antony and Cleopatra,” 3 : 13 : 111.)

But conscience will sooner or later awake again in the case of the guilty. Gonzalo, in “The Tempest” (3 : 3 : 104), testifies :

          Their great guilt,  
Like poison given to work a great time after,  
Now ’gins to bite the spirits.

Even “Richard III.” confesses at the last (5 : 3 : 180) :

O coward conscience, how thou dost afflict me !

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,  
And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
And every tale condemns me for a villain.

And conscience is but the prophecy of another condemnation more terrible still. “Can we outrun the heavens?” says “Henry VI.” (Part II., 5 : 2 : 73). And “Henry V.” (4 : 1 : 157) says nobly : “If transgressors have defeated the law and outrun native punishment, though they can outstrip men, they have no wings to fly from God.” Hamlet witnesses (3 : 3 : 57) :

In the corrupted currents of this world  
Offence’s gilded hand may shove by justice ;  
But ’tis not so above. There is no shuffling ;  
There the action lies in his true nature, and we ourselves  
Compell’d, even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,  
To give in evidence.

Hear King John (4 : 2 : 216) :

Oh, when the last account 'twixt heaven and earth  
 Is to be made, then shall this hand and seal  
 [the warrant for the murder of Prince Arthur]  
 Witness against us to damnation.

And in the same play the Bastard speaks (4 : 3 : 117):

Beyond the infinite and boundless reach  
 Of mercy, if thou didst this deed of death,  
 Art thou damn'd, Hubert !

In all literature there is no scene more moving than that one in which Beaufort, the bloody cardinal in King Henry VI. (Part II., 3 : 3 : 2), offers the treasures of a realm to purchase a little longer life, cries out in agony at the thought of his victims, and when asked to indicate some remaining hope in God's mercy, sinks back in death, but makes no sign.

There is retribution in the world to come, but there is also retribution here. This world is under the rule of Providence ("Hamlet," 5 : 2 : 10):

There's a divinity that shapes our ends  
 Rough-hew them how we will.

Says Edgar, in "King Lear" (5 : 3 ; 171):

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
 Make instruments to plague us...

and Hamlet (1 : 2 : 257):

Foul deeds will rise,  
 Though all the earth o'erwhelm them,  
 To men's eyes.

Macbeth testifies (1 : 7 : 10) that

Even-handed justice  
Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice  
To our own lips ;

and Buckingham, in "Richard III." (5 : 2 : 23):

Thus doth he force the swords of wicked men  
To turn their own points in their master's bosoms.

From this retributive Providence here, as well as from God's judgments hereafter, there is no escape except through repentance and faith in the atonement which God himself has provided.

But let us particularly notice that repentance is not mere outward penance, nor any merely transient sorrow. Shakespeare understands that no true penitence exists where the sinner still clings to his sin, or fails to repair the wrong. The king in "Hamlet" cries (3 : 3 ; 51):

What form of prayer  
Can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder?  
That cannot be ; since I am still possess'd  
Of those effects for which I did the murder,  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.  
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?"

What then? what rests?  
Try what repentance can : what can it not?  
Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?  
O wretched state ! O bosom, black as death !  
O limèd soul, that, struggling to be free,  
Art more engag'd !

In "Measure for Measure" (2 : 3 : 30) the duke addresses Juliet:

'Tis meet so, daughter ; but lest you do repent  
 As that the sin hath brought you to this shame,  
 Which sorrow is always toward ourselves, not heaven,  
 Showing we would not spare heaven as we love it,  
 But as we stand in fear.

And Juliet responds :

I do repent me, as it is an evil,  
 And take the shame with joy.

Ariel, in "The Tempest" (3 : 3 : 72) interprets both nature and the human heart when he says :

For which foul deed,  
 The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have  
 Incensed the seas and shores ; yea, all the creatures  
 Against your peace ; . . whose wrath to guard you from,  
 . . is nothing but heart's sorrow,  
 And a clear life ensuing.

Henry V. (4 : 1 : 287) expresses the deepest feeling of the truly penitent man, when he adds to his reparation and his sorrow the confession that both these are insufficient :

More will I do,  
 Though all that I can do is nothing worth ;  
 Since that my penitence comes after all,  
 Imploring pardon—

pardon both for the crime itself, and for the imperfection of his repenting of it. Repentance does not of itself pay man's debt to the divine justice, or clear the guilty from the punishment of their sin. Prayer may to some extent avail. In "All's Well That Ends Well" (3 : 4 : 25) the aged countess speaks :

What angel shall  
 Bless this unworthy husband? He cannot thrive,  
 Unless her prayers, whom heaven delights to hear  
 And loves to grant, relieve him from the wrath  
 Of greatest justice !

But the only real quittance is afforded by the work of Christ in our behalf. Here the testimony of Shakespeare to the need of human nature and the sufficiency of the divine provision is ample and complete. In "All's Well That Ends Well," Helena declares (2 : 1 : 149):

It is not so with Him that all things knows  
 As 'tis with us that square our guess by shows ;  
 But most it is presumption in us when  
 The help of heaven we count the act of men.

We read in "King Henry VI." (Part II., 3 : 2 : 154):

That dread King took our state upon him  
 To free us from his Father's wrathful curse.

In "Measure for Measure" (2 : 2 : 73):

Why, all the souls that are were forfeit once ;  
 And He that might the vantage best have took  
 Found out the remedy.

He speaks in "Richard II." (2 : 1 : 56), of

The world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son ;

and in "King Henry IV." (Part I., 1 : 1 : 24) of

Those holy fields  
 Over whose acres walked those blessed feet



Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed  
For our advantage on the bitter cross.

In "King Henry VI." (Part II., 1 : 1 : 110) Salisbury swears

Now by the death of Him that died for all ;

and in "King Richard III." Clarence in the Tower adjures his murderers (1 : 4 : 183):

I charge you, as you hope to have redemption  
By Christ's dear blood, shed for our grievous sins,  
That you depart, and lay no hands on me.

It may possibly be thought that in the plays of Shakespeare we have no real clew to the religious beliefs of the poet, since he puts into the mouth of each character only what fitted his station and his time. This might be true, if there were intermingled with the testimonies to the great facts of ethics and religion other testimonies to atheism and immorality. But these latter are conspicuously lacking. It is otherwise with Marlowe; he was known as an atheist, and his characters witness both for and against morality and the Christian faith.

Suppose for a moment that a census were taken of George Eliot's characters; that their expressions of belief or unbelief were classified, as I have attempted to classify Shakespeare's; can any one doubt that the result would be a far different one, and that George Eliot's own skepticism and pessimism would be discovered faintly written, as in a palimpsest, underneath their lines? I challenge any man to find unbelief in the *dramatis personæ* of Shakespeare's plays, except in cases

where it is the manifest effect or excuse of sin, reproved by the context, or changed to fearful acknowledgment of the truth by the results of transgression. In his ethical judgments he never makes a slip; he is as sure-footed as a Swiss mountaineer; he depicts vice, but he does not make it alluring or successful.

After earnest searching I can unhesitatingly avow the belief that the great dramatist was both pure in his moral teaching and singularly sound in faith. There is a freedom of utterance with regard to the relations of the sexes, such as is natural in a bold and vigorous age, but there is no lingering over sensual details. Plausible sinners like Falstaff come to an evil end. How pathetic is the Hostess' account of his death in "King Henry V." (2 : 3 : 16):

His nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. "How now, Sir John," quoth I: "what man! be of good cheer." So 'a cried out, "God, God, God!" three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him 'a should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet: I put my hand into the bed, and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees and so upward, and upward, and all was as cold as any stone.

The recent suggestion that Sir John's "babbling of green fields" is an allusion to the Twenty-third Psalm, and that Shakespeare here means to intimate that at his death he returned to the faith of his childhood and felt that the Lord was "making him to lie down in green pastures," had not yet occurred to the Hostess, for she was only bent on soothing a troubled conscience by turning away its thoughts from God.

There is no trace of Mariolatry, nor of dependence for salvation upon ritual and ceremony. Yet Shakespeare is as devoid of Puritanism as he is of Romish superstition. In an age of much clerical corruption he never rails at the clergy. While he has some most ungodly prelates, his priests are all a credit to their calling. None of his characters are disseminators of skepticism. I cannot explain all this except by supposing that Shakespeare was himself a believer. Though he was not a theological dogmatist, nor an ecclesiastical partisan, he was unwaveringly assured of the fundamental verities of the Christian scheme. Shakespeare had dug down through superficial formulas to the bed-rock of Christian doctrine. He held the truths which belong in common to all ages of the church. If any deny the personality of God or the deity of Christ, they have a controversy with Shakespeare. If any think it irrational to believe in man's depravity, guilt, and need of supernatural redemption, they must also be prepared to say that Shakespeare did not understand human nature.

Here is a healthy secular mind, calmly and sagaciously judging things high and things low, and so picturing life in its essential features that we appeal to his characters as if they were living men. He had his trials with the sex, but there is no more bitterness against women than prejudice against priests. The king and the beggar he conceives with equal truth to nature. The archness and persuasiveness of a French woman were never depicted so well as in Katherine's reception of King Henry's suit. The pedantic theorizing and dogged courage of a Welsh soldier were never better exhibited than in Fluellen. Yet Shakespeare never traveled. He was not a

man of the court. He was primarily a man of business. But the man of business was a genius—the finest genius in the way of poetic imagination that ever appeared upon this planet.

Goethe carried erudition into art. Shakespeare was never a man of technical learning—the scholastic element is absent from his plays. He makes up for all deficiencies by his creative faculty. What others acquire by rote, he gets by insight. And so “he could take in everything,” as Taine has said; “sanguinary ferocity and refined generosity, trivial buffoonery and the divine innocence of love.” “It was a piece of good fortune that he knew little Latin and less Greek,” says Lilly; “for this closed to him the rôle of imitation. The rules of classicalism he knows not of, nor is his mental horizon bounded by the writers of antiquity. Of intellectual freedom he is our supreme example, and for two centuries well-nigh the last example, among English poets.”

I have said so much of the universal element in Shakespeare's creation of character, that I have but scant time to deal with the poet's creation of imagery or of diction. As to imagery, I run no risk in saying that our poet saw nothing in an isolated way. To him there was a universe: all things were interdependent; truth in one realm had its analogues in every other. It was not the mere association of ideas which we call fancy; it was the discernment of rational connections which we call imagination.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the most imaginative, and at the same time the most profound, of thinkers: bread, water, light, darkness, the sea, the sky, the birds, the beasts, the fish of the sea, all taught spiritual lessons.

Shakespeare possessed this divine gift of imagination in his lower degree and within his more limited range. The flow of metaphor is so constant and so natural that we cannot call it brilliancy—it is insight into the heart of things. Like Tennyson's wizard,

To him the wall  
That sunders ghosts and shadow-casting men  
Became as crystal, and he saw them through it,  
And heard their voices talk behind the wall,  
And learnt their elemental secrets, powers,  
And forces.

Other poets strain after effects; with Shakespeare all is spontaneous. With others there are lapses, and the poetry becomes prose; with Shakespeare the vision and the faculty divine seem native to him and perpetual. Milton's epitaph on Shakespeare is only truthful when it says:

To the shame of slow-endeavoring art  
Thy easy numbers flow.

We are amazed, tantalized, carried away, with the rush, the beauty, the inexhaustible vitality of his imagination. And yet nothing is overdone—in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of his passion, there is a temperance that gives it hold upon our judgment. When Hotspur asks ("King Henry IV.," Part I., 4 : 1 : 94):

Where is his son,  
The nimble-footed, mad-cap Prince of Wales,  
And his comrades, that duffed the world aside  
And bid it pass?

Sir Richard Vernon answers :

All furnish'd, all in arms,  
All plumed like estridges, that with the wind  
Bated—like eagles newly bath'd ;  
Glittering in golden coats like images ;  
As full of spirit as the month of May,  
And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer ;  
Wanton as youthful goats, wild as young bulls.  
I saw young Harry—with his beaver on,  
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly armed—  
Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury,  
And vaulted with such ease into his seat,  
As if an angel dropped down from the clouds  
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,  
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.

Here are nine different similes, succeeding each other with such matchless freshness and beauty that they fairly dazzle us, yet each adding a quick new stroke of stirring description, and all together rising to a climax that captivates both sense and reason.

In character and in imagery we have seen the universality of Shakespeare—his appeal to the universal elements of human nature. It remains to speak of the poet's diction—the word-garb in which his creations are portrayed. Here we find him the greatest aug-  
menter of our language. Milton, with all his adaptations from the Greek and the Latin, uses but eight thousand words, Shakespeare cannot content himself with less than fifteen thousand. Hundreds of these are of his own coinage, or are preserved to our literature only by his use of them. *Feliciter audax* is the phrase that best designates him. He had the subtle sense of the connection between word and thing which led the

Greeks to apply the same name *rhema* to both. It is said of Ruskin that in his childhood the sight of the word crocodile would frighten him. Every great poet has this keen appreciation of the capacity of language. Shakespeare, beyond all others, had the gift of naming things which the author of the book of Genesis ascribes to the unfallen father of the race. Of all poets, he is most easily master of the art: *rem acu tangere*. His words are "the true and only words." To change the words is to spoil the thought.

Not only the single word but the various combinations of the word into phrase and line were as much creations as were his characters and his images. There is an immortal music in his verse. Pathetic or gay, gentle or grand, as the case may be, it goes so to the heart and it so lingers in the ear, that a sense of divine perfection is roused within us, and we get a new proof of a supernatural intelligence that has made the rhythm of thought and the rhythm of speech to complement each other and to constitute one whole.

If we ask for pathos, where can we find it if not in the dirge which the princes sing over the seemingly lifeless Cymbeline (4 : 2 : 259):

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,  
Nor the furious winter's rages ;  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages ;  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frowns o' the great,  
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke ;  
Care no more to clothe and eat ;  
To thee the reed is as the oak ;

The sceptre, learning, physic, must  
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning-flash,  
Nor th' all-dreaded thunder-stone ;  
Fear not slander, censure rash ;  
Thou hast finished joy and moan :  
All lovers young, all lovers must,  
Consign to thee, and come to dust.

If we desire solemn utterance, what can surpass Alonzo's confession of his crime in "The Tempest" (3 : 3 : 96) :

O, it is monstrous, monstrous !  
Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it ;  
The winds did sing it to me ; and the thunder,  
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounc'd  
The name of Prosper ; it did base my trespass !

Or if we wish for ethereal delicacy, we shall discover it nowhere if not in Ariel's song ("Tempest," 1 : 2 : 395) :

Full fathom five thy father lies ;  
Of his bones are coral made ;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes ;  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell :  
Hark ! now I hear them—Ding-dong, bell.

It took two hundred years to convince the English people that Shakespeare was their greatest poet, but no writer of eminence in recent times has had inclination to dispute it. We are in a fair way indeed to crown him as the poet laureate of the race. But with all our appreciation let us be both critical and just. His great-



ness does not consist in his power of invention. Of all his plays there are only two the germs of which cannot be found before his time; but those two are "Midsummer-Night's Dream" and "The Tempest," in which pure imagination has reached its very loftiest flights. Quite commonly, however, he took his whole story from others. He was not an inventor of incident, but a creator of character.

The *disjecta membra* of many a dead drama lay scattered at his feet. Like the bones of Ezekiel's vision, they were very old and exceeding dry. Shakespeare prophesied over them and a spirit came into them; a veritable heart began to throb under the ribs of death; the *simulacra* of humanity breathed and moved and spoke; the dry bones became living men. And with this creation of real characters, true to nature, instinct with vitality, and perfectly separable from one another, all the complex web of incident in which they moved became living also. The story when Shakespeare took it was dull and colorless; the poet touched it with the torch of his genius, and it began to glow and coruscate like a piece of fireworks after it is lit.

Shakespeare is the creator of character, but of character belonging to this world rather than the next. He is the poet of secular humanity. Homer has pictured a few types of humanity in a naïve and objective way. Shakespeare shows us human nature in its infinite variety; there are more than six hundred distinct characters in his mimic world, yet every one of them gives us intimation of another world of varied passions and fears within the circle of his breast. Virgil is the poet of a political epoch, the representative of Roman hope and

civilization, the sweet singer of the Augustan age. Shakespeare transcends all epochs and all times ; he can enter into the spirit of Greece and of Rome as easily as into that of his native England ; and that because he knows what human nature is, everywhere and always.

✓ Dante is the religious poet of the Roman and mediæval church, as Milton is the religious poet of Protestantism and the Reformation. Both Dante and Milton regard man chiefly in his relations to an invisible and spiritual world, and earthly life is merely incidental to the heavenly. But to Shakespeare the present world is man's arena, and the future looms up only now and then as a dim and shadowy background.

✓ Wordsworth is the poet of nature. The divine life interfused through all physical things is the central thought of his verse. Shakespeare does not go beneath the surface of nature, and he regards the outward world mainly in its relations to man, hardly ever as the manifestation of God. Browning is the poet of the inner life, the dramatist of motives, the portrayer of speculative struggles and triumphs. Shakespeare is no philosopher ; he deals with motives only as they work themselves out in action ; he is the poet of the concrete, rather than of the abstract. But within this realm of secular life and character in action, he is supreme. More than any other poet he has added to our knowledge of ourselves as creatures of this present world.

✓ A greater poetry than his is indeed conceivable and possible, for nature and God are indispensable factors in the imaginative interpretation of the universe, and these play no great part in Shakespeare's verse. But human nature reflects the divine nature, and in studying hu-

manity we gain material for the study of God. What our great poet has told us about humanity is of inestimable value to theological thought.

✓ I have not intended to compare the poetry of Shakespeare with the poetry of the Bible. Shakespeare has neither the eloquence of Isaiah nor the sublimity of Job. What Shakespeare does not profess to do, Job and Isaiah do profess to do—namely, to teach of God and duty. Nor have I intended to compare the merits of the great uninspired poets, or to call one greater and another less. It is better to call each great in his peculiar sphere. But in the creation of character Shakespeare so far surpasses all others, that by common consent we have come to regard him as the greatest secular poet of the world. Will the world ever see a poet who shall surpass him? It can only be by adding Dante's vision of God and Wordsworth's vision of nature to Shakespeare's vision of humanity. Until some inspired bard shall touch all these several strings with simultaneous and equal mastery, we may well content ourselves with Shakespeare.

We can subscribe to the judgment of James Russell Lowell when he says that "For those who know no language but their own there is as much intellectual training to be got from the study of his writings as from those of any, I had almost said, of all, of the great writers of antiquity." And the chief reason for this is that beyond all other poets Shakespeare has a faculty for the universal, a power of seizing upon the types of things, and an art of evoking living characters in which these types are concretely represented.

Dewey, in his "Psychology" (200), comes very near

to expressing the noblest lesson of our theme, when he says : "All products of the creative imagination are unconscious testimonies to the unity of spirit which binds man to man, and man to nature, in one organic whole." We would add only the one remark and explanation, that the spirit which thus binds all things together, and makes possible the poet's insight into universal truth and beauty, is none other than the omnipresent Spirit of God, whose specifically religious work is inspiration, but who is also working in all secular literature, and is making it the progressive revelation of his own divine life.

MILTON



# MILTON

## THE POET OF THE REFORMATION

IN the French Academy, that national Sanhedrin of *savants* and *littérateurs*, the custom is for each newly elected member to signalize his admission into the company of the immortals by delivering a eulogy upon the academician who has last died and whose place he has been chosen to fill. It is a curious fact that the first published poem of John Milton should have been his "Epitaph on the Admirable Dramatick Poet, W. Shakespeare." The six-year-old boy with auburn curls, who played before the door of his father's shop at the sign of the spread eagle in Bread Street, may possibly have attracted the attention of William Shakespeare, when he made his last visit to London town in 1614, and with Ben Jonson and other jovial spirits passed by the scrivener's door on their way to the Mermaid Inn.

We know at any rate that, whether in the theatre or through the printed page, Milton very early heard

Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
Warble his native wood-notes wild.

He took the torch as it were, from Shakespeare's hand, and passed it on to after times. It is no wonder that one of the first uses to which Milton puts the torch is to light up the portrait of his great predecessor. He

tells us that Shakespeare requires no monument of piled stones :

Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,  
What needst thou such weak witness of thy name?

The rapt and mute astonishment of mankind is itself a sort of stony monument to enshrine him :

Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,  
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving ;  
And, so sepulchred, in such pomp dost lie,  
That kings, for such a tomb, would wish to die.

In this epitaph to the greatest of poets, whose sun had so lately set, we perceive already the signs that another sun had risen in the literary firmament. The new light was no mere reproduction of the old—it had a quality of its own. The world has agreed to call it “Miltonic,” in token of its unique force and greatness. I shall make it my first business to define this epithet, and to show the new and peculiar sources of Milton’s power. The one word which springs into mind, as we give account to ourselves of the impression he makes upon us, is the word “sublime.” But the sublimity of Milton is a sublimity of his own. You cannot explain it as a composite of elements found separately in any past writings, whether secular or sacred. It is something larger and more complete than the broken and jagged grandeur of Æschylus. Milton’s sublimity is a new majesty combined with a new harmony. In it you may discern a boom of lofty independence, of super-sensual ideality, of free commerce with the invisible world. There is a “linked sweetness long drawn out,” but there is also the *os magna soniturum*, the sustained



utterance of one who seems to be prophet as well as poet, and to repeat in our ears with not unaccustomed lips the whispers of the Infinite.

Whether we can put into words the whole meaning of the word "Miltonic" may be doubtful. There can be no doubt, however, that the gift of sublime thought and expression was in this case inborn. The first productions of the poet reveal its existence not so fully, but just as truly, as the last. When he was twenty-six years of age he could describe in "Arcades" such meditations as these:

In deep of night, when drowsiness  
Hath lock'd up mortal sense, then listen I  
To the celestial Syrens' harmony,  
That sit upon the nine infolded spheres,  
And sing to those that hold the vital shears  
And turn the adamantine spindle round  
On which the fates of gods and men are wound.

And he was but twenty-one when he wrote his ode, "At a Solemn Musick," in which, not after the fashion of the classic Muse, but rather in language drawn from the treasuries of Holy Writ and in the spirit of Isaiah or of John, he presents "to our high-rais'd phantasy":

That undisturbed song of pure consent,  
Aye sung before the sapphire-colour'd throne  
To him who sits thereon,  
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee  
Where the bright Seraphim, in burning row,  
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow;  
And the cherubic host, in thousand quires,  
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,  
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,

Hymns devout and holy psalms  
Singing everlastingly.

There are certain constituents of the Miltonic poetry somewhat less obvious, and which go far to explain its power to move and awe. One of these is its intense personality. The subjective element is felt everywhere; the poem and the man are inseparable; the poet puts his own life and history into his verse. The contrast between Shakespeare and Dante in this matter is particularly instructive. Shakespearean poetry is objective—the author is lost in his work. It requires much subtlety and insight to gather anything with regard to the poet's idiosyncrasies from the plays or the poems; and, when we have drawn our inferences, we have to acknowledge that they are unpleasantly precarious. The poetry of Dante, on the contrary, is full of the poet himself; "The Divine Comedy" is the drama of his life; hell, purgatory, and heaven itself, are but the three-fold stage upon which the exiled patriot acts out his thoughts and sorrows. In a similar manner John Milton's personality shines through all his works. Out of his prose and poetry we can reconstruct the whole fabric of his life, as perfectly as if his main purpose had been to write for us an autobiography.

Yet another note of the Miltonic poetry is its austere purity. The personality is a pure personality, and therefore the poet may, nay, he must, put it into his verse. Through all his writing there runs a strain of noble pride and self-assertion. Not for nothing had God made him what he was. He knew that he had received the full quota of ten talents. He would not waste his

gifts in riot or self-indulgence, but would husband them, and increase them, by protracted studies and the opening of his heart to influences from above. "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well," he himself says, "ought himself to be a true poem." John Milton's life and work are a great object-lesson to the whole school of thinkers who maintain that the true artist must be a colorless mirror to reflect whatever images the pure or impure world may print upon its surface—an object-lesson equally to that other school that regards the sowing of wild oats in youth merely as the gaining of a valuable experience.

Our poet never forgot that he was a man, and a servant of the high and holy One. Of his travels in Italy he asseverates: "I again take God to witness that, in all those places where so many things are considered lawful, I lived sound and untouched by all profligacy and vice, having this thought perpetually with me, that, though I might escape the eyes of men, I certainly could not the eyes of God." And so through all his days there was not one line written which, so far as its moral tone was concerned, he or any other pure soul would have wished afterward to blot. The closing words of "Comus" are the consistent testimony both of his poetry and of his life:

Mortals that would follow me,  
Love Virtue ; she alone is free :  
She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the sphery chime ;  
Or, if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

There is a third characteristic of Milton as a poet—

I mean his immense erudition. His verse not seldom requires learning to interpret it. The whole mythological world of Greece and Rome was native to him, and he was deeply read in sacred Scripture. The words of John the Baptist in "Paradise Regained" might have been Milton's own :

When I was but a child, no childish play  
To me was pleasing ; all my mind was set  
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do  
What might be public good : myself I thought  
Born to that end, born to promote all truth  
And righteous things.

We are told that his father caused him to be "instructed daily . . . by sundry masters and teachers both at home and in the public schools." He had a passion for study, and from his twelfth year he scarcely ever until midnight went from books to bed—it was this unseasonable diligence indeed that laid the foundation for disease of the eyes and subsequent total blindness. He became the most distinguished Latinist at his university. Listen to his "Master's Oration on the Advantages of Knowledge" :

No more in the orator than in the poet [he says] can anything common or mediocre be tolerated. . . It behooves him who would truly be and be considered an orator, to be instructed and thoroughly finished in a certain circular education in all the arts and all science. . . I would rather be working with severe study for that true reputation, by the preliminary practice of the necessary means, than hurrying on a false reputation by a forced and precocious style.

He finds nothing more nourishing to his genius than a learned and liberal leisure, and thus he praises it :

This I would fain believe to be the divine sleep of Hesiod ; this to be Endymion's nightly meetings with the moon ; this to be the retirement of Prometheus, under the guidance of Mercury, to the steepest solitudes of Mount Caucasus, where he became the wisest of gods and men, so that even Jupiter himself is said to have gone to consult him about the marriage of Thetis. I call to witness for myself the groves and rivers and the beloved village elms, under which I remember so pleasantly having had supreme delight with the Muses, where I too among rural scenes and remote forests seemed as if I could have grown and vegetated through a hidden eternity.

The poet had his wish. His well-to-do and liberal father did not force him either into the law or into the church, but permitted him to spend the six years succeeding his graduation in storing his mind with various learning, though he was yet ignorant what his future work would be. It was a hazardous experiment. All depended upon the quality of the stock and his capacity for self-culture. Fortunately, these were of the best.

Religious faith constituted a fourth element, more important and dominant than all the rest. John Milton was a profound believer. He believed in a personal God and in man's personal responsibility to him. In the Latin college oration, which I have already quoted in translation, there occurs also this sentence : ✓

This I consider, my hearers, as known and received by all, that the great Maker of the universe, when he had framed all else fleeting and subject to decay, did mingle with man, in addition to that of him which is mortal, a certain divine breath and, as it were, part of himself, immortal, indestructible, free from death and all hurt ; which, after it had sojourned purely and holily for some time in the earth as a heavenly visitant, should flutter upward to its native heaven and return to its proper place and

country ; accordingly, that nothing can deservedly be taken into account among the causes of our happiness, unless it somehow or other regards not only this secular life, but also that life everlasting.

On arriving at the age of twenty-three he mourns the fact that, while the days are hasting by, his late spring shows as yet no bud or blossom of completed work, and even inward ripeness does not yet appear :

Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
It shall be still in strictest measure even  
To that same lot, however mean or high,  
Toward which Time leads me, and the Will of Heaven ;  
All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.

Here is a great mind and a great heart not ignorant of its own powers, yet humbly waiting its appointed task. To his friend, Charles Diodati, he writes in 1637 :

What God has resolved concerning me I know not, but this at least I know : he has instilled into me a vehement love of the beautiful. Not with so much labor is Ceres said to have sought her daughter Proserpine, as I am wont day and night to seek for this idea of the beautiful through all the forms and faces of things, for many are the shapes of things divine . . . But what am I doing? I am pluming my wings and meditating flight ; but as yet our Pegasus raises himself on very tender pinions. Let us be lowly wise.

It is evident that Milton, at the age of thirty-four, has both the literary training and the devout spirit which fit him to be a great religious poet. But he has not yet received his message. Form is assured, but substance is yet to come. As respects form, he is the product of the generation past—the spontaneity and

splendor of the Renaissance survive in him. As respects substance, he is to be the product of the new generation, with its profound convictions, its hatred of ancient error, its fierce struggles for the truth—the English Reformation finds in him its poetical embodiment and expression. Milton was a Puritan of the Puritans; and, as Puritanism has been said to be only Protestantism in its acute form, we can best express the significance of his work by saying that, as Dante was the poet of the Roman Catholic Church, so John Milton was the poet of the Protestant Reformation.

How shall the young student, whose lofty and finished verse might as yet be counted only the achievement of a better Spenser, be endowed with the stern magnificence of “Paradise Lost” and “Paradise Regained”? Only by exchanging the ideal for the real world, only by undergoing the discipline of sorrow, by mingling with men, by absorbing himself for years in a great cause. The Miltonic sublimity, like the Dantean sublimity, was developed through experiences of exalted hope and agonizing fear. Not only the spirit of the prophet, but also the spirit of the martyr, must enter into it. The poet must come into contact with the greatest soldiers and statesmen of his time—heroes of faith, yet men of action, born to command, yet ready to die for the truth. He never can paint the conflict between God and Satan in the invisible world, until he has taken part in the actual conflict between God and Satan in the world of the visible and present. And this plunging into the thick of the battle, this actual participation in the most momentous affairs, was Milton’s lot during the twenty years from 1640 to 1660—

the years that saw the rise and the success of the great Rebellion, the trial and execution of King Charles the First, the splendid reign of the great Protector, the rallying of the Royalists after Cromwell's death, and the cruelty and shame of the Restoration.

In my last and only conversation with George William Curtis, toward the close of his honored life, I told him that I had used his writings to illustrate the possibility of two styles but of one Isaiah. At first sight, I ventured to say, it might seem hardly possible that the mellifluous grace of "The Potiphar Papers" and the "Nile Notes of a Howadji," written in Mr. Curtis' youth, could have had for their author the same person who, in later years, wrote the calm and statesmanlike articles in "Harper's Weekly"; if in thirty years Mr. Curtis' style could so change, then during the forty years of Isaiah's ministry under the four kings of Judah his style may have changed also, and there may be no necessity for believing in two Isaiahs. Mr. Curtis was interested in the parallel I sought to draw, and he replied vivaciously: "But do you know what it was that changed my style? It was the Civil War. That roused me to see that I had no right to spend my life in literary leisure. I felt that I must throw myself into the struggle for freedom and for the Union. I began to lecture, and to write, for a purpose. The style took care of itself. But I fancy it is somewhat more solid now than it was thirty years ago."

So it was with John Milton. His country called for his service. He became the literary chief of the Parliamentary party, as Cromwell became its political chief. His services as Latin Secretary to the Council, and the



noble State papers that he wrote, were only the natural sequence of those tremendous pamphlets which he had previously hurled against the enemies of the Reformation in England. And no account of his poetry can be adequate which fails to notice the influence upon it of his prose, and of the great part he took in that life and death struggle of English liberty.

By birth and education Milton was a Puritan. His father had been disinherited by his Roman Catholic grandfather for becoming a Protestant and for having in his possession an English Bible. His father's house was a home of grave Puritanic piety, of religious reading, and of devout exercises. His mother, a woman given to charity and to prayer, had destined him for the church. At ten years he was put under the charge of a Puritan schoolmaster in Essex, who cut his hair short and turned him into a sweet little Roundhead. But his father had been a student in Christ's Church at Oxford, and was a lover and composer of music. Young Milton's training was of the broadest sort; he became an excellent swordsman as well as an excellent player upon the organ. He was under the middle height, and was so distinguished for his personal beauty as well as for his withdrawal from common sports, that his contemporaries at Cambridge called him "the Lady of Christ's College." Milton replied, in a comic oration, that he wished those who thus named him could as easily put off the ass as he could put off the woman.

In spite of his delicacy, no one ever seems to have questioned either his manliness or his courage. He would have taken orders if he could have done so with good conscience. But it was the time when Laud was

trying to bring back all manner of papal ritual and ceremony into the church. This was Laud's idea of "the beauty of holiness." Nonconformists were harried out of the Establishment. Milton could be neither a hypocrite nor a slave. To the church, as governed by Laud, he could not belong. He determined to devote himself to literature, not in a secular but in a religious spirit. As if speaking of his own gifts, he writes :

These abilities are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some in every nation, and are a power, beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and to set the affections in right tune to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God's Almightyness.

These words were written while he was meditating the plan of "Paradise Lost." But twenty years were to elapse before he could take up that work effectively. While he was in Italy, the conflict broke out between the Parliament and King Charles. "When I was desirous to cross to Sicily and Greece," he writes, "the sad news of civil war coming from England called me back; for I considered it disgraceful that, while my fellow-countrymen were fighting at home for liberty, I should be traveling abroad at ease for intellectual purposes." Returning to England, he found the battle joined. Charles I., after trying in vain to govern without a Parliament, had summoned a Parliament that counted it a first duty to call him to account. A deep religious fervor moved the nation to assert its right to freedom in Church and State. Over against the policy of "Thorough," which meant nothing more nor less than the

breaking down of all constitutional checks upon royal absolutism and tyranny, the Parliament party asserted the doctrine of "Root and Branch," and this meant the abolition of Episcopacy and the wresting from the king of all control over both revenue and army.

Milton took part in the struggle, but not as a soldier. He says:

I did not for any other reason decline the dangers of war, than that I might in another way, with much more efficacy, and with not less danger to myself, render assistance to my countrymen, and discover a mind neither shrinking from adverse fortune, nor actuated by any improper fear of calumny or death. Since from my childhood I had been devoted to the more liberal studies, and was always more powerful in my intellect than in my body, avoiding the labors of the camp, in which any robust soldier could have surpassed me, I betook myself to those weapons which I could wield with the most effect; and I conceived that I was acting wisely when I thus brought my better and more valuable faculties, those which constituted my principal strength and consequence, to the assistance of my country and her honorable cause.

In 1641 he published the first of his pamphlets. It was entitled, "Of Reformation in England, and the Causes that Hitherto Have Hindered It." If any are inclined to think it a pity that one with such capacities for poetry should compel himself to prose, they need only to read this pamphlet to be convinced that Milton's prose, if it was not itself poetry, was one of the best of all preparations for poetry. In this prose, eloquence reaches a very lofty strain. No English essayist or orator or preacher can afford to be unfamiliar with the prose writing of Milton. There is a roll to it, like that of ocean waves driven by a mighty wind. It shows

the power of language to express the most exalted emotions.

Moral energy, hatred of unrighteousness, unconquerable devotion to truth, resistless determination to put down oppression, uplifting of the whole soul to God—all these, apart from Scripture, have never been put into more soul-moving forms of expression than they have been by John Milton. The prayer which concludes the pamphlet on the Reformation has a majesty and a pathos, combined with a long-drawn fervor and a soaring splendor of phrase, which would befit one of the angels in the Apocalypse. I am bound, however, in all good conscience, to say that Milton's prose is noblest when it approaches most nearly to poetry. When he is most of a poet, then he is most of a man. It is hard for him, indeed, to keep the poet under—there is a smoldering fire that is ever ready to break forth; and when it does flame out we have a grandeur of expression such as has never been surpassed by any uninspired writer.

Alas that the poetic instinct could not always rule! Side by side with these bursts of eloquence, or, rather, surrounding them, interpenetrating them, and sometimes swamping them, we have great tracts of sonorous and learned, but involved and entangled, speech, in which simplicity is lost sight of, and bitterness of partisanship seems quite ready to make the worse appear the better reason. Here is the narrowness, as well as the sternness, of the Puritan.

With all his knowledge of literature and of art, Milton was from his youth something of a recluse. The broadening and humanizing process ended with his departure from Italy. Henceforth for twenty years he

threw himself into the conflict of opinions with an uncompromising rancor which sometimes makes even truth and righteousness seem unlovely. The close of that very prayer which pictures the redeemed as "clasping inseparable hands, with joy and bliss in overmeasure forever," exults over the fallen foes of liberty, and predicts that, "after a shameful end in this life," they "shall be thrown down eternally into the darkest and deepest gulf of hell," where they shall remain forever, "the basest and lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot and downtrodden, vassals of perdition."

Here is a fierceness of denunciation which reminds us of Sumner's assaults upon slavery. There have been days in our own national history when even Quakers found great satisfaction in reading the imprecatory psalms. We cannot understand the fulminations of Milton, until in imagination we put ourselves back into the times of the Long Parliament. Milton's prose is full of imprecations upon the enemies of liberty because they are regarded as the enemies of God. His pamphlets breathe a spirit of lofty justice, and they appeal to the conscience of mankind. There was in them, to use Shakespeare's phrase, "a proud, majestic, high scorn," which served an excellent purpose in combating aristocratic pretence and royal prerogative.

Their influence in the crisis of the struggle for freedom in England was only second to the influence of the sword of Cromwell. The essay entitled "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates," printed in February, 1648-49, immediately after the execution of King Charles, and "proving that it is lawful and hath been held so through all ages, for any, who have the power, to call to

account a tyrant or wicked king, and after due conviction to depose and put him to death," is so scathing an indictment of the dead "traitor, murderer, and public enemy," and so tremendous a justification of that act of State by which he was condemned to death, that it will forever stand in human history as the unanswerable plea of the Regicides. That it did its work is plain, when we remember that in 1663, Twyn, a bookseller, was hanged, drawn, and quartered, for printing a book which merely reproduced the substance of Milton's argument. It is one of the yet unexplained mysteries of the time that Milton himself, when so many friends of liberty perished, was not called to answer with his life.

The "Areopagitica" is the noblest of all defenses of an unfettered press. Milton says:

Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve, as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. . . . As good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. . . . We should be wary, therefore, what persecution we raise against the living labors of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man preserved and stored up in books: since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed; sometimes a martyrdom; and, if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre; whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at the ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself; slays an immortality rather than a life.

Yet this masterly "Speech for the Liberty of Un

licensed Printing" would never have seen the light, if Milton had not felt called upon to defend his own previous conduct. On August 1, 1643, he had printed without a license, because no license could ever have been obtained, a tract entitled "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce." In it he had argued that "indisposition, unfitness, and contrariety of mind are proper causes of divorce," and that proper laws on this subject should be included in the new Reformation in England. The modern world knows well, and Milton's enemies did not delay to point out then, that his views had been in great part determined by his hasty and infelicitous marriage.

Until his thirty-fifth year, this lofty idealist, with his soaring imagination and his devotion to books, had dwelt, as Wordsworth phrases it, "like a star, apart." But when he visited Richard Powell, at Forest Hill, in Oxfordshire, to collect five hundred pounds which that gentleman had long owed his father, the star came strangely down from its heavenly heights, and entangled itself in the golden curls of Mary Powell, the daughter of his host. It was clearly a case of love at first sight, at least on Milton's part, and he afterward sorrowfully confessed that love, though not blind, has but one eye, and that eye is often deceived. He seems to have clothed the pretty creature that attracted him with a whole array of graces and virtues drawn solely from the wardrobe of his fancy. Because she smiled, he thought her appreciative; because she was silent, he thought her wise.

In less than a month after their first meeting, Milton, instead of his five hundred pounds, took Mary Powell

back to London with him, as his wife. There, instead of the fresh air and the flowers of the country, she had the smoky city, and rooms that overlooked a churchyard. After the first feasting, life came to be ineffably dull. Milton was much with his books, and the young bride began to sigh for the gayety of her home. Milton was as handsome as a statue, but, alas! he seemed almost as stiff and cold. Unless you are a Pygmalion, you cannot love a statue, and Mary Powell Milton was no Pygmalion. Nor did her husband find her the wise and appreciative wife he had expected her to be. Sad to say, he found her stupid, instead. In his subsequent pamphlets he cites, as a proper cause for divorce, "inability for fit and matchable conversation." He talks of "a mute and spiritless mate"; "a living soul bound to a dead corpse." He declares that it is "enough to abase the mettle of a generous spirit, and sink him to a low and vulgar pitch of endeavor in all his actions"; enough to drive a man "at last, through murmuring and despair, to thoughts of atheism."

The husband, in this case, it must be acknowledged, was of too lofty and severe a nature to be fitted for matrimony. Rigid self-discipline had prepared him for autocracy in the household. He had ideas with regard to the subjection of women which belonged to pagan and classic, rather than to Christian times. It is quite possible that he undertook to command, when he should have ruled by love. The verses in "Samson Agonistes," where the athlete laments his failure to resist Delilah, seem a reminiscence of this experience of Milton's, though they intimate no consciousness on his part of wrong:



Therefore God's universal law  
Gave to the man despotic power  
Over his female in due awe,  
Nor from that right to part an hour,  
Smile she or lower ;  
So shall he least confusion draw  
On his whole life, nor sway' d  
By female usurpation, or dismay' d.

But it took two to make a bargain here. Mrs. Milton was doubtless stupid, but she was not stupid enough to endure subjection without a protest. As it had taken only a month for Milton to win her, so it took him only a month to lose her. She accepted an invitation to visit her old home, and the visit was prolonged to two years. Milton's remonstrances were met with silence ; his messengers were driven away by her father with contempt. The pamphlet on " Divorce " seems to have been written and printed in hot haste. In May he began his courtship ; in June he married ; in July his wife deserted him ; in August he stirred the country with a tract advocating almost unlimited liberty of divorce.

Divorce for the man, however—not for the woman. The wiser should govern the less wise. Man being the superior being, God pitied him most and gave him the right to divorce his wife, but gave to the wife no corresponding right to divorce her husband. Mrs. Milton repented after two years, when her royalist father had lost his fortune. She made most humble confession and submission, pleading that " her mother had been the chief promoter of her frowardness." Milton instantly forgave the past and took her back. But the end was like the beginning. Milton's family life, though he was three times married, was only at rare intervals a happy

one. The proud, self-contained, exalted spirit carried his head too far above the clouds to elicit much of sympathy from either wife or children. Milton was by nature a lonely man—to a certain extent his loneliness was the penalty of his greatness.

I am detailing these features of his life, in order to show the influences that changed a poet of the departing Renaissance into the stern and majestic poet of the Protestant Reformation. The story will not be complete without some allusion to Milton's blindness. We have seen how the foundation for this was laid by the premature vigils of his studious boyhood. Too sedentary a life in the succeeding years brought on a rheumatic affection, and this was naturally accompanied by increasing weakness of the eyes. When he entered the service of the Commonwealth, at the age of forty-one, his sight was already getting dim. A year later, when Salmasius published his defense of King Charles the First, the Council of State requested Milton to prepare a reply. This required much work by candle-light. Milton's left eye was useless already, and there were warnings that before long the right eye might fail also. His physicians admonished him that total blindness might result, if he persevered. But, with the alternative before him of blindness on the one hand and desertion of duty on the other, he chose blindness. "Urged," he says, "by the heavenly Counsellor who dwells in conscience, I would have shut my ears to Æsculapius himself speaking in his Epidaurian temple."

He finished his reply, but he lost his sight. He learned to dictate to amanuenses indeed, and he could still hear his favorite authors as they were read to him

by others. But the labor of investigation in his library was multiplied many-fold. He was dependent now. Imagine the great, imperious, self-absorbed man, after Charles the Second had come to the throne; driven into hiding; his friends exiled or beheaded; uncertain whether he himself might not yet be hanged; his motherless children in a chronic state of mute rebellion against the task of reading to him in languages which they could not understand, unfilially conspiring with his servants to embezzle his money and to sell his books, and when he sought to alleviate his loneliness by another marriage, wishing rather they could hear that he was dead; and all this while increasingly afflicted with gout-calculi, accompanied by swelling of the joints, and twinges of pain at every movement of the limbs.

But worst of all was the blindness. Blind Samson, in the drama which constitutes his last great work, is simply the blind Milton in antique Grecian dress. Hear his pitiful lament:

O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!  
Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,  
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!  
Light, the prime work of God, to me is extinct,  
And all her various objects of delight  
Annull'd, which might in part my grief have eas'd,  
Inferior to the vilest now become  
Of man or worm; the vilest here excel me;  
They creep, yet see; I, dark in light, expos'd  
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong;  
Within doors, as without, still, as a fool,  
In power of others, never in my own;  
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.  
O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,

Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse,  
Without all hope of day !

Such words as these mark the nadir of the poet's sorrows. There were consolations also. To Cyriack Skinner, one of his old scholars and lifelong friends, he wrote in more calm and cheerful strain :

Cyriack, this three years day these eyes, though clear,  
To outward view, of blemish or of spot,  
Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot ;  
Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear  
Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,  
Or man, or woman. Yet I argue not  
Against heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot  
Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer  
Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask ?  
The conscience, friend, to have lost them, overplied  
In liberty's defense, my noble task,  
Of which all Europe rings from side to side.

But more than this. The blind poet came to see that blindness did not preclude work—it rather threw him back upon the work to which in his youth he had consecrated himself, but from which the political struggles of his time had withdrawn him—threw him back upon it with an experience of life so enlarged that he was now a different man, with a new insight into truth and a new impulse of

adventurous song  
That with no middle flight intends to soar  
Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues  
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

We must go even further. The poet's blindness, while it shut him out from the world of the natural, shut

him in, as it were, to the world of the supernatural. His ear became more attent to heavenly harmonies ; his spiritual eyes were opened, as the outward eyes were closed. The "troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes," upon which he had embarked in 1640, was from 1660 to 1674 only as a distant murmur of the waves to one who has entered the harbor. Though straitened in means, his last years were, on the whole, years of rest and devotion. As the Cromwellian republic, for which he had sacrificed so much, proved to be only another Utopia, the vision of a celestial order dawned upon him, and the struggle between right and wrong on earth, with all the personal trouble through which he had passed, furnished him with the spirit and imagery of a new drama, the scene of which should be laid almost wholly in the supernatural world, which should describe the age-long war between God and Satan, and which should

assert eternal Providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men.

Milton's blindness drove him not only from the outward to the inward and from the sensible to the super-sensible for his subject—it drove him also to God, the source of true illumination. There is in all literature no more noble or pathetic prayer than that at the opening of the third book of "Paradise Lost," in which he mourns "wisdom at one entrance quite shut out," yet lifts up his soul to him who is himself Wisdom :

So much the rather thou, celestial Light,  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate ; there plant eyes ; all mist from thence

Purge and disperse ; that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

It is certain that Milton deals with the invisible more than any other poet that ever lived. Like Jonathan Edwards in his "History of Redemption," he would relate a story which begins in an eternity past and ends in an eternity to come, the whole life of angels and of men being spanned by its mighty arch. Supernatural beings play a greater part in this epic than in any other—the persons of the Godhead and the celestial emissaries and servants of the Almighty do two-thirds of all the speaking, and the other third is done by two specimens of unfallen humanity whose thought and language transcend all ordinary human standards.

The world into which the poet introduces us is not a part of this universe—it is rather that empyrean which subsisted before this universe had a being. The demands of such an epic as this are simply colossal; the conception of it could come only to one to whom the sublime was as his native air; the mere statement of the fact gives us one of the best explanations of the Miltonic poetry and one of the best reasons for its power. In order that we may better appreciate the greatness of "Paradise Lost," the work resumed with such new advantages after twenty years of enforced silence, and may understand what manner of "singing robes" the great poet then put on, it will be indispensable to distinguish between Dante's universe and Milton's universe, and to see how much more supersensual and ideal the latter was than the former.

Both Dante and Milton were believers in the Ptole-

maic or geocentric theory of the universe. Milton indeed had heard of Copernicus, and he seems to have suspected the new scheme of things to be true; but all his education and all the ideas of his time were of the older sort, and, for poetic purposes at least, he thought it not wise to change. It was not in this universe, however, Ptolemaic as it was, that Milton laid the scene of his epic. Dante's hell and purgatory, on the contrary, and even his heaven, were parts of this present visible frame of things. Hell was that tremendous cone-shaped cavity in the very earth beneath our feet, which Satan's falling mass and bulk had hollowed out when he was thrust from heaven and came hurtling down upon our sublunary planet, crashing through its successive strata till gravitation brought him up standing at the center and held him fast there at the very bottom of the pit.

Purgatory, to Dante's mind, was a mount on this earth, on the side opposite to the mouth of hell, composed of the material dislodged by Satan's fall and made to bulge out when that material fled from his hated presence. And what was Dante's heaven? Why, it was simply the concentric spheres which in the Ptolemaic system enclosed this earth and revolved around it as their center. In those spheres, the moon, the sun, the planets were fixed, and surrounding all was the *Primum Mobile*, so called because it moved all the rest, but itself never moved at all. Here God himself dwelt. This was the abode of the Almighty and of the most exalted saints. But Dante's heaven was as definite in extent as Dante's earth. The *Primum Mobile* had its bounds, and everything in existence could be weighed

and measured. William Watson characterizes the Dantean sublimity as "mysticism tempered by mensuration."

The essence of the sublime is its suggestion of the infinite. Macaulay's essay on Milton makes its best point by showing how much more sublime Milton's indefinite descriptions are than any of the definite statements of Dante. Dante would excite our imagination by giving us the size of Satan in feet and inches; by this intrusion of earthly and finite measures he limits and degrades. It is the old error of the pictures and images of the Roman Church. Milton has in him the spirit of Protestantism and the spirit of true art—he suggests, but he does not define. There is an air of vastness about his poetry; the very absence of fixed limits permits the imagination of the reader, nay, compels his imagination, to spread its own wings and soar; Milton's Satan is incomparably grander than the Satan of Dante.

But I wish now especially to point out what Macaulay seems not to see, namely, that Dante's whole universe is infinitesimal compared with that of Milton. For Milton hangs Dante's whole universe as a mere drop in the center of his empyrean. Milton, being a Protestant, has, of course, no purgatory, and his heaven and hell are both outside of Dante's universe. At the beginning God dwells in an infinite heaven. Beneath him is a weltering chaos, formless and dark, yet containing the material of the world that is to be. Angels of many ranks and endowments are created, to be his servants and companions, long before the earth or man appears. When the Son of God is exalted above them and they are bidden to worship him, there is rebellion and war in



heaven; Satan and the rebel angels are cast out of heaven and thrust down to the lowermost point of chaos, and the abode constructed for them and by them becomes hell. Nine days they fall; nine days they lie stupefied upon the burning marl; during six days of these nine the Almighty creates our universe, and suspends it like a solid sphere at that point in the floor of heaven where Satan and his host burst through when they fell. When the fallen archangel gathers strength and essays to pass through chaos on his way to tempt mankind, he sees the new-created universe hanging in space so far above him that it appears, in comparison with "the empyreal heaven, extended wide in circuit . . . once his native seat,"

in bigness as a star,  
Of smallest magnitude, close by the moon.

Into this universe, hard, solid, opaque, and illuminated only from the empyrean above, there is but one opening, and that is at the point of attachment to heaven. Satan perceives a gleam of light from the staircase, not yet withdrawn, by which angels went up and down. There he enters, and entering, all the flaming systems of orbs that constitute our universe dawn for the first time upon his sight. He makes his way to our sun, and, on pretence of being a belated spirit just returned from some distant errand in heaven, he inquires about God's new creation. Uriel, the archangelic regent of the sun, unsuspectingly directs his steps to earth. There the adversary finds our first parents, clad only in the majesty of spotless innocence and "imparadisèd in each other's arms." Filled with jealousy, he plans their over-

throw. Raphael is sent from heaven to instruct them and prepare them to resist ; and here come in, after the fashion of Homer and Virgil, three whole books of information with regard to the war in heaven, Adam's previous experiences, and Milton's whole scheme of philosophy and theology.

The historical background of the drama being thus complete, the tragedy can proceed to its sad climax. Satan tempts, our first mother and father fall, the Son of God comes down to pronounce their doom, the guilty pair incriminate each other and sink into despair. But at last they pray ; and in answer to that first evidence of penitence, the same Archangel Michael, who is sent to expel them from Paradise, comforts them on their way by two whole books of prophecy. All the future history of redemption is unfolded to them ; they are taught that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head ; they are promised a return to paradise when discipline has done its work. So the heavenly Muse taught John Milton to cover past, present, and future with his sublime epic, and to fulfill, in age and weariness and pain and solitude, the purpose, formed at least thirty years before, to sing

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.

It is not true that the poem met with a cold reception from the public. The impression that it did so is probably derived from the fact that the author received

for his work only five pounds down, with promise of fifteen pounds more for the three succeeding editions. But this was partly due to Milton's printing it just after the great fire of London, when all the booksellers were ruined and any literary venture was hazardous. Though the book actually brought to the poet and his family only eighteen pounds in money, worth perhaps two hundred and fifty dollars in our day, it gave at once to its author a fame second only to that of Shakespeare. Dryden not only called it "one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced," but he was compelled to say also, "This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too!"

In that Philistine age, the Philistines themselves received a shock comparable only to that which Samson had given them of old; and Masson, at the close of his six-volume biography of Milton, quotes "Samson Agonistes," as expressing the poet's triumph in contemplating the effect of his great work upon his contemporaries:

But he, though blind of sight,  
 Despis'd and thought extinguish'd quite,  
 With inward eyes illuminated,  
 His fiery virtues rous'd  
 From under ashes into sudden flame,  
 And as an evening dragon came,  
 Assailant on the perched roosts  
 And nests in order rang'd  
 Of tame villatic fowl; but as an eagle  
 His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.  
 So Virtue, given for lost,  
 Depress'd, and overthrown, as seem'd,  
 . . . . .  
 Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most,

When most unactive deem'd ;  
And, though her body die, her fame survives,  
A secular bird, ages of lives.

Nor is it true that Milton himself regarded his "Paradise Lost" as inferior to his "Paradise Regained." He simply hoped that the fame of the former might not prevent a due consideration of the merits of the latter. He would not have the victory of Satan, the hero of the first epic, obscure the victory of Christ, the hero of the second. The "Paradise Lost" appeared in 1667, when Milton was fifty-nine. The actual writing of it had occupied seven solid years. The poet had but seven more years to live. But he filled them up with noble work. Before the first great poem was published, young Ellwood, a friend of Milton's, borrowed a manuscript copy of it. When he returned it, he said to the poet, "Thou hast said much here of 'Paradise Lost,' but what hast thou to say of 'Paradise Found'?" Milton sat some time in a muse, but returned no answer. The final answer was the publication of "Paradise Regained," in which our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, with its foiling of Satan's arts and its winning of eternal life for man, is set over against Adam's temptation in the garden, with its defeat and its incurring of universal death.

The later epic indubitably shows some falling off in the poet's powers; the supernatural vein has already yielded the best of its ore; earth must now be the main scene of the drama; the piercing splendors of the poet's earlier verse give place to something more like grand and sonorous prose. Yet now and then the old inspira-

tion seems to seize him; flame bursts out from the embers; as when he describes

Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts  
And eloquence, native to famous wits  
Or hospitable,

and bids us

Thence to the famous orators repair,  
Those ancient, whose resistless eloquence  
Wielded at will that fierce democratic,  
Shook the arsenal, and fulmin'd over Greece  
To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne;

or, when he closes the poem with the acclaim of angels to the victorious Son of God:

Now thou hast aveng'd  
Supplanted Adam, and, by vanquishing  
Temptation, hast regain'd lost Paradise.

Milton is a didactic poet, and perhaps the most critical question that can be asked with regard to his place in literature is this: Is the dogmatic element consistent with the very highest poetry? Our age is inclined to deny this. It is a part of the current theory of art in general, that the artist should only reproduce what he sees, and thus hold the mirror up to nature. He must do this simply because he is smitten with the love of nature's beauty and longs to express the passion of his soul. The ulterior aim of teaching interferes with spontaneity and freedom, and without spontaneity and freedom no true poetry is possible. We deny the premises as well as the conclusion. The theory that art consists simply in imitation, is the relic of a bygone

age that knew nothing of the idealizing and the creative powers of the human imagination. What the poet *sees*, moreover, will depend upon what the poet *is*; if he is a sensual soul, he will revel in dreams of sense, and will strive to reproduce them; if he is an ardent lover of purity and goodness, he will embody these in "thoughts that breathe and words that burn."

It is vain to say that the poet shall not teach; if he is a true poet, he cannot help teaching. No man ever yet made strong impression on his fellow-men without being a great believer: "I believed, therefore have I spoken," might be the motto of every leader of mankind. "Entire intellectual toleration," said Mrs. Browning, "is the mark of those who believe nothing." And believing something involves antagonism to its opposite; in the words of Coleridge, "He who does not withstand, has no standing-ground of his own." Advocacy of truth, denunciation of error, these are instincts of those who see. "When any truth becomes central and vital, there comes the desire to utter it," as Dr. Storrs has well remarked. And shall the poet, who is simply the most deeply seeing man, be shut out from the advocacy of truth and the denunciation of error, simply because he is a poet? Nay, rather, because he is a poet, he will give truth wings; he will be her champion; he will bring all the powers of his soul into her defense.

The poet then not only may be a dogmatist—he must be a dogmatist. But he must be more. He must not only possess the truth, but the truth must possess him. He must have a soul great enough to apprehend it, not only in its bare logical forms and in its isolated particulars, but in its broad reaches of connection and in its

power to rouse the deepest emotions. He must see it as *beauty*, and must be so ravished by the sight that he cannot contain the vision within himself, but must publish it to others. Imagination, spontaneity, passion—these are not originally angels of darkness, but angels of light. Their highest service is to utter God's messages of righteousness and salvation. Isaiah and John are none the less, but rather the greater poets because they are teachers. And Milton, that

Mighty-mouth'd inventor of harmonies,  
Skill'd to sing of Time or Eternity,  
God-gifted organ-voice of England,

as Tennyson calls him, is none the less a poet because he has so definite and dogmatic an aim. With all his conviction, he seeks to conquer by beauty; he feeds

on thoughts that voluntary move  
Harmonious numbers;

and in his best writing he is conscious of the rush and impulse of a higher and larger Love and Wisdom.

The scenery of the "Paradise Lost" is so unearthly, and the poem makes natural law so much the sport of arbitrary will, that some have doubted whether Milton can retain his hold upon future ages. We meet the doubt with the simple denial that any one of the world's greatest poems depends for longevity upon its conformity to correct science. Homer will never cease to be the world's great epic teacher, even though his universe is peopled with Naiads and is under the rule of the upper and the nether Jove. Virgil will live forever by virtue of his sweet and sonorous verse, even though his

subterranean realms are reached by an easy and literal descent from the volcanic hillsides of Naples. Who will refuse immortality to Dante because his purgatory bulges out from our southern hemisphere, or to Shakespeare because he furnishes a seacoast to Bohemia?

No, the currency of poetry is independent of such matters of geography or astronomy; the truth it sets forth is truth of a different sort; its universal and everlasting hold upon the human spirit consists in its ability to lift man above mere space and time into the region of the spiritual and eternal. It does this in two ways, and in each of these ways John Milton has no superior. First, he is our greatest English master of literary form. We can well believe John Bright, when he said that his own oratory was built upon John Milton. But since perfection of form can never exist by itself alone, we may add, secondly, that our poet proclaims to all ages the greatest moral message. Behind the form is substance such as never entered into Homer's or Virgil's or Dante's or Shakespeare's verse, namely, the profoundest conception of man's apostasy from God, and of his recovery from ruin through Jesus Christ.

Milton has not the spontaneity of imagination that distinguishes Shakespeare, nor has he so large a nature, but his sense of form is more unfailing, and in loftiness of character he towers far above the bard of Avon. Puritan as he is, he is more of an aristocrat, and more of a man, than is Shakespeare. His nobility of poetic form is but the expression of a lofty soul, thrilled to the center of its being with the greatest of possible themes—the struggle of good and evil, of God and Satan, and the triumph of the Almighty in the redemption of man.



When this theme grows old, then will "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained" grow old. But so long as man recognizes and values his own immortality, so long will the poetry of Milton vindicate its claim to be immortal.

With most poets, we are obliged to gather their doctrine from their verse. In the case of Milton, we get additional information from his biography; but, besides this, we are particularly favored by the fact that Milton, of all the great poets, was the one and only systematic theologian. In his early life he had planned a treatise on Christian truth; in his last years he composed it. Curiously enough, it was never printed during his lifetime; the very existence of it was forgotten; at last the manuscript of it, tied up in a bundle with the original copy of his State Letters, was discovered among the lumber of the State Paper Office in London, in 1823. So, after a disappearance lasting nearly a century and a half, the key to Milton's poetry came to light, and Macaulay justly signalized the event by the publication, in the "Edinburgh Review," of his famous first essay on John Milton. Though unfortunately it has never yet gained wide recognition in the theological world, this "Treatise of Christian Doctrine" is so original and so able a discussion of fundamental truth, that it merits careful attention.

At many points it shows a daring independence, and an anticipation of views only recently propounded or thought tolerable in the Christian church. Yet its doctrine is proclaimed with a confidence and calmness which are themselves impressive. The importance and value which the author ascribed to his work are indi-

cated by the fact that he begins it as if it were an apostolic general epistle: "John Milton, Englishman, to all the churches of Christ, and also to all everywhere on earth professing the Christian faith: Peace and knowledge of the truth, and eternal salvation in God the Father, and in our Lord Jesus Christ." He divides his treatise into two parts—a theoretical part, as to Christian knowledge, and a practical part, as to Christian duty. We can deal only with the former of these. But since our aim is to consider Milton's poetry especially in its theological aspect, we may be permitted a somewhat minute inspection of the great features of his doctrinal system.

First of all, then, Milton is an unwavering believer in the infallibility and sufficiency of the Bible as God's revelation of truth to men. Though his formal teaching with regard to Holy Scripture is reserved for the later portion of his treatise, it is plain, even from the beginning, that he assumes the divine inspiration of every part of the Old and the New Testaments. He gives no proof of this, but declares that the word of God carries with it its own evidence. Clearly, he writes for those who are Christians already, not for those who doubt the essentials of the Christian faith.

Yet this rigid doctrine of inspiration is held in a somewhat large and liberal way. It does not claim the absolute truth of every statement of Scripture taken by itself. There are many sorts of composition, and the Holy Spirit can make use of them all. He can set before us the complaints of Job, and the doubts of Solomon. "The Bible," says Milton, in his "Areopagitica," "brings in holiest men passionately murmuring against

Providence through all the arguments of Epicurus." It is necessary to *interpret* Scripture, therefore; and every man has the right to interpret for himself. For this purpose he has the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. There is an inner light, as well as an outer standard. In one place, Milton's words would at first sight seem to sanction the Quaker doctrine: "The Spirit," he says, "is a more certain guide than Scripture, whom, therefore, it is our duty to follow." But, taken in connection with the supremacy given to Scripture everywhere else in his writings, this must be understood to mean, not that the Holy Spirit is a co-ordinate source of truth, but only that his interpretation is so indispensable that even the Scriptures would fail to be apprehended aright without it.

Milton, in the second place, is an Arminian, so far as respects his doctrine of the divine decrees. Though God foreknows all events, he has not decreed them absolutely; he only decrees that, if his creatures act so and so, such and such will be the consequences. Here I quote his own words to show how remarkably he could anticipate certain methods of statement now current even among moderate Calvinists, yet statements which in those days would have been thought heresy itself. "Future events," he says, "will happen certainly, but not of necessity. They will happen certainly, because the divine prescience will not be deceived; but they will not happen necessarily, because prescience can have no influence on the object foreknown, inasmuch as it is only an intransitive action."

Thus far the modern Calvinist might assent, though he would claim that God's decree to create at all, when

he foreknew the results, was to all intents and purposes a decreeing of those results, the decree, however, in the case of moral evil, being a permissive, and not an efficient, decree. But when Milton applies his principle to the matter of salvation, he takes ground which the Calvinist cannot hold with him. "There is no particular predestination or election," he says, "but only general." He means, as Masson has expressed it, that John or Peter is not predestined to be saved as John or Peter; but believers are predestined to be saved, and John and Peter will be saved if they are in the class of believers." Of course this is a denial that God bestows any special grace to make John or Peter a believer; and so it must be regarded as the denial of a fundamental principle of Calvinism. This Arminian doctrine must be considered, however, as a later development of his theology, for in "Areopagitica," printed twenty-five years before this treatise was written, he had mentioned "the acute and distinct Arminius," but had spoken of him as "perverted."

In his views of the Person of Christ, thirdly, Milton was not an orthodox Trinitarian, but a high Arian. Here too, we must recognize a change from the poet's way of thinking in his earlier years. In 1629, in his wonderful "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," he had written of "the Son of heaven's eternal King":

That glorious form, that light unsufferable,  
 And that far-beaming blaze of majesty,  
 Wherewith he went at heaven's high council-table  
 To sit the midst of trinal unity,  
 He laid aside; and, here with us to be,

Forsook the courts of everlasting day,  
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

In 1641 he closed his first prose-pamphlet, "Of Reformation," with a prayer to the "One Tripersonal Godhead," as in that same pamphlet he had called the Arians "no true friends of Christ."

But in the fifth book of "Paradise Lost" Milton has come to be of a different mind; now he attributes a beginning of existence to the Son; he makes the sin of the rebel angels to consist in their refusal to recognize the Lordship of him whom God in these following words sets over them:

Hear, all ye angels, progeny of light,  
Thrones, dominations, pryncedoms, virtues, powers;  
Hear my decree, which unrevok'd shall stand.  
This day I have begot whom I declare  
My only Son, and on this holy hill  
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold  
At my right hand: your head I him appoint;  
And by myself have sworn, to him shall bow  
All knees in heaven, and shall confess him Lord.

Here God's eternal decree, to which corresponds an eternal Sonship, is interpreted as if it were a temporal decree to which would correspond a Sonship beginning in time. And though, in the third book of the same poem, we read:

Thee next they sang, of all creation first,  
Begotten Son, divine Similitude,  
In whose conspicuous countenance, without cloud  
Made visible, the Almighty Father shines,  
Whom else no creature can behold; on thee  
Impress'd the effulgence of his glory abides,

Transfus'd on thee his ample spirit rests.  
 He heaven of heavens, and all the powers therein  
 By thee created;

we are compelled to interpret this by the later theological treatise. That teaches us that "the Son of God did not exist from all eternity, is not coeval or coessential or coequal with the Father, but came into existence by the will of God to be the next being to himself, the first-born and best beloved, the Logos or Word through whom all creation should take its beginnings. . . God imparted to the Son as much as he pleased of the divine nature, nay, of the divine substance itself, care being taken not to confound the substance with the whole essence."

This is very like the doctrine of Sir Isaac Newton. Christ may be said to be divine, in the sense that he is next in rank to God and has been endowed by God with divine power to create, but he is inferior to the supreme Godhead. It was perhaps well for Milton that his treatise was not published in his lifetime, for Arianism was not a heresy which those times winked at. He must have remembered the fate of Bartholomew Legate, an Essex man and an Arian, who was burned to death at Smithfield, March 13, 1613. King James the First asked him whether he did not pray to Christ. Legate's answer was that "indeed he had prayed to Christ in the days of his ignorance, but not for these last seven years;" which so shocked the king that "he spurned at him with his foot." At the stake Legate still refused to recant, and so was burned to ashes amid a vast conflux of people.

In the fourth place, as to Milton's doctrine of Crea-

tion, he was a Monist, while yet maintaining the independence and freedom of the human will. He is not an idealistic, but a materialistic, Monist. All things are forms of matter more or less ethereal. But this matter is not something either lifeless or self-subsistent—it is an efflux or emanation from the Divine Being himself, and it partakes of his indestructibility. “No created thing” therefore “can be finally annihilated.” Raphael, the archangel, explains :

O Adam ! One Almighty is, from whom  
 All things proceed, and up to him return,  
 If not depriv'd from good, created all  
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,  
 Endued with various forms, various degrees  
 Of substance and, in things that live, of life,  
 But more refin'd, more spirituous and pure,  
 As nearer to him plac'd.

But see how carefully the poet guards himself from pantheistic conclusions. The original matter of which all things are made, being a part of God's own substance, is not evil, but good. Yet “God has voluntarily loosened his hold on such portions of this primeval matter as he has endowed with free will, so that they may originate independent actions not morally referable to God himself.” Hear Raphael once more, as he speaks to Adam :

Son of heaven and earth,  
 Attend ! That thou art happy, owe to God ;  
 That thou continuest such, owe to thyself,  
 That is, to thy obedience ; therein stand.  
 This was that caution given thee ; be advis'd,  
 God made thee perfect, not immutable :  
 And good he made thee ; but to persevere,

He left it in thy power ; ordained thy will  
 By nature free, not overrul'd by fate  
 Inextricable, or strict necessity :  
 Our voluntary service he requires,  
 Not our necessitated ; such with him  
 Finds no acceptance, nor can find ; for how  
 Can hearts, not free, be tried whether they serve  
 Willing or no, who will but what they must  
 By destiny, and can no other choose ?

In all this John Milton anticipated the modern doctrine of Lotze, of Dorner, and of Browning.

Fifthly, in his opinions with regard to the origin of the soul, our great poet is a Traducian. In opposition to the current orthodoxy of his time, which was Federalist and Creationist, he held that the soul, like the body, comes to us all by inheritance. Indeed, Milton goes further than this. "He has no faith in soul as separate from, and inhabiting, the body. He believes in a certain corporeity of the soul. Mind and thought are rooted in the bodily organism. Soul was not inbreathed by God after the body was formed. The breathing into man's nostrils was only the quickening impulse given to that which had life already. God does not create souls every day. Man is a body-and-soul, or a soul-body, and he transmits himself as such."

These quotations are not Milton's own words, but they are the summing up of his doctrine which is given by Masson, his great biographer. Special creation is indeed taught pictorially in book seven of the "Paradise Lost," both with reference to the lower animals and to man. There we read :

The grassy clods now calved ; now half appeared  
 The tawny lion, pawing to get free



His hinder parts, then springs as broke from bonds  
 And rampant shakes his brinded mane ; the ounce,  
 The libbard, and the tiger, as the mole  
 Rising, the crumbled earth above them threw  
 In hillocks : the swift stag from under ground  
 Bore up his branching head.

But we must interpret this as only pictorial, for in the fifth book the whole modern philosophy of evolution seems to be hinted at in Milton's verse. He speaks of the various degrees and forms of the "one first matter," as

Each in their several active spheres assign'd,  
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds  
 Proportion'd to each kind. So, from the root  
 Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves  
 More aëry, last the bright consummate flower  
 Spirits odorous breathes : flowers and their fruit,  
 Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd  
 To vital spirits aspire, to animal,  
 To intellectual ; give both life and sense,  
 Fancy and understanding ; whence the soul  
 Reason receives, and reason is her being,  
 Discursive or intuitive ; discourse  
 Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,  
 Differing but in degree, of kind the same.

Milton's Anthropology and Soteriology are so stoutly orthodox as to excite but little curiosity. He is a believer in the universal sinfulness of the human race and in the common guilt of the Fall. Humanity, when it comes into the world, is just what Adam made it by his transgression. Man is doomed to death for his sin.

Die he, or justice must ; unless for him  
 Some other able, and as willing, pay  
 The rigid satisfaction, death for death.

But, in his great love, Christ became incarnate for our salvation. Having taken our human nature by being born of a virgin, he had resting upon him all our exposures and liabilities. "He voluntarily submitted himself to the divine justice," and suffered death, the penalty due to human sin. So he made atonement, and redeemed all believers at the price of his own blood; as Michael teaches Adam:

Slain for bringing life;  
 But to the cross he nails thy enemies,  
 The law that is against thee, and the sins  
 Of all mankind, with him there crucified,  
 Never to hurt them more who rightly trust  
 In this his satisfaction.

We can object to these statements only upon the ground that the poet conceives of the relation of men to Adam and to Christ respectively in somewhat too formal and mechanical a way. If he had followed his Traducian view of the soul to its logical conclusions, it would have made him a sound Augustinian in his view of sin, and an advocate of the ethical or realistic view of the atonement.

We pass these doctrines, however, to consider, in the sixth place, Milton's Eschatology. Here we can anticipate his conclusions from what we know of his premises. If soul and body are not two, but one and inseparable, then at death the whole man dies, soul and body together; and not till the resurrection, when the body is revived, does the soul live again. "The millions who have died since Adam"—I quote once more from his biographer—"are all asleep, thick and sere as the au-

tumnal leaves in Vallombrosa ; they shall not wake till the last trump stirs their multitudes. For the dead, however, the intervening time is annihilated. They die ; but so far as their consciousness is concerned, they revive the next instant to be alive with Christ forever."

At this point too, Milton's later thinking carried him away both from Scripture teaching and from his earlier beliefs. We may well prefer the doctrine he held from 1637 to 1639 when, in "Il Penseroso," he spoke of unsphering

The spirit of Plato, to unfold  
What worlds or what regions hold  
The immortal mind that hath forsook  
Her mansion in this fleshly nook.

or when, in "Lycidas," he wrote the most pathetic of all elegies for the friend of his youth drowned in the Irish Sea :

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more;  
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor;  
So sinks the day-star in the ocean-bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky;  
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
Through the dear might of him that walked the waves,  
Where other groves and other streams along,  
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,  
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,  
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
There entertain him all the saints above,  
In solemn troops, and sweet societies,  
That sing, and, singing, in their glory move,  
And wipe the tears forever from his eyes.

But to the aged Milton all this was fancy and not fact. His dead friend was unconscious and would be unconscious until the morning of the resurrection. When should that morning dawn? Ah, the poet held, not only to soul-sleeping, but to the pre-millennial advent of Christ. The day of judgment with which Christ's coming is so closely connected in Scripture he believed to be no single day, marked by the rising and setting of the sun, but a period a thousand years in duration. Judgment to him was not so much an act as a long process, continuing through Christ's millennial reign on earth, and "wound up at last by a new revolt of Satan, his final overthrow, the sentencing of devils and bad men, the destruction of the world by fire, the banishment of the bad to hell, and the exaltation of the saints to a new heaven and a new earth created for their enjoyment."

The seventh and last point of Milton's theological belief which I can notice is his doctrine of the church. Here too, there was a constant progress from his early to his later years, and in my judgment, a progress on the whole toward truth rather than toward error. He began by being a Puritan member of the Established Church. When he entered the service of the State he was a strong Presbyterian, and his first political pamphlets were written in the interest of Presbyterian government in the Church of England. But he found that Presbyterianism at that time represented as much of intolerance and tyranny as belonged to the Roman Church. In his poem "On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament," these lines occur :

Because you have thrown off your Prelate Lord  
And with stiff vows renounced his Liturgy,  
To seize the widowed whore Plurality  
From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorr'd ;  
Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword  
To force our consciences that Christ set free,  
And ride us with a classic hierarchy? . . .  
Men whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent  
Would have been held in high esteem with Paul  
Must now be named and printed heretics. . .  
But we do hope to find out all your tricks . . .  
When they shall read this clearly in your charge,  
New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large.

As from being a Churchman he had become a Presbyterian, so from being a Presbyterian he became an Independent, or Congregationalist. The ideas of republican civil government that were gaining headway in the army had, as their correlative, ideas of absolute democracy in the government of the church. And then, ten years of further thought and experience made him theoretically a Baptist. Cromwell did not profess any particular opinion, but he was more nearly a Baptist than anything else, and Cromwell's influence was strong over Milton. The poet, however, was more consistent both in his republicanism and in his Independency than was Cromwell himself. Milton feared the monarchical tendencies of the protectorate; and, on the subject of absolute freedom of opinion, he was a monitor to the Protector. Not only did Milton hold, in theory at least, to the fundamental Baptist principle of separation of Church and State, but he agreed with Baptists in his rejection of infant baptism, and in his belief that immersion in water is the proper form of baptism. Infants, he says,

“are not to be baptized, inasmuch as they are incompetent to receive instruction, or to believe, or to enter into a covenant, or to promise or answer for themselves, or even to hear a word.” Of baptism he thus speaks: “The bodies of believers, who engage themselves to pureness of life, are immersed in running water, to signify their regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and their union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.” These quotations are taken of course from his “Christian Doctrine,” but, in the twelfth book of the “Paradise Lost,” we have the following significant lines:

To teach all nations what of him they learned,  
And his salvation, them who shall believe  
Baptizing in the profluent stream, the sign  
Of washing them from guilt of sin to life  
Pure, and in mind prepared, if so befall,  
For death like that which the Redeemer died.

I am far from maintaining that John Milton was ever himself immersed, or that he ever formally identified himself with any local Baptist church. I must add, indeed, that before the end of his days there came to be a Quaker element in his religion. He became indifferent to times and places of worship; he held the Sabbath to be abrogated, with the Mosaic law of which he considered it a part; in his latest years “he ceased to attend any church, he belonged to no religious communion, and he had no religious observances in his family. Considering the profoundly religious character of his mind,” says Masson, “this excited considerable surmise among his friends, but he gave no explanation.” The explanation, we may imagine, was simply this: The

blind and dependent old man, who could not attend even a conventicle except as he was led, had simply permitted himself, partly from the inertia of failing strength, and partly from dislike of all religious forms even though they were the simplest, to swing to the opposite extreme of no religious service at all. What he excused in himself he could not have justified in others; for, in this very "Treatise of Christian Doctrine," he counts individual membership and support of Christ's church to be the duty of every believer.

We have spoken of the influence of Cromwell, but there was another influence upon Milton's thinking more important still, and that was the influence of Roger Williams. This most lovable man, yet born agitator, republican, and Baptist, did a work in England as well as in America—a work that only of late years has come to be recognized. When the Long Parliament had loosened the grip of Charles and of Laud upon the civil and religious liberties of England, Williams, in the year 1643, made a visit to his English home. Twelve years before, he had emigrated to Massachusetts; seven years before, he had founded a tiny settlement at Providence in Rhode Island. Cotton Mather tells us what manner of man he seemed to orthodox New Englanders to be. "In the year 1654," says that distinguished divine, "a certain windmill in the Low Countries, whirling round with extraordinary violence, by reason of a violent storm then blowing, the stone at length by its rapid motion became so intensely hot as to fire the mill; from whence the flames, being dispersed by the high winds, did set a whole town on fire. But I can tell my reader that, above twenty years before this, there was a

whole country in America like to be set on fire by the rapid motion of a windmill in the head of one particular man ;” and Cotton Mather proceeds to say that this man was Roger Williams.

The church to which Roger Williams belonged in Salem had excommunicated him because he had been baptized and had baptized others, establishing thereby the first church in America of the Baptist faith. It was not in human nature—it was certainly not in Roger Williams’ human nature—when he returned to England to cease propagating his new faith. The windmill continued to run and set other towns on fire. He proclaimed, far in advance of his time, the duty of absolutely separating Church and State. He was the guest, for a whole year, of the younger Vane. Here he naturally came frequently in contact with Milton, Vane’s warm friend and admirer. He found Milton, on account of his divorce pamphlets, put out with the Presbyterians, thrown among the sectaries, and, as the poet himself tells us, in “a world of disesteem.” Williams now published his “Bloody Tenet of Persecution, with a Plea for Liberty of Conscience.” He was the apostle of Voluntaryism. His book made great stir in London, but it especially commended itself to Milton. From Roger Williams, the poet probably imbibed not only this particular portion of Baptist doctrine, but much more with regard to the nature and the subjects of Christian baptism.

If circumstances had permitted the absolute separation of Church and State in England, we may believe that Milton would have steadfastly argued in its favor. But even Cromwell could not accept the principle of



universal toleration—popery at least must be suppressed. And Milton seems to have yielded to the inevitable. After the Restoration, disestablishment seemed to him only a dream. The final doctrine of the pamphlets published in his lifetime is simply this: Since not reason or the church, but the Scripture, is the one and only authority and standard, there must be “*no* liberty of conscience *until* and *without* acceptance of the Scriptures, but *after* and *with* that acceptance, *all* liberty.” But in his “Treatise of Christian Doctrine,” he comes squarely to the ground of Roger Williams, and opposes interference of the State or civil magistrate in any way in matters of religious belief.

Travelers in Italy tell us that even educated Italians refer to the Bible ideas and expressions which are found only in the “Divine Comedy.” The popular theology of the English-speaking race is, in a similar manner, to a considerable extent derived from “Paradise Lost.” Many notions with regard to the nature of angels and with regard to the temptation of man have come to us, not from Moses, but from Milton. It is well for us, therefore, carefully to estimate the claims of the Miltonic theology and its correspondence or non-correspondence with Scripture. We have called Milton the poet of the Protestant Reformation. Can we still subscribe to this dictum, when we find him, in his doctrinal treatise, declaring himself to be an Arminian, an Arian, a Monist, a Traducian, a Soul-sleeper, a Pre-millenarian, and, last of all, a Baptist?

We can answer this question only by asking another, and that is: What is the essence of Protestantism? We reply, Protestantism is the protest of mankind

against the substitution of the church in the place of Christ, and of the priest in the place of Scripture. Roman Catholicism had turned means into ends. George Herbert has stigmatized the error in his couplet :

What wretchedness can give him any room,  
Whose house is foul, while he adores his broom !

The Protestant Reformation, on the other hand, disposed all these intermediaries between the soul and God. It insisted that every man must have personal dealings with Christ. He is not to come to Christ through the church, but to come to the church through Christ. He is not to take his belief from the priest, but from the word of God. He is bound to read and to interpret the Scripture for himself, and he is personally responsible to God for the conclusions to which he comes.

This is Protestantism ; this is Puritanism ; and Milton is a Puritan of the Puritans. He will put his conscience into no ecclesiastical keeping, even though it may be the keeping of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. So he thinks for himself and writes for himself. While he believes all men to be sinners, and salvation to be only through Christ, he shows how flexible and daring the intellectual spirit of Puritanism may be. It is not so much the old orthodoxy, as the new theology, that appears in him. He is the poet of Protestantism, by illustrating its large range of freedom, and by turning its rugged doctrine into song.

How much the politics and religion of the Commonwealth owe to Milton may be judged by the utter contempt into which they fell for a hundred and fifty years.

The Long Parliament voted themselves out of office when they determined that none of their number should be members and soldiers at the same time—the Restoration wits stigmatized them as “self-denying devils.” Cromwell said to the artist, “Paint me just as I am—wrinkles and all!”—the Cavaliers called him “Noll Maggot-face.” When that “steel-clad theorist” found that his first levies were eager for prayer meetings and holdings-forth at every halt, he said, “I have a lovely company!” and prophesied that they would hold their own against the gentlemen of the king—but in the next generation all this religious zeal became an object of ridicule. Lofty patriotism gave place to swinish self-indulgence. Milton suffered obloquy with his party. Dr. George H. Clark, the biographer of Oliver Cromwell, tells us that “in the year 1710 an engraver was at work in Westminster Abbey upon a Latin inscription to the memory of the poet, John Phillips. He came to the words: *Uni Miltono Secundus*—‘Next to Milton.’ The Dean of the Abbey stopped the engraver; that hallowed building must not be desecrated even by the name of Milton on another man’s monument. John Phillips, with his poetry, must go down to posterity without it.”

Only during the last fifty years has the world begun to do justice either to the Puritans or to Milton. We cannot understand the one without understanding the other. It is only Milton who shows that the iron faith of the Puritans was compatible with the highest art. His gorgeous verse has glorified the time in which he lived and the doctrine for which he contended. His prose is a defense of the great Protector more telling

than the "Memoirs of Carlyle." His poetry, the real product of that stalwart age of faith and freedom, does more to prove the idealizing and creative power of true religion than Macaulay's eulogy of the Puritans. The age of the Commonwealth would seem hard and coarse and unrespectable without him. Since Roman Catholicism has Dante for its poetical representative and expositor, it is well for us, and for the cause of truth and righteousness, that we have in Milton the poet of the Protestant Reformation.

Many years ago, on a summer evening, I wandered through the ruins of Ludlow Castle, in the West of England, where in 1634 the great Earl of Bridgewater, Lord President of Wales, celebrated his entrance into office. The castle has its own wall separate from the wall of Ludlow town, from which town the visitor passes to the castle over moat and drawbridge. The immense thickness of the walls, and the strength of the position on a rocky promontory at the confluence of two beautiful streams, were enough of themselves to attract interest. But the goal to which every foot now tends is the great banquet-hall, now dismantled, where, as a part of the pomp and pageantry of the earl's inauguration, Milton's Masque, entitled "Comus," was first represented.

I could imagine the end of the hall turned into a stage; a mimic forest; the young daughter of the house playing the part of the lady, lost in the thickets of the wood; the necromancer and his rout of monsters with heads of beasts and bodies of men; the "barbarous dissonance of Bacchus and his revelers"; the temptation of innocence; the invocation of help; the triumph of

virtue. When that Masque was first acted, Milton was a youth unknown, and the castle honored him. Two hundred and fifty years have passed since then, and now it is Milton who gives to Ludlow Castle all its honor. To the pure ambition which that early poem breathed, the poet was true through all his life, and, in spite of French critics, who make a mock at sin and cannot understand how art and faith can ever dwell together, the words of the Attendant Spirit in "Comus" still express, to those who have ears to hear, the mission of his poetry :

Before the starry threshold of Jove's court  
 My mansion is, where those immortal shapes  
 Of bright aërial spirits live inspher'd  
 In regions mild of calm and serene air,  
 Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot  
 Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care,  
 Confin'd and pester'd in this pifold here  
 Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,  
 Unmindful of the crown that virtue gives,  
 After this mortal change, to her true servants,  
 Amongst the enthroned gods on sainted seats ;  
 Yet some there be, that by due steps aspire  
 To lay their just hands on that golden key  
 That opes the palace of eternity :  
 To such my errand is.



GOETHE





# GOETHE

## THE POET OF PANTHEISM

Who is the greatest German? There are two, and only two, who can compete for the honor—Luther and Goethe. In native genius as well as in influence upon the national life we can find points of similarity between them. Both were richly endowed with vigor and emotion; both shaped the faith and the literature of Germany.

But their nature and work were more unlike than like each other. Luther's moral and religious instincts mastered him; he freed his people from the tyranny of ecclesiasticism, and led them back to Scripture and to God. Goethe was a man without conscience; he was the instrument of a merely literary emancipation, while he re-established, so far as he could, the reign of pagan self-dependence and of moral indifference.

Luther's whole being was pervaded with faith in a personal and living God, and his songs were half-battles for truth and righteousness. Goethe believed only in a God who was identical with nature; who consecrated the lower impulses of man as well as the higher; who could be approached without confession or repentance of sin; and his writings effected only an æsthetic, never an ethical, reformation. So long, then, as we judge greatness by moral and spiritual standards, we must

regard Luther, and not Goethe, as the greatest of the Germans. And yet, since he is the type of a remarkable literary development, Goethe is worthy of profound study. He has been called the supreme literary artist. I propose to speak of him as the poet of pantheism.

“Wilt thou the poet understand? Dwell thou in the poet’s land!” No one can comprehend Goethe without knowing something of Germany and its previous literary history, of Frankfort, where the poet was born, and of Weimar, the scene of his greatest productive activity. Until Goethe appeared, Germany could hardly be said to have had a literature of its own. Frederick the Great, while he made Prussia independent in politics, had enslaved his country to French standards of composition. The traditions of the French Academy, with its dramatic unities and its magniloquent proprieties, had exerted a benumbing influence upon German authors, until freedom and life had almost departed. Pride in their own rich and sonorous language gave place to contempt. Their national history seemed hardly worth the chronicling. The land of the *Nibelungenlied*, the land of the Reformers, seemed to furnish no subjects for poetry or for art. German writers set themselves to copying the classics, or rather to copying French copies of the classics.

But a new breath of life was stirring. A spirit of revolt was in the air. Rousseau and the French Revolution began to have their analogues, if not their effects, in Germany. Shakespeare was read, and brought his readers back to nature. Herder and Lessing and Klopstock showed independent powers of criticism and creation. But it was chiefly Goethe who, like

a literary Moses, led his people out from bondage into liberty. It was his masterful originality that first convinced his countrymen that there could be a native growth of German literature, and that they need no longer be in subjection to foreign powers.

Frankfort was a fit city from which the movement might begin. It was not only a free city of the Holy Roman Empire, but it was the city where for centuries the emperors had been crowned. Its annual fair brought together the fabrics of the East and the West, and gave a sort of cosmopolitan atmosphere to the place. The burgher class was wealthy and enterprising, per-vious to modern ideas, while at the same time proud of the mediæval traditions of the town. From this burgher class Goethe sprang. His father was a re-tired government official, with the title of Counsellor. He was a man of education, and he had traveled in Italy. Methodical in his habits, and with little of business to occupy him, he devoted himself mainly to the training of his wife, and his two children, John and Cornelia.

His wife, a bright, airy, pleasure-loving creature of seventeen, found, when she married the wise Counsellor of thirty-eight, that she had put herself under severe discipline. She had to spend most of the honeymoon in learning the piano, and in writing out Italian ex-ercises. She conceived an unwholesome fear of her husband, and she encouraged her children in all sorts of deceptions in order to escape from the rigid rule and scrutiny of their father. She declared that she had no gift for bringing up a family. She coaxed her offspring to be good, and whipped them if they

cried, without inquiry into the causes either of their goodness or of their grief. In short, she was a child with them.

Her one strong point was her endless story-telling. The evenings were beguiled with all manner of extempore dramas and fairy tales. The tales were continuous, like those of Queen Scheherezade. When the interest was at its height and the hero or the villain was at the crisis of his fate, the story was suspended for twenty-four hours and young Goethe and his sister were put to bed. His imagination, however, could not rest, and before he went to sleep he had devised an exit from the dramatic difficulty. Next morning he confided his invention to his grandmother. She was in collusion with the mother, and when evening came again Goethe would be delighted to find that the story came out just as he had expected. So the child lived in a world of poetry and romance, wonderfully adapted to stimulate his gifts to precocious development.

The elements derived from father and from mother were each in their way admirable, yet each had its drawbacks and limitations. The father furnished to the son a love of order, a persistent industry, an omnivorous appetite for knowledge. Yet with this there was a calm and severe self-dependence, and a disregard of the feelings of others when they crossed the plans of the party of the first part. The boy was held to work by the father, as few boys have been. In his eighth year he wrote Latin with ease, and had made considerable progress in Greek and in French. But the mother furnished the *bonhommie*, the fresh insight into nature, the charm of fancy, the warmth of feeling, the impulse to

expression, which made common things glow with life and clamor to be described.

But with these gifts of imagination and of utterance, there were great deficiencies. There was no reverence and no conscience. The moral idea was almost wholly lacking in Goethe's mother. She hated pain, and she taught the forgetting of sin instead of repentance for it. An emotional religion she had, but no prostration of the sinful soul before the holiness of God. There was an easy-going confidence in the future that at times amounted to flippancy and even sacrilege. On her deathbed she was particularly anxious that the raisins should not be skimmed in the cake for the funeral, and she replied to an invitation, that Frau Goethe was sorry to be compelled to decline it, for the reason that just at that time she was engaged in dying.

Goethe himself has described what he supposed to be his inheritance from his parents, in the well-known lines :

My goodly frame and earnest soul  
I from my sire inherit ;  
My happy heart and glib discourse  
Were my brave mother's merit.

That goodly frame was indeed goodly. Though not great in stature, the poet was in point of physical beauty one of the noblest men that the world has ever seen. Jung Stilling speaks of his broad brow, his flashing eye, and his mastery of every company of which he formed a part. When he was young, he never entered a place of public entertainment or passed through a crowded street without finding that all eyes turned toward him and followed him with a sort of fascination. "*Voilà*

*un homme !*" said Napoleon, when Goethe retired from his interview with the emperor at Weimar.

A certain majesty of mien was natural to him, a calm, self-contained air, which is described as Olympian, and which gave the impression of inexhaustible resources combined with just consciousness of power. He said of himself that he had an innate aristocracy which made him feel on a level with princes. When the duke made him Privy Councillor and confidential adviser, it took but a little time for the newly elevated burgher to subdue all murmurs of the ancient nobility, and to convince them that in serene dignity he surpassed them all. This dignity was not vanity, for Goethe was influenced very little by mere desire for admiration. It was rather a lofty pride, a sense of greatness, an insight into human nature, and a consciousness of larger knowledge and ability than other men possessed. And it does not appear that either in childhood, youth, or manhood, this proud and self-conscious spirit ever learned humility, or was taught to depend either upon man or God.

It was perhaps natural that such a man should have but few male friends. Men of independence were obliged to resign their independence or conceive aversion toward a being so superior. But women were ordinarily enthralled. He came, he saw, he conquered, because his whole bearing seemed to say that he knew their hearts, and that he had a breadth and sympathy of nature which they could completely rest upon. And this was partly true. His greatest gift was the gift of a quick sensibility for all common things. The little things of nature and of life stirred depths of feeling in him. It was not love, it was not reverence ; it was sim-

ple emotion. But women thought it was love, and they poured out their love upon him. He seemed to them the greatest star they had ever descried in the human firmament, and in some respects he was. But he? Ah, there was no star for him but that same Goethe-star—the star of self.

It is said that he had the perpetual habit of falling in love, and the list of his lady-loves is very long. Sixteen of these have been catalogued and minutely described. Eight of them are scientifically classified as A1, hotly and passionately loved. Five are enumerated as A2, to whom he was very intimately attached. Then follow a great number B1 and B2, to whom he gave a more transient adoration. One might say of them as Sainte Beuve said of Chateaubriand's attachments: "'T is like the stars in the sky; the more you look at them, the more you discover.'" Professor Blackie has gone so far as to say that this talent for falling in love was an essential part of Goethe's genius, that it was inseparable from his insight into character and life, and that it is to be commended rather than to be condemned.

I venture to say that Goethe was incapable of any true love, and that all these passions were mere means of self-gratification and self-glorification. There was unquestionably an easy flow of sentiment which simulated love. But if love is self-devotion and self-impartation, Goethe knew nothing of this sacred and divine emotion. Up to a certain point his nature was stirred, but when he found that the object of his regard desired an exclusive and eternal affection, he drew back. It has been well said that the conception of living for another probably never occurred to him. The bright

and cheerful mother to whom he owed so much was visited in Frankfort, because Goethe was her son, by every distinguished stranger who passed through the town ; but the son visited her very rarely, and, during the last eleven years of her old age, he visited her not at all. His vacations were spent in other places than Frankfort, though Frankfort was not a hundred miles from Weimar. Nor are his few letters to her distinguished by any special love or gratitude.

His affair of the heart with Friederike Brion, the pastor's daughter at Sesenheim, near Strasburg, was one in which it is difficult to acquit Goethe from the charge of treachery. The sweet young girl gave herself to him ; the parents regarded the pair as virtually betrothed ; but he left her, without explanations, to wait and pine in vain. It is said that he suffered for years from self-reproach, but no sign of this appears in his account of the matter. What was a small thing to him was a great thing to her. She refused excellent offers of marriage, saying that to have loved a Goethe was enough for one life. She fell into a consumption and died, still loving her early but inconstant admirer.

It would have been far better for Goethe's soul, and far better for his genius, if he had married Friederike. It would have saved him from a long series of illicit connections which did much to benumb his moral sense, cut the wings of his imagination and limit his outlook to merely earthly and temporal things. It would have prevented the composition of those Roman Elegies, which sing the praises of unhallowed love ; it would have made impossible the eighteen hundred love letters to Frau von Stein ; and still more impossible the seven-



teen years of concubinage with Christiane Vulpius, whom he afterward took to be his wife. But the radical defect in Goethe's character was that which constitutes the essence of sin everywhere, namely, the overweening love of self. He looked upon others as mere instruments, to be used for purposes of self-advancement, and to be thrown aside so soon as he had exhausted their power to be of use to him.

This is the secret of all his so-called love affairs. Under the portrait of the Frau von Stein, when he first saw it, he wrote: "What a glorious poem it would be to see how the world mirrors itself in this soul!" He regarded women as furnishing mere studies of human nature. He played upon their affections, as upon harp strings, until he had possessed himself of every melody of which they were capable. He felt more or less, indeed, but then he was always master of his feeling; he never by any accident permitted it to master him.

Bettine von Arnim said to Lord Houghton that Goethe treated women as, in his childhood, he treated flowers and birds: pulling off the leaves to see how the petals were joined to the calyx, or plucking birds to observe how the feathers were inserted into the wings. He subjected each woman who loved him to a process of spiritual vivisection, in order that he might obtain literary material. In the case of Kestner and his wife, he repaid the unmeasured adoration which the innocent pair bestowed upon him, by misrepresenting his relations to them in his "Sorrows of Werther," by staining the reputation of Kestner's wife, and finally by berating Kestner himself for the indignation he felt at the attack upon her honor.

Treachery in the case of Friederike, and ingratitude in the case of Lotta, were matched by Goethe's indifference to the cause of his country at the crisis of her fate. Napoleon had invaded Germany, and every patriotic German was eager to drive out the invader. The emperor, with his usual desire to lead men of thought captive in his train, invited the poet of Weimar to an audience. Goethe accepted the advances of his country's enemy, and flattered the conqueror. The poet's defenders are accustomed to argue that his greatness made him cosmopolitan; it was not the invader whom he flattered, but the man of might; breadth of intellect, we are told, renders patriotism impossible. This is true only if greatness absolves a man from all moral relations. And this was the view of Goethe. Evil and good were alike to be studied and admired. To know the world and to reproduce it in literature, this was his mission. And, to do this efficiently, he must be thoroughly master of himself, and must reach the utmost pitch of self-culture and self-development.

There was an element of personal character here, and there was an element of philosophic theory. I believe that the character shaped the philosophy first of all, and that then the philosophy in turn reacted upon the character. Let me, therefore, call attention primarily to the moral attitude of Goethe in his early life. A wonderfully gifted child, an object of the father's pride and the mother's indulgence, he early contracted a self-confidence that was phenomenal. Nothing seems ever to have disturbed it.

The only possible exception was in his boyhood, when his schoolfellows and himself wrote competitive verses.

He noticed that they thought just as well of their productions as he thought of his, and for a moment the question occurred to him whether his own estimate of his work might not be a self-deception, as he felt assured theirs was. But these doubts of himself soon vanished, and they appear never to have returned. He was the most imperturbable believer in himself that ever attained literary fame. By virtue of his powers, he regarded himself as pledged to make the most of himself. The object was, not to serve God or man, but simply to gather in to himself whatever of knowledge or of power the world could give, and then to express himself in literature.

This was not merely a spontaneous and constitutional tendency—it was the deliberate decision and purpose of his life. In a youthful letter to Lavater he writes: “The desire to raise the pyramid of my existence, the base of which is already laid, as high as possible into the air, absorbs every other desire, and scarcely ever leaves me.” And he held on in this course to the end. In *Faust*, published only in his later life, one of the most admired verses has been thus translated by Carlyle:

Like as a star,  
That maketh not haste,  
That taketh not rest,  
Be each one fulfilling  
His God-given hest.

But Boyeson points out that in the original there is no mention of God or of a “God-given hest.” The proper translation is: “Be each revolving about his own weight”—that is, about the center of his own personal-

ity. Goethe's life was a self-centered life, and that, not from instinct but by choice.

It cannot be said that this choice was the choice of short-sightedness or of invincible ignorance. At least once in his life he came in contact with a person whose character and aims were formed upon a totally different model. This was Fräulein von Klettenberg, a lady much older than Goethe, and suffering from an incurable disorder. Her patience and resignation attracted the young man's attention, and she had opportunity to tell him the story of a profound and unmistakable Christian experience. An illness of his own at this time made him more nearly conscious of weakness than he appears ever to have been before or after. The Moravian type of religion which his pious friend, like an older sister, sought to commend to him, made a deep impression, though a temporary one.

It is characteristic of Goethe that this whole story of a life in God, a life of communion with Christ and of constant charity to man, is reproduced in "Wilhelm Meister." But it is found there in strange companionship. It is side by side with Wilhelm's experiences behind the scenes of the theatre and with strolling play-actors, that we find these "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul," as illustrations of certain facts of the universe that must be studied by a truly educated man. As we read the account of this spiritual and holy life, it seems as if no one but a Christian could ever have written it. But like the sermon of Dinah, in George Eliot's "Adam Bede," this episode in "Wilhelm Meister" passes by. It has shown the author's wonderful ability to enter into phases of human life other than his own. It is the

purely artistic delineation of a character with which he had no inner sympathy. It is a work of the imagination and not of the heart—a mere *chef-d'œuvre* of dramatic representation. This touching story of a life devoted to God is followed by other experiences, frivolous or commonplace. The greatest altitude reached is that of labor for labor's sake. No unselfish heart-throbs of Goethe are recorded. On the whole, "Wilhelm Meister" is only what Niebuhr called it, "A menagerie of tame creatures."

Yet the rejection of the true ideal and the clinging to the false cost Goethe a struggle; it seems indeed to have been the turning-point of his moral life. The only letter we possess from Goethe to Fräulein von Klettenberg was written just before his twenty-first birthday, and was apparently an answer to her earnest entreaties that he would devote his life to God. It seems to be his half-earnest, half-ironical effort to excuse himself from duty. He says:

I have been to-day to the Holy Communion, to keep in mind the passion and death of our Lord; and you can guess why I am amusing myself this afternoon, and at last intending in earnest to write a letter so long delayed. . . My connection with the religious people here is not exactly firm: at the beginning I had turned myself very persistently toward them, but it seems as if it could not be. They are so mortally prosy, when they begin, that my liveliness could not endure it. . . People of moderate intellect think religion is everything, because they know nothing else. . . Another acquaintance, exactly the opposite, has been of no little use to me. . . Herr —, with the cool-bloodedness with which he has always regarded the world, thinks he has found out that we are set in this world especially to be useful to it, that we are able to make ourselves capable of this, whereto religion affords some aid, and that the most useful man is the best.

Goethe did reach this conviction, and he has made his Faust find happiness and heaven only when he uses his powers for the benefit of others. But the development of self must come first, and this self-development is to be carried on in man's own strength. Prometheus is the picture of Goethe's ideal of life. He is an artistic creator, who works for the interests of men, but he looks to heaven for nothing, and relies wholly upon his own power. From the summer of 1772, Goethe no longer went to church and seldom prayed.

It is instructive to observe that this putting away from him of the distinctly religious ideal, and the substitution for it of the gospel of self-culture, preceded by only a single month Goethe's acquaintance with Friederike at Sesenheim. It was because he feared she would hinder his mental growth that he left her to fade and die. He had no sense of duty to a personal God, to hold him true to any human friend. I am convinced that the refusal to yield his will to God's claims upon him explains not only his treachery in this love affair, but the tone of moral indifference that afterward distinguished his life. Theoretically there was before him the service of humanity. But practically, self-development and self-gratification, chosen first as means, became in themselves the end. Conscience, not listened to, became benumbed. Pleasure assumed an importance and asserted a claim to which it had no right.

"Extreme strictness," he said, "tends to make a man melancholy." The self-denial and self-sacrifice which Christianity accounts to be virtues, Goethe came to regard as vices. This is evident from the "*Generalbeichte*," or "Form of Confession," in which he makes his followers

repent of the sin of having let slip an opportunity of enjoyment, and solemnly resolve never to be guilty of such sin in future. They vow to "wean themselves from half-measures, and live resolutely in the whole, in the good, and in the beautiful." If this were simply, as Professor Seeley claims, a resolve to abstain from useless self-denial, it would be only the common Protestant revolt from monasticism, and there would be in it nothing reprehensible. But it was more than that. It was a determination to open all the avenues of the nature to enjoyment, without regard to the restraints of social tradition or positive law.

He would develop all sides of his nature, gain all sorts of experience, taste all the pleasures that life could give. It was a pagan culture which he set himself to attain. He was "the great heathen" of modern times, and he was not ashamed to be known as such. He hid his face from the pain and suffering of the world, as the old Greeks did. The Cross of Christ, with its vicarious love and sorrow, was repulsive to him, for it was a contrast and rebuke to his self-indulgent, self-seeking, self-exalting spirit. Goethe had in his heart turned away from the true God—the personal God, the God of holiness, the God who imposes moral law, the God who offers pardon through Christ—and he had put in his place a God of his own wishes and imagination, a nature-God, a God without personality or moral character, a God to whom evil and good are both alike, because both alike proceed from him, a God who is best served, not by self-restraint and self-sacrifice, but by the unhindered development of all our inborn instincts and powers.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once lectured to the Woman's

Fortnightly Club, of Chicago. Its president said to him: "I regret that you were not here last week, Mr. Emerson. We were discussing Goethe's 'Elective Affinities,' and we should have been happy to learn your views of the work." Emerson bowed, but maintained a gracious silence. His interlocutor was not content, but persisted: "What would you have said to us about it?" "Madam," he replied, "I have never felt that I had attained to the purity of mind that qualified me to read that book." The "Elective Affinities," a work not of Goethe's youth but of his mature life, was only the frank expression of his loose conceptions of the marriage relation. A thin veil of sentiment partly hides and partly idealizes illicit passion. The sentiment is mawkish, and the evil intent is plain. There was in the man a settled love of the impure. He was "the great heathen," in spite of all the light of the Christian dispensation that shone around him.

Goethe's history shows that he loved darkness rather than light, because his deeds were evil. It was his heteropraxy that led to his heterodoxy. To one who had made an essentially immoral decision, it was a great satisfaction to find what seemed to be a rational justification of his position. And this he did find in the philosophy of Spinoza. I do not mean that Goethe was a metaphysician or a lover of metaphysics. With his inborn love for clearness and for facts he even derided the philosophic schools of his day. He explains his own greatness by his avoidance of such speculation:

*Mein Kind, ich habe's klug gemacht;  
Ich habe nie über's Denken gedacht.*



“My wisdom has been, never to think about thinking.”

If he had thought more about thinking, he might possibly have scrutinized more sharply the system which he accepted, might have perceived its incongruity with the facts of human life, might have seen its utter inability to explain such things as sin and guilt, remorse and retribution. But Goethe did not accept the views of Spinoza upon rational grounds; he accepted them rather because they fitted in with a previous moral decision of his own. He has himself well said, “As are the inclinations, so are the opinions.” And Fichte, whom he ridiculed, uttered the same truth in the aphorism, “Men do not will according to their reason, but reason according to their will.”

He read Spinoza in 1774, when he was twenty-five years of age. “I well remember,” he writes, “what peace and serenity came over me when I first glanced over the surviving works of that remarkable man. This sensation was still quite distinct to me, though I could not have recalled any particular point. But I hastened forthwith to the works to which I was so much indebted, and the same sense of peace took possession of me. I gave myself up to reading them, and thought when I scrutinized myself that the world had never looked so clear.”

Far be it from me to deny that in the works of Spinoza there is this charm for the mere intellect. His system is a system of Monism. There is but one Substance, one aspect of which is extension, and the other aspect is thought. All the events of the universe follow from the nature of this one Substance, as the nature of

the diameter follows from the nature of the circle. There is no freedom, no purpose, no morality. It is a sort of Monism, but it is not an Ethical Monism. "The great systematic work of Spinoza," says Hodge, "is entitled 'Ethica'; but for real ethics we might as well consult the 'Elements' of Euclid." And though this one Substance is called God, it might far better be called the Universe.

Hegel was right when he declared the superiority of his system to Spinozism to lie in his substitution of 'Subject' for 'Substance.' "The true Absolute," says Seth, "must contain, instead of abolishing, relations; the true Monism must include, instead of excluding, Pluralism." And this true Absolute, I may add, is a Personal Intelligence and Will, not bound to the Universe by necessity, but freely originating the Universe, and expressing in his relations to free moral beings not only his wisdom and power, but also his holiness and love.

Such a God as this Spinoza knew nothing of, and Goethe knew the true God quite as little as Spinoza. Hutton tells us that Goethe combined the pantheistic view of God with the personal view of man. But I think it is clear that whatever personality is left to man becomes distinctly unmoral. If there is no freedom in God, there can be none in man, and a personality without freedom is entirely illusory. Man is only a part of the all-embracing Spirit of the Universe, a Universe eternally changing indeed, but changing according to unchangeable laws. No attributes can be ascribed to God—in fact, we can have no definite thought of him. No special revelation can come from him. He is deaf

to our entreaties. He speaks only in us. It is impossible to make God an object of love, for love goes out only toward persons. Or, if we say that love to God becomes love for Nature, this means no more than that we love the highest expression of God, namely ourselves. All tends to the exaltation of self and the weakening of the sense of obligation. God is within, not without. There, in the desires and aspirations of the individual soul, is to be found the only standard of morality.

As Goethe had no definite thought of God, so he had no definite expectation of immortality—at least it was no present aid to him. “Such incomprehensible subjects lie too far off,” he said, “and only disturb our thoughts if made the theme of daily meditation. An able man who has something to do here, and must toil and strive day by day to accomplish it, leaves the future world till it comes, and contents himself with being active and useful in this.” And Faust’s words only express the poet’s own view :

The sphere of earth is known enough to me,  
 The view above is barred immutably.  
 A fool who there his blinking eyes directeth  
 And o’er the clouds of earth a place expecteth,  
 Firm let him stand and look around him well !  
 This world means something to the capable ;  
 Why needs he through eternity to wend ?  
 Here he acquires what he can comprehend.

Which simply means : Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. There is no eye to pity, and no arm to save.

It is a proof of the blinding influence of sin, that

Goethe maintained this plan of life to be unselfish. Because he surrendered himself to self, to toil and learn, to enjoy and to describe, he conceived himself as subject to the invisible Spirit of the Universe, and as working for humanity. But the real nature of that invisible Spirit he persistently ignored; the moral law which expresses his nature he put beneath his feet; the revelation of his will in Christ and in Scripture he contemned. He describes his religion as one of self-confidence, attention to the present, admiration of gods only as works of art, submission to irresistible fate, future hope confined to this world, the preciousness of post-humous fame. This he considered to be the religion of health and joy, religion not of the word, but of the deed—the acting out of man's nature.

It was, alas, only a maimed and stunted nature which Goethe had in mind—a nature in which both the ethical and spiritual elements were wholly lacking. And yet there were grains of truth even in this pantheistic view which gave it a hold both upon the poet himself and upon his readers. The immanence of God was a great truth, exaggerated and perverted though it was by being held in isolation and unqualified by the complementary truth of the divine transcendence. Even the Christian can see the sublimity of the words:

*Was wär' ein Gott der nur von aussen stiesse,  
Im Kreis' das All am Finger laufen liesse?  
Ihm ziemt die Welt im Innern zu bewegen,  
Sich in Natur, Natur in sich, zu hegen,  
So dass, was in Ihm lebt und webt und ist,  
Nie seine Kraft, nie seinen Geist, vermisst.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>“Sprüche in Reimen: Gott, Gemüth, und Welt.”

What God would *outwardly* alone control,  
And on his finger whirl, the mighty Whole?  
He loves the *inner* world to move; to view  
Nature in him, himself in Nature too;  
So that what in him works, and is, and lives,  
The measure of his strength, his spirit, gives.<sup>1</sup>

As Goethe was a monist, so he was an evolutionist. He believed that man is an outgrowth of the animal creation, even as animals have come from plants. There is a blood relationship, he thought, between all organic beings. The oneness of things deeply impressed him. In his conception of the leaf as the typical form of the plant, and of all other organs as modifications of the leaf, he made one of those sage guesses into the meaning of nature, which are possible only to a genius. Nor were his utterances mere guesses. They were insights into truth, based upon large knowledge of facts. It was the intermaxillary bone, that taught him the kinship of man to the lower forms of life. But it was just in proportion as he turned his thoughts away from the higher ranges of human life and experience, that he seemed to utter truth.

To the facts of the ethical world he became increasingly insensitive. He lost even the moral predilections of his early days, and became a cold and calculating egoist. His aim was to throw off every yoke and to be arbiter of his own destiny. His old age was that of a self-absorbed and fastidious Lothario, who sought continually, but sought in vain, to renew the raptures of his passionate youth. Since all men are victims of circumstance, and great men are great only because a certain

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<sup>1</sup> "Proverbs in Rhyme: God, Soul, and World."

demonic influence spurs them on, he never repented of sin—indeed, sin for him was simply the mistake of ignorance, the stumbling of the child who thereby learns to walk.

*Nichts taugt Ungeduld,  
Noch weniger Reue;  
Jene vermehrt die Schuld  
Diese schafft neue.*

“Impatience avails nothing, and still less contrition; the former only increases our guilt, while the latter makes us guilty anew.”

Here was a soul that felt itself great enough to treat sin and guilt and pain and death as non-existent, or at least as matters with which it had no concern. Lessing said that the character of the Germans was to have no character. If this is true, it is certain that Goethe was the typical German. But I do not hold it to be true. Tennyson was right in his “Palace of Art” in making Goethe the type, not of German character, but of that irresponsible and godless spirit which cultivates art wholly for art’s sake :

I take possession of men’s minds and deeds ;  
I live in all things great and small ;  
I sit apart, holding no forms of creeds,  
But contemplating all.

Let us examine the effect of this pantheistic philosophy upon Goethe’s personal life, and then upon his literary productions. He went to Weimar at the invitation of the duke. He was already a famous man. He was made an important officer of the court, and he became the duke’s most intimate friend. The duke

himself was noted for his loose talk and for his still looser morals. Society in his capital is described as only "imperfectly monogamous." Schiller, in disgust, declared of the women of the court, "There is not one of them who has not had a *liaison*." Goethe not only did not set himself to better the morals of Weimar, but he fell in with the tide. He was the boon-companion of his sovereign in dances and drinking bouts, and, though his elder by seven years, was his aider and abettor in the maddest of pranks. "All reserve was laid aside between them from the first," says his biographer. "They spent days and nights in each other's society; they hunted, drank, and gambled together. On one occasion they were seen cracking sledge-whips in the market-place of Jena for a wager. At night they finished up with carousals, in which wine was drunk from human skulls."

Goethe was fresh from an engagement of marriage with a banker's daughter of Frankfort—an engagement which the lady had herself broken off on account of Goethe's vacillation and inconstancy. It was not long before he formed his celebrated connection with Frau von Stein, the wife of the Master of the Horse, six years Goethe's elder, and the mother of seven children. This connection lasted for twelve years. Goethe wrote a letter to her nearly every day. She visited with him and traveled with him. No term of endearment which the German language possesses, from "darling" to "dearest angel," is spared in these multitudinous epistles. The Frau von Stein was not handsome, but she was a woman of birth and dignity, combined with a vivacity, tact, and subtle charm of manner, such as

Goethe up to this time had been a stranger to. For the first time he met a woman who was his equal. He declares that her influence upon his literary work was next to that of Shakespeare. There are those who regard the poet's relations to his friend as purely Platonic. We have only his letters to her, not her letters to him. When he took Christiane Vulpius to his house without marrying her, the Frau von Stein rebelled, either at the rivalry or the wrong, recalled the letters she had sent, and so the close friendship between them came to an end. But it had illustrated Goethe's new version of the commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor and thy neighbor's wife."

But before this break-up of intimacy, there came the visit of Goethe to Italy. He regarded the year there spent as the turning-point of his life. He had become wearied of official duties at Weimar, which absorbed his strength, and he longed for freedom to devote himself exclusively to literature. Strange to say, he regarded the traditions and proprieties of Weimar as fettering his development, and he sought in Italy to live a life modeled after pagan art and pagan morals. His ethical sense was so blunted that he could not understand Frau von Stein's objections to the illicit connections which he formed in Venice and in Rome, and which in his letters he frankly avowed to her. In Italy he determined to live in the senses as well as in the intellect, and when he returned to Weimar his connection with Christiane began. What shall we say of a man who, after he has done a young girl the greatest wrong, can yet write to his best woman friend: "What kind of a relation is it? Who is defrauded by it? Who lays claim to the



sentiments which I give to the poor creature, and who to the hours I spend with her?"

It does not seem to have occurred to him that he owed something to the poor creature he was injuring. As a matter of fact, the humiliating position in which she was put, as his housekeeper but not his wife, led her to intemperance. Slighted by the very friends whom Goethe most honored and loved—he himself permitting the slight—she became so addicted to drink as to make him miserable, even though he made her the slight reparation of marrying her after seventeen years of concubinage. Goethe's two sons inherited the passion for drink from the mother, and the eldest, his idol, died in Rome as the result of a drunken debauch. The family became extinct in the very next generation, and so the sins of the father were visited upon his children.

How shall I picture Goethe's old age? One by one death took from him the friends of earlier days. Schiller, with whom he had come to have the most sincere and honorable literary friendship, and who had called him, as he said, out of the charnel-house of science back into the fair garden of life, died in 1805. "Goethe himself was ill at the time, and those who were about him refrained from telling him the news. Meyer, the artist, his intimate friend, who was with him, left the house lest his grief might escape him. Goethe divined something of the fact, and said, at last, 'I see Schiller must be very ill.'" Says Lord Lytton, in his "Life of Schiller": "That night they overheard Goethe—the serene man, who seemed almost above human affection, who disdained to reveal to others whatever grief he felt

when his son died—they overheard Goethe weep! In the morning he said to a friend, ‘Is it not true that Schiller was very ill yesterday?’ The friend—it was a woman—sobbed. ‘He is dead,’ said Goethe faintly. ‘You have said it,’ was the answer. ‘He is dead!’ repeated Goethe, and covered his face with his hands.”

The Duchess Amalia died in 1807, his mother in 1808, his wife in 1816. When his wife was taken from him—the woman who with all her faults had pardoned the long contumely he had heaped upon her, had tenderly nursed him through successive illnesses, and who had clung to him to the end in spite of his repeated unfaithfulness—the outburst of his grief was terrible. He knelt, we are told, by her deathbed, and seizing her hands said, “Thou wilt not forsake me; thou must not forsake me!” The demigod after all was human, and was not sufficient to himself.

Whether as the result of these losses or of his own more mature reflection, there seems to have been in his last days a little quickening of his moral sense and of his desire for a life after death. He was inclined to believe in immortality, “because nature wastes no power.” When Wieland died, Goethe consoled himself by thinking that a man so industrious would never cease to act, somewhere and in some way. In 1819, in reply to a letter from Augusta von Stolberg, urging him to turn his mind to God, he wrote:

Let us go on, not caring too anxiously for the future. In our Father’s kingdom there are many provinces, and since he has given us here so fair a dwelling, he will doubtless take good care of us both in our future state of existence. There perhaps we shall understand each other better, and therefore shall love each other more.

To Zelter he wrote :

Let us continue our work till one of us, before or after the other, returns to ether at the summons of the World-Spirit. Then may the Eternal not refuse us new activities analogous to those wherein we have here been tested ! If he shall also add memory and a continued sense of the Right and the Good, in his fatherly kindness, we shall then surely all the sooner take hold of the wheels which drive the cosmic machinery—

or, as I suppose he means, enter upon the work of eternity. It is the principle of continuity to which he appeals, together with the idea that man is made for labor, for accomplishment. Here is teleology. To Goethe work and happiness were inseparable.

But he did not desire to work in solitude, either here or hereafter. Seven years after the death of his wife, and when Goethe was seventy-four years of age, he conceived a passion for a young Bohemian lady, and wished to marry her. She wisely thought the difference in their years to be too great, and he was saved from so hazardous a venture. Thackeray visited him in 1830, when Goethe was eighty-one, and found him still keen in intellect, and, though his hearing was defective, his eyesight was unimpaired. But at last the end came. In 1832, the old man of eighty-three was taken with a slight fever ; his mind began to wander ; his speech became incoherent ; he called for more light ; at last he settled himself in the corner of his armchair and fell into a gentle sleep. No one knew at what precise moment sleep became death.

So a pantheistic philosophy produced a life of ever-increasing isolation and hopelessness. The benumbing of his moral sense and the taking of law into his own

hands followed more and more upon his renunciation of a personal God. But I have still to examine the effects of this pantheistic philosophy upon Goethe's literary work. I must express my conviction that in this regard also the result was a narrowing of his range of vision, an impoverishment of his emotions, and a barring of the highest poetic achievement.

It is the judgment of all the competent critics, that the most vigorous delineation of noble character, and the most stirring dramatic work of Goethe's life, was the play that he first published, "Goetz von Berlichingen." In the figure of Goetz, the asserter of individual rights and the redresser of wrong, we have a heart-stirring picture of the glory and romance of feudal times. The drama pulsates with life from beginning to end. In it we have not only progressive action, but we have vivid contrast. Over against the generous daring of the hero, we have the vacillation and perfidy of Weislingen, and the Satanic arts of his temptress Adelaide. The pangs of remorse are here, and the deepest elements of tragedy. The love of liberty is appealed to so effectively that we wonder what would have happened if Goethe had used his powers to rouse his countrymen against the French invader, and then wonder again how the youthful patriotic impulse of the author could ever have been so lost. In Goetz, our poet most nearly forgets himself, throws his whole soul into his characters, shows us great principles and passions contending together in personal form on the field of action. He has recreated the Middle Ages, with their barbaric splendor and their wild independence. The first published work of Walter Scott was a translation of this

drama of Goethe, and many have thought that "Goetz von Berlichingen" first suggested to Sir Walter the possibilities of a literature of feudalism, and so the writing of the Waverley Novels.

"Goetz" is Shakespearean in its variety, movement, and life; indeed it was consciously the introduction into Germany of Shakespeare's method and spirit, and the result was a breaking away from French literary fetters, and the creation of a new German literature. But "Goetz" was written before Goethe had come under the spell of Spinoza, and had still some belief in freedom, accountability, and guilt. From this time on, his sense of individuality grew weaker. The person became of less account than the idea; action seemed less valuable than thought. In all Goethe's works we never have another whole-souled lover of his kind like Goetz; we never have another self-condemning and self-torturing villain like Weislingen. The moral element gradually evaporates; persons give place to abstractions; and abstractions finally become, as in the second part of "Faust," mere unintelligible symbols.

When Goethe broke away from God and from the moral law, he broke away from real life, and lost his power to depict reality. Not only did his patriotic sympathies give place to scorn for the aspirations of his country, but the highest sources of poetic inspiration were dried up. A long step away from truth was the publication of the "Sorrows of Werther." They are the sorrows of a young man who falls in love with the wife of another, and who kills himself because he cannot possess her. It is a long piece of sickly sentimentality, so feverish and so maudlin as utterly to disgust

the healthy-minded reader. What can be more ridiculous than the following :

We went to the window. It still thundered in the distance ; a soft rain was pouring down over the country and filled the air around us with delicious odors. Charlotte leaned forward upon her arm ; her eyes wandered over the scene ; she raised them to heaven, and then turned them upon me ; they were moistened with tears ; she placed her hand upon mine, and said, "Klopstock !" At once I remembered the magnificent ode which was in her thoughts ; I felt oppressed with the weight of my sensations, and sank under them. It was more than I could bear. I bent over her hand and kissed it in a stream of delicious tears. As I raised myself, I looked steadfastly in her face. Divine Klopstock ! why didst thou not see thy apotheosis in those eyes ? And thy name, so often profaned, why should I ever desire to hear it repeated ?

And yet the ravings of this young idiot were read in all classes of society, and were translated into many foreign languages. "Perhaps there never was a fiction," says Lewes, "which so startled and enraptured the world. Men of all kinds and classes were moved by it. It was the companion of Napoleon in Egypt ; it penetrated into China. To convey in a sentence its wonderful popularity, we may state that in Germany it became a people's book, printed on miserable paper, hawked about the streets like an ancient ballad, while, in the Chinese Empire, Charlotte and Werther were modeled in porcelain."

It was symptomatic of the time—a time of long-repressed and therefore overwrought individual feeling. Goethe, with all his disposition to renounce foreign models, had been reading Rousseau, and the vain and impious Frenchman had encouraged the impulse of

Goethe himself to open the floodgates of emotion, without regard to the restraints of reason or social order. And as "Goetz von Berlichingen" had prepared the way for Walter Scott and the literature of feudalism, so the "Sorrows of Werther" prepared the way for Lord Byron and the literature of romance. Byron regarded Goethe as the awakener of his genius, and "Childe Harold" is an English adaptation of Werther, as Manfred is an English adaptation of "Faust."

But thus far Goethe's work was of the Gothic type. With the higher social life of the court at Weimar, and especially with his journey to Italy, begins the second great period of his literary activity, when the Gothic gave place to the classical. Having infused life into German literature, he felt the need of giving it law and order, and all the more since his acknowledged position as the greatest German poet now gave him the right and the confidence, as he expressed it, to "command poetry." Poetry should be no less spontaneous, but its spontaneity should be in glad and natural subjection to the rules of right reason. These he found in classic lands and especially in Italy. To the south, with its sunny skies and its treasures of ancient art, he looked as to the poet's paradise. This is the meaning of his lovely song, "*Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen blühen?*"

Knowst thou the land where the fair citron blows,  
Where the bright orange midst the foliage glows,  
Where soft winds greet us from the azure skies,  
Where silent myrtles, stately laurels rise,  
Knowst thou it well? 'Tis there, 'tis there,  
That I, with thee, beloved one, would now repair!

It is not Christian Italy, with its sanctuaries and martyrs that he longed for, but pagan Italy rather, with its monuments of imperial greatness and its masterpieces of painting and sculpture. The cloudy skies of the North oppressed him; he sought light and freedom. It is too evident that moral and not simply artistic freedom was the goal he had in view. He scarcely ever visited the churches, and the history of the church he took little interest in. Dante he had no taste for; he thought the "Inferno" abominable, the "Purgatorio" dubious, and the "Paradiso" tiresome. It was the calm superiority of Greek art to conscience and to morals that constituted to him its attraction.

Beauty was the one expression of the Infinite in which he believed, and beauty he would worship even at the sacrifice of goodness and of truth. Yet he persuaded himself that this worship was normal and worthy. There was in it a grain of sense. Religion has too often ignored the beautiful. Truth has often failed of acceptance because the substance has been so belied by the form. Goethe wished to unite the two. And this is the meaning of the mystical marriage, in the second part of his great drama, between Faust and Helen of Greece. It is the marriage of substance and form, of truth and beauty, of Northern life and fire with Southern order and law.

The works of this period are in point of artistic finish and completeness the noblest of Goethe's life. The ordering of material, the exclusion of the irrelevant, the dignity of the thought, the melody of the phrase, show the hand of a master. "Tasso" and "Iphigenia" are sculpturally perfect. One might almost



think them written and acted in ancient Greece, so full are they of the spirit of classic poetry and art. While the play of feeling in them shows us that the motive and idea are modern, the form is statuesque and the effect is that of cold regularity. We long for greater warmth, even at the expense of beauty. With the pagan indifference to moral ideas, there is also a deadening of the emotions and a consequent weakening of interest. The operation of conscience is the very essence of tragedy. No other fear thrills the reader or spectator as does the fear of retribution. Pity and remorse and repentance touch deeper chords in the heart than do any representations of love or joy. But these deeper chords Goethe found it increasingly hard to reach.

The proud serenity of the man disdained itself to feel, and it could not make others feel, the real emotions that make human life solemn and momentous. More and more, as the mood of Goethe became that of the pagan gods, a mood of cheerful optimism and of moral indifference, his works became icily regular and faultily faultless, but the life had gone out of them. The wonderful song of the Fates in "Iphigenia," the translation of which I quote from Hutton, expresses his whole conception of deity and his whole philosophy of life :

Within my ear there rings that ancient song,—  
Forgotten was it and forgotten gladly,—  
Song of the Parcæ, which they shuddering sang  
When from his golden seat fell Tantalus.  
They suffered in his wrongs ; their bosom boiled  
Within them, and their song was terrible.  
To me and to my sister in our youth  
The nurse would sing it, and I marked it well.

- “The gods be your terror  
Ye children of men ;  
They hold the dominion  
In hands everlasting,  
All free to exert it  
As listeth their will.
- “Let him fear them doubly  
Whom e'er they've exalted !  
On crags and on cloud-piles  
The seats are made ready  
Around the gold tables.
- “Dissension arises :  
Then tumble the feasters  
Reviled and dishonored  
To gulfs of deep midnight ;  
And look ever vainly  
In fetters of darkness  
For judgment that's just.
- “But they remain seated  
At feasts never failing  
Around the gold tables.  
They stride at a footstep  
From mountain to mountain ;  
Through jaws of abysses  
Steams toward them the breathing  
Of suffocate Titans,  
Like offerings of incense  
A light-rising vapor.
- “They turn, the proud masters,  
From whole generations  
The eye of their blessing ;  
Nor will in the children  
The once well-beloved  
Still eloquent features  
Of ancestor see.”

So sang the dark sisters.  
The old exile heareth  
That terrible music  
In caverns of darkness,  
Remembereth his children  
And shaketh his head.

There had been a Shakespearean period in Goethe's work, a period of fresh original genius ; this had been followed by the classical period, in which form was the great aim of the poet ; there was still to come the Romantic period, in which he sought to combine the merits of the other two. "Faust" was the great work of this period, as indeed it was the crowning work of his life, and the greatest production of the century in the German language. But it is so, not because it is the work of the author's age, but because it preserves to us the best impulses of the author's youth. As the poet himself has said, the conception of it came to him as early as the year 1774, when he was twenty-five years old. Considerable portions of the first part were printed in 1790, but the first part was complete only in 1808, and the second part belongs to the poet's last days in 1831, after he had meditated upon it for more than fifty years.

The story of "Faust" had the great advantage of being already a popular one, with elements of the deepest interest derived from still lingering beliefs in magic, evil spirits, and the possibility of a fatal confederacy of man with the Prince of Darkness. Here was a framework in which Goethe's abstract ideas might fix themselves—ideas which in his mind were ever tending to an impotent generality. The theme was nothing less than that of Dante and of Milton : man's fall and man's re-

covery. Much as Goethe disliked Dante, our poet described the purpose of his great drama somewhat as Dante would have described the purpose of the "Divine Comedy"; he declared it to be the progress of the human soul through the world to hell, and then again through the world to heaven.

As in the case of Dante, so in the case of Goethe, the personal experiences of the poet are interwoven with the story. Indeed, both Faust and Mephistopheles are only impersonations of the two contending principles in the breast of Goethe himself. In 1781 he wrote to Lavater: "I am conscious of the fact you so well describe, that God and Satan, heaven and hell, are striving for the mastery within me." And Faust only echoes Goethe's own experience when he says:

Two souls are ever striving in my breast  
Each from the other longing to be free.

But neither to us nor to the world at large does the interest of the work depend upon its representation of purely personal struggle and achievement. We are moved by it because it presents to us a most vivid picture of universal human experience, sets before us the moral struggle of the ages, reflects our own life with its temptation and danger, promises to throw light upon the great problem of sin and redemption.

"Faust" is great—one of the greatest poems of the world—because the first part embodies sublime truths of human freedom, sin, guilt, retribution, from which Goethe in his earlier life had not yet falsely emancipated himself. The cynical and lascivious Satan, who can assume the garb and air of a gentleman when he

entices to transgression, but who throws off disguise when once he has bound his victim fast, is a true creation of Goethe's genius. The restlessness of a selfish spirit, the impossibility of satisfying its longings with the things of sense, the ever-increasing complications of shame and misery in which the sinner involves himself, the ruin which all unconsciously he spreads around him, have never been portrayed more powerfully than in the first part of "Faust."

Margaret is the picture of a guileless child led astray by the arts of the tempter; her love is made the means of her destruction; her sin brings death to her mother, her brother, her child. In the great cathedral, where she goes to pray, the consciousness of guilt chokes back her prayer, and she falls fainting as she hears the solemn reverberations of the "*Dies Iræ.*" In prison, when Faust comes to rescue her, she is found wild with insanity and rejecting all entreaties to escape, while Faust himself, torn with remorse and anguish, is forced by his chuckling demon to leave her to her fate. There is no more pitiful story anywhere than this, and Goethe has told it with a vividness and terseness that are worthy of all praise. Here he has drawn his characters from real life, and has been true to the facts of human nature. The first part of "Faust" must be ranked with "Goetz," as a survival of insight, the priceless relic of an early manhood as yet uncorrupted by false philosophy. While in form it shows the influence of Goethe's classical studies, it has preserved the freshness and spontaneity of his Shakespearean youth; and it will doubtless hold its place as one of the world's master-works in the realm of poetry.

It is comparatively easy to tell the story of sin and degradation. Not only the descent to Avernus, but the description of it, can be compassed by a genius unilluminated by Divine revelation. But the return from hell is difficult, and is equally difficult to describe. It is plain that unity and completeness required an account of Faust's restoration, just as Milton's "Paradise Lost" required for its complement the "Paradise Regained." It is no wonder that the pantheistic poet found the second part of "Faust" a long and arduous task. He was to show, what no mortal wisdom apart from special revelation can ever show, how a human soul exposed to the penalties of violated law, and in addition inwardly defiled, can be restored to favor with God and made like God in character.

To this mystery he had thrown away the key when he gave up his belief in a personal God. From the impersonal God of pantheism there could be no reaching down in sympathy, no atonement for sin, no declaration of pardon, no inward transformation of the affections, no help in the way of virtue. Man must accomplish his own renewal. As he has bound himself to his lower nature, so he must liberate himself from it. And this he can do, first, by self-culture, and secondly, by labor for the good of others. Self-culture is typified by Faust's marriage with Helen of Greece, the symbol of Beauty, and labor for the good of others is typified by Faust's reclaiming of the barren seashore and providing for the happiness of its coming inhabitants. When, in his old age, though blind, he realizes that others will be benefited by his work, he finds a moment of true happiness and dies with these words upon his lips :

Freedom like life must be deserved by toil;  
 Here men shall live, and on this fertile soil,  
 Begirt with dangers, shall from youth to age  
 Their constant warfare with the ocean wage.  
 Oh, could I see my followers! Might I stand  
 Among free people on my once free land!  
 To such a moment of intense delight  
 I'd fearless say: "O stay, thou art so bright!"  
 Anticipating all that future bliss,  
 I have it now. That moment's here! 'Tis this!

And this is Faust's redemption. Mephistopheles is outwitted. The bargain had been that whenever Faust should say to the passing moment, "Stay! thou art so fair!" his soul should thenceforth belong to the Evil One. Satan therefore claims his prey. But angelic hosts appear to claim the soul of Faust for their own—only the body is left to the devil. And these heavenly messengers, as they bear his immortal part away, give the reason for this defeat of the adversary and this rescue of his victim:

The noble spirit now is free  
 And saved from evil scheming;  
 Whoe'er aspires unweariedly  
 Is not beyond redeeming.  
 And if he feels the grace of love  
 That from on high is given,  
 The blessed hosts that wait above  
 Shall welcome him to heaven.

"In these lines," said Goethe to Eckermann, "the key to Faust's rescue may be found—in Faust himself an ever purer and higher form of activity to the end, and the Eternal Love coming down to his aid from

above. This is entirely in harmony with our religious ideas, according to which we are saved not alone through our own strength, but through the freely bestowed grace of God." Goethe had a habit of putting his thoughts into Christian language, while the substance of them was wholly pantheistic and pagan. And though the second part of "Faust" has often been quoted as indicating its author's final approximation to evangelical beliefs, a careful examination of his writings shows that his meaning is by no means the Christian meaning even in his closing words:

All things transitory  
 But as symbols are sent :  
 Earth's insufficiency  
 Here grows to event ;  
 The Indescribable  
 Here it is done :  
 The Woman-soul leadeth us  
 Upward and on.

The "Woman-soul"—*das Ewig-weibliche*—is the pantheistic substitute for the personal Love of God in Jesus Christ. But it has no Christian significance. The God to whom Goethe would lead us is only the Brocken-shadow of humanity itself, projected upon the clouds by the imagination. "Christ," he says, "conceived of an only God, to whom he attributed all the qualities which he felt in himself as perfections. God became simply the essence of his own beautiful soul, full of goodness and love like himself, and entirely adapted to have good men confidingly give themselves up to him and cherish this idea as the sweetest bond with heaven." This ideal of humanity is not only the only



God, but it is the only Christ, for Goethe says also :  
 “Your Christ has awakened my wonder and admiration.  
 . . . In him you can now see yourself as in a mirror,  
 and in fact can thus worship yourself.”

This ideal of humanity is not confined to Christ, it is more or less embodied in all men. He says :

We are not the disciples of one master ; we have many teachers. We regard ourselves as all sons of God, and worship him as existing in ourselves and in all his children. . . My views are not anti-Christian or un-Christian, they are simply non-Christian. . . You think nothing is so beautiful as the gospel. But among all the books, ancient and modern, written by men to whom God has given wisdom, I find thousands of pages as beautiful, as useful, as indispensable for the instruction of mankind. . . Were I a preacher, you would find me as zealous in defending my notion of an aristocracy as you are now in asserting your idea of Christ's monarchy.

Every man may have God revealed in him just as Christ had. “What greater gain can man find in life than this, that the one principle which is both God and Nature should reveal itself to him?”

*Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen  
 Als dass ihm Gott-Natur sich offenbare ?*

Yet he cannot conceive of any higher or more perfect revelation of his impersonal God—which is simply ideal humanity—than that which is found in Christ. “The third religion and the last,” he says in “Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre,” “is Christianity.” Men have been led up by Christ to an ideal that could not have been believed possible without his aid.

To leave beneath his feet all the shows and honors of this world,

and to keep ever in view heaven, his birthplace and home, might seem possible in a wise and good man ; but to endure the utmost sorrow, nay more, to find means of a divine manifestation in his endurance of humiliation, poverty, contempt, torture, and death ; to lift up the vilest out of their sins and miseries ; to make them capable of loving holiness, yea, capable of attaining holiness—these are facts of which only faint indications had appeared before the time of his coming to dwell with men. And such a coming cannot be temporary, cannot pass away as a fact merely historical. Since human nature has been elevated to a point so high, and has been made capable of rising to such a height, it remains forever as a point from which humanity cannot recede. . . The truth that has thus been made manifest has been incorporated and can never disappear. . . Humanity cannot take a retrograde step, and the truth that has once found a divine embodiment can never again be dissolved. . . The Christian religion has strength in itself. From age to age that strength has been exerted to lift up fallen and suffering humanity. With such facts on its side it cannot require the aid of philosophy, but must hold an independent and sublime position—one far above all philosophy.

The central idea of Christianity is that of the suffering Saviour. Carlyle says that he learned from Goethe to seek, not happiness, but the Cross of Christ. And Goethe himself said: "The Christian religion, often enough dismembered and scattered here and there, must at last be found collected and restored to union by the Cross." And he counsels us, in founding our future society, to make Christianity a principal element in its religion.

Here is a would-be heathen compelled, in spite of himself, to take account of Christianity, yet utterly misconceiving its meaning and value. The fundamental difficulty is in his erroneous conception of God. His God is not the God of holiness, personal and free,

reflected in the human conscience and demanding obedience to moral law, but rather a universal force indistinguishable from nature. Neither God nor man has freedom, and man is but the link in an endless chain of necessity, a victim of circumstance. The moral impulse is only one of many impulses, all of which equally proceed from this Nature-God. The reproaches of conscience and the threats of retribution are alike illusions to which the wise man becomes superior. To follow one's bent, to develop all one's powers, to do the greatest amount of work, to secure the greatest amount of enjoyment—in short, to make the most of one's self and of one's opportunities—this is man's calling on earth.

There is no such thing as sin or guilt, for there is no freedom to abuse, and no moral law to be violated. There need be no repentance therefore. All that is needed is self-development, choice of the highest, labor for others. Faust is admitted into heaven without so much as a pang of repentance or a word of confession, though his life has been stained by lust and treachery and murder. As there is no God against whom he has sinned, so he needs no atonement for his sin. The culture and development which he needs are quite within his own power. He can whiten his own black heart. The leopard can put away his spots, and the Ethiopian can change his skin. In place of the Spirit of God we find at most a nature-power, which is nothing more than the man himself. Superstitious faith in a certain demonic energy takes the place of dependence upon God, and the fact that man is possessed by this demonic energy excuses and even glorifies every passion however

vicious. Redemption is to be attained, not by the cultivation of character, but by the cultivation of impulse. The second part of "Faust" preaches the pantheistic gospel of salvation by mere natural development. Evil in time becomes good, and man saves himself.

So much for the substance of Goethe's greatest work. Is the second part of "Faust" as inferior to the first part in form? Here all the critics and commentators are well-nigh agreed. The second part is one of the puzzles of literature. While the general drift of it is comprehensible and there are isolated passages of great power and beauty, we must declare that with increasing age the poet's hold upon reality grew weaker and weaker. It is a world of mere fancy into which he bears us. Not only is all verisimilitude left behind, but all intelligibility also. A host of symbolic creatures move and talk, but it is a long process of wearisome mystification, the inanity of which only the poet's lack of humor could have prevented him from recognizing. It is not only unintelligible and unreal, but it is also cold. The warmth of life, which pulsed so strongly in Goetz and in the first part of "Faust," has gone out of it. The atmosphere of necessity encircles it. The sun that shines is that of winter.

The drama is purely intellectual. It is like the aged Goethe himself, on whose lily-white hand no vein showed the way to the heart. A pretended wisdom amuses itself by writing for us hieroglyphics, which, when we succeed in translating them, seem intended for the very purpose of concealing the poverty of the thought. As the old man, in his study at Weimar, disposed the lights in such a way as to make the most

effective impression upon his visitors, so in the second part of "Faust" Goethe seems to play the oracle simply for the purpose of imposing on the credulous. He was accustomed to be worshiped, and he had the art to make that worship posthumous by a work of apocalyptic obscurity. In form as well as in substance, we must hold the second part of "Faust" to be the most striking of judgments upon the philosophy which it seeks to express. The tree is known by its fruits, and we have in Goethe the proof that pantheism not only depraves the poet's life, but withers the poet's art.

Thus I have tried to show the effect of a wrong moral decision upon Goethe's philosophy, and the effect of that philosophy in turn upon his morality and upon his poetry. It has been a painful task, and I have undertaken it only because the Goethe-cult which has been rife both in Germany and in America has in it such promise and potency of evil. Carlyle and George Eliot are the English representatives of this Goethean school. The Concord School of Philosophy has devoted a whole summer to his glorification. It must be that much of truth and of beauty is to be found in his writings, or this systematic panegyric would hardly be possible.

What then is the great merit of Goethe, and how can we account for his hold upon the thought of our time? I answer that Goethe is in many ways even yet the best exponent of the thought of our time, with its lawless independence, its new knowledge of nature, its confidence in material things, its love of merely sensuous beauty, its aversion to pain and self-denial, its belief that the evils of the world can be cured by physical

means without the forgiveness of sins or the regenerating grace of God.

It was Goethe's merit or demerit that he put all this doctrine into attractive form. With a wonderfully clear and serene mind, he learned from French masters to write for the first time a German that was no longer crabbed, but simple and musical as Apollo's lute. His prose has a sweetness and at the same time an intensity that of itself goes far to persuade the reader of the importance and truth of what he reads, and his poetry has in it that sustained dignity and precision, that masterful vigor and repose, which we call "the large style." This was unknown to the German tongue before Goethe's time. Thus he used French means to conquer French traditions and to create a new German literature.

He was one of the very greatest literary artists that the world has seen ; only Virgil and Milton in this matter of form can be called his superiors. He had a deep and sympathetic feeling for the life of nature which might have surpassed that of Wordsworth, if he had only been able with Wordsworth to break from necessitarian and pantheistic fetters and to see in rock and mountain, in the leaves of the trees and the clouds of the sky, the presence and utterance of a personal God. As Saul's companions on the way to Damascus heard the voice from heaven but saw no man, so Goethe heard the voice in nature but did not recognize the person ; he perceived the moving panorama to be instinct with life, but he could not discern in it all the living God. So his imagination has been called a passive imagination ; it was not in the truest sense active or

creative ; it simply gave back what the senses had given to it ; there was no true interpretation by the spirit. But as a mere reproduction of nature his verse is almost unequalled. Hutton has well said that his lyrics seem to escape as unconsciously from the essence of earth and air, as the scent from a violet or the music from a bird.

It is in his lyrics indeed that Goethe most nearly forgets himself. Goetz and Faust are his great characters, and in these early works he has put the fervor and freshness of his genius. But because of his necessitarian views he was able to understand physical nature more fully than he could understand human nature. The kinship between man and the outward world, our brotherhood with the universe, this he saw and expressed in song. Here abstractions are absent ; the poet throws himself into the feeling of the moment ; there is a flash of insight and a flood of sympathy that carry him away, and when he puts them into verse, they carry us away likewise. What, for example, can be more beautiful than this little night-song :

Hush'd on the hill  
Is the breeze ;  
Scarce by the zephyr  
The trees  
Softly are pressed ;  
The woodbird's asleep on the bough ;  
Wait then, and thou  
Soon wilt find rest !

I am inclined to believe that Goethe's songs are more genuine and lasting proofs of poetic genius than any of his dramas or any of his works in prose. He has said

that a work of art can be comprehended by the head only with the assistance of the heart, and nothing can be more pertinent or true. But I would add that a work of art can be produced by the head only with the assistance of the heart. It is because Goethe's heart was put into his lyrics that they are immortal. Yet even these degenerated as he grew older, and for the plain reason that his heart grew selfish and cold. His Olympian serenity was also Olympian isolation. His calm avoidance of all that would disturb, his ignoring of human sin, his effort to lift himself above all sorrow, constituted a limitation of his genius, narrowed its range, dried up its springs of emotion. As he cut himself loose from moral restraint and suffered passion to have its way with him, a chill came over his soul; poetic inspiration gave place to poetic artifice; his later lyrics, like the second part of "Faust," are didactic and abstract; the poet, in trying to save his life, has lost it.

Herder, the critic, the preacher, and the Christian, who watched with sadness and growing repulsion the downward progress of Goethe's mind and art, said well, "Would that Goethe could take up some other Latin book besides Spinoza!" We see the evil that can be wrought by a false philosophy. Much of the modern notion, so popular in fiction, that love is a passion which knows no law, which reason and will cannot control, and which justifies any means taken for its gratification, is directly or indirectly the result of the teaching of Goethe. He has done much to spread about immoral desire a glamour of refinement, and to abate the blame of transgression by charging it to nature. He has made



moral and æsthetic culture a substitute for religion, and has substituted self-development for the service of God.

I do not deny that in doing this he has incidentally called attention to human impulses and needs which the current Christianity of his time too much neglected. The Puritan turned from the moss-rosebud saying, "I have learned to call nothing on earth lovely." But nature is beautiful notwithstanding. Art has its claims, and we are bound to have a proper regard for self. While Goethe moves in the sphere of the merely æsthetic and worldly, he has surprising insight and wisdom; whole books of proverbs and maxims for the conduct of life have been drawn from his writings. He has been called the wisest man that ever lived without a conscience, without humility, and without faith. But his wisdom is simply the wisdom of this world that is foolishness with God, and that is foolishness likewise to any *man* who looks beneath the surface and who sees its results in Goethe's character and in Goethe's literary work. He himself said that his writings were one continued confession. We must also say that his writings are one continuous judgment and condemnation of his philosophy and his life.

Goethe desired, above all other honors, that he might be called by the name of *Befreier*, or Liberator. In one sense he merits the title; he has freed his country from its bondage to French literary models, and has opened the way for a native German literature. Believer in necessity, as he was, and resigning himself to whatever force was uppermost, he could not be a patriot. And yet, like Dante, by uniting his country in a literary bond, he indirectly and unintentionally prepared his

country for political unity. Hermann Grimm tells us in fact that a politically united Germany was made possible only by Goethe and Schiller. While we grant, however, that Goethe may be called directly the literary liberator, and indirectly the political liberator, of Germany, I must record my conviction that in other and more important respects he was the enslaver of his country. I believe that the materialistic tendency which has been felt throughout the century in Germany, and which has almost superseded the older idealistic and spiritualistic teaching of the universities, is in large part due to the influence of Goethe.

Multitudes of youth have been captivated by his sensuous and fatalistic spirit. How vast a power the greatest writer of a nation can exert, was never more strikingly illustrated than in the case of Goethe. Sad to say, he has not used that power, as Shakespeare did, to depict the actual facts of human nature—he has used it rather to set before us a humanity devoid of conscience and freedom, and the helpless prey to whatever demonic impulse may arise within. He has not used that power, as Milton did, to impress upon men's minds the central truths of the Christian scheme, man's willful abuse of freedom, his fall into sin and guilt and misery, his recovery by the reaching down of infinite divine grace—he has used it rather to weaken human faith in divine revelation and in the one and only means of man's restoration.

To bring a whole nation, and to some extent a whole world, into the toils and under the bonds of a pantheistic philosophy that knows no personal God, no freedom of will, no real responsibility for sin, no way of pardon

and renewal, no certain hope of immortal life, is to be the agent of a moral and spiritual enslavement worse by far than any enslavement that is merely physical or political, because it is enslavement of the soul to falsehood and wickedness, and sure in due time to bring physical and political enslavement in its train. Over the door of the house where Goethe was born was carved a lyre and a star. He loved to think it a prognostication of his greatness as a poet. But the star was

A star that with the choral starry dance  
Joined not, but stood, and standing saw  
The hollow orb of moving Circumstance  
Rolled round by one fixed law.

And Tennyson is not too severe when he intimates that this abuse of intellectual power and this self-exaltation above truth and duty are signs not of human, but of diabolic greatness. It is Goethe whom he calls

A glorious Devil, large in heart and brain,  
That did love Beauty only, or, if Good,  
Good only for its beauty.



WORDSWORTH



# WORDSWORTH

## THE POET OF NATURE

MATTHEW ARNOLD has well said that Wordsworth is one of the chief glories of English poetry, and he adds that by nothing is England so glorious as by her poetry. When we think of what England has done for liberty and for religion, it may seem at first thought extravagant to call her greatest gift to the world the gift of poetry. But it is her poetry, in which England's liberty and religion are best expressed. Matthew Arnold himself suggests the point of view from which his words can be interpreted, when he says that "poetry is the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth."

I wish to compare with this a passage from John Stuart Mill. The philosopher and economist, in a time of great mental depression, sought relief in the reading of poetry. He read Byron, but he found his own *ennui* and discontent only reflected to him. He turned to Wordsworth. There he found medicine for his state of mind, because Wordsworth's poems furnished the culture of the emotions which he was in quest of. They awakened not only the love of rural beauty but a greatly increased interest in the common destiny of human beings.

"The result was," said Mr. Mill, "that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never

again subject to it. I long continued to value Wordsworth, less according to his intrinsic merits, than by the measure of what he had done for me. Compared with the greatest poets, he may be said to be the poet of unpoetical natures, possessed of quiet and contemplative tastes. But unpoetical natures are precisely those which require poetic cultivation. This cultivation Wordsworth is much more fitted to give, than poets who are intrinsically far more poets than he."

The characterization of Wordsworth as "the poet of unpoetical natures" is itself a stroke of genius; and, by combining the thought of it with Arnold's dictum about poetry, we may get a new understanding of Wordsworth's exact place in literature. Our poet was primarily a seeker after truth. But he did not regard truth as consisting solely or mainly in mere facts, or in mere abstract propositions. To him truth was reality, the inner life of things. The world of nature and of man expressed not only thought but feeling, and this thought and feeling was the thought and feeling of a Being greater than the world, because he was the Maker and the Life of the world. The macrocosm could be interpreted by the microcosm, for macrocosm and microcosm alike were modes in which the Infinite One made himself known to us. It is the great and unique merit of Wordsworth that he first used the common, unsophisticated, primary, and universal sympathies of humanity, to interpret the physical universe in which humanity has its dwelling-place. He is the poet of nature, because he perceives the kinship between nature and man by reason of their common origin and life in God.

There was need enough of such poetry as this, for the thought of the world had for many a day tended to sunder nature from God, and so to sunder nature from



man. The Hebrews saw God in nature. They said, "The God of glory thundereth," and "The heavens declare the glory of God." Our Lord declared that God fed the birds, and clothed the grass of the field with beauty. Paul and John recognized the presence of God in his works. As all men "live, move, and have their being" in God, so all things "consist" or hold together in Christ, the one great Revealer of God; "whatever has come into being was life in him." The Eastern Church in general held more strongly to this conception of God's immanence than did the Western; Augustine and Calvin unduly emphasized the forensic element, and made God's operation more a matter of law than of life. So Puritan theology led by natural reaction to deism, with its distant God and its automatic universe. Upton has said:

The defect of deism is that on the human side it treats all men as isolated individuals, forgetful of the immanent divine nature that interrelates them and in a measure unifies them, and that on the divine side it separates man from God and makes the relation between them a purely external one.<sup>1</sup>

On this view, man loses his dignity, and the sympathies and aspirations which men have in common cease to be matters of interest or concern. But nature follows the fate of man. It becomes a curious machine, whose mathematics may be studied, but whose life and glory have departed. A universe which can get on without God has no longer anything which irresistibly attracts the mind of man. There is no affinity between man and nature; nature has no voice with which to stir man's heart; nature indeed is dead.

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<sup>1</sup> "Hibbert Lectures," 287.

These were the influences which had come to reign in English literature before Wordsworth began his work. A formal and mechanical versifying had taken the place of the Elizabethan vigor and insight. Pope showed what talent could do without genius, what mere taste could do without a lofty faith. But a new breath of life swept over the world. The French Revolution was the sign of it in politics; the transcendental school of Kant and Fichte and Schelling was the sign of it in philosophy; Burns, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, were signs of it in English literature. The greatest of these poets was Wordsworth. He was greatest because he, most distinctly of all poets up to his time, apprehended the principle of all true poetry and most consistently and continuously applied it to the description of nature and of man. Henry Crabb Robinson states the principle, when he says that "by the imagination the mere fact is connected with that Infinity without which there is no poetry." Wordsworth regarded it as his sacred mission to show that the world is full of beauty and meaning because it is throbbing with the life of God. Nothing is insignificant or valueless, for each thing manifests the "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe." "Amongst least things he had an under-sense of the greatest." We see in him the true biological impulse which since his day has transformed science as well as literature, and Emerson only expressed Wordsworth's leading thought, when he wrote,

In the mud and scum of things  
Something always, always sings.

It is fortunate that we have in "The Prelude" the

poet's account of the growth of his own mind. For frank unfolding of the innermost experiences of a great man and a great writer, it holds much the same place in literature as that which is held in philosophy by Descartes' "Treatise on Method," and in theology by the "Confessions" of Augustine. "The Prelude" is a poem of nine thousand lines, yet it is intended only as a sort of ante-chapel to a great cathedral upon which Wordsworth intended to spend the main labor of his life, and to which his minor poems were to sustain the relation of niches, chantries, oratories, and altars. "The Excursion," nearly eleven thousand lines in length, was the only part of the great structure which the poet actually completed. It was meant to be the second book of the poem. "The Recluse," of which only fragments were written, was to be the first book. The third book never existed except in Wordsworth's imagination. In many ways "The Prelude," though long and occasionally prosaic, is an invaluable record. The poet has there disclosed himself more perfectly than Dante or Milton ever did. As we read, we see a vigorous and healthy, yet a calm and quiet spirit developing under our eyes, even though we fail to see the justice of Coleridge's praise when he described the poem as

An Orphic song, indeed,  
A song divine of high and passionate thoughts,  
To their own music chanted.

A peasant near Rydal was asked during the poet's lifetime: "What sort of a man is Mr. Wordsworth?" and the reply was: "Oh, sir, he goes humming and muffling and talking to himself; but *whiles* he's as sen-

sible as you or me!" In this matter of meditation upon nature, the child was father of the man. From his earliest youth he ranged the open heights, rowed upon the lake, angled in lonely brooks, or "alone upon some jutting eminence" watched for the gleams of dawn. So he tells us "the foundations of his mind were laid." At first he passively received, passively enjoyed. But at length he became conscious that "a plastic power abode within him," "a local spirit of his own, at war with general tendency." The creative impulse began to awaken:

An auxiliar light,  
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun  
Bestowed new splendor.

But even this creation was reproduction, for he was able to create only because of the pre-existing harmony between man and nature. "He began to construe the universal life as quasi-human," says Professor Knight, his biographer. "Delight in nature for herself was exchanged for delight in nature for what she revealed of man. The process of idealization, or rather, of interpretation, was matured, only when he detached himself from nature and realized the separateness and the kindredness together."

As if awakened, summoned, roused, constrained,  
I looked for universal things, perused  
The common countenance of earth and sky ;  
Earth, nowhere unembellished by some trace  
Of that first paradise whence man was driven ;  
And sky, whose beauty and whose bounty are expressed  
By the proud name she bears—the name of heaven.  
I called on both to teach me what they might ;

Or turning the mind in upon herself  
Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts  
And spread them with a wider creeping ; felt  
Incumbencies more awful, visitings  
Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul,  
That tolerates the indignities of time  
And, from the center of eternity  
All finite motions overruling, lives  
In glory immutable.

Yet, with all this love for nature and insight into her meaning, Wordsworth was a homely and almost a rustic poet. It was truth that he sought, even more than beauty. And he tended to express the truth he saw in common phrase. One can hardly avoid the conviction that the meager and plain surroundings of his childhood, and the lack of cultivated society, made him tolerant of rude and inharmonious speech, and ready to lapse into bare and dull expression, when the creative impulse within him grew weak. He had little or no sense of humor, to preserve him from unconsciously degenerating into commonplace. Many of his minor poems are like Sunday-school talks in words of one syllable—they underrate the intelligence of his readers. Even in the larger poems there is not enough of linked sweetness to make up for the fact that they are so long drawn out. The truth is that all the best work of Wordsworth was done from his twenty-eighth to his thirty-eighth year. After that decade had passed, the spontaneity of his verse seemed to vanish, while yet his indomitable industry remained. From thirty-eight to eighty, a long course of forty-two years, he was fruitlessly chasing poetry, as the boy pursues the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow.

The sense of a vocation dawned upon him as early as his nineteenth year. He was then a student of St. John's College, Cambridge. He had brought thither a robust vitality, a habit of solitary wandering in the woods and fields, and a genuinely meditative spirit. He was a great reader, but he was no great scholar. Yet university life strongly influenced him. As he sat in the chambers of Milton, or looked upon the statue of Newton, the past got hold upon him. He says :

I could not print  
Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps  
Of generations of illustrious men,  
Unmoved.

He became aware of the fact that he had a peculiar gift of observation and insight, and that he might be able, "else deeply sinning," to leave behind him some work which "pure hearts would reverence." His conception of his office was no mean or humble one. He held that no poet could be great unless he was a teacher as well as a versifier, and unless the result of his teaching was the ennobling of character. He regarded Sir Walter Scott, not as a poet, but as a novelist in verse, because he had "never written anything addressed to the immortal part of man"; and Wordsworth was not inconsistent with himself when, on Scott's departure to Naples in search of health, he declared that the might

Of the whole world's good wishes with him goes ;  
Blessings and prayers in nobler retinue  
Than sceptred king or laureled conqueror knows,  
Follow this wondrous Potentate.

So he did not think Goethe a great writer. Homer

and Shakespeare he called universal. "Goethe," he said, "tried the universal, without ever being able to avoid exposing his individuality, which his character was not of a kind to dignify. His moral perceptions were not sufficiently clear to make him anything but an artificial writer." Wordsworth has expressed the sense of his mission in the words :

He serves the Muses erringly and ill  
 Whose aim is pleasure light and fugitive.  
 O that my mind were equal to fulfill  
 The comprehensive mandate which they give !  
 Vain aspiration of an earnest will !  
 Yet in this moral strain a power may live.

And, like Milton, he invokes the Spirit of God to help his high endeavor :

Descend, prophetic Spirit ! that inspirest  
 The human soul of universal earth,  
 Dreaming on things to come, and dost possess  
 A metropolitan temple in the hearts  
 Of mighty poets ; upon me bestow  
 A gift of genuine insight ; that my song  
 With starlike virtue in its place may shine,  
 Shedding benignant influence—and secure,  
 Itself, from all malevolent effect  
 Of those mutations that extend their sway  
 Throughout the nether sphere !

It must not be inferred that Wordsworth was a specifically Christian poet. It was not his business to put dogma into verse, or to buttress any particular ecclesiastical system. He valued the Church of England as a safeguard of popular morals, a comforter of the poor, an elevator of national ideals, and a noble inheritance

from the past. "I would lay down my life for the church," he said. But it is still true that he did not often attend the services of the church. We are reminded of the Polish nobleman who was ready to die for his country, but who could not be prevailed upon to live in it. It was not so much the Christian scheme which the poet conceived himself as set to teach. It was rather the great truths of natural religion, which lie at the basis of the Christian scheme indeed, but which may be treated apart from their relation to a supernatural revelation. This is his meaning when he says:

I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety.

God is manifested in nature. He may be recognized in the unity, law, order, harmony, of the world. Our own intelligence and affection find even in the physical universe another and a higher intelligence and affection coming out to meet us. The storm reveals a power, and the sunshine reveals a love, which gives us joy. This recognition of nature's divinity, and the submission of the soul to its tranquilizing and restoring influence, is what Wordsworth means by "natural piety."

This is not Christianity, but it is not inconsistent with Christianity. God has not left himself without a witness, even where the light of Christ's gospel has never shone. Paul declares that "the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are plainly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity." And these presuppositions of Christianity are of inestimable importance.



Men will not believe in supernatural revelation, unless they first believe in a God from whom such supernatural revelation may come. The tendency of deistic thought has always been to render Christianity an impertinence and an absurdity. Wordsworth's poetry was one long protest against this banishment of God from His universe. Because he believes in "Nature's self, which is the breath of God," he can also believe in "his pure word, by miracle revealed." And rather than abandon this pure elementary faith in a divine life hidden beneath the raiment of the natural world, he would go back to heathen religion, because that still preserved some remnants of the truth.

Great God ! I'd rather be  
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn ;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

Wordsworth's biographer tells us that "'The Eclectic Review' criticised 'The Excursion' as pointedly insinuating that nature is a sort of God, and that the love of nature is a sanctifying process." It regarded the religious character of the poem as doubtful. All such criticism savors strongly of Philistinism. It is like denouncing Humboldt's "Cosmos" as atheistic, because the author confines himself to physics and never once mentions the name of God. We must not judge a writer by what he does not say, but only by what he does say. Let us grant him the right to choose his province. Wordsworth's province was the religion of nature, and there he was great. It was well that he did

not attempt theology, for there he was not great. Yet he was a believer in the simple facts of Scripture. He left their systematizing and their interpretation to others. Perhaps the best understanding of his position may be gotten from his own words. He writes:

Theologians may puzzle their heads about dogmas as they will ; the religion of gratitude cannot mislead us. Of that we are sure ; and gratitude is the handmaid to hope, and hope the harbinger of faith. I look abroad upon nature, I think of the best part of our species, I lean upon my friends, and I meditate upon the Scripture, especially the Gospel of St. John, and my creed rises up of itself, with the ease of an exhalation, yet a fabric of adamant.

No account of Wordsworth's life and work would be complete or even correct, which did not make mention of two other persons who had the largest influence upon him. One of these was his sister Dorothy, and the other was Coleridge. The death of the poet's mother when he was eight years of age, and the death of his father when he was fourteen, had broken up the family and had separated its members from one another. They lived with a grandfather or with an uncle. But after Wordsworth finished his course at Cambridge, he and his sister began their simple life together, and led that simple life for more than sixty years. It was one soul in two bodies. When the poet married Mary Hutchinson, the quiet and kindly friend of his childhood, brother and sister were still as inseparable as ever.

It is doubtful whether literary history can furnish another such instance of absolute devotion as that which Dorothy Wordsworth showed toward her brother. She

lived only in him and for him. The labor of writing was irksome to him; she put down upon paper line upon line as the words fell from his lips. Endless copying of manuscript, after endless correction, occupied her often far on into the night. She was the constant companion of his walks at all hours of daylight or dark, in all weathers, with little care for proper clothing or food, of which indeed there was never too much, for the Wordsworths lived for years at Grasmere on only seventy pounds a year. They were poor, and were not ashamed to be poor. Yet Coleridge said: "His is the happiest family I ever saw." They lived for a great end, the development of a noble poetic gift, the discovery and expression of the beauty and meaning of the world. Wordsworth was "very much resigned to his own company." He would often walk on in sublime meditation, while wife and sister submissively followed, hopefully waiting for the utterances of the oracle. Coleridge was often with them. The four discussed every aspect of the scenes about them. Then they stopped to eat their bread and cheese. Dorothy says in her diary: "We rested upon a moss-covered rock, rising out of the bed of the river. William and Coleridge repeated and read verses. I drank a little brandy and water, and was in heaven."

Dorothy Wordsworth, as her diaries show, was a woman of genius. She furnished the complement to her brother; he found in her the sprightliness and sweetness which in him were somewhat lacking. She was no merely passive recipient, for she was more full of suggestion even than he. Exquisite sensibility was united with extraordinary insight, the deepest feeling

with the minutest observation. Innocent, ardent, loving, the secret of nature seemed disclosed to her, but all the treasure that she found she laid at her brother's feet. There was a sort of communism between them. He used her journals at times for the material of his poems, and even extracted bits of it for his letters, because he could not compose anything better. Dorothy did everything for him, even wrote his love letters, since he detested correspondence. There was little of romance in him; there was much of romance in her. He could go to the cemetery and look at the tombstones a few hours after his wedding, and that in spite of the fact that the exquisite poem, "She was a Phantom of Delight," was written for his bride. His sister did much to correct this austerity. And though, like Milton, he did not greatly devote himself to his sister or to his wife, he has recognized his debt to Dorothy in his poems. He says, for example:

I too exclusively esteemed that love  
And sought that beauty which (as Milton sings)  
Hath terror in it. Thou didst soften down  
This oversternness.

And it was of Dorothy that he wrote:

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,  
And humble cares and delicate fears,  
And love and thought and joy.

It could be wished that the record of such lifelong sisterly devotion could be written without intimation that harm of any sort had come from it. But the poet himself was rendered too autocratic and seclusive, while

Dorothy's health was injured by exhausting walks and long exposures to wind and rain. Wordsworth's own robust constitution could endure the strain, but with his sister the intense spirit "o'erinformed its tenement of clay," and her last years were years of mental alienation, with only occasional gleams of smoldering genius. Yet it was she who, at an earlier day, when her brother was for a time skeptical, depressed, bewildered, almost ready to give up his vocation in despair, brought him back to calmness and to faith. "Then it was," he says:

Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good,  
That the beloved sister in whose sight  
Those days were passed, now speaking in a voice  
Of sudden admonition—like a brook  
That did but cross a lonely road, and now  
Is seen, heard, felt, and caught at every turn,  
Companion never lost through many a league—  
Maintained for me a saving intercourse  
With my true self; for though bedimmed and changed  
Much, as it seemed, I was no further changed  
Than as a clouded and a waning moon:  
She whispered still that brightness would return;  
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still  
A poet, made me seek beneath that name,  
And that alone, my office upon earth.

Coleridge too must be mentioned, because he contributed to Wordsworth an element of ideality which would otherwise have been imperfectly developed. We must remember their early friendship and their great influence upon each other. Damon and Pythias had scarcely a warmer affection. Here too, each furnished what the other lacked. Coleridge had more of the native poetic instinct, but he had also the discursive

and philosophic mind. It may be questioned whether we should ever have found in Wordsworth the metaphysical element which here and there characterizes his poems, if it had not been for his long communings with Coleridge. Coleridge was "the Friend" to whom the outpourings of heart in "The Prelude" were addressed. On the other hand it was Wordsworth who gave to Coleridge whatever practical wisdom he ever had, and who taught him that

to the solid ground  
Of Nature trusts the mind that builds for aye.

Wordsworth himself was ignorant enough of the affairs of this life, but Coleridge was an infant beside him. When the two tried for a half-hour to get the collar off a horse without ever thinking of turning it, they showed that they were more familiar with "the light that never was on sea or land," than they were with the lights of modern horsemanship. Coleridge had imagination, and could write his "Hymn at Chamounix," with its sublime description of the avalanche, without ever having seen either Chamounix or an avalanche. But Wordsworth taught him something of the observation of nature. Wordsworth suggested those realistic features of the "Ancient Mariner," the shooting of the albatross and the navigation of the ship by the dead men. In fact, the interpretation of nature as the continual manifestation of God may possibly be the echo of Wordsworth's thought. At any rate, Coleridge had in some way learned the secret which Plato and Plotinus had taught long before, and in his "Æolian Harp" had written:

And what if all of animated Nature  
Be but organic harps diversely framed,  
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps,  
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,  
At once the soul of each and God of all.

It seems a great pity that these two gifted souls, so fitted to supplement each other's virtues and correct each other's faults, should, after long and loving intercourse, have fallen apart and ceased greatly to influence each other. It was partly the fault of circumstances, partly the fault of natural temperament. Coleridge's marriage was unhappy, and separation from wife and family made him a wanderer. Opium, taken at first to ease pain, became a fearful tyrant; conscience became dull, and will became impotent; to know that a thing ought to be done was the very reason why the doing of it was impossible. Coleridge fled from Wordsworth's compassion, and an estrangement began which was never wholly removed. Possibly it was this estrangement which Coleridge had in mind when he wrote:

Alas, they had been friends in youth ;  
But whispering tongues can poison truth ;  
And constancy lives in realms above ;  
And life is thorny ; and youth is vain ;  
And to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain.  
And thus it chanced, as I divine,  
With Roland and Sir Leoline.  
Each spake words of high disdain  
And insult to his heart's best brother ;  
They parted—ne'er to meet again !  
But never either found another  
To free the hollow heart from paining.  
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,

Like cliffs that had been rent asunder ;  
 A dreary sea flows now between ;—  
 But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,  
 Shall wholly do away, I ween,  
 The marks of that which once hath been.

And yet each loved the other to the end. The separation was due to mutual knowledge of each other's limitations. Coleridge disliked Wordsworth's excessive frugality, and spoke of his occasional fits of hypochondria. Yet he called Wordsworth "the first and greatest philosophical poet." Wordsworth on the other hand thought Coleridge "destined to be unhappy." When Coleridge died, the poet felt that he could not write an elegy; the tie between them was too close, the pain was too overwhelming. Coleridge, as Dr. Knight had said, "was his earliest and closest friend, and his most illustrious contemporary in English literature." All he could venture to say of him, a year and a half after he was dead, is in these following words :

Every moral power of Coleridge  
 Is frozen at its marvelous source ; . .  
 The rapt one of the godlike forehead,  
 The heaven-eyed creature, sleeps in earth.

The three poems which mark the highest poetical attainment of Wordsworth are the "Intimations of Immortality," "Tintern Abbey," and "Ode to Duty." The first has in it most of philosophy, the second most of religion, the third most of morality. Together they furnish an admirable test of the poet's range and quality. So lofty and noble are they, that we are tempted to wish, for his fame's sake, that he had never written



anything else, and that these shining mountain peaks had not required so vast a body of commonplace earth and rock for their foundation. Yet these great poems are the outgrowth of Wordsworth's whole literary life and work, and they cannot be understood by themselves. Let us take them successively and subject them to critical examination, in the light of what we have learned of the poet's mind and aim.

The “Intimations of Immortality” is an attempt to show that man must live after death because he lived before he was born. The argument is as old as Plato. In the “Phædo” this is the chief and most impressive consideration upon which the sublime faith in immortality is based. Plato held that intuitive ideas, such as ideas of space, time, cause, substance, right, God, are reminiscences of things learned in a previous state of being. He regarded the body as the grave of the soul, and urged the fact that the soul had knowledge before it entered the body, as proof that the soul would have knowledge after it left the body. But even in Plato this argument is based upon an unconscious identification of the ideal with the actual. The truth at the foundation of the theory of pre-existence is simply the ideal existence of the soul, before birth, in the mind of God—that is, God's foreknowledge of it. The intuitive ideas, of which the soul finds itself in possession, are really evolved from itself; in other words, man is so constituted that he perceives these truths upon proper occasions or conditions; the fact that they are not derived from sense by no means proves that they are recollections of what was learned in a previous or timeless state of being.

Yet the persistence of this speculation is a curiosity in philosophy, theology, and literature. Philo and Origen both held to it, the former to account for the soul's imprisonment in the body, the latter to justify the disparity of conditions under which men enter the world. Kant and Julius Müller have advocated it in Germany, and Edward Beecher in America, upon the ground that the inborn depravity of the human will can be explained only by supposing a personal act of self-determination before the present life began. The large place which the doctrine of the transmigration of souls holds in the Indian religions is known to all, but it may not be so generally known that a sort of metempsychosis has been favored in Scotland, and in our own day, by Professor Knight, the editor and biographer of Wordsworth. That Wordsworth himself made the idea the basis of his great poem is not so wonderful when we remember that Vaughan in the "Retreate," so early as 1621, used the same idea, and probably gave to Wordsworth the clew which he has more successfully followed, as Tennyson in his "Two Voices," and Browning in his "La Saisiaz," have followed Wordsworth.

The poets, however, have added something to the philosophers. They have utilized a peculiar experience which men like Walter Scott have vividly described, namely the apparent recollection that we have seen at some time past a landscape which we know to be now for the first time before us, or that before the present time we have passed through an exigency which our sober reason tells us we now first confront. It is probably an illusion of the memory, a mistaking of a part for the whole : we have seen something like a part of

the landscape—we fancy that we have seen this landscape and the whole of it. So our recollection of a past event is one whole, but this idea of the whole may have an indefinite number of subordinate ideas existing within it; the sight of something similar to one of these parts suggests the whole which the parts make up. Augustine hinted that this illusion of the memory may have played an important part in developing the belief in metempsychosis—we infer that, since what we remember has never happened in this world, it must have happened in some world which we inhabited before we entered upon this.

The fact that Coleridge busied himself with this problem, and suggested that “likeness in part tends to become likeness of the whole,” makes it a very interesting question how far Wordsworth’s adoption of the idea may have been due to the influence of Coleridge. But a still more interesting question is how far Wordsworth’s adoption of the idea may be said to express his own conviction of the truth, or how far we may believe it to be a *jeu d’esprit*, or a mere device of fancy to attract us to his poetry. Here we must confess that what we know of the poet’s solemn earnestness, his passion for truth, his scorn of all disingenuous arts and tricks, inclines us to reject the second explanation and to accept the first. In this greatest of his poems he seems, if ever, to be speaking out of his own innermost mind and heart. The “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” is not argument from our present recollections of our past childhood, but from the recollections which we had, when we were children, of a previous state of being. A few quotations from

the poem will possibly assume a new aspect when we remember this :

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :  
 The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
     Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
     And cometh from afar :  
 Not in entire forgetfulness,  
 Nor yet in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
     From God, who is our home.

The homely Nurse [Earth] doth all she can  
 To make her foster child, her inmate man,  
     Forget the glories he hath known,  
 And that imperial palace whence he came.

Thou, over whom thy immortality  
 Broods like the day, a master o'er a slave,  
 A presence which is not to be put by ;  
 Thou little child, yet glorious in the might  
 Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height !

O joy ! that in our embers  
     Is something that doth live,  
 That nature yet remembers  
     What was so fugitive !

Not for these I raise  
     The song of thanks and praise,  
 But for those obstinate questionings  
 Of sense and outward things,  
 Falling from us, vanishings,  
 Blank misgivings of a creature  
 Moving about in worlds not realized,  
 High instincts before which our mortal nature  
 Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised :  
     But for those first affections  
     Those shadowy recollections

Which, be they what they may,  
 Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,  
 Are yet the master-light of all our seeing :  
     Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make  
 Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
 Of the eternal silence ; truths that wake  
     To perish never ;  
 Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavor,  
     Nor man, nor boy,  
 Nor all that is at enmity with joy,  
 Can utterly abolish or destroy !  
     Hence in a season of calm weather,  
     Though inland far we be,  
 Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
     Which brought us hither,  
     Can in a moment travel thither,  
 And see the children sport upon the shore,  
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

It is impossible to read these lines carefully without perceiving that the recollections which the poet attributes to childhood are not recollections of a personal existence in a preceding state of being. They are rather recollections of what belonged to it before it "drew from out the vast," as Tennyson has expressed it; survivals, in the finite personality, of knowledge in the infinite personality from which it has come; in other words, God's ideas revealing themselves in the creature who partakes of his life. Not ideal pre-existence in God's foreknowledge, but substantial pre-existence in God's being, is the thought of Wordsworth. While nature is the constant expression of the divine mind and will, man is an actual emanation from God himself, and therefore

a being,  
 Both in perception and discernment, first

In every capability of rapture,  
 Through the divine effect of power and love :  
 As, more than anything we know, instinct  
 With godhead and, by reason and by will,  
 Acknowledging dependency sublime.

Our destiny, our being's heart and home  
 Is with infinitude and only there.

And this interpretation is confirmed by other passages  
 in the "Excursion" as well as in the "Prelude" :

Ah, why in age  
 Do we revert so fondly to the walks  
 Of childhood, but that there the soul discerns  
 The dear memorial footsteps unimpaired  
 Of her own native vigor ; thence can hear  
 Reverberations ; and a choral song,  
 Commingling with the incense that ascends  
 Undaunted toward the imperishable heavens  
 From her own lonely altar.

Thou, thou alone  
 Art everlasting, and the blessed spirits  
 Which thou includest, as the sea her waves.

Our childhood sits,  
 Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne,  
 That hath more power than all the elements ;  
 I guess not what this tells of Being past,  
 Nor what it augurs of the life to come.

We must confess that if this were all, the proof of  
 immortality would be defective. If the soul had no  
 personal existence before it entered upon its present  
 state, it may have no personal existence after this pres-  
 ent state is ended. As it came from the boundless  
 infinite, so to the boundless infinite it may return, merg-

ing its little wave once more in the great ocean from which it sprang. But another thought is suggested which helps the proof. It is that of the divine love. He who gave being to these sons of men will not disappoint their expectations nor put an end to their progress. Made in the image of God, only an eternity will suffice for their development. Their sympathies are evidence of God's sympathies. Their very longing for immortality is the impulse of divinity within them, and so is prophetic of the future :

What though the radiance which was once so bright  
 Be now forever taken from my sight,  
     Though nothing can bring back the hour  
 Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower ;  
     We will grieve not, rather find  
 Strength in what remains behind ;  
     In the primal sympathy  
 Which having been must ever be,  
     In the soothing thoughts that spring  
 Out of human suffering,  
     In the faith that looks through death,  
 In years that bring the philosophic mind.

That Wordsworth advocated no pantheistic confounding of the soul with God, but rather believed in a personal consciousness and life beyond the grave, is evident from his poem, "The Primrose of the Rock" :

Sin-blighted though we are, we too,  
     The reasoning sons of men,  
 From one oblivious winter called,  
     Shall rise and breathe again ;  
 And in eternal summer lose  
     Our threescore years and ten.

To humbleness of heart descends  
This prescience from on high,  
The faith that elevates the just,  
Before and when they die ;  
And makes each soul a separate heaven,  
A court for Deity.

In the lines composed a few miles above "Tintern Abbey," on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, we have the poet's most complete expression of his views of the relation between nature and God. But in order fully to understand it, we need to take a slight preliminary survey of some of his other utterances, especially those with reference to imagination and the office of a poet. As I have already intimated, Wordsworth regards love as a medium of insight into truth. Beauty cannot be perceived by him who has no love for beauty, and the morally right cannot be perceived by him who has no love for the morally right. Reason, in its largest sense, is far more than reasoning—it is the mind's whole power of knowing, and to the highest exercise of reason a right state of the sensibilities and affections is just as essential as merely perceptive and logical power.

Intellect is not the whole of man ; the integral man is made up of emotion as well as intellect. The feelings give wings to the intellect and permit it to soar into lofty regions of truth, when without right feeling intellect would grovel on the earth and learn nothing of the true meaning of the universe. Nor can mere love for the creature ensure the higher intelligence ; only love to God can enable us to understand the least of God's works. All the delights of love are pitiable—



Unless this love by a still higher love  
 Be hallowed, love that breathes not without awe,  
 Love that adores, but on the knees of prayer,  
 By heaven inspired ; that frees from chains the soul,  
 Lifted, in union with the purest, best  
 Of earth-born passions, on the wings of praise,  
 Bearing a tribute to the Almighty's throne.

And now we have, directly following this passage of the "Prelude," the most notable and valuable definition of imagination to be found in all poetical literature :

This spiritual love acts not nor can exist  
 Without imagination, which, in truth,  
 Is but another name for absolute power,  
 And clearer insight, amplitude of mind,  
 And reason in her most exalted mood.

The imagination of a pure and loving soul is therefore an organ for the recognition of truth. The creative faculty in the poet is like the microscope or the telescope—it does not invent but rather discovers ; that others do not see is simply the fault of their defective vision. And imagination in man enables him to enter into the thought of God—the creative element in us is the medium through which we perceive the meaning of the Creator in his creation. The world without answers to the world within, because God is the soul of both. Even the least sensitive are stirred at times by the cataract or the storm.

The power which all  
 Acknowledgè when thus moved, which Nature thus  
 To bodily sense exhibits, is the express  
 Resemblance of that glorious faculty  
 That higher minds bear with them as their own ;

This is the very spirit in which they deal  
 With the whole compass of the universe ;  
 They from their native selves can send abroad  
 Kindred mutations. . .

They build up greatest things  
 From least suggestions. . .  
 Such minds are truly from the Deity,  
 For they are Powers ; and hence the highest bliss  
 That flesh can know is theirs—the consciousness  
 Of Whom they are, habitually infused  
 Through every image and through every thought,  
 And all affections by communion raised  
 From earth to heaven, from human to divine.

So to the poet :

The unity of all hath been revealed,  
 Feeling has to him imparted power  
 That through the growing faculties of sense  
 Doth, like an agent of the one great Mind,  
 Create, creator and receiver both,  
 Working but in alliance with the works  
 Which it beholds.

He catches glimpses of affinities

In objects where no brotherhood exists  
 To passive minds. . .  
 Even in their fixed and steady lineaments  
 He traced an ebbing and a flowing mind,  
 Expression ever varying.

I felt the sentiment of Being, spread  
 O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still, . . .  
 Communing in this sort through earth and heaven  
 With every form of creature as it looked  
 Toward the Uncreated with a countenance  
 Of adoration, with an eye of love.

Coming now to Wordsworth's great poem of “Tintern Abbey,” we can see how the poet has condensed a whole system of thought into his verse. The ministries of nature have given him “sensations sweet” and happy memories :

Nor less, I trust,  
 To them I may have owed another gift,  
 Of aspect more sublime ; that blessed mood,  
 In which the burden of the mystery,  
 In which the heavy and the weary weight  
 Of all this unintelligible world  
 Is lightened—that serene and blessed mood,  
 In which the affections gently lead us on—  
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
 And even the motion of our human blood  
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
 In body, and become a living soul ;  
 While with an eye made quiet by the power  
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
 We see into the life of things.

It was not always thus, however :

For nature then  
 To me was all in all. I cannot paint  
 What then I was. The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colors and their forms, were then to me  
 An appetite ; a feeling and a love,  
 That had no need of a remoter charm,  
 By thought supplied, or any interest  
 Unborrowed from the eye. That time is past,  
 And all its aching joys are now no more,  
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur ; other gifts  
 Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,

Abundant recompense. For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean, and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods  
And mountains ; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth ; of all the mighty world  
Of eye and ear, both what they half create  
And what perceive ; well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.

We can understand now what Wordsworth means by Nature, and why he can recognize in her an instructor, protector, and comforter. If Nature had been to him a dead somewhat, something unintelligent, foreign, and unknown, no verse of this sort would have been possible. It is only because Nature is to him, as Goethe phrased it, "the living garment of the Deity," nay, more, the constant expression of divine intelligence and love, that he can cherish toward it affection and find in it a guide. Nature is not created by fiat and then left by God to itself. The Creator is ever active—he is in

the smallest of his works, and the smallest of them, as truly as the greatest, is the arena in which his omnipresence and omnipotence display themselves. Therefore

To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

But therefore also the simple and common emotions and affections of humanity are the best guide to the interpretation of nature, since the same God who is present in the one is present also in the other. From this point of view Wordsworth's preference for humble life, with its joys and sorrows, is explicable. It was the primitive and unsophisticated that taught him most of God. The universal feelings, he thought, were the most significant. The hopes and fears of all tell us more about the secret of the world than do the hopes and fears of some, even though they be the rich and cultivated few. His poetry busied itself with the toil and suffering, the hope and love, of the poor. He disclosed the hidden sources of content which are possessed by the shepherd on the hillside and the grandame at her loom. He sang of "joy in widest commonalty spread." He glorified the obscure. He had hope for the fallen. And that because he saw in man, as in nature, the common life of God.

Neither vice nor guilt,  
Debasement undergone by body or mind,  
Nor all the misery forced upon my sight,  
Misery not lightly passed, but sometimes scanned  
Most feelingly, could overthrow my trust  
In what we may become.

I have reserved to the last the mention of the "Ode

to Duty," not only because the ethical seems naturally to follow the philosophical and theological, but because this ode, in my judgment, is the most noble and complete of Wordsworth's poems. Though briefer by far than either of the two just examined, it is more sustained in its dignity, and has a flavor of antique grandeur which reminds us of the best work of Milton. In this ode, moreover, we have the best assurance that Wordsworth was no pantheist, and that he never meant, when he looked upon God as the life of nature and of man, to break down all moral boundaries and confound the human personality with the divine. If this had been the case, conscience would have been declared to be God's own voice within the soul. In the first line of the ode, however, duty is addressed as

Stern daughter of the voice of God.

It is an allusion to the rabbinic doctrine of the *Bath-kol*, or "Daughter of the Voice." The later Jewish teachers held that the Holy Spirit spoke during the tabernacle by Urim and Thummim, under the first temple by the prophets, but under the second temple by the *Bath-kol*, a divine intimation as inferior to the oracular voice proceeding from the mercy-seat as a daughter is supposed to be inferior to her mother. Hence an approving conscience came to be called *Bath-kol*, and the rabbins intimated thereby that while conscience holds a relation to God's voice, is indeed the reflection or echo of that voice, it is not to be identified with it. Man has a connection of life with God, even as his being has sprung from God. But the creature is not the Creator. Man has an independent mind and

will. Though his conscience testifies to his divine origin, it also testifies to the fact that he is free.

Look up to heaven ! the industrious sun  
 Already half his race hath run ;  
 He cannot halt or go astray  
 But our immortal spirits may.

Conscience therefore is an eternal witness in the soul against pantheism, and our poet in his adoption of the rabbinical definition of conscience intimates his belief in man's freedom and responsibility. Not simply the initial apostrophe to Duty, but the whole poem from beginning to end, is instinct with moral life. Wordsworth recognizes the beauty and blessedness of a loving and spontaneous obedience. But he recognizes human weakness and perversity also, and the need of severe reproof at times to keep the soul from straying from the path of rectitude.

Serene will be our days, and bright  
 And happy will our nature be,  
 When love is an unerring light,  
 And joy its own security.  
 And they a blissful course may hold  
 Even now who, not unwisely bold,  
 Live in the spirit of this creed,  
 Yet seek thy firm support, according to their need.

Then comes confession of past error and sincere repentance for the wrong, together with yearning for a state where the will is secure in righteousness. He chooses to be the bondman of duty, rather than to be the bondman of sin.

Me this unchartered freedom tires ;  
 I feel the weight of chance desires ;

My hopes no more must change their name,  
I long for a repose that ever is the same.

Stern Lawgiver, yet thou dost wear  
The Godhead's most benignant grace ;  
Nor know we anything so fair  
As is the smile upon thy face ;  
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,  
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;  
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,  
And the most ancient heavens, through thee, are  
firm and strong.

To humbler functions, awful Power,  
I call thee : I myself commend  
Unto thy guidance from this hour.  
Oh, let my weakness have an end !  
Give unto me, made lowly wise,  
The spirit of self-sacrifice ;  
The confidence of reason give ;  
And in the light of truth thy bondman let me live.

I have said that Wordsworth is not a specifically Christian poet, and we shall look through his writings in vain for any evidence that he intended to teach the details of Christian doctrine. Yet the spirit of his poetry is the spirit of Christianity, and that in spite of the fact that he felt it his mission to be the poet of nature. He never would have been able to find in nature so much to awe and to console, he never could have seen in her so much of truth and love, if he had not carried into his contemplations what he had learned from the gospel of Christ. It is the old story of Plato's cave. He who has once explored the cave with a torch can afterward make his way through in the dark. Many an ethical philosopher like Spencer imagines his conclu-



sions about man's being to be the result of his own insight, when in fact they are unconscious plagiarisms from the Christian revelation. We have followed that torch through the recesses of the cavern, and only for that reason are we now able to find our way through them alone. The interpretation of nature, as well as the interpretation of man, is an exclusively Christian achievement. The wisdom and love of God were never seen in nature, until Christ himself had been revealed as the Lord of nature and yet as the Redeemer of man.

There are those who refuse to call Wordsworth a great poet, for the reason that there are so many commonplace and prosaic pages in his collected works. But there are two reasons for calling him great which these critics overlook: First, the large body of genuine poetry which these works contain; and, secondly, the new bent and insight which these works have communicated to literature. The sonnets of Wordsworth constitute of themselves our noblest collection after those of Shakespeare and Milton, and there is a grave and serious beauty even in poems so long as the "Prelude" and the "Excursion." His chief claim to greatness, however, is this, that he has not only apprehended and expressed the divinity of nature as it had never been apprehended and expressed before, but that he has done this in such a way as to mold and change the poetry of his country and of the world, and to begin a new epoch in the history of literature.

His belief in this divinity of nature was so utter that the homeliest things were to him transfigured. The roughest aspects of humanity and the boldest scenes

of the physical world were full of interest, because they conveyed some thought of God. They seemed to him so interesting in themselves that they needed no artistic charms of verse: let the poetry that described them be as bare as the rocks, and it still would have power to move the heart of man. Yes, we say, but only if the heart of man be prepared to receive it. The clew must first be given; the taste must first be formed; the love of nature must first be implanted.

It is no wonder that the admirers of mechanical verse and the devotees of fashion and convention had no ears to hear the sober and solemn music of Wordsworth—they even denied that there was music there. Jeffries, of the “Edinburgh Review,” read “Peter Bell,” and declared that it would never do. It took almost forty years to convince the English-speaking world that a new poetic luminary had risen upon the horizon. But when the degree of Doctor of Civil Law was conferred upon the poet by the University of Oxford, and the whole auditory of England’s picked and sifted scholars rose as one man with shouts and cheers to do him reverence; when Sir Robert Peel overbore his modesty and well-nigh entreated him to accept the poet-laureateship, not because England gave him anything more to do but because England demanded the privilege of rewarding what he had done; it became clear that the tide had forever turned and that his name was to be inscribed upon the rolls of everlasting fame as the first and greatest poet of nature and of common life. And Tennyson, when he succeeded to the office, only did just honor to the spirit of Wordsworth’s verse when he congratulated himself upon receiving

The laurel greener from the brows  
Of him who uttered nothing base.

It is not possible to concede supreme merit to more than a few, and those by no means the longest, of Wordsworth's poems. But no poet is to be judged by his worst. Let Wordsworth be judged by his best, and he takes the rank of a great poet—the greatest poet who had appeared since Milton. Browning and Tennyson have eclipsed his fame, but only because they have drawn into their own writings much of his peculiar light. He has added a permanent element to the world's thought; he has given us a new method of regarding the world of nature and of man; he has increased the calmness, the comfort, the hope, of humanity. William Watson has given proof of his critical, as well as of his poetic, genius in his lines upon "Wordsworth's Grave," and his estimate may fitly close this essay :

Not Milton's keen, translunar music thine ;  
Not Shakespeare's cloudless, boundless, human view,  
Not Shelley's flush of rose on peaks divine ;  
Nor yet the wizard twilight Coleridge knew.

What hast thou that could make so large amends  
For all thou hadst not and thy peers possessed—  
Motion and fire, swift means to radiant ends ?  
Thou hadst, for weary feet, the gift of rest.

From Shelley's dazzling glow or thunderous haze,  
From Byron's tempest-anger, tempest-mirth,  
Men turned to thee and found—not blast and blaze,  
Tumult of tottering heavens—but peace on earth.

Not peace that grows by Lethe, scentless flower,  
There in white languors to decline and cease ;

But peace whose names are also rapture, power,  
Clear sight, and love : for these are parts of peace.

It may be that his manly chant, beside  
More dainty numbers, seems a rustic tune ;  
It may be thought has broadened, since he died,  
Upon the century's noon ; . . .  
Enough that there is none since risen who sings  
A song so gotten of the immediate soul,  
So instant from the vital fount of things  
Which is our source and goal ;  
And though at touch of later hands there float  
More artful tones than from his lyre he drew,  
Ages may pass ere trills another note  
So sweet, so great, so true.

BROWNING



# BROWNING

## HIS POETRY AND HIS THEOLOGY

### I

IT is a serious question whether this essay would ever have been written if I had not awhile ago seen Robert Browning—not in the flesh, but in the Watts' collection. I do not refer to the collection of Isaac Watts, valuable as that collection is, but to that of George Frederick Watts, who puts his poetry upon canvas instead of coining it into song. Many critics regard this particular Watts as the best modern reviver of the color and the ideality of the Venetian masters.

A considerable number of his pictures were exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. There was "Love and Death"—a rosy boy, with appealing look, vainly striving to press back from the threshold a veiled and sombre form that trampled under his feet the flowers falling from Love's fingers. There was "Love and Life"—a noble, masculine figure helping a fainting maiden along a rocky, precipitous path—the lesson being this, that life cannot get on without love. There was "Time, Death, and Judgment"—Time, an immortal youth, Death, a solemn, dusky shape, both wading through a deep stream, while Judgment, with flaming sword, followed close behind.

These three were all of them great pictures—great

because they bodied forth ideal truth and gave it power over the heart. But the portraits of the collection were more impressive still. The realistic method was never more rigidly applied. Each subject was treated in its own way. The artist had seized the central feature of each personality and had set it forth so vividly and powerfully that the living man stood revealed before you in lineaments never to be forgotten.

There was Lord Lawrence, a swarthy face against a lurid background, as if just emerging from the smoke and flame and blood of the Indian mutiny. There was Sir Frederick Leighton, president of the Royal Academy, all elegance and jollity, as if he cared not a fig whether his special school of painting kept or not. There was John Stuart Mill, cold and intellectual, as if meditating whether in some distant star like Sirius two and two might not possibly make five. There was John Lothrop Motley, the very pink of a literary aristocrat. There was Cardinal Manning, all scarlet and lace, all dignity and devotion, but with an ascetic air that seemed to say he had not had a good meal of victuals since he entered the Roman church. There was Thomas Carlyle, biting through his under lip for very groutiness. There was Swinburne, a pert little counter-jumper, with red hair flying all abroad as if he had just received a shock of electricity. There was Alfred Tennyson, with melancholy and self-consciousness only slightly relieved by the remembrance of his elevation to the House of Lords.

And there, finally, was Robert Browning, healthy, robust, sagacious, subtle; seemingly a large-minded cotton manufacturer, rather than a retail vender of "Red-



cotton Night-caps"; with good humor, knowledge of affairs, insight into character, determination to express what he saw; but, as for "the soul of melody," "singing as the bird sings," or anything sensuous, sentimental, or purely artistic, why, it was simply not there. Philosopher, critic of life, man of the world? Yes. But, poet? Well, if so, not one of the common sort. Not Tennyson's

*quite* x The poet in a golden clime was born,

but Emerson's

x The free winds told him what they knew,

is the verse to describe him. Yet, when I saw the portrait, I felt that I had new light thrown upon all that Browning ever wrote. The *man* interpreted his *work*. I recognized a new species of the genus "poet"—one who has made a sort of poetry so entirely his own that we shall have to pull down our barns and build greater, or else construct an annex to our old scheme of classification, in order to make room for him and take him in.

That Robert Browning is a great writer, the story of his life sufficiently demonstrates. Born in 1812, he was graduated at the London University before reaching the age of twenty. He then spent some years south of the Alps, rummaging about in the libraries of old monasteries and inspecting the pictures of old cathedrals, till Walter Savage Landor could truly say that Browning never strikes a false note when he treats of Italy. "Pauline" was his first printed poem; "Paracelsus," published in 1836, his first tragedy. His "Strafford" was represented upon the stage and failed, though Mac-

ready took the principal rôle in 1837. He married Elizabeth Barrett in 1846, and Mrs. Browning died in 1861.

During all these and the following years Browning has been a prolific writer. As many as ten thick volumes attest his industry. Yet he has never caught the popular ear—he has never tried to catch it. His productions have had to make their way against storms of criticism, but they have been read by a continually increasing number of thoughtful people. Whatever the student of literature may think of Browning, he must take account of the fact that never before was there a writer of verse for the study of whose writings during his lifetime clubs were formed in every large city of both hemispheres—the proceedings of some of these clubs being regularly published, like the transactions of learned societies.

Here is at least a literary phenomenon. There are two possible explanations: Either Robert Browning is a plausible pretender, or he is a great poet. Is Robert Browning a great poet? Well, "that depends." We must know what poetry is and what Robert Browning is. I shall treat my reader therefore to a definition of poetry which, however defective in other respects it may be, will at least have the merit of being brand-new. I shall then weigh Robert Browning in these balances and see whether he is found wanting.

Poetry is an imaginative reproduction of the universe in its ideal relations and the expression of these relations in rhythmical literary form. The meaning of this definition will more fully appear if we say concretely that the poet is, first, a creator; secondly, an idealizer; and,

thirdly, a literary artist. Take the first of these. There is a creative element in all true poetry. The poet is etymologically a "maker," not in the sense in which God is the maker of all, but in the secondary sense that he shapes into new forms the material made ready to his hand. Browning has himself furnished us with a noble description of this office of the imagination :

I find first

Writ down for very A, B, C, of fact :

"In the beginning God made heaven and earth," . . .

Man—as befits the made, the inferior thing— . . .

Repeats God's process, in man's due degree,

Attaining man's proportionate result ;

Creates? No, but resuscitates perhaps.

For such man's feat is, in the due degree,

Mimic creation, galvanism for life,

But still a glory portioned in the scale.

—*The Ring and the Book, I: 706, 741.*

Still farther on, in the same work from which we have quoted, the author compares this manipulation of facts by the imagination to the adding of alloy when the gold is made into a ring.

We must remember, however, that this creative function is to be clearly distinguished from that power of the mind which merely recalls the past. The reproductive faculty is not simply the representative faculty. Imagination is not memory. Every woman can write one novel ; she remembers one story—her own—and she can tell that. But "the vision and the faculty divine" that can evolve a hundred stories, all true to life and throbbing with emotion, how rare a thing is this! Byron shows the narrowness of his creative powers, when

everywhere, on the Alps or on the Rhine, in Greece or Spain or Italy, he sees only himself. Manfred and the Giaour, Childe Harold and Don Juan, are all Byron, under different names and various disguises. Not so with Shakespeare. The greatness of the master appears in nothing so much as in this, that in Shakespeare you see everybody and everything but Shakespeare himself. So Browning hides his own personality. Only twice that I remember in all his writings does he speak in his own name—first, in that magnificent tribute to his living wife, “One Word More”; and, secondly, at the close of his introduction to “The Ring and the Book,” in which he almost apotheosizes his wife now dead. Browning deals with the *non-ego*, not with the *ego*, in the sense of self.

I have called poetry the imaginative reproduction of the universe. But I have not meant to limit the word “universe” to its technical theological meaning. I have meant it to include all, even God himself. Only by giving to the term this infinite sweep of significance do we gain the proper conception of the dignity of poetry. It is nothing less than the reproduction to the imagination of all being, all beauty, all truth, in short of all things, visible or invisible. The high praises of God are its noblest province, but all the world of finite things is its province also. To reproduce all this to the imagination would require an infinite mind, and the result would be the poetry of the ages, the poetry of eternity.

If this is the meaning of the word “universe,” then it is certain that no mortal poet can compass it. Hence the poet must make his choice; he must divide, in order

to conquer. It is not to his discredit that he takes a limited field, provided within those limits he "holds the mirror up to nature" and shows us the essential truth of things. In order to judge Browning justly then, we must ask what range he has assigned himself, and whether within that range he shows himself possessed of a great creative imagination.

The most obvious thing to be said about Browning's genius is that he is the poet, not of nature, but of man. <sup>①</sup> Wordsworth was the poet of nature. To him the world was sacred, because symbolic and interfused with a divine element. The "light of setting suns," and "the billows rolling evermore"—these kindled his poetic imagination.

The meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Appareled in celestial light—  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

Now all this affords the utmost contrast to Browning's poetry. I doubt whether sentiments like these can be found in all the dozen solid volumes that bear his name. Browning and Wordsworth both deal with common things; but Wordsworth treats of nature, Browning of life. The latter could adopt Pope's line, "The proper study of mankind is man." And in the introduction to "Sordello," where our author has most clearly indicated the direction of his literary ambition, he says in plain prose: "My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul."

Again, Browning is the poet, not of events, but of

② thoughts. He cares not so much for the result as for the process—he describes, not so much incidents, as people's impressions of them. Some might perhaps think that in the "Bringing of the Good News from Ghent to Aix" we had at least one exception to this rule; but even here the interest lies not so much in the ride as in the rider; not so much in the redoubtable steed as in the fiery determination that spurred him on; not so much in the deliverance itself as in the thoughts of the deliverer. Rarely, if ever, has this writer's verse any tinge of the objective, much less of the epic.

On the other hand, he lets us into the secrets of the heart. As he sets before us "Bishop Blougram's Apology" for holding great ecclesiastical preferments while all real faith in the doctrines he was set to defend has gone out of him, we see "all the recesses and windings of an acute but mean and peddling little soul." As we hear the duke calmly describe his villainous treatment of "My Last Duchess," it is difficult to say which we most shudder at, the speaker's icy cruelty, or his unconsciousness of it. No poet has more clearly taught that "out of the heart are the issues of life," and that "as a man thinketh, so is he." No poet has more powerfully depicted the self-perpetuating sin of the thoughts, or has given more impressive illustrations of the necessity of "bringing every thought into captivity," if we would make the least pretense to virtue.

③ Once more, Browning's poetry is not lyric, but dramatic. He does not himself describe men's thoughts, but he makes men describe their own. In one of his poems he rebukes a brother poet for "speaking naked

thoughts, instead of draping them in sights and sounds." In the "Spanish Cloister," the malicious, cursing monk involuntarily sets before us the character and life of the gentle and kindly brother whom he hates; so that, though the latter never utters a word for himself, the very cursing of his enemy becomes his justification and his monument. The little poem entitled "Confessions" contains a startling revelation of the heart. It is the last words of a dying man. He will have nothing to do with the clergyman who comes to give him spiritual consolation. He fastens his eyes on the medicine bottles upon the table, and his imagination turns even them into a picture of a darling sin of his youth, and gloats over the remembered transgression, even though the next moment is to usher him into the presence of God.

All this reminds me of a historical incident related by Mrs. George in her book, entitled "The Diary of Kitty Trevylyan." John Nelson, the Methodist preacher of England, was converted by means of a dream. He saw the great white throne set and the myriads gathered of earth and heaven. The Judge sat silent, but before him was an open book. Up to that book came one by one in long procession every soul of all mankind, and as each advanced he tore open his breast as a man would tear open the bosom of his shirt, and then compared his heart with the commandments written in the book. Not a word was said, nor did the Judge lift his finger, but each man, according as his heart agreed or disagreed with that perfect standard, went with joy to the company of the saved, or in despair to the company of the damned. Sin became its own detector and judge

and tormentor. So as we read Robert Browning we become aware that a process of self-revelation is going on. We seem to have naked souls before us. We look into the heart of man and into the day of judgment.

Now, granting to our author his peculiar and chosen department, namely, *man*; his aspect of that segment of the universe, namely, *thought*; and, finally, his method of treatment, the *dramatic*; we ask once more: Is Browning a great creative genius? I think no one who has attentively and sympathetically read such poems as "Karshish," "Andrea del Sarto," "The Flight of the Duchess," "*Dis Aliter Visum*," "The Statue and the Bust," "By the Fireside," "Master Hugues," "Evelyn Hope," can refrain from answering in the affirmative.

But none of these, after all, give more than fragmentary evidences of his power. The greatest work of Robert Browning is unquestionably "The Ring and the Book." A sort of personality invests this acknowledgment of mine, and I make it partly by way of reparation; for, fifteen years ago, I began to read this production of the poet, but allowed myself to be daunted by the roughness and obscurity of its opening pages. I threw it down, determined to read no more. For ten years I kept my vow. Beginning then with something easier, I found to my surprise that Browning was comprehensible. A summer vacation devoted to "The Ring and the Book" converted me to a qualified admirer of the poet. Now, after further study of his writings, I regard this poem as the greatest work of creative imagination that has appeared since the time of Shakespeare.



I wish to justify this statement, which to many will seem so extraordinary. I can only do so by briefly describing "The Ring and the Book." It is founded upon the story of an old Italian murder. Count Guido, after having passed his youth in the service of the pope and having failed to secure the advancement that he sought, determines in disgust to retire to his dilapidated castle and his ancestral estate. He bethinks him, however, that an addition to his meagre income will be desirable, and he manages, with that end in view, to marry the reputed daughter of an aged and well-to-do couple of the middle class and to take her with him. Her parents follow her and, being ill-treated by him, leave his house in wrath. They then make known the fact that their reputed daughter is no daughter of theirs, but the offspring of a courtesan.

Count Guido, in revenge, pursues toward his wife a course of relentless cruelty. He would drive her from him, yet in such a way as to throw the blame on her. A young priest is filled with pity for this double victim of avarice and malice—so young, so pure, so miserable—and he helps her to escape and to make her way to her so-called father's house in Rome. Thither Count Guido pursues her, and on a certain Christmas eve bursts in with hired assassins and fatally stabs the father, the mother, and herself. The count is apprehended, tried, and executed.

It is this story upon which Browning has rung the changes in "The Ring and the Book." First, we have the bare facts narrated—fourteen hundred lines. Secondly, we have the story as one-half of Rome tells it, said one-half taking the part of the husband—fifteen

hundred lines. Thirdly, what the other half of Rome said, taking the side of the wife—seventeen hundred lines. Fourthly, *Tertium quid*—what the few, the *élite*, the cultured, the cardinals, said—sixteen hundred lines. Fifthly, what Count Guido himself said—two thousand lines. Sixthly, what the brave priest said who fled with the count's wife—twenty-one hundred lines. Seventhly, what the young wife herself said during the short hours between the attack and her death—eighteen hundred lines. Eighthly, what the counsel for the defense said at the trial—eighteen hundred lines. Ninthly, what the counsel for the prosecution said at that same trial—sixteen hundred lines. Tenthly, what the pope said, to whom the case was referred for final decision—twenty-one hundred lines. Eleventhly, what Count Guido said in prison before he was beheaded—twenty-four hundred lines. Twelfthly, what the world said when all was over—nine hundred lines.

A most audacious and wearisome specimen of literary trifling, the reader will be apt to say. Not so. Each new telling of the story adds new incident and sheds new light. The effect is stereoscopic—you see the facts from ever new points of view. Little by little the real truth is evolved from the chaos of testimony; little by little the real motives of the actors become manifest. As the process goes on you catch yourself speculating about each of the *dramatis personæ*, as if he were a character in real life. The complexity of human motive, the wonderful interaction of character and circumstance, the vastness of the soul, all these begin to dawn upon you. Men are both better and worse than they know; only God can judge the heart. I know of no

poem in all literature in which the greatness of human nature so looms up before you, or which so convinces you that a whole heaven or a whole hell may be wrapped up in the compass of a single soul.

And as for the separate figures, I know not where to find characters more original or more distinct than that of Guido, with a selfishness that makes sun, moon, and stars revolve about him, and when foiled turns to desperate malignity; or Pompilia, the white lily grown out the horsepond scum, unstained even in the midst of cruelty and misery; or Caponsacchi, the pleasure-loving soul turned to a hero by one resolve of daring and self-sacrifice; or the grand old pope, rounding out a just life and preparing to go before God's judgment bar by doing one last act of justice and judgment upon earth. There are those who think this poem great only in its length, and it cannot be denied that it gives the impression of inexhaustible fertility. But such critics can scarcely have read the poem through. The learning, the thought, the general conception—these are as remarkable as the length; and taking them all together, I am persuaded that the generations to come will regard "The Ring and the Book," in the mere matter of creative genius, as the greatest poetical work of this generation.

The strongest and most flattering thing that can be said about Robert Browning has been said already. We have found him to possess in an eminent degree the first and most important characteristic of the true poet, creative genius. But there is a second standard by which he must be tried. Is the idealizing element as highly developed in him? Poetry is the imaginative

reproduction, not of the actual, but of the ideal universe. The great poet then must be able to idealize. His imagination, creative though it may be, must not find its affinities in the bad, the morally indifferent, or the merely actual. It must hold high converse with the true, the beautiful, and the good. The poet must be one of

The immortal few  
Who to the enraptured soul and ear and eye  
Teach beauty, virtue, truth, and love, and melody,

Let me make this plain by a few contrasts. Imagination is not enough to make a poet. I once had a classmate who had a vivid imagination—the trouble was that his imagination all ran to snakes. Of words descriptive of creeping and slimy things—centipedes, scorpions, and toads—he had a rare supply; and the imaginative power displayed in his occasional objurgations was something impressive. But I never called him a poet.

Somewhat similarly there is an imagination that runs by instinct to the morally bad, that seems to love the low and the vile for its own sake; or, if not this, is possessed with the notion—a notion born of a pantheistic philosophy—that everything that *is* has a sort of sacredness and value, and therefore is to be faithfully represented in literature. And so we have Zola's studies of morbid anatomy, and his minute depicting of the festering plague-spots of humanity. Of a somewhat better sort are the novels of Henry James—novels with no moral purpose; novels, in fact, that scout a moral purpose as foreign to true art. Mr. James seems to fancy that his business is simply to set before us studies of

actual society and manners : he would photograph modern life.

Now in contrast to all this tendency in our modern literature I stand for the thesis that poetry is not a mere representation of life. Preraphaelite studies of nature are not worthy the name of poetry. Art is not photography, and photography is not art. The ideal element must be seized and exhibited, or we have no poetry. We want to see the good in low surroundings, and we want to see the evil only as a foil and contrast to the good. "Poetry," as Ruskin has well said, "presents to us noble grounds for the noble emotions." We seek in poetry for the essential truth and beauty that lie at the heart of things. Bluer skies than those of Italy, brighter wit than that of Sidney Smith, higher thought than that of Plato, these we seek and expect in poetry. We look to her to lift us from the dull realm of the actual into the "great air" of the ideal.

Of Browning as an idealizer I cannot say so much as I said when I spoke of him as a creator. And yet a striking feature of his poetry is its recognition of this higher element in human life. To him all men are in a true sense ideal beings. There is a germ of greatness in every soul, continents that no Columbus has ever yet discovered, thoughts and motives, feelings and decisions, that possess interest beyond that of the whole material universe. Browning would not have chosen for his subject the soul of man if he had not sympathized with the dictum of Sir William Hamilton, "In the universe there is nothing great but man ; in man there is nothing great but mind."

Idealization, however, to be of any value, requires the

(5) possession of right standards of judgment. The poet therefore must be able to see things in large relations, discern the universal in the particular, catch glimpses of the absolute truth and beauty in its minor manifestations. The greatest poetry is impossible except to a great philosopher. I know what prejudices I am encountering here; still I believe that these prejudices originate in a mistaken and narrow view of what poetry is. If poetry is the imaginative reproduction of the universe in its ideal relations, then nothing human, nothing divine, can be foreign to the poet. He must know psychology and ethics and politics and law; he must know the physical sciences, and he must be a theologian as well. Of course I do not mean that he must be a master in details; but this is certain, that the great poets have possessed themselves of the substance of the knowledge of their times. And this means that the great poet must be a man of broad mind, of deep sympathy, a great thinker, and a great man.

There are three things in particular which serve as standards in all idealization, and which the great poet must rightly apprehend. He must first of all have a right view of human nature. He must believe in freedom and immortality. No great poet was ever a fatalist. The poetry of mere fate denies man's consciousness, and fails to inspire. Emerson was better than his philosophy when he wrote :

So near is grandeur to our dust,  
 So near is God to man,  
 When duty whispers low, "Thou must,"  
 The youth replies, "I can."

How different from this is the writing of George Eliot, with her exaggeration of heredity. To her, life is but the working out of inborn tendencies. Man may struggle and he may pray, but his nature is too much for him at last. Those who have seen Elihu Vedder's illustrations of Omar Khayyám will remember the ever-recurring swirl that images human life; the many threads that come, no man knows whence, that go, no man knows whither; the gathering of these threads for a moment into the knot of human consciousness, and then the scattering of that consciousness forever. No wonder that at that center stands the wine cup. It is the old philosophy of the brute: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Now I say that with such a conception as this there can be no proper idealization, and no poetry that will permanently touch the heart of man. Life is not worth writing poetry about, for it has lost its dignity. The true poet believes less in environment, and more in will; less in heredity, and more in freedom. Charles Kingsley has said that the spirit of the ancient tragedy was "man conquered by circumstance," while the spirit of the modern tragedy is "man conquering circumstance." But this is only partly true. Even the ancient tragedy had its Prometheus, with unconquerable will asserting his freedom in spite of the thunderbolts and the vultures.

And there is still more to be said. The thirst of conscience for reparation is the very essence of tragedy, whether ancient or modern. And this conscience witnesses to freedom in the past and to an immortality of retribution in the future. Poetry must take account of

these facts in the nature of man, or it ceases to be poetry. Now we claim for Robert Browning that he recognizes them. In his pages we read of human freedom. "Ixion" is a poem worthy, for its spirit and its power, to be put side by side with the "Prometheus" of Æschylus. In it the victim, bound to his iron wheel, can still triumph over Jove. In "Pippa Passes," the innocent peasant girl trips in simple gladness from scene to scene, singing as she goes :

God's in his heaven,  
All's right with the world,

but her little song rouses conscience, makes vice seem hateful, reveals men to themselves. All unconsciously to herself her words strike right and left, "a savor of life unto life or of death unto death," and the result is two murders and three souls saved. I know of no poem since "Macbeth" that so portrays the agony of an awakened conscience. In this day of Hegelian revival, when moral evil and natural evil are confounded with each other, our literature needs to be invigorated by a fresh breeze from Dante, by Shakespeare's pictures of remorse, and by Robert Browning's illustrations of the voluntariness and the damnableness of sin.

If the poet must have proper views of human nature, it is yet more important that he should have proper views of the divine. He must recognize the fact that there is a God. A poet of whom it can be said that "God is not in all his thoughts," has missed the greatest thought of poetry, for "the greatest thought of the finite is the Infinite." So Jean Paul has said, and Browning would adopt his phrase. Our author's writing is so full



of this divine element that many a reader would fain call him a religious philosopher, if not a religious poet. We maintain that the highest poetry is impossible without religion, not only because the thought of God is the most sublime and fruitful of thoughts, but because from this loftiest thought all our lower thoughts take their proper measure and color. He who has no sense of God can never look at finite things in their right proportions. He who does not see in God an infinite personality, righteousness, and love, can never interpret the world with its sorrow and its sin.

Browning believes in the personality and righteousness and love of God. He is at war indeed with the anthropomorphism which would degrade God to the level of human appetites and passions. His "Caliban on Setebos" is a most scathing and convincing arraignment of superstitious and slavish worship. "The Epilogue," in which David stands as the type of the religion that confines God to place, and Renan as the type of the skepticism that gazes sensuously into heaven until the last star of faith grows dim and disappears, ends with Browning's own declaration of faith in an immanent Deity :

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,  
Or decomposes but to recompose,  
Become my Universe that feels and knows.

But that this is not pantheism, we are assured by other poems like "Saul," in which, not content with an unmoral God, he declares that "All's law, yet all's love," and maintains that incarnation is the only true revelation. So Pompilia strikes the same note when she says :

I never realized God's birth before—  
How he grew likest God in being born.

“Ferishtah's Fancies,” thought by some to be only a collection of slight poems, seems to me to be one of the most significant examples of the poet's irresistible tendency to the expression of religious ideas. In these slight poems I find the following subjects successively treated: 1. God works no unnecessary miracles. 2. Let us give thanks for actual blessings, though much that we desire may fail us. 3. Faith and love go together. 4. Pray on, though you see no answer to your prayers. 5. The purpose of suffering is purification. 6. The punishment of sin is the dwarfing of nature. 7. Asceticism fails of its own end. 8. Love must go before knowledge. 9. Life is worth the living. I think no one can read over this list without being convinced that here is a poet who believes in God as well as in the soul.

But there are also relations between man and God upon which the poet must have definite opinions, if he would idealize aright. I have already referred to “Saul,” by way of evidence that Browning's God is a personal God, a God of love, a God self-revealed and brought down to our human comprehension in the incarnate Christ. I wish to speak of this same poem as embodying the true idea of inspiration, and so in general, of the communications of God to man. I speak of this poem the more readily because it is perhaps the most widely known and the most easily understood of Browning's longer productions—the fittest of all therefore for a beginner to master.

The title of the poem should be "David," rather than "Saul," for the interest centers not in Saul's hearing but in David's song. The shepherd boy has been brought from the sheepfold to chase away with music the abnormal and insane depression of Saul's spirit. David sings of nature and her beauty, but Saul is not moved. He celebrates Saul's own heroic deeds, but there is no response. David rises in spirit as he sings; in love he takes to himself Saul's sorrow; and, as he does so, a Spirit greater than his own takes possession of the singer; through his own love for his monarch, he is lifted up to understand something of the great love of God; his human sympathy becomes the vehicle of prophecy; in God himself he sees the desire to reveal himself in human form to men; he looks into the far future and cries, "See the Christ stand!"

Is there any other poem than this that more fully and truly expresses the method of divine inspiration? Here is a using of human faculties and powers, of human heart and tongue, yet an elevation of all these to heights of understanding and expression which unaided humanity is powerless to reach. The supernatural uses the natural as its basis and starting-point, as its medium and vehicle; but it transcends the natural, opening to it the far reaches of prophetic vision, and attuning it to the melody of a heavenly song.

I might speak of "A Death in the Desert," an attempt to depict the last hours of St. John, and to illustrate how human nature, fainting and failing as it is, can hospitably receive and faithfully express the mind and will of the Spirit of God. But I find nowhere in Browning's writings any intimation that the gift of in-

spiration proper is to be confounded with the enlightenment of Christian men in general. He stops with the faith that "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And yet the obscure and the weak may be God's workmen still :

All service ranks the same with God—  
With God, whose puppets best and worst  
Are we : there is no last nor first.

Alfred Tennyson has been called the religious poet of this century, apparently upon the ground of such poems as "The Two Voices," "The Vision of Sin," and "In Memoriam." I dislike to shock the sensibilities of Tennyson's admirers ; but I wish to record my belief that there is far more of a healthful religious spirit in Browning than in Tennyson. In the latter, underneath the faith there is a generally hidden, but sometimes outcropping, skepticism ; so that I should hesitate to say whether his poetry had been quoted the more by the prophets of faith or the prophets of unbelief. This cannot be said of Browning. I do not read fragments of his writings in sermons preached for the purpose of criticising or denouncing the old faith. I do find him referred to in reverent discussions of the law and the attributes of God.

I am inclined to commend the reading of Robert Browning to all preachers and theologians, as well as to all thoughtful Christian people. He is the most learned, stirring, impressive literary teacher of our time—but he is a religious philosopher as well. He has expressed himself upon a larger variety of problems than any modern poet. He who would serve men's highest in-

terests as secular or religious teacher, will find more of suggestion, more of illustration, more of stimulus, in Browning than in any modern writer. To quote again from Walter Savage Landor: "His is the surest foot, since Chaucer's, that has waked the echoes from the difficult places of poetry and of life."

I cannot leave this general subject of Browning's idealizing faculty without fairly considering two objections to my doctrine, one directed against the seriousness, and the other against the healthfulness of his poetry. I grant that there is at times an apparent levity. This may sometimes be merely a sign that he is consciously master of his theme—so fully master that he can play with it. The cat plays with the mouse she has caught—she does not care to play with the dog. But Browning himself has suggested a deeper and more constant reason than this. He has appropriated as motto for "Ferishtah's Fancies" what Collier in his edition of Shakespeare says of that great master: "His genius was jocular, but when disposed he could be very serious." So we may say that it is the nature of Browning's genius to be jocular.

Is jocularitas incompatible with seriousness? "I am never merry when I hear sweet music," says Jessica in "The Merchant of Venice." Why did Jesus never jest? Would he have seemed to us possessed of a larger and truer humanity if the humorous element had appeared in him? It is common to say that our Lord's unique work of suffering and death involved unique and soul-crushing burdens—for him to laugh would have been as incongruous as for us to laugh at a funeral. We sing, "He wept that we might weep."

Is it not equally true to say, "He wept that we might smile"? Since "Believing, we rejoice to see the curse remove," may we not maintain that an unhindered development of all parts of our nature is first rendered possible by his death?

I think no one can doubt that there is a provision in our nature for wit and jollity. Great men with great cares have solaced themselves with jests. We do not think either Socrates or Abraham Lincoln the less serious because they were occasionally jocular. I will not venture to say that Browning is never guilty of seeming irreverence; but that this seeming irreverence has a really profane intent would be hard to prove. In general, I think it is rather the bubbling up of a deep effervescent spring. It is part of his idealizing faculty to see things in their humorous relations. His jocularity, though sometimes carried to an extreme, is part of the large-mindedness of the man.

And this opens the way to the discussion of the last objection. Is Robert Browning's poetry healthful in its influence? We must grant that there is a certain freedom about its treatment of man's physical instincts, which now and then may offend critics of the Tennysonian school. There is no asceticism in Browning. He does not attempt to do without the body, as Shelley did. But neither does he deify the body, as Swinburne does. *Mens sana in corpore sano* is his motto. He believes in food and drink—but in food and drink mainly as means, not as ends. If he ever speaks of sensuous things with something of Elizabethan frankness, we must remember that there is a mock modesty more akin to vice than is innocent freedom of speech.

I find in Browning true sentiment without a tinge of sentimentality.

John Stuart Mill once defined sentimentality as "a setting of the sympathetic aspect of things above their æsthetic aspect, or above the moral aspect of them—their right or wrong." This was the fault of the early novels, like Richardson's "Clarissa," which drew such oceans of tears from our great-great-grandmothers, but whose sickly and maudlin sentiment we only make merry over to-day. Now I think it a great tribute to the healthfulness of Robert Browning's poetry, and so to his power of true idealization, when I say that, as for this mawkish sentimentality, he will have none of it. Wordsworth would have come nearer to being one of the greatest poets if he had not lacked one of his senses—not one of the five senses, but that sixth, most important sense—the sense of the ludicrous. Browning's sense of the ludicrous stands him in good stead. He cannot be commonplace, he cannot be nonsensical, he cannot be affected, he cannot be sentimental. Our young people will get good from reading such poems as *Dis Aliter Visum*, because Browning does not believe that true love is an unreasoning impulse, but rather regards it as subject to judgment and conscience.

Passion is not its own justification ; the sympathies are under law to reason ; feeling should have a basis in fact—these are truths which greatly need to be taught to our easy-going, pleasure-loving time ; and no one has taught them so well as Browning. Out of his books there blows a healthful breeze, as from the woods and the hills, to brace up and reinvigorate a literature that was fast becoming finical and *dilettante*. And I

think I am not mistaken in saying that much of the modern progress toward direct and sensible speech, both in the pulpit and in the press; much of the new simplicity and vigor which differences our talk from the bookish conversations of Walter Scott's novels; aye, much of the condensation and energy of recent English poetry, as compared with the long-winded wearisomeness of Wordsworth, is to be attributed to the healthful influence of Robert Browning.

Browning is greatest as a creative genius; less great as an idealizer; least great as a literary artist. We have said that poetry is an imaginative reproduction of the universe in its ideal relations and an expression of these relations in rhythmical literary form. It is this standard of artistic form by which we have still to try our poet. Artistic form is of two sorts, or rather involves two elements: first, an element of construction; and secondly, an element of rhythmical and musical expression. In considering the constructive element, we must remember that true poetry, like true science, puts before us not merely facts, but facts in their relations. In a great poem we want, not the materials of poetry, but an organic structure; not bricks, but a house. It is a serious question whether that can be a great poem which compels the reader to do the poet's work. I do not attempt just here to decide the question; I only suggest it with the view of adducing an argument or two upon each side and then leaving the reader to judge for himself.

For all ordinary purposes and in all ordinary kinds of writing, the world has come to accept Herbert Spencer's principle of style,—a contribution to human knowledge, by the way, of more value and longer to be re-



membered than all the rest of his philosophy,—I mean the principle of “economy of the reader’s or hearer’s attention.” Given in the auditor, for example, a certain amount of intellectual and emotional energy, then the less of this energy expended in grappling with the mere form of an address, the more there will be left to seize upon the substance. Hence the wisdom of making the drapery as thin as possible, that the real form may be the better seen. Avoid all involution and remote allusion that will hinder the hearer from getting at the sense. Let the phrase of your essay be so simple that he who runs may read. So order your material that it unfolds most easily and naturally, each new sentence adding some point of interest, and all tending to a climax of thought and of expression.

This is the art of putting things. The French excel in it. Every great teacher is in this respect a literary artist. He knows how to organize his matter so as to produce the most rapid, comprehensive, and powerful impression. And this is the first thing pointed out in Milton’s description of true poetry: “Simple, sensuous, passionate.”

Now it is agreed by all that Browning is often obscure, and that this obscurity resides not alone in the single phrase or verse, but also in the whole arrangement of his material. The reader often begins, as I myself began, with unprepossessed and even favorable mind, only to find that unexplained allusions throng upon him; clues are presented which, being tracked out, seem to lead no-whither; in fact, a labyrinth seems to be the only comparison that fits the poem. Grave doubts suggest themselves either of the poet’s sanity

or of our own. Or is he trifling with us? The average reader concludes at any rate that what it is not worth Mr. Browning's while to make intelligible, it is not worth his own while to read. The very multiplicity of questions that suggest themselves at every turn, and that make so lively the meetings of the Browning clubs, are an offense to the man who does not love to think much as he reads.

I know of no author, ancient or modern, the mention of whose name just now excites more violent dispute. Certain it is that Browning divides the world. There are two hostile camps. If he is not of all poets the best loved by his friends, he is surely the best hated by his foes. Indeed it is almost amusing to hear one who has been cheered, in beginning *Sordello*, by the author's assurance: "Who will, may hear *Sordello's* story told," and then has floundered through what he cannot but regard as a mediæval literary morass—I say, it is amusing to hear such a one describe the indignation with which at the close of the poem he read the words: "Who would, has *heard* *Sordello's* story told."

It is only fair, however, to listen to Browning's defense. His method, he would say, is the true method, because it is the method of life. Suppose you go down the street to-morrow morning, and as you go, perceive in the distance a great crowd stretching from curb to curb. There are excitement, and hurried ejaculations, and much rushing to and fro. You draw near and ask some person upon the periphery of the circle what it is all about. He gives you the curt and fragmentary answer, "Murder," and then turns from you. You press your way inward, questioning others as you can, until

gradually there rises in your mind the structure of a story; hints which at first you could not understand begin to be interpreted; you modify first impressions by subsequent information; by the time you have reached the center of the crowd a whole tragedy of love, and jealousy, and crime, and death, has been enacted in your brain.

Compare this way of getting at the story with the other way of reading about it all in the evening paper of that same day. Which of these ways most rouses your thinking powers, most excites your interest and sympathy? Can any one doubt that it is the former? Now this is Browning's method. He thrusts us into the turmoil of life and compels us to construct the story for ourselves. He gives us facts, but only in a fragmentary way. What is said becomes fully intelligible only in the light of further knowledge. What is the result? Why this: you become a judicial personage, and weigh evidence, as the case unfolds before you. You become yourself a poet, a creator, and when you have done, you feel that the poem is a thing of life, that you have your own hard-earned conception of it, that it is your poem as well as Browning's.

All this is best illustrated in the case of "The Ring and the Book." As those twenty-two thousand lines pass before your eyes, your first impulse is to give up the investigation—the case is too complicated, and life is short. But keep on, and the story gets a hold upon you; the characters become instinct with life; each new aspect of the case is like a new revelation; the whole poem becomes a mighty living structure, wheel within wheel, the fit type and representative of the life of hu-

manity moved upon from above by angelic influences, and seized from beneath by the powers of hell. When you have read it you can call it "A ring without a posy, and that, *mine*." In this very sense of possession which Browning's poems awaken, I see the secret of the intense interest he excites in those who have the patience and the grace to read him. If we have to eat our own bread in the sweat of our brow, Browning would say that this is precisely what he has been aiming at; without exercise we should have no appetite, no enjoyment of our food, no profit from the eating of it.

I confess that this view of the case has much to say for itself. Certainly the best poetry is not that which yields its full meaning at the first cursory reading. If absolute intelligibility to a half-roused mind be the test of poetry, much of what we call the best is no poetry at all. No, a man cannot understand the best poetry without being something of a poet; even as he cannot appreciate Mont Blanc without looking at it from some neighboring height. The best poetry of Shakespeare or even of Tennyson is not mastered except by repeated reading; it takes years, and maturity indeed, before the full glory of some great passages dawns upon us.

Browning compels us to work for our intellectual living more perhaps than any other modern poet, but there is always the comfort of knowing that there is a real pot of gold at the end of this rainbow, and that there is a definite place where the rainbow ends. I do not think that Browning is obscure for the mere sake of obscurity; what obscurity there is is a part of his art, whether the principle upon which it rests is ill-judged or not. And, with practice, the obscure becomes plain.

In fact I find that the objection upon the score of obscurity is urged less and less, as the reader becomes more and more familiar with Browning's method. He expects it, he sees the object of it, he is stimulated by it, he ends by becoming a qualified admirer of it, just as he admires the twilight and the growing splendor of the stars.

Thus I have presented with all fairness the considerations *pro* and *con*, so far as respects the constructive element in Browning's poetry. I wish I could sum up and give the verdict squarely upon the side of the poet. This I fear I cannot do. I could do so if I did not recognize certain "unexplored remainders" in his writings, the meaning of which I have some doubt whether even Browning himself ever knew. In "Ferishtah's Fancies" there are certain lines printed in the original Hebrew; this looks to me mischievous, if not malicious. A noted Greek professor said that he could understand Browning's translation of the "Agamemnon," if he were only permitted to use the original as a "pony."

I have always thought it doubtful whether the Romans understood their own great poets at first reading. I have some sympathy with the man who declared that if the Latins had had to learn their own language, they would have had no time to conquer the world. But there is seldom what you may call willful and needless obscurity in the classic poets. Their condensed and nervous speech was meant to pack things in for preservation; and it is no wonder that the original package sometimes takes time to untie. So Browning means to pack his thought. Mrs. Orr tells us that it was a reproachful note of Miss Caroline Fox that determined

him nevermore to use an unnecessary word. Would that he had added the determination perfectly to organize his material before he began to write.

While I see in Browning an untold wealth of resource, a mind most eager for expression, a power to recognize truth in its secret hiding-places, I see also an occasional lack of judgment as to what is valuable and what is merely curious, and a lack of constructive power to make the most of the matter that is chosen. He seems at times content with first drafts, willing to put down out of a teeming mind what first comes to hand, and ready to say, upon objection made, that if the reader cannot understand it, so much the worse for the reader. Here he is something less than a great literary artist, for true art is intelligible, and no unintelligible poem can ever become immortal.

I cannot leave this part of my subject without putting something of the poet's least intelligible verse side by side with something of his simplest and best. I know few passages more difficult as to form, yet more noble for depth and insight, than this one from "The Ring and the Book":<sup>1</sup>

God breathes, not speaks, his verdicts, felt not heard—  
 Passed on successively to each court I call  
 Man's conscience, custom, manners, all that make  
 More and more effort to promulgate, mark  
 God's verdict in determinable words,  
 Till last come human jurists—solidify  
 Fluid results—what's fixable lies forged,  
 Statute—the residue escapes in fume,  
 Yet hangs aloft a cloud, as palpable  
 To the finer sense as word the legist welds.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Ring and the Book," I : 255 *sq.*

Justinian's Pandects only make precise  
 What simply sparkled in men's eyes before,  
 Twitched in their brow or quivered on their lip,  
 Waited the speech they called, but would not come.

Yet this passage is obscure to many merely because the thought is profound. To such let us commend "The Martyr's Epitaph," in which Browning shows himself capable of a simplicity and grandeur unsurpassed in English poetry:

Sickly I was, and poor and mean,—  
 A slave ; no misery could screen  
 The holders of the pearl of price  
 From Cæsar's envy ; therefore twice  
 I fought with beasts, and thrice I saw  
 My children suffer by his law.  
 At length my own release I earned ;  
 I was some time in being burned,  
 But at the last a hand came through  
 The flame above my head, and drew  
 My soul to Christ, whom now I see.  
 Sergius, a brother, wrote for me  
 This testimony on the wall ;  
 For me—I have forgot it all.

—*Easter Day*, 275-288.

The truest artistic form requires something more than the constructive element—it implies also the element of rhythmical and musical expression. The good and true must be married to the beautiful. This marriage certainly seems made in heaven, for nothing more surprises the poet than the leaping from his brain of thought and word together—wedded from their birth. In this matter of melodious expression the poets differ more than in almost anything else. We modern and English-

speaking people owe, in this respect, a great debt to Shelley. I find in him a "linked sweetness long drawn out," that Milton himself was never master of, and that Swinburne has sought, but with weaker intellectual powers, to copy. It is a wonder that, with Browning's passionate admiration of Shelley, he has in his own writing so little of Shelley's distinguishing excellence. In this mastery of melodious expression, Elizabeth Barrett Browning is greatly the superior of her husband. Compare "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" with the "Flight of the Duchess"; compare "My Kate" with "The Lady of Tripoli," and you cannot help seeing that the wife puts into her verse a delicate sweetness and a tremulous emotion which the husband can never equal.

Indeed, for a reason already suggested when I spoke of defects of construction, Robert Browning aims *not* to be an emotional poet. And here let us do him justice, as we can only do by looking at the matter from his peculiar point of view. Browning found the literary world well-nigh enslaved to a poetry in which sense was sacrificed to sound, in which melody of phrase took the place of thought, in which mere sweetness covered a multitude of sins of vagueness and rhapsody and inanity. You could read such poetry when half asleep, and you were quite asleep when you were done. Browning thought such writing beneath the dignity of the poet. No "Airy, fairy Lillians" would he write. His poetry should carry no one to heaven on flowery beds of ease. Men's minds should be alert, if they read him at all. Hence his brusque air, his harsh turns, his scorn for the merely sensuous and quieting, his startling us from



dreams into sense. A little poem of his illustrates this :

Verse-making was least of my virtues : I viewed with despair  
Wealth that never yet was but might be—all that verse-making  
were

If the life would but lengthen to wish, let the mind be laid bare.  
So I said "To do little is bad, to do nothing is worse"—  
And made verse.

Love-making—how simple a matter ! No depths to explore,  
No heights in a life to ascend ! No disheartening before,  
No affrighting hereafter—love now will be love evermore.  
So I felt "To keep silence were folly—all language above,"  
I made love.

It reminds me of an out-of-door play of my early days which bore the name of "Snap the whip." A long line was formed of boys taking hold of hands, the biggest and strongest boy at one end of the line, the smallest and most unsuspecting at the other, many fine gradations between. The game was to swing the line around with the big boy for a center, and to swing it around with such momentum that the little boy at the small end should be thrown off like a comet from the solar system. It was fine fun for the big boy; for the little one it meant the general demoralization of his attire and the breaking of his head against the fence. Many a time, as I have read Robert Browning and have been hurled off into vacancy by one of his sudden turns, I have felt like the little boy in "Snap the whip." It is all very well for Mr. Browning, but how about the unsophisticated reader? Is it possible for him to escape a certain sense of injury?

Emotion, music, grace—these are not so native to Robert Browning as thought. The philosopher often

overtops the poet. His harshness is not all to be pardoned upon the plea that it is a higher kind of art. Much of it is to be accounted for only upon the ground that "it is his nature to." Verse is not quite spontaneous with him. — John Stuart Mill's conception of God is somewhat similar. The imperfections of the universe, he thinks, argue either lack of love or lack of power in the Supreme Intelligence; he prefers to doubt the power rather than to doubt the love. God does the best he can, but he has to work with very intractable material. And so Mill speaks of God as if he were some weak old man trudging up-hill with a mighty burden which he cannot easily manage, which, in fact, he is just able to carry—a shocking representation of him whom we know to be infinite in power as well as infinite in love. I have sometimes thought that the representation was an excellent one of merely earthly creators—and of none more so than of Browning. His material at times seems too much for him. The metal is not hot enough to run freely into poetic molds; the metal is of the best; but the power to shape it into perfect forms—the highest measure of this is lacking.

In Italy they have a peculiar way of cooking and serving that pretty little bird, the ortolan. It is transfixed with a skewer, but upon the skewer are also put a piece of brown toast upon the one side, a sage-leaf upon the other. So came, in thick succession, sage-leaf, ortolan, toast, sage-leaf, ortolan, toast, repeated as many times as need be. Browning likens his writing very justly to the combination of these three. The ortolan represents the poetry; the sage-leaf furnishes piquancy; the brown toast is nothing but sound sense.

I admire his candor—few poets are so frank. My only fear is that at times when ortolans were scarce and thin, Browning may have made up for their lack by putting two sage leaves in place of one, and by indefinitely increasing the size and thickness of the brown toast.

I would not indulge myself, however, nor would I advise my younger readers to indulge, in the calm superciliousness with which many intelligent people still treat Robert Browning. It is not wise to assume that so steadily growing a fame and so marked an influence upon current literature are without any just foundation. It is best to take account of the forces of our time; we cannot afford to be ignorant of them. The youth who postponed his crossing of the stream until the water should flow by had to wait for a long time. So, it seems to me, the man who regards what he calls “the Browning-cult” as a merely temporary craze “*expectat, dum defluit amnis.*” Those who know most of Browning are rather inclined to say of him as Isocrates said of Heraclitus: “What I know of him is so excellent that I can draw conclusions from it concerning what I cannot understand.”

And one can say all this without for a moment surrendering his powers of critical judgment. He only insists that wisdom does not exclude wonder, and that we live, as intellectual and spiritual beings, only by “admiration, hope, and love.” The *nil admirari* spirit is the spirit of decrepitude and death, and faith in great men is next to faith in God. I would not have Robert Browning’s defects of artistic form blind any of my readers to the broad humanity of the poet and his ideal pictures of the deep thoughts of man’s heart. No poet.

of this century is more widely learned, no poet has more carefully pondered the great problems of existence, no poet has uttered more important truth.

There is, of course, a higher poetry than his, a poetry of wider range, of sweeter sound, of deeper spiritual significance. As civilization goes on, imagination will not fall into disuse, but will reach a higher development. To believe otherwise is to fancy that an inalienable prerogative of the human soul can be sloughed off as a mere excrescence, or can dwindle till it ceases to be. No, imagination belongs to man ; and, as with advancing ages man's range of vision widens, imagination will only be furnished with larger and nobler materials, will only have deeper insight into the ideal relations of the universe, will only grow in power to express the truth. With larger truth will come deeper emotions, and with deeper emotions will come greater perfection of artistic form.

If there were only as much of us at all times as there is at some times, and if power of expression only answered always to the heart's desire, living would be a delight and earth would be heaven. I take the very sense of imperfection in all poetry of the past as an incentive to look forward. I not only anticipate no decline of poetry, but I confidently predict a day when, under the influence of a diviner Spirit than any earthly Muse, poetry shall be the chief handmaid of religion, the incarnate God shall be its chief subject, and the poet shall undertake "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme." I look for a grander poetry here on earth—but I am not content with this ; I want all God's sons and daughters to prophesy ; I trust we shall all be poets

in the New Jerusalem ; I long for the great future when the soul can fully express herself, when form shall answer to spirit, when language shall be the perfect vehicle of thought, and when all speech shall be song.

## II

In the charming "Memoirs of Caroline Fox," we are told that Carlyle once entertained Emerson by taking him at midnight through the London slums. After he had shown his friend some more than common specimens of depravity, the sage of Chelsea blurted out in his cynical way : "Do you believe in a devil now?" But the calm American only replied : "I am more and more convinced of the greatness and goodness of the English people." It is an illustration of the tendencies to pessimism on the one hand, and to optimism on the other, that divide the world between them. In Germany, Schopenhauer looked at life through glasses dim with the smoke of the pit, while to Fichte a roseate mist suffused and glorified every dark and hateful thing. The pessimists, like the poor, we have always with us ; but in literature it is only the optimists who have lasting power and attraction. The true poet must be a sort of prophet—a believer in the divine presence and purpose in all things, and therefore confident and forward-looking, like the prophets of Israel.

Robert Browning was the greatest optimist of the century, and his optimism constituted his chief message to our generation. In a pessimistic age, when the winds were laden with wailing, he preached a gospel of cheer and hope. He did this persistently and courageously,

in spite of the fact that the age had its strong influence upon him. In his later days even he became involved in the toils of a pessimistic philosophy, and that to the great detriment of his poetry. Yet the optimistic faith and impulse of his early years remained to the last and asserted themselves in spite of speculative difficulties. The withes of the Philistines could not long bind this Samson, and, even when old and blind, he could summon up his strength and confound his enemies.

It was largely a matter of temperament. When Henry Ward Beecher was asked whether life was really worth living, he replied that it depended very much upon the liver. It was not wholly without reason that the ancients located the affections in that particular portion of the body. Pessimism and optimism are to a considerable extent matters of digestion. The dyspeptic takes dark views of the universe around him, while youth and health see all things bright and fair. Browning certainly began his career with a fine physical endowment, and though some of his later philosophical aberrations have been laid to the account of ill-health, I can testify that, so recently as 1887, when I saw him in his scarlet gown among the dons at the Oxford Commemoration, he seemed the picture of a sound mind in a sound body. The twinkle of humor in his eye and the air of sagacity and comfort in his whole manner indicated that there was no place in him for mawkish sentiment. There is a story that Swinburne, when he first met Browning, refused to take the chair that was offered him, and insisted upon sitting upon a hassock at the master's feet. The story goes on to relate that when Swinburne took his departure the master indulged

in what the lower classes of London call "language." Carlyle once said of Browning: "There's a great contrast between him and me. He seems very content with life, and takes much satisfaction in the world. It's a very strange and curious spectacle to behold a man in these days so confidently cheerful." If something of this cheer was due to native temperament, a part was attributable to the fact that he constantly mingled with men. In this respect we may contrast him with Tennyson. As compared with Browning, Tennyson was a recluse. Self-conscious and morbidly sensitive to whatever voices were rife around him, he came to be a praiser of the time that was past, and a somewhat morose critic of the present. One has only to read "Locksley Hall" and then to read "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," to perceive that the tender grace of a day that was dead could never come back to Lord Tennyson. He who shuts himself out from his kind comes to distrust his kind. Browning believed in humanity, in large part because he was *en rapport* with humanity.

Yet we must go deeper than this. Every man is a product of his time. Larger influences than those of his own health and environment make him what he is. There are streams of tendency that come down from the past. The atmosphere of thought owes its temperature and quality to distant seas and to other lands. The Puritans had so exalted God as to leave no place for man, and there had been a natural reaction. Deism had come in, with its "absentee God, sitting idle ever since the first sabbath at the outside of the universe and seeing it go." Sensationalism had come in, with its derivation of our sublimest ideas from sense, and its

consequent failure to see dignity in anything. But the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a change. Whatever else the German transcendental philosophers did do or did not do, they showed that there are elements in knowledge which are not furnished by the senses. Kant proved that there may be, Hegel proved that there must be, being to which our knowledge corresponds. In other words, we can get at Reality. It was the rediscovery of God in his universe.

The wave of German thought swept over to England. Shelley, in his "Adonais," saw God in nature, though he could not pronounce the sacred name, and even called himself an atheist :

The One remains, the many change and pass ;  
 Heaven's light forever shines, earth's shadows fly ;  
 Life, like a dome of many-colored glass  
 Stains the white radiance of eternity,  
 Until death tramples it to fragments.

And in this recognition of the divine principle in the world, more than in the matchless melody of his verse, I find the explanation of Browning's apotheosis of Shelley in his "Sordello." Wordsworth also saw God in nature—his insistence upon a personal intelligence and love in even the meanest flower that blows constitutes the chief merit and charm of his poetry.

But here Shelley and Wordsworth stopped. Shelley felt that he was at war with the world of mankind and the world of mankind at war with him. He would have pulled down the existing order of society, if only he could have done it. And Wordsworth, in spite of his theoretical recognition of God in all things, was at



home only when he got "far from the madding crowd." Men were lawless, and the divine in them was hard to recognize. I cannot better express my conception of Browning's place in literature than by saying that he begins where Shelley and Wordsworth leave off—begins by finding God in nature and ends by finding God in man. Listen to "Paracelsus":

The center fire heaves underneath the earth,  
 And the earth changes like a human face ;  
 The molten ore bursts up among the rocks,  
 Winds into the stone's heart, outbranches bright  
 In hidden mines, spots barren river-beds,  
 Crumbles into fine sand where sunbeams bask—  
 God joys therein. The wroth sea's waves are edged  
 With foam, white as the bitten lip of hate,  
 When, in the solitary waste, strange groups  
 Of young volcanoes come up, cyclops-like,  
 Staring together with their eyes on flame—  
 God tastes a pleasure in their uncouth pride.  
 Then all is still ; earth is a wintry clod ;  
 But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passes  
 Over its breast to waken it ; rare verdure  
 Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between  
 The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,  
 Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face.

. . . . .  
 Above, birds fly in merry flocks ; the lark  
 Soars up and up, shivering for very joy ;  
 Afar the ocean sleeps ; white fishing-gulls  
 Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe  
 Of nested limpets ; savage creatures seek  
 Their loves in wood and plain—and God renews  
 His ancient rapture. Thus he dwells in all,  
 From life's minute beginnings, up at last  
 To man—the consummation of this scheme  
 Of being, the completion of this sphere of life. . .

And man produced, all has its end thus far ;  
 But in completed man begins anew  
 A tendency toward God.

In these last lines the poet goes far beyond Shelley or Wordsworth. Browning sees God, not only in nature, but in the soul. He has been called the "subtlest asserter of the soul in song." In his main poems, indeed, he finds his subjects in the struggles, aspirations, triumphs, of the soul. He believes in spirit. In "The Ring and the Book," the Pope says: "Mind is not matter, nor from matter, but above"; and, in one of his last poems, he writes:

Quoth a young Sadducee, "Reader of many rolls,  
 Is it so certain we have, as they tell us, souls?"  
 "Son, there is no reply" ; the rabbi bit his beard ;  
 "Certain, a soul have I—*we* may have none," he sneered.  
 Thus Karshook, the Hiram's-hammer,  
 The Right-hand Temple-column,  
 Taught babes in grace their grammar,  
 And struck the simple solemn.

Yet Browning is a pronounced evolutionist. He finds it difficult to maintain an absolute difference between the organic and the inorganic, so long as every plant is turning the one into the other ; and, so long as man by eating animal food is turning the brute into himself, he finds it difficult to assert an absolute difference between himself and the brute. The same principle which manifests itself in matter manifests itself in a higher form in spirit. Evolution is only the name of a process. It leaves the question of agency still unsolved. Both evolution and law are modes of action—the action of a

spiritual Being who reveals himself in both matter and mind.

The poet's idealism makes all this easier to him. "To know," he says in "Paracelsus,"

To know

Rather consists in opening out a way  
Whence the imprisoned splendor may escape,  
Than in effecting entry for a light  
Supposed to be without.

Thus his evolutionism, instead of lowering man, elevates nature. Matter cannot explain spirit, for matter cannot be understood except as a manifestation of spirit, or else as an element in the spiritual world. As we look upon the ascending scale of being, shall we take as the principle of explanation the beginning or the end? Evidently the latter. "The oak explains the acorn, even more truly than the acorn explains the oak." We say, therefore, of the spiritual activities of man: "This is what the crude beginning in nature really was. Man, with his higher ideas, shows the meaning and content of all that led up to him." Here is genuine poetic insight. Let me illustrate it first by a quotation from "*Hohenstiel-Schwangau*":

For many a thrill of kinship I confess to  
With the powers called Nature, animate, inanimate,  
In parts or in the whole; there's something there  
Manlike, that somehow meets the man in me.

And then by several brief quotations from "Paracelsus":

Man, once descried, imprints forever  
His presence on all lifeless things.

A supplementary reflex of light  
 Illustrates all the inferior grades, explains  
 Each back-step in the circle.

The winds

Are henceforth voices, wailing or a shout,  
 A querulous mutter or a quick gay laugh,  
 Never a senseless gust, now man is born.  
 The herded pines commune and have deep thoughts,  
 A secret they assemble to discuss  
 When the sun drops behind their trunks.

The morn has enterprise, deep quiet droops  
 With evening, triumph takes the sunset hour,  
 Voluptuous transport ripens with the corn  
 Beneath the warm moon, like a happy face.

I knew, I felt (perception unexpressed,  
 Uncomprehended by our narrower thought,  
 But somehow known and felt in every shift  
 And change in the spirit—nay, in every pore  
 Of the body even)—what God is, what we are,  
 What life is—how God takes an infinite joy  
 In infinite ways—one everlasting bliss,  
 From whom all being emanates, all power  
 Proceeds.

Comte declared that science would conduct God to the frontier of his universe, and politely bow him out, with thanks for his provisional services. But Browning holds rather with Lord Bacon, that while “a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism,” “depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.” For, while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them and go no further; but, when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and

Deity." Our poet never dispenses with God. Instead of seeing no design in the universe, he finds nothing but design. "Strange," says Frances Power Cobbe, "that when we once find out how a thing is done, we at once conclude that God has not done it!" Our intuitions are not valueless because we come from ape-like progenitors. "Intuitions are God's tuitions," and man, the end and goal of the development, explains the significance and purpose of all the lower forms that prepared the way for him.

In the powers and faculties of man, the summit of creation, therefore, Browning finds the most conclusive evidence of God's existence. We must interpret nature by man and not man by nature. Nature is no "empty eye-socket," as Jean Paul expresses it, without life or intelligence, but shows everywhere a living face, to meet and respond to the face of man. We have heard in our day the mournful atheism of Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyám":

And that inverted bowl they call the sky,  
Whereunder crawling cooped we live and die,  
Lift not your hands to It for help—for It  
As impotently moves as you or I.

Here the sweetness of the verse is like that of flowers upon a coffin. Contrast with this the glowing theism of Robert Browning:

I know that He is there, as I am here,  
By the same proof, which seems no proof at all,  
It so exceeds familiar forms of proof.

—*Hohenstiel-Schwangau.*

The truth in God's breast  
Lies trace upon trace on ours impressed:

Though he is so bright, and we so dim,  
We are made in his image to witness him.

—*Christmas Eve.*

God is behind all.

We find great things are made of little things,  
And little things go lessening, till at last  
Comes God behind them.

—*Mr. Sludge, the Medium.*

God is the perfect poet,

Who, in creation, acts out his own conceptions.

—*Paracelsus.*

And so, while nature is a manifestation of God, it is in man that God most perfectly reveals himself. Every man has in him a divine element, and this presence of God in man gives an infinite value and dignity to the poorest and meanest human being. Browning, like John Milton before him, is a monist. He holds that there is but one substance or principle of being. All things are potentially spirit, or, in other words, the universe is a universe of spirits. Nature herself is instinct with life, and all things show a divine idea and plan:

This is the glory, that, in all conceived  
Or felt or known, I recognize a Mind  
—Not mine, but like mine—for the double joy  
Making all things for me, and me for Him.

—*Hohenstiel-Schwangau.*

But he does not hesitate to include man, as well as nature, in this monistic view of the universe. Man too, in the deep basis of his being, is connected with God. Humanity is naturally rooted and grounded in him. "from whom and through whom and to whom are all

things." In "The Ring and the Book," the Pope soliloquizes :

O thou,—as represented to me here  
 In such conception as my soul allows,—  
 Under thy measureless, my atom-width !  
 Man's mind, what is it but a convex-glass  
 Wherein are gathered all the scattered points  
 Picked out of the immensity of sky,  
 To reunite there, be our heaven for earth,  
 Our known Unknown, our God revealed to man?

Professor Jones of Wales has given the best exposition of Robert Browning's philosophy. He says that :

*Quo's*  
 While Browning insists on this identity of the human spirit with God, and declares all the phenomena of the world to be manifestations of love, he does not forget that the identity is not absolute. Absolute identity would be pantheism, which leaves God lonely and loveless, and extinguishes man, as well as his morality. In his poem entitled "Death in the Desert," we read :

"Man is not God, but hath God's end to serve ;  
 A Master to obey, a Cause to take,  
 Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become."

The unity of the divine and the human within the spiritual life of man is a real unity, just because man is free ; the identity manifests itself through the difference ; and the difference is possible through the unity. . . He would find God in man, and yet leave man free.

To this statement of Professor Jones I may add that Browning does not attempt to explain how unity of substance between God and man is consistent with freedom, sin, and guilt in the finite creature. Yet he believes in these last, as firmly as in the first. Observe

the two elements of his doctrine in the following lines, first, from "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

Rejoice we are allied  
 To that which doth provide  
 And not partake, effect and not receive ;  
 A spark disturbs our clod :  
 Nearer we hold of God  
 Than of his tribes that take, I must believe.

Here we are declared to be one with the Source and Giver of life. But now, secondly, note the limitation of this unity. In "Christmas Eve" we hear the poet deriding

The important stumble  
 Of adding, he, the sage and humble,  
 Was also one with the Creator.

He tells us that it was God's plan to make man in his image :

To create man, and then leave him  
 Able, his own word saith, to grieve him ;  
 But able to glorify him too,  
 As a mere machine could never do  
 That prayed or praised, all unaware  
 Of its fitness for aught but praise or prayer,  
 Made perfect as a thing of course.

God, whose pleasure brought  
 Man into being, stands away,  
 As it were, a hand-breadth off, to give  
 Room for the newly made to live,  
 And look at him from a place apart,  
 And use his gifts of brain and heart.

Life's business being just the terrible choice.

—*The Ring and the Book, Pope, 1238.*



We may interpret all this by saying that the poet is a monist, but an ethical monist, a believer that God and man are of one substance, but a hater of pantheism which denies God's transcendence and separate personality.

Sidney Lanier asserts that the last twenty centuries have spent their best power upon the development of personality, and that literature, education, government, and religion have all learned to recognize the individual as the unit of force. Of all poets, Robert Browning most clearly perceives that the greatness and power of God are revealed in the very freedom of human personality and the consequent diversity of human life. Man has a freedom which he may abuse, and the essential thing in life is the opportunity for probation, choice, the determination and manifestation of character. The poet seizes a typical man at the crisis of his history, when all the influences of ancestry and environment converge to a focus upon him, and when he speaks the one word or makes the one decision which reveals to all eternity what manner of man he chooses to be. At that moment, that instant one and infinite, he takes his snap-shot, photographs the man, depicts his innermost thought and character. But not because the single act or the single man is of supreme importance—rather, because in this particular man and this particular act we may see one aspect or manifestation of the infinite energy and the perfect character of God.

It is easy to suggest difficulties here, and to maintain that our poet is formulating metaphysical and moral contradictions. How can ignorance and weakness manifest wisdom and power? Above all, how can falsehood

N.B.

and wickedness manifest the divine purity and truth? The complete answer to these questions Browning does not profess to give. He only suggests that there is an ultimate principle of unity, and tells us what it is, though without showing us in detail how the reconciliation is effected. Here we come to another characteristic and fundamental feature of his system of thought. The principle that unifies all is Love. All grades of being are in some way embodiments of the supreme good. The whole is in every part. *Unus homo, nullus homo.* The universe in like manner is an organism, and every part ministers to the whole, as the whole to every part. So the world may be called the return of the highest to itself, and the universe is homeward-bound. As all things are manifestations of spirit, so all things are manifestations of love.

*Denn das Leben ist die Liebe,  
Und des Lebens Lebengeist.*

Love is for Browning the highest, richest conception man can form. Mere intellect *is not* perfection; here he differs from Hegel; love *is* perfection, for it includes intellect and all else. The poet was certainly a man of affectionate nature; if he had not been, it is doubtful whether such a solution of the problems of life would ever have dawned upon him. Fanny Kemble said he was the only man whom she had ever known that behaved like a Christian to his wife. As she was frail and secluded from the world, he never but once during his fifteen years of married life dined away from home. On every anniversary of his marriage, when he was in London, this robust Englishman, who did not ordinarily

deal in mere sentiment, went to the church where the ceremony had been performed, and kneeling down kissed the doorstep. In his last illness he called every night for the ring his wife had given him on her deathbed, and pressed it to his lips before he went to sleep. He regarded love as a direct emanation from the inmost nature of God, and the most essential article of his creed he summed up in the word in "Paracelsus":

God, thou art love ! I build my faith on that !

How could Browning believe the universe to be in every part a manifestation of love, when sin and wretchedness abound ? The answer is that he saw the love of God so demonstrated in Jesus Christ that these seemingly opposing phenomena ceased to trouble him. I do not mean that he held to any of the orthodox formulas as to the person of our Lord. His faith was doubtless a very liberal one. But he did see in Christ the most effective revelation of God. With his conviction that personality was the highest form of being was united a belief that only personal influences can ever transform character. He declares that so powerful is a complete personality that its very touch gives life and courage and power. When he seeks stimulus for sustained effort, and inspiration for enduring virtue, he finds them in Jesus Christ.

The proof of all this from Browning's writings must be a cumulative one. Let me first quote from his letters. In writing to a lady in her last illness, he says : "It is a great thing—the greatest—that a human being should have passed the probation of life, and sum up its experience in a witness to the power and love of God.

. . . I see ever more reason to hold by the same hope." And then he quotes the words of Charles Lamb, when "in a gay fancy with some friends as to how he and they would feel if the greatest of the dead were to appear suddenly in flesh and blood once more, on the final suggestion: 'And if Christ entered this room?' he changed his manner at once and stuttered out, as his manner was when moved: 'You see, if Shakespeare entered, we should all rise; if He appeared, we should all kneel!'" But why should Robert Browning join with Charles Lamb in the worship of Christ? I answer, first, because he regards Christ as God revealed, Deity active in nature and in history. The living God whom we see in nature is none other than Christ. Nature is *not* his body, in the sense that he is *confined* to nature. Nature is his body, in the sense that *in* nature we see him who is *above* nature, and in whom at the same time all things consist.

Mrs. Orr, his biographer, says that Browning once spoke to her with relation to his own religious opinions, and concluded by reading to her the "Epilogue to *Dramatis Personæ*." She continues:

It will be remembered that the beautiful and pathetic second part of the poem is a cry of spiritual bereavement, the cry of those victims of nineteenth century skepticism for whom incarnate Love has disappeared from the universe, carrying with it the belief in God. The third part attests the continued existence of God in Christ, as mystically present to the individual soul:

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,  
Or decomposes but to recompose,  
Become my Universe that feels and knows.

"That face," said Mr. Browning as he closed the book, "that face is the face of Christ: that is how I feel him."

With one qualification the most orthodox believer may accept the view of the poet. Nature is an expression of the mind and will of Christ, as my face is an expression of my mind and will. Rhetorically I can identify nature with Christ, just as I can identify my face with myself. But then let us remember that behind and above my face is a personality of which the face is but the partial and temporary manifestation. And, in like manner, let us remember that nature is but the partial and temporary manifestation of the Christ who is not only *in* all things, but *before* all things, and *above* all things.

There is a second reason why Browning bows to Christ, and that is because he who is the life of nature and the moving power in history has taken human form and has shown by an infinite self-sacrifice that God is love. I quote from several poems:

From the first Power was, I knew ;  
 Life has made clear to me  
 That, strive but for closer view,  
 Love were as plain to see.

—*Reverie, in Asolando.*

I never realized God's birth before,  
 How he grew likest God in being born.

Such ever was love's way—to rise, it stoops.

—*Pompilia, in The Ring and the Book.*

Gladness be with thee, Helper of the world !  
 I think this the authentic sign and seal  
 Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad  
 And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts,  
 Into a rage to suffer for mankind  
 And recommence at sorrow.

— *Balaustion's Adventure.*

This man so cured regards the curer then  
 As—God forgive me—who but God himself,  
 Creator and Sustainer of the world,  
 That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile.  
 The very God!—think, Abib; dost thou think?  
 So the All-Great were the All-loving too!  
 So through the thunder comes a human voice  
 Saying: “O heart I made, a heart beats here!  
 Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself!  
 Thou hast no power, nor mayst conceive of mine,  
 But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,  
 And thou must love me who have died for thee.”

—*Karshish, the Arabian Physician.*

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wilt thou—so wilt thou!  
 So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown,  
 And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up or down  
 One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,  
 Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!  
 As thy love is discovered Almighty, almighty be proved  
 Thy power, that exists with it and for it, of being beloved!  
 He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the  
 most weak.

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for; my flesh that I seek  
 In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be  
 A Face like my face that receives thee: a man like to me  
 Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever! A hand like this hand  
 Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ  
 stand!  
 —*Saul.*

After all these citations I think it will not be doubted  
 that the secret of Browning's persistent optimism lay in  
his recognition of Christ as God and Saviour. If the  
 life that pulsates through all nature is the life of Christ,  
 and if the hand that conducts the march of history is the  
 hand that was nailed to the cross, then we may dismiss  
 our fears and advance to the study of life's problems

with cheerful heart, believing with Pippa that, however great the intellectual difficulties may be,

God's in his heaven,  
All's right with the world !

Or if any one still questions whether this is the real source of the poet's quietude as he faces the mysteries and seeming contradictions of existence, I make one quotation from "Death in the Desert" :

I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
All questions in the world and out of it,  
And hath so far advanced thee to be wise ;

*Justo*

and another from "The Ring and the Book," where he speaks of

The divine instance of self-sacrifice  
That never ends and aye begins for man.  
So, never miss I footing in the maze ;  
No ! I have light, nor fear the dark at all.

✓

I wish that my account of Browning's philosophical and religious views might only end here. In general it is the earlier Browning that I have been describing. The earlier Browning is Browning the poet ; the later Browning is Browning the would-be philosopher. While he sticks to intuition and to poetry, he satisfies us. In his earlier poems he sees with the imagination and the heart, and his poems rouse us, warm us, inspire us, like Luther's triumphant songs. He starts with insight and Scripture, and he is strong. He attempts to prove, and he becomes weak. He makes the mistake of attempting to put philosophy into poetry. He succeeds

only in spoiling a good poet to make a poor philosopher. It is like the story of George Eliot over again—at first simplicity and natural pathos, afterward over-elaboration and wearisome sententiousness.

Was the change due to the weakening of imagination and the strengthening of the merely logical intelligence which growing years brought with them? Or did success in grappling with problems stimulate ambition to demonstrate the truth he saw? Certain it is that insight brings logic after it. The poet gives the hint to the philosopher. After Æschylus and Sophocles come Plato and Aristotle. And sometimes a long historical succession is represented in the life of a single individual. I am disposed, however, to connect the change in Browning rather with a change of the utmost importance in his personal relations—I mean with Mrs. Browning's death, and with the loss of her insight and influence. The poet's wife had more of native poetic ardor than her husband had. So long as she lived, he valued his proper vocation and was content with "the vision and the faculty divine." But when she left him, the mystery of life and death, of sin and sorrow, oppressed him as never before. Her cultivation of his faith-instinct was now lacking. He began to speculate. He determined to interpret the world in terms of spirit. He staked all on his ability to prove that all things are illustrations of love.

But this was philosophy and not poetry. The effect upon his verse was not fortunate. In poetry it is not the first step but the last step that costs. That last step—of making the form perfect—he had always been averse to. His later work is full of rude vigor, but it is



the vigor of a first draft—what he has written he has written, and he more and more disdains to alter or amend; if the reader is scandalized by the roughness or blindness of it, so much the worse for the reader. It is unfortunate that so many people get their first impressions of Browning from these later productions of his, in which involved and long-drawn reasoning is only occasionally relieved by a simile or aphorism that shows the sage and the seer. If this were the only Browning, we might well subscribe to the lines of George C. Bragdon, who describes him as :

Versed in all schools, athirst for the unseen.  
 He wrote in measures noble English prose,  
 Dropping rich gems of poesy between,  
 Where passion flamed through masterful repose.

It was a mistake even so far as the philosophy was concerned, for poetry sees deeper than science does. Faith is a sort of winged intellect, an operation of the integral mind, the highest activity of reason. Only love can give eyes to the mind. Only the intellect that is conditioned by a right state of the affections can ever reach the highest truth. It is not blind faith but "blind unbelief" that is "sure to err and scan God's works in vain." Faith is not blind, but is endued with powers of insight which mere intellect can never boast of. When Browning ceased to trust his poetic insight and began to indulge in argument, he exchanged the spear of Ithuriel for a weapon of merely earthly temper.

The poet's thesis is that all things are manifestations of love. His earlier poems simply declare the fact, to-

gether with what he can see of God's method, but without pretense of reconciliation; as, for example, in "Saul," he says:

I spoke as I saw—

I report as man may of God's work—all's love, yet all's law.

But his later poems are efforts to defend his thesis in terms of intellect alone. Here he had to confront the fact of moral evil. Now there are two kinds of optimism: first, Christian optimism, which asserts that, *in spite of* moral evil all things are working together for good; and secondly, pantheistic optimism, which asserts that all things *are* good. With every inclination to put the best interpretation upon his work, I am obliged to confess that Browning came dangerously near to the pantheistic explanation of sin. And Dr. E. G. Robinson has well said that "Sin explained is sin defended."

Let us trace from step to step the growth of this wrong principle. Robert Browning wished to see in all things, even the worst, only various forms of good. He describes the result of his observations as follows:

All the same,  
Of absolute and irretrievable black—black's soul of black,  
Beyond white's power to disintensify—  
Of that I saw no sample; such may wreck  
My life and ruin my philosophy  
To-morrow, doubtless.

—*Ferishtah's Fancies.*

He depicted the criminals in "The Ring and the Book," only to show

In the absolutest drench of dark  
Some stray beauty-beam, to the despair of hell.

*U. G. White*

So even Guido, that arch-fiend among mortals, who declared that, as he had tried to murder Pompilia here, so he would murder her in the next world if he could only catch her there, is made to give at least one sign of incipient morality in his last cry for mercy :

“Pompilia, will you let them murder me?”

Our poet set out with a firm belief in personality and freedom. If he had kept this constantly in mind, he would have referred all evil to the perversity of the finite will. But he thought it necessary, instead, to refer it somehow to God. This could only result in a gradual blurring of the clear line between moral good and moral evil. How shall moral evil be shown to have in it an element of good? In this way : Man's life is a progress through strife. The important thing is to rouse the will. Evil awakens man's active energies, incites him to conflict and endeavor. So evil is the necessary means of good. But it is clear that, in this explanation, the moral idea already begins to be lost sight of, and force takes the place of right. Virtue is defined as mere valor in the battle of life. Better seek evil with one's whole mind, than be lukewarm in goodness. Indifference and spiritual lassitude are the worst of sins. “The Statue and the Bust” seems to teach that vigorous transgression is better than pusillanimous rectitude. Says Browning :

I hear your reproach : “But delay was best ;  
 For their end was a crime.” Oh, a crime will do  
 As well, I reply, to serve for a test,  
 As virtue golden through and through,  
 Sufficient to vindicate itself  
 And prove its worth at a moment's view.

Here let us listen to Professor Boyesen's interpretation:

What Browning contends is that passion is the expression of the personality at its floodtide; it is the man's or the woman's power at its climax; it is the rich blossoming of the soul; and the failure to obey its prompting is a sacrilege, a wasting of golden moments that will never return. It is in these moments that life reaches out for its fulfillment; and dying, without having tasted their sweetness, is death indeed; is sterility and failure. It is as if the plant should die without having blossomed. The moral objections to this doctrine are known to Browning in all their aspects, but he chooses never to emphasize them. It is doubtful whether he would recommend his philosophy to any one as a guide of action. . . Quite apart from the fact that society must, for its own protection, punish nonconformity in morals, the pursuer of pleasure for its own sake, or for his own sake, will always have the experience of Ixion—he will embrace a cloud. Even from a purely philosophical point of view the words of Christ are true: "He that seeketh his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life, for my sake, shall find it."

With this criticism of Boyesen I heartily agree. Browning in attributing the origin of evil to God has come dangerously near to consecrating every abnormal impulse of human nature. Right is simply might. In "The Ring and the Book," the pope is a warrior-priest, and Pompilia reaches the height of virtue by becoming energetic. Browning would have agreed with Dante in consigning to a specially despicable Limbo those who were not good enough for heaven and who had not character enough for hell. Luther's "*Pecca fortiter*" seems to be the recipe for true greatness.

Is all moral failure, then, only apparent? Is sin only a phantom? Are right and wrong only illusions to sting men to effort? Is Ottima just as good in her place as

Pippa? It certainly seems as if this were at times Browning's doctrine. He says:

All service ranks the same with God—  
With God, whose puppets, best and worst,  
Are we; there is no last or first.

—*Pippa Passes.*

In spite of the evil will that opposes the good, the poet seems to take the voice of conscience in man as evidence of his moral worthiness, instead of its being evidence that he knows the right and so is the more guilty for the wrong.

Sin then is not the willful grieving of God and departure from his commandment which Browning's earlier poems had declared it to be. It is rather a necessary result of the limitations of man's finite being. It is the blundering of inexperience, the thoughtlessness that takes evil for good, the ignorance that puts its fingers into the fire, the stumbling without which one cannot learn to walk. It is a fruit which is sour and bitter simply because it is immature. It is a means of discipline and training for something better—it is holiness in the germ, good in the making; and, so long as we are finite creatures, the idea of escaping from it is, as Goethe expresses it, like "the idleness of wishing to jump off from one's own shadow."

Our moral nature, however, revolts against this view. James Russell Lowell said truly:

In vain we call old notions fudge  
And bend our conscience to our dealing;  
The ten commandments will not budge  
And stealing will continue stealing.

What shall be done with this voice of conscience? Is the solemn utterance of our moral nature only a deception? The answer is substantially this, that, as evil is necessary to good, so error is necessary to truth. We cannot know truth except as the antithesis to error; we cannot gain truth except by putting off error; in other words, error is only partial truth, that prepares the way for truth that is more complete.

↑  
*quote*  
 Man must pass from old to new,  
 From vain to real, from mistake to fact,  
 From what once seemed good, to what now proves best.  
 —*Death in the Desert.*

What were life,  
 Did soul stand still therein, forego her strife  
 Through the ambiguous Present to the goal  
 Of some all-reconciling Future?

—*Gerard de Lairesse.*

The space  
 Which yields thee knowledge—do its bounds embrace  
 Well-willing and wise-working, each at height?  
 Enough : beyond this lies the infinite—  
 Back to thy circumscription !

—*Francis Turini.*

Take the joys and bear the sorrows—neither with extreme  
 concern !

Living here means nescience simply : 't is next life that helps  
 to learn.

—*La Saisiaz.*

But this is skepticism and agnosticism. If nothing is true, or if nothing is known, then this theory is not true or its truth cannot be known. Browning was a poet rather than a metaphysician, or he could hardly have accepted a scheme so self-contradictory.

But let us get the scheme itself more fully before us. The doctrine is, that ignorance and deception are needful if man is to strive and grow. To know things as they really are would reveal all as locked together in a system of universal good; but to know this would be the greatest of disasters, since stimulus to activity would then be lacking. Evil is only illusion, but the knowledge of that fact would paralyze all moral effort. To believe that evil is only evil, however, would be alike ruinous, since it would take away all trust in universal providence and all ground of hope for the future. Hence we are left to faith. In default of intellectual certainty we betake ourselves to our fundamental postulate that love is the controlling principle of all, and we conclude that ignorance is only love's instrument. Good can be known only by the contrast of evil; evil is but illusion, the necessary stepping-stone to good; Love permits the illusion, only to incite to good.

But is not God truth and right, as well as love? Here we come to another peculiarity of Browning's thinking. In his earlier poems he did apply to truth and right the same principle that he applied to love. In "Christmas Eve" he says :

For Justice, Good, and Truth were still  
Divine, if, by some demon's will,  
Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed  
Law through the worlds, and Right misnamed.

And in "A Soul's Tragedy" he adds :

Were 't not for God, I mean, what hope of truth—  
Speaking truth, hearing truth—would stay with man?  
I trust in God, the Right shall be the Right,  
And other than the Wrong, while he endures.

Here truth and right are declared as divine and eternal as God himself. But in his later productions he classes these by themselves, and sets love above them as the only thing divine and eternal. Man's love is a gift from God and a means of interpreting God—not so man's knowledge. While "love gains God at first leap," knowledge is always defective. A radical flaw runs through our knowing faculty. In his last poems he seems to grant that intellect finds mere power ruling on every side, indifferent to morally good or evil, while heart rebels against this conclusion of intellect, and believes that even power will some day be seen to be love:

When see? When there dawns a day,  
 If not on this homely earth,  
 Then yonder, worlds away,  
 Where the strange and the new have birth,  
 And Power comes full in play.

This setting of the heart against the intellect, and the affections against the reason, is not only to make man's nature inherently self-contradictory, but to make God, who reveals himself in man's reason, essentially unmerciful. Conscience cannot acquiesce in this explanation of evil as only apparent. And love protests against the sorrow that evil brings in its train. We feel that the divinest thing in us is our recognition of the essential and eternal difference between right and wrong, and we feel also that God cannot be the author of moral evil, even though it should prove in the end to be merely apparent and transient. Browning himself feels the pressure of this difficulty. He asks:

Wherefore should any evil hap to man,  
 From ache of flesh to agony of soul,



Since God's All-mercy mates All-potency?  
 Nay, why permits he evil to himself—  
 Man's sin, accounted such? Suppose a world  
 Purged of all pain, with fit inhabitant—  
 Man pure of evil in thought, word, deed—  
 Were it not well? Then wherefore otherwise?

The only answer is that the apparent existence of evil is the necessary condition of goodness. If man is to aspire and attain, the present must seem to him inadequate, imperfect, wrong. But the evil must still be only apparent, since God is love. We are to believe and love, in spite of all that intellect may say.

Man's part  
 Is plain, to send love forth, astray perhaps;  
 No matter—he has done his part.

—*The Sun.*

We can now perceive how deep a speculative error that was into which Browning fell when, in order to substantiate his optimistic faith, he stigmatized human knowledge as only apparent. His appeal from the head to the heart should have been an appeal from the narrower knowledge of the mere intellect to the larger knowledge which is conditioned upon right affection. Human nature cannot be cut in two with a hatchet. We must not sever the intellect from the affections. Yet that is what our poet did. Instead of standing by his earlier utterances with regard to finite personality and freedom, and referring all sin and misery to the abnormal working of the human will, he must somehow find in God the ground and explanation of moral evil. This requires him by hook or by crook to turn evil into good. But if moral black is at bottom only moral

white, there is evident mistake in our most serious moral judgments. Hence, knowledge must be discredited, and truth itself be made a merely subjective and relative thing. And this implies that, though love comes from God, truth does not; in other words, God is love, but he is not truth.

A sad falling off from the earlier Browning! How sad can be estimated by one or two quotations from his earlier works. "The Ring and the Book" marks the high tide of his poetic insight, before his faith had taken an agnostic philosophy for its treacherous ally. There he says :

Truth nowhere lies, yet everywhere, in these ;  
Not absolutely in a portion, yet evolvable  
From the whole, evolved at last  
Painfully, held tenaciously, by me.

Yet my poor spark had for its source the Sun ;  
Thither I sent the great looks that compel  
Light from its fount : all that I do and am  
Comes from the truth, or seen or else surmised,  
Remembered or divined, as mere man may.

and in "Christmas Eve" we read :

What is left for us, save, in growth  
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,  
From the gift looking to the giver,  
And from the cistern to the river,  
And from the finite to infinity,  
And from man's dust to God's divinity?

EV So in "Paracelsus," "Easter Day," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "Death in the Desert," knowledge as well as love is treated as an emanation from God. With these

poems, his later works, "La Saisiaz," "Ferishtah's Fancies," "The Parleyings," and "Asolando," form a painful contrast. In these an intellectual pessimism hangs like an old man of the sea upon the neck of his moral optimism and greatly hampers its free going. When the poet concedes that knowledge is only dissembling ignorance, and that faith is only blind trust, he plucks out his own right eye.

So Browning condemns man to strive for a truth he can never attain, as Carlyle, with a similar philosophy, condemns him to strive for a goodness he can never achieve. Browning saw more deeply than Carlyle, when he maintained that divine love was at the heart of all things. Professor Jones has finely indicated the contrast between these two literary lights of our day, when he says that Carlyle saw in law only the work of a great taskmaster, and in man only hopeless confusion. He is so busy working himself, that he sees no other workers. But Browning is certain of the moral purpose of life, of the grand result of good toward which the universe is moving, because law to him is only the method of love. Carlyle saw God as lawgiver and judge, but not as helper; as a God within, only in conscience, issuing imperatives and threats, not within as a beneficent and regenerating power. But to Browning, all moral progress is the spiritual incarnation of God, God's love putting itself into human action, and bringing good out of evil. How great the pity that Browning could not have carried his doctrine farther, and have seen that, as all human love, even the poorest, is God's love in man flowing back to its source, so all human knowledge is God's truth in man bearing witness to him from whom it

comes! Knowledge is not "lacquered ignorance" simply because it is not complete. We can know truly without knowing exhaustively. God is light as well as love, and the ideal without is not only a power of love, but also a power of knowledge, within.

Yet, in spite of his speculative errors, this poet of the soul found love a guarantee for immortality. We may separate the soul from the body, its instrument, but this separation does not arrest the course of its moral development. Here is an optimism that refuses to confine its view to the narrow span of three score years and ten:

Have you found your life distasteful?  
 My life did, and does, smack sweet.  
 Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?  
 Mine I saved; and hold complete.  
 Do your joys with age diminish?  
 When mine fail me, I'll complain.  
 Must in death your daylight vanish?  
 My sun sets to rise again.

—*At the Mermaid.*

Pleasure must succeed to pleasure, else past pleasure turns to pain;  
 And this first life claims a second, else I count its good no gain.

What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes—  
 Man has forever.

—*The Grammarian's Funeral.*

No work begun shall ever pause for death.

There shall never be one lost good; what was, shall live as before;  
 The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;  
 What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much more;  
 On the earth, the broken arc; in the heaven, a perfect round.

—*Abt Vogler.*

And so Robert Browning was to the end

One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward ;  
 Never doubted clouds would break ;  
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph ;  
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
 Sleep to wake.

The death of Mrs. Browning deprived him of his best adviser and left him to struggle, not always successfully, with oppositions of science falsely so called. Yet that death directed all his later thinking to the future life, gave him a fresh and ineradicable conviction of immortality, and made his words a source of courage and faith to this generation not only, but to many generations to come. How much our age needed his message will appear, if I quote from the "Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyám, whose melodious pessimism has seemed to so many like an Epicurean gospel :

I came like water, and like wind I go.

Up from earth's center through the seventh gate  
 I rose and on the throne of Satan sate,  
 And many a knot unraveled by the Road,  
 But not the master-knot of human fate.

There was the door to which I found no key ;  
 There was the veil through which I might not see ;  
 Some little talk awhile of *Me* and *Thee*  
 There was, and then no more of *Thee* and *Me*.

Earth could not answer, nor the seas that mourn  
 In flowing purple, of their Lord forlorn ;  
 Nor rolling Heaven, with all his signs revealed,  
 And hidden by the sleeve of Night and Morn.

Then of the *Thee* in *Me*, who works behind  
 The veil, I lifted up my hands to find .  
 A Lamp amid the darkness ; and I heard  
 As from without : “The *Me* within *Thee* find !”

Then to the lips of this poor earthen Urn  
 I leaned, the secret of my life to learn ;  
 And lip to lip it murmured : “While you live,  
 Drink ! for once dead, you never shall return !”

Robert Browning has hope for the bad as well as for the good—not hope for them in their badness, but hope that the badness may yet be purged out of them. Even of Guido, the typical villain, as he enters eternity, the Pope says :

Else I avert my face, nor follow him  
 Into that sad, obscure, sequestered state  
 Where God unmakes, but to remake, the soul  
 He else made first in vain : which must not be !  
 —*The Ring and the Book.*

And in his poem entitled “Apparent Failure,” we read :

It's wiser being good than bad,  
 It's safer being meek than fierce,  
 It's fitter being sane than mad.  
 My own hope is, a sun will pierce  
 The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;  
 That, after Last, returns the First,  
 Though a wide compass round be fetched ;  
 That what began best, can't end worst,  
 Nor what God blest once, prove accurst.

And as for Browning's personal prospect, I think it cannot be doubted that he spoke out of his own heart in “Prospice” :

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,  
The mist in my face,  
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
I am nearing the place,  
The power of the night, the stress of the storm,  
The post of the foe,  
Where he stands, the Arch-Fear, in a visible form?  
Yet the strong man must go :  
For the journey is done, and the summit attained,  
And the barriers fall,  
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all.  
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more  
The best and the last !  
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forebore,  
And let me creep past.  
No ! let me take the whole of it, fare like my peers,  
The heroes of old ;  
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears,  
Of pain, darkness, and cold.  
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
The black minute's at end,  
And the elements rage, the fiend-voices that rave  
Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
Shall change, shall become first a peace, then a joy,  
Then a light, then thy breast,  
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,  
And with God be the rest !





TENNYSON



# TENNYSON

## POETRY AS INTERPRETING THE DIVINE ORDER

FEW poets have given so early promise of greatness as did Alfred Tennyson. At five years of age in his father's garden, when caught and swept along by a gale, he exclaimed: "I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind!" His first verses were inscribed upon a slate at home, while his elders were at church. "Yes, you can write!" said his brother Charles, after he had read them. The grandfather was not so hopeful. He gave Alfred a half-sovereign for a few lines upon his grandmother's death, with the words: "That is the first money you have earned by your poetry and, my word for it, it will be your last." He little thought that the manuscript of the "Poems by Two Brothers," including Alfred's first productions, would be one day sold for two thousand one hundred and fifty dollars, and that a single copy of the published work would bring one hundred and twenty dollars.

At Somersby, in Lincolnshire, where the poet was born and where he gained the most of his preparatory training for the university, he spent his youth in the still air of delightful studies. The father was variously learned, with gifts for painting, architecture, and music, as well as for poetry and the classic languages. A sweet and gentle mother bound the household together

by ties of reverence and love, so that faith in woman-kind beat henceforth with the poet's blood. There were twelve children in the rectory family, and of the seven sons the two older than himself were poets also. The village numbered scarcely a hundred souls. It was far removed from the noise of politics or trade. But there were books in plenty, and there was endless storytelling at the table and around the hearth. The news of the battle of Waterloo never penetrated to that remote corner of the earth; but there were mimic battles fought on the lawn, with rods stuck in the ground for kings, with knights on either side to defend them, and with an inexhaustible artillery of stones for their overthrow.

The "Ode to Memory" is still printed among the juvenile works of the author, but it has touches that are worthy of his prime. It tells of the strong impressions that were made upon him by his English home, that haunt of ancient peace:

Come from the woods that belt the gray hillside,  
 The seven elms, the poplars four,  
 That stand beside my father's door,  
 And chiefly from the brook that loves  
 To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand,  
 Or dimple in the dark of rushy coves,  
 Drawing into his narrow earthen urn,  
     In every elbow and turn,  
 The filtered tribute of the rough woodland.  
     O! hither lead thy feet!  
 Pour round mine ears the livelong bleat  
 Of the thick-fleeced sheep from wattled folds,  
     Upon the ridged wolds,  
 When the first matin-song hath wakened loud  
 Over the dark dewy earth forlorn,

What time the amber morn  
Forth gushes from beneath a low-hung cloud.

Here are a keen observation of nature, a sparkling freshness of phrase, and a pure affection for the scenes of childhood. None of these, however, are sure proofs of coming greatness. There are other lines of greater significance in this same "Ode to Memory":

In sweet dreams softer than unbroken rest  
Thou leddest by the hand thy infant Hope.  
The eddying of her garments caught from thee  
The light of thy great presence ; and the cope  
    Of the half-attained futurity,  
    Though deep, not fathomless,  
Was cloven with the million stars that tremble  
O'er the deep mind of dauntless infancy.  
Small thought was there of life's distress ;  
For sure she deemed no mist of earth could dull  
Those spirit-thrilling eyes so keen and beautiful.  
Sure she was nigher to heaven's spheres,  
Listening the lordly music flowing from  
    The illimitable years.

These last words are repeated and preserved from "Timbuctoo," the first poem of the author published under his own name. They are in the grand style, and they disclose the central thought of the poet's life and work. He has in mind something larger than the fabled music of the spheres, namely, the ordered march of the ages and of all their histories. He found within him an impulse to measured speech. But this would have been child's play if he had not felt it to correspond with rhythmical realities in the universe. There is an order which pervades all time as well as all space. It

is the function of the poet to discover that order, and to interpret it to men. Tennyson began his work with a right theory of art. His position in literature and his influence upon his generation cannot be understood without recognizing this.

What is merely intimated in the "Ode to Memory" is clearly expressed elsewhere. Not often has a great singer in his first lays so fully spread out the programme of his career as has our author in another early poem, "The Poet." Rarely has the after-harvest given so abundant witness to the quality of the seed. And never, I believe, has any literary sower committed this seed more daringly or more tremblingly to the earth :

The poet in a golden clime was born,  
 With golden stars above ;  
 Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,  
 The love of love.

He saw through life and death, through good and ill  
 He saw through his own soul.  
 The marvel of the everlasting Will,  
 An open scroll,

Before him lay : with echoing feet he threaded  
 The secretest walks of fame :  
 The viewless arrows of his thoughts were headed  
 And winged with flame.

. . . . .

So, many minds did gird their orbs with beams,  
 Though one did fling the fire ;  
 Heaven flow'd upon the soul in many dreams  
 Of high desire.

Thus truth was multiplied on truth, the world  
 Like one great garden show'd,

And, through the wreaths of floating dark upcurl'd,  
Rare sunrise flow'd.

Her words did gather thunder as they ran,  
And as the lightning to the thunder  
Which follows it, riving the spirit of man,  
Making earth wonder,

So was their meaning to her words. No sword  
Of wrath her right arm whirl'd,  
But one poor poet's scroll, and with *his* word  
She shook the world.

So much of sound philosophy is condensed into these lines, and so much of Tennyson's own theory of art, that I venture, even at the risk of repeating what I have said in other essays, to point out some of the features of his poetic creed. All truth is material for the poet, whether it be truth of nature or of the human soul, of history or of the divine purpose that unifies history. One ordered realm of truth is open to the poet's gaze, and he is truth's interpreter. He deals with truth, however, not in its abstract forms, but in its power to move and sway the soul—with truth therefore in its aspect as beauty, and as fit to charm and stir, to inspire and energize. Not mere fact, but tendency, not the individual, but the type, not the sequences of life, but the order and beauty which lie behind them, it is the poet's mission to discover and to declare—and all for the good of human kind and for the unveiling of the divine love and wisdom.

The true poet then has a moral aim. He is a prophet of the Highest. He does not minister to pleasure, light and fugitive, but to man's lasting good. He does

not depict the actual, so much as the ideal. He is not a photographer of all that is, so much as he is a delineator of that which ought to be. His art does not exist for art's sake, but for humanity's sake and for God's sake. He peers into the great purpose of good at the heart of the universe, in order that he may promote that purpose. And as it is his greater powers of love that enable him to see the universal order, so love enables him to pity the disorder which man has wrought, and to lend his own inspiring words to set that disorder right. In short, the poet is the man of deeper feeling, and therefore of larger insight, who sees the inner truth and order of the world, through all its superficial falsity and disorder, with a view to expressing that truth and order in forms of beauty and for purposes of goodness.

In his later poems Tennyson has more fully set forth his conception of his mission. Without faith in an eternal order, he calls the world,

This round of green, this orb of flame,  
 Fantastic beauty ; such as lurks  
 In some wild Poet, when he works  
 Without a conscience or an aim.

Knowledge severed from love and faith, he says, is "a child, and vain." Goethe had declared that "the great poet must be free from all moral prepossessions." Tennyson, on the contrary, regards wisdom, or knowledge tempered by love, as essential to poetic inspiration. The faith which constitutes the heart and core of his writings is expressed in the closing lines of "In Memoriam." There he confesses a personal and loving God, who is the source of the world's order



and the guarantee that it will wisely reach its appointed end:

That God, which ever lives and loves,  
 One God, one law, one element,  
 And one far-off divine event,  
 To which the whole creation moves.

*quote*

I do not mean that this view of the universe, or of his relation to it as interpreter, was so definite and conscious at the beginning of his career as it was at the close. His faith was no "idle ore,"

But iron dug from central gloom,  
 And heated hot with burning fears,  
 And dipt in baths of hissing tears,  
 And batter'd with the shocks of doom,  
 To shape and use.

My purpose, indeed, is to trace the development of this faith. It will be found, if I mistake not, that its history and the history of the poet are one and the same thing. For the very reason that Tennyson's belief in a divine order is more than a native tendency of mind, is rather an achievement, made by struggle with many opposing influences until at last it became a settled consciousness of the soul, for this reason he constitutes not only the best representative of his age, but also its most powerful poetic influence.

He fought his doubts and gathered strength,  
 He would not make his judgment blind,  
 He faced the spectres of the mind  
 And laid them : thus he came at length  
 To find a stronger faith his own ;  
 And Power was with him in the night,

*quote*

Which makes the darkness and the light,  
And dwells not in the light alone,

But in the darkness and the cloud.

Although Waterloo was unheard of, the news of Lord Byron's death reached the rectory of Somersby. It stirred the hearts of those imaginative children as no political event ever could. To young Alfred, it seemed as if the world were over and done for. Now that this great literary light was extinguished, there was nothing left of any worth. He walked out alone and carved deep into the sandstone, and with the feeling that the inscription marked the tombstone of the universe, the words, "Byron is dead!" It is an illustration of the fascination which that wayward and passionate spirit exerted upon all English-speaking youth. Byron was the artistic counterpart of the French Revolution, with its fierce license, its revolt against established forms, its wild determination to be free. The influence of Byron is quite perceptible in Tennyson's juvenile verse. There are imitations of "The Maid of Athens," and of "The Destruction of Sennacherib."

But Byron and his school burnt over the ground, so that poetry of this sort could not grow again. They ran passion to death. The world tired of the Satanic in literature. There came a natural reaction, and Wordsworth was its representative. It was a return to nature, idyllic, calm, sincere. It appealed to the thoughtful. But dramatic fervor was lacking. Tennyson's "Dora" and "The Miller's Daughter" are in Wordsworth's manner. Our poet had in him too much of life and fire, to follow long in the ways of Wordsworth's tame sim-

plicity. Poetry has been described as "great thoughts clothed in splendor." Tennyson has retained much of Byron's dramatic energy, though he lacks something of his rush and spontaneity. He combines with this dramatic energy much of the idyllic sweetness of Wordsworth, while he is master of a condensation and of a selective skill which neither Byron nor Wordsworth ever possessed. Of prosaic passages he is almost wholly guiltless. He is at the same time the greatest example of pure beauty in English poetical literature.

Let us, with William Watson, distinguish between beauty and style. In women, style does not imply pure beauty. Milton is unapproached in pure poetic endowment, and presents to us the highest summit of style. But he is no doubt less perfectly beautiful than Tennyson. There is a perpetual refinement and elegance in our later poet which the earlier seldom equals. We can almost believe the current story that Tennyson has made it his rule to keep his productions seven years under the file before printing them. In this respect he resembles Virgil; indeed, he is our English Virgil, not merely for the minute care and the uniform merit of his verse, but for his embodiment in it of the principle of artistic, civil, social, and religious order. Tennyson is the poet of organized society, as truly as was Virgil the poet of the Roman Empire.

He has been said to belong to "the art-school of poets." There is much truth in the phrase. His artistic impulses antedated the substance of his message. The instrument was shaped before the music was written. It seems a providential preparation for subsequent work. Tennyson's first productive period was distinguished by

mastery of form rather than of thought. There was a dainty grace, somewhat out of proportion to the meaning. Sense was subordinated to sound. We must regard "Airy, fairy Lilian," and "Where Claribel Low Lieth," rather as metrical experiments, than as significant ventures into the realm of true poetry. Tennyson served an apprenticeship like that of Robert Louis Stevenson. He first familiarized himself with the machinery of style—only afterward did he learn to use it.

In "Poems, Chiefly Lyrical," his earliest publication, the most promising were "The Poet" and "The Ode to Memory," already mentioned. "Mariana," "The Seafairies," and "Recollections of the Arabian Nights," all had a charm of melody and a pictorial beauty. But they were over-fanciful. There is a sense of effort in the frequency of the compound words, in the revival of terms antiquated or obsolete, and in the irregularity of the metre. The new music of the verse did not blind the critics to its defects. "Blackwood's Magazine" found the author "self-willed and perverse in his infantile vanity," and "hampered by a puerile partiality for particular forms of expression." Christopher North called his book "dismal drivel," and, alluding to the little poem "The Owl," said that Mr. Tennyson himself was "the greatest owl." The "Hang-draw-and Quarterly" that criticised Tennyson, however, had previously cut up quite as savagely the "Endymion" of John Keats.

It may be interesting to pursue still further this history of criticism. It will show through what a fiery gauntlet every new claimant to poetic honors must pass. The first book, printed in 1830, was followed by another in 1833, with the title: "The Lady of Shalott, and other

Poems." Among these other poems was "Oenone." It provoked the anger of Carlyle, as a mere echo of the classics instead of original work dealing with the life of the present, and he said of Tennyson: "There he sits, upon a dungheap, surrounded with innumerable dead dogs." Yet Carlyle came to regard Tennyson with pride and admiration. When he read "The Revenge," he cried, "Eh, he's got the grip o' it!" He asked Richard Monckton Milnes why he had not secured a pension for Alfred Tennyson. Milnes replied that his constituents knew nothing of poetry and would think the pension a matter of personal favoritism. Carlyle responded: "Richard Milnes! in the day of judgment, when you are asked why you did not get that pension, you may lay the blame on your constituents, but it is *you* that will be damned!"

The pension of two hundred pounds was granted in 1845, and in 1850 Tennyson was made poet-laureate. It is said that Sir Robert Peel, when the poet was mentioned in connection with the laureateship, had never read a line of his writings. He took up "Ulysses," however, and that one poem convinced him. Even after the honor had been conferred, the poet had to fight for his reputation. Bulwer called him "School-Miss Alfred"; spoke of him as "out-babying Wordsworth"; and in "The New Timon, a Romance of London," described him as "quartered on the public purse, in the prime of life, without either wife or family." Last of all, and least of all, Alfred Austin, so late as 1869, contributed an article to "Temple Bar" on "The Poetry of the Period," in which he declared that "Mr. Tennyson has no sound pretensions to be called a great poet."

Tennyson always chafed under criticism. He replied to Christopher North :

When I learnt from whom it came  
I forgave you all the blame,  
    Musty Christopher ;  
I could *not* forgive the praise,  
    Fusty Christopher.

He retorted upon Bulwer by calling him a "band-box," and by pointing out that the true Timon did not wear his hair in curl-papers. I do not know that he ever thought it worth his while to notice the disparagement of Alfred Austin. It must be confessed that there was a vein of self-consciousness in our poet, and a sort of stately vanity, which a little detracted from the highest greatness.

Recent stories illustrate these characteristics. When entertaining or entertained, he expected to read from his own poems. "Come and let me read you 'Maud,'" said he to Mr. Fields, "you will never forget it!" At an English country house where he appeared unexpectedly, though he was asked to read, not a single copy of his works could be found—all had been taken to another place. The host was embarrassed; but the occasion was made laughably memorable when Mr. Tennyson, in a petulant and contemptuous voice, said: "Bring me Shakespeare!" When traveling on the Rhine, he read a poem of his own in the half-intelligible Dodonic chant so natural to him, and when he closed the book he broke the spell with the question: "Could Browning do that?" Nothing seemed to inspire him more than to hold the hand of some lady while he read, and he once, in an

imperial party, unconsciously grasped the hand of the Empress Augusta and held it through the entire reading, only to discover his mistake and to make most profuse apologies at the end, apologies which were as graciously received as they were humbly offered.

The poet has been described as "a great-boned, loose-limbed, gigantesque man, with domed head, soft dark hair, gentle eyes; white, smooth, fine-lined brow covered with delicate skin through which the blue veins shone." Force and fineness were united in him. Bayard Taylor speaks of him as "tall and broad-shouldered as a son of Anak, with hair, beard, and eyes of Southern darkness." Edward Fitzgerald calls him "a man at all points of grand proportion and feature, of great strength, straight and with broad breast, as if from the army." Carlyle writes to Emerson :

Tennyson came in to us on Sunday evening. A truly interesting son of earth and son of heaven. One of the finest-looking men in the world. His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail and all that may be between; speech and speculation free and plenteous. I do not meet in these decades with such company over a pipe. A true human soul, or some authentic approximation thereto, to whom your soul can say, Brother; a man solitary and sad, as certain men are; dwelling in an atmosphere of gloom—carrying a bit of chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into cosmos.

The sign of chaos was perhaps his unkempt hair, which led the undergraduates of Oxford, when Tennyson received his degree of D. C. L., to salute him with the cry, "Did your mother call you too early this morning, Alfred dear?" He smoked nine hours a day, never the same pipe twice; and when some one spoke of one

of his lines as evidently spontaneous, he merely replied: "I smoked more than twenty pipes over that line."

I have said that he was extraordinarily sensitive to criticism. His sensitiveness stood him in good stead, for it led him to criticise himself. "The Lover's Tale," printed in 1833, was withdrawn from circulation because of imperfections pointed out in his other poems. He seems to have discovered that form with him had dominated substance. Some have found in "The Lady of Shalott" the poet's own confession that he had lived too long in the world of mere fancy, and that before he gave more to the public he needed a larger experience of life. As,

"I am half-sick of shadows," said  
The Lady of Shalott,

so Tennyson, if he did not "leave the web" and "leave the loom," left off for ten whole years all publication and marketing of his wares. He determined that his next work should be as good as he could make it. For one who had already printed such poems as "The Palace of Art," "The Lotos Eaters," and "A Dream of Fair Women," this was rigid self-restraint, a self-restraint all the more admirable because the poet's external circumstances were narrow and there was constant temptation to print for mere pecuniary reward.

Virtue was in this case not only its own reward, but it was the unconscious servant of a divine Providence. For it was the death of Arthur Henry Hallam, Tennyson's dearest friend, in 1833, that first shook from him the fantastic and unreal element that hindered his



growth. Like Samson, Hallam slew more by his death than by his life. A young man of wonderful powers, he still spoke, though dead, through his friend. That friend was led to profound meditation upon the realities of existence. The world, life, and death, things present and things to come, assumed new significance. The development of heart and soul which came to John Milton through experience of outward conflict, came to Alfred Tennyson through experience of inward sorrow. In the quick sense of personal loss he seemed to lose that faith in the order of the world which had unconsciously been the source of his strength. The recovery of this faith was the result of a new apprehension of the divine love that pervades the universe. When he had seized upon that organic principle, it remade the poet as it remade the man.

The period of dainty grace came thus to be followed by the period of subtle thought. Tennyson always shunned publicity. The *digito monstrari* vexed him, as much as it troubled Virgil. Unlike Browning, he preferred to look upon the struggles of life from the outside. This gives to his poetry a certain academic air. Yet he grapples with all the problems of his time, though the strength he shows is not that of the Hercules, but that of the Apollo; not that of the club, but that of the winged arrow. All his poetical work is an application to human affairs of the principle of divine order. This key for him opens all locks. In 1842 he published "The Princess." It set forth divine order in the relation of the sexes. "Locksley Hall" applied the same principle to social life; "The Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" applied it to national

affairs; and "In Memoriam," in 1850, applied it to the great question of man's relations to God and immortality.

Reserving for a later place in our discussion the theological implications of Tennyson's poetry, let us for a moment consider the manifestations of this principle of order during the second period of his productive activity. "The Princess" is a protest against the doctrine that "marriage is but an old tradition." It is a half-humorous, half-satirical reassertion of the true relation of man and woman. Byron and Shelley had propounded the theory that love is mainly a matter of physical passion. They had adopted Goethe's view that passion is its own justification, and that it may override all obstacles of law or conscience. But the results of this theory are disastrous to woman, even more than to man. She becomes man's victim and slave, while he becomes by his superior strength her tyrant and oppressor.

Marriage itself is often contracted on man's part in the spirit of the tyrant, and when woman discovers this there is a disposition to rebel against the ordinance itself. She undervalues love, even if she does not become skeptical as to its existence. She perceives that man owes his power in large degree to his superior knowledge, and she fancies that knowledge will enfranchise her. She isolates herself, that she may learn. In all this, she forgets that she is not man, but woman; that man and woman were meant to work together, not in separation from each other; that the highest knowledge is impossible without love; that she therefore needs, not less love, but more.

This divine order in the relation of the sexes Tenny-

son sets forth in a mock-heroic medley, where the outward form is drawn from the middle ages, but the motive and spirit of the poem from the life of to-day. In Shakespeare's "Love's Labour's Lost," the king and three of his lords withdraw from the world for purposes of study; they bind themselves to see no woman for three years. Dr. Johnson, in his "Rasselas," makes his princess found a college of learned women, over which she presides. Tennyson combines the features of both these schemes. His princess too establishes a university, in a certain summer palace of her father's. It is for maidens only, and they are to see no men. Knowledge, she held,

Was all in all; they had been, she thought,  
As children; they must lose the child, assume  
The woman; . . .

Maintaining that, with equal husbandry,  
The woman were an equal to the man.

We cannot stay to describe the gradual breaking down of all this noble but unnatural enterprise. Ida, the Princess, cannot suppress her pity for the Prince who loves her. And pity brings love in its train. She learns that

The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink  
Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free:

Let her make herself her own  
To give or keep, to live and learn and be  
All that harms not distinctive womanhood.  
For woman is not undeveloped man,  
But diverse: could we make her as the man,  
Sweet love were slain: his dearest bond is this,  
Not like to like, but like in difference:

Yet in the long years liker must they grow ;  
 The man be more of woman, she of man ;  
 He gain in sweetness and in moral height,  
 Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world ;  
 She mental breadth, nor fail in childward care,  
 Nor lose the childlike in the larger mind ;  
 Till at the last she set herself to man,  
 Like perfect music unto noble words ;  
 And so these twain, upon the skirts of Time,  
 Sit side by side, full-summed in all their powers,  
 Dispensing harvest, sowing the To-be,  
 Self-reverent each, and reverencing each,  
 Distinct in individualities,  
 But like each other even as those who love.  
 Then comes the statelier Eden back to men,  
 Then reign the world's great bridals, chaste and calm,  
 Then springs the crowning race of human kind.  
 May these things be !

It has been said that Tennyson, after all, merges the individuality of the Princess in that of the Prince ; that there is too little of self-realization in her case ; that her mission is conceived of too exclusively as that of accomplishing the Prince's manhood. We must grant that the poet's ideal woman is of the domestic type. In "Locksley Hall," he says indeed that

Woman's pleasure, woman's pain—  
 Nature made them blinder motions bounded in a shallower brain :  
 Woman is the lesser man, and all thy passions, matched with mine,  
 Are as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.

But this may be only an instance where the poet projects himself into a character, and the pessimism of "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" may be, in like manner, only the dramatic picture of the fruitage of

early misanthropy. For fifty years ago, "The Princess" was an almost startling advocacy of the dignity and rights of woman, as it has been ever since a repertory of argument and defense of her just claims.

In the poetry of pure affection, in distinction from that of passion, Tennyson is a master. No one more movingly than he has described the self-forgetful devotion with which the happy bride joins her lot to that of her husband :

And on her lover's arm she leant,  
 And round her waist she felt it fold,  
 And far across the hills they went  
 In that new world which is the old :

And o'er the hills and far away  
 Beyond their utmost purple rim,  
 Beyond the night, across the day,  
 Through all the world she followed him.

And King Arthur expresses the true end of a noble marriage when he says :

Were I joined with her,  
 Then might we live together as one life,  
 And reigning with one will in everything  
 Have power on this dark land to lighten it,  
 And power on this dead world to make it live.

Our poet has done immeasurable service to humanity by his maintenance of the sanctity of marriage, on the one hand, and of the equality in diversity which is its essential nature, on the other. There are no more winning pictures of its grave and loving union than in "Isabel" :

The stately flower of female fortitude  
 Of perfect wifehood and pure lowlihead ;  
 . . . Through all her placid life  
 The queen of marriage, a most perfect wife.

He would give to woman the highest possibilities of education, but would withdraw her from public place and work, thus

Turning to scorn, with lips divine,  
 The falsehood of extremes.

Her true place is that of wife, and her first duty is motherhood. The poet's whole doctrine, indeed, may be summed up in the Scripture words: "Whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." And the "Dedication" to his own wife shows that he knew not only in theory, but in practice, the blessedness of an equal marriage:

Dear, near and true—no truer Time himself  
 Can prove you, though he make you evermore  
 Dearer and nearer, as the rapid of life  
 Shoots to the fall.

The same reverence for the divine order appears in Tennyson's treatment of man's social relations. In "Locksley Hall," which has been explained by some as a record of the poet's own disappointment in love, we have a fervid denunciation of the ambitions and the conventions which prevent pure natural affection from having its way:

Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth !  
 Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the living truth !

Cursed be the sickly forms that err from honest Nature's rule !  
Cursed be the gold that gilds the straitened forehead of the fool !

He is never so scathing as when he describes the man who sells his daughter to a mercenary marriage. And yet no one can have more regard than Tennyson for custom and law, for birth and blood, when these represent justice and nobility. It is organized society which he respects, and of which he is the interpreter. He cares little for the individual as a mere individual. This is one of the chief distinctions between him and Robert Browning. Browning is the poet of the individual soul ; he has no sense of corporate interests ; society and government matter little to him, or not at all. Tennyson looks beyond the single man : man is of value only as he is part of an ordered whole far greater than himself.

He who has an eye for men in the aggregate is often blind to individual misery and wrong. The order of society seems to him cheaply purchased by personal sacrifice. Tennyson's love for order made him more and more a conservative, while Gladstone's sympathy with individual rights and liberties made him more and more a radical. In his youth the poet could sing of

Men my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something  
new :  
That which they have done but earnest of the things that they  
shall do.

But he looked at his brothers from afar. He took no part in efforts for their legal emancipation. For him the only remedy for the evils of competition was more competition. He praised and defended Governor Eyre,

of Jamaica, when his cruelty was denounced. He took no part in the Italian struggle for national unity. He was silent when the slave-power of America sought to establish itself even to the ruin of the republic.

These mistakes were misinterpretations of the principle of order. They can be forgiven, because they were exaggerations of a virtue. In a similar manner we must treat the narrow nationalism of Tennyson. He is so loyally English that international sympathy is practically excluded. His early hope that the world might live

Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battleflags were  
furlled

In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world ;

Where the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,  
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law,

seems exchanged sixty years after for a darker prospect .

Warless? When her tens are thousands, and her thousands mil-  
lions, then—

All her harvest all too narrow—who can fancy warless men?

Warless? War will die out late then. Will it ever, late or soon?  
Can it, till this outworn earth be dead as yon dead world the moon?

In the meantime he regards war as necessary. In “Maud,” fighting for one’s country seems to atone for private misconduct. And his highest ambition for Eng-land’s colonies is expressed in the words :

Sons, be welded each and all,  
Into one imperial whole,  
One with Britain, heart and soul,  
One life, one flag, one fleet, one Throne !  
Britons, hold your own !



Tennyson is no republican. He is afraid of the people, except as they are governed by the wise and faithful few. The "red fool-fury of the Seine" and "the blind hysterics of the Celt" arouse in him a passion of objurgation which is almost equally hysterical. But he has unfailing pride and confidence in sturdy English common sense. He trusts the wisdom of the past. He chooses for his abode

A land of settled government,  
A land of old and just renown,  
Where freedom slowly broadens down  
From precedent to precedent.

And it is because he sees in England the type of a divine order, the powers that are ordained of God, that he can throw into his patriotic and martial songs such exuberant loyalty and devotion. The British empire will be stronger forever for such poems as "The Defense of Lucknow," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," and the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington."

The greatest work of Tennyson's second period, however, is unquestionably "In Memoriam." Here the poet grapples with the deepest themes, the mysteries of sorrow, suffering, and death. He expresses, with a tenderness and a yearning unknown before in literature, the dull sense of loss, the agonizing regrets, the wild rebellion, the tormenting doubts which prey upon one whom death has just despoiled of the object of his love. But the poem is no mere elegy, like the "Lycidas" of Milton or the "Adonais" of Shelley; it is the effort of the loving soul to give rational account to itself of the

great facts of sin, pain, and grief, and to reconcile them with the belief in God. "In Memoriam" is not a theological discussion, and the poet does not reach his conclusions by pure argument. But he does assert most luminously the intuitions of the soul—the conviction that there is divine order in the universe, and that this order is the result of love :

If these brief lays of sorrow born  
 Were taken to be such as closed  
 Grave doubts and questions here proposed,  
 Then these were such as men might scorn.

Her care is not to part and prove ;  
 She takes, when harsher moods remit,  
 What slender shade of doubt may flit,  
 And makes it vassal unto love.

In the way that he intends, Tennyson attains his purpose. He longs "to prove no lapse of moons can canker love." He does prove this to the heart, though he cannot prove it to the mere intellect. The various doubts that rise with regard to the separate existence of the soul after death, its continued consciousness, and its affection for those who are left behind, are all dissipated by reflections upon the nature and essential immortality of love. Earthly love is but the transcript and efflux of the heavenly. Our loves in higher love endure—a love that embraces us and all. As the poet meditates, he finds his own sorrow only a little part of a great world's sorrow, and his own love only a little part of a great divine love which would meet that sorrow and would turn it into joy. So from individual grief he is led to a consciousness of his oneness with all the race, and of his oneness with God himself.

I regard "In Memoriam" as the greatest poem of our century, both for substance and for form. It is the most representative poem of the age. If Goethe's "Faust" reflects the materialism and skepticism of the nineteenth century, Tennyson's "In Memoriam" expresses its faith triumphant over doubt. It is regarded by superficial readers as mournful and prosaic. M. Taine thinks it the pretentious monody of a young man with new black gloves and spotless cambric pocket-handkerchief. The Frenchman cannot understand either the sorrow or the joy. Frederick W. Robertson saw deeper into the poem, when he said: "It is simply one of the most victorious songs that poet ever chanted."

It is difficult to express in words the value of a poem that demonstrates to the universal heart the divinity and immortality of love. Amid so many claimants for supremacy—money, power, pleasure, fame—a pure affection is in danger of being thrust aside. But love is of God, and can never die. "Your heart," says the Psalmist, "shall live forever." Love can never lose its own; those whom God loves can never cease to be; and those who are one with the God of love can never lose the objects of their affection. Love must grow with our growth, both here and hereafter:

Regret is dead, but love is more  
Than in the summers that have flown,  
For I myself with these have grown  
To something greater than before.

"If we still love those we lose," says Thackeray, "can we altogether lose those we love?"

“In Memoriam” is, in the truest sense, a religious poem: it aims to soothe and spiritualize grief by taking hold of the unseen and eternal. In this respect it forms a striking contrast to the “Sonnets” of Shakespeare. The “Sonnets” describe such love to a friend, that Tennyson, in allusion to it, can say:

I loved thee, Spirit, and love; nor can  
The soul of Shakespeare love thee more.

But the love of the “Sonnets” is shadowed with sin and shame; that of “In Memoriam” is a pure and lofty affection, which ennobles him who cherishes it. Shakespeare’s love never lifts him above the earth. Tennyson’s, from being a power within, becomes a Lord and King without, and at last identifies itself with that

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,  
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,  
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove.

“In Memoriam” is Tennyson’s “Paradise Regained,” and “The Idylls of the King” is his “Paradise Lost.” The order in which the works were produced differed from that of John Milton. But there was advantage in it. Only after Tennyson had proved to his own soul that, through all and in all and above all sin and sorrow and death, a divine and immortal order reigned, could he hopefully undertake the story of the world’s downfall and shame. And this is his intent in the “Idylls.” He aims to show how man has broken the divine order, to his own undoing. He has written an epic, not of fate, but of free-will; not an allegory, but a parable, of

human sin and ruin by the abuse of freedom. He himself has called it "the dream of man coming into practical life, and ruined by one sin."

The "Idylls" is the characteristic work of Tennyson's third period. As the first was the period of dainty grace, and the second the period of subtle thought, the third was the period of broad humanity. No one can pass from "In Memoriam" to "The Idylls of the King," without feeling that a new note of vigorous simplicity has been struck; the former touches us like a *marche funèbre*, but the latter shows the fruits of sorrow in a more universal sympathy. Since I have called "The Idylls" Tennyson's "Paradise Lost," it will be interesting to compare the work of our poet with that of John Milton. Milton in early life thought seriously of taking the story of King Arthur for the subject of an epic. In Tennyson's story, as in Milton's, it is the fault of a woman, and she the best beloved, that brings destruction to her husband. Milton's epic is in parts more dramatic, original, and sublime than Tennyson's, but the latter is the superior in sustained beauty. Milton is in long passages stiff and prosaic, while our poet is always graceful, and never dull.

King Arthur and his Round Table furnish us with a curious illustration of the nature of the myth, and of its power to survive and grow and improve through many transformations. It is highly probable that some enlightened chief of the Britons, after the Roman power had been broken, sought to defend his island from Norse invasion, and to perpetuate a Christian civilization. But those were barbarous times; his helpers were few; opposing forces both within and without were too mighty

to be subdued; internal treachery and external assault brought his fair scheme to ruin, and himself to death. Yet his name remained. Around it gathered popular conceptions of gentleness and purity and honor. The story of Arthur and his knights was told in many ways. Each generation manufactured its own drapery. The age of chivalry clothed it with all the paraphernalia of the tournament and the banquet hall.

The legend of the Holy Grail became mixed with it. There had been a heathen story of an enchanted castle whose inmates preserved a perpetual youth by feeding from a vessel dedicated to one of the Celtic gods. The turning of the pagan temple at Glastonbury into a church perhaps gave a Christian interpretation to the legend. The holy vessel became the symbol of the mass. The Grail was the cup in which was preserved the blood of Christ, of which if one drink he shall never die. Joseph of Arimathea had brought to Britain the very cup used at the Last Supper. To see the red blood throbbing within the cup was granted only as the reward of long service to Christ and the church.

Sir Thomas Malory collected these stories and wove them into one whole. Tennyson has availed himself of the work of Malory. But, in the very spirit of the legends themselves, he has not scrupled to omit, to interpret, to add, whenever he could thus adapt the material more perfectly to his purpose. He has made King Arthur an impeccable saint, although the original legend makes his heroic sacrifices to be expiatory in their nature—the effort to atone for earlier sin. Swinburne laughs at our poet's regard for the proprieties, and calls Arthur "a prig." But Tennyson has done

well to make the King a model of virtue, and his poem a Christian, rather than a Greek, tragedy. The sad success of evil in frustrating the hopes of the good appeals more strongly to the heart of this age than any of Mr. Swinburne's pagan exhibitions of the natural development of vice.

The hero of the "Idylls" is no mere allegorical phantom, like those of Spenser's "Fairie Queene." Dr. Van Dyke has rightly pointed this out to us. The hero is a living, breathing human being instead. And yet he is at the same time the parabolic representation of the soul of man, coming out of the unknown eternity that is past, to live its life, fight its fight, undergo its probation, and then departing, as it had come, into the unknown eternity that is before it. It is here, in this narrow earthly existence, to stand for the true and the right, to shed abroad the light of a noble example, to wage war upon the sensual and the selfish, and to put them down. It begins with lofty hopes. Youth and love think all things possible. As King Arthur is the symbol of man in his freedom, so his knights are symbols of man's powers—courage and intellect, purity and justice, truth and loyalty. For a time all goes well. There seems good prospect that the soul will set up a kingdom of righteousness, a restored Eden, upon earth.

What are the hindrances? First, man's sensual appetites. The story of Lancelot and Guinevere is the story of passion dethroning faith, of secret sin wasting all the powers of the soul within and bringing to naught all the noblest possibilities of achievement without. One evil example corrupts the court, until only three or four of Arthur's helpers are left untainted. And the second

hindrance is that wild asceticism which is the opposite extreme to license, and which in the end only makes license more licentious. The knights resolve to go in quest of the Holy Grail. Percivale tells the story :

Then on a summer night it came to pass,  
While the great banquet lay along the hall,  
That Galahad would sit down in Merlin's chair.

And all at once, as there we sat, we heard  
A cracking and a riving of the roofs,  
And rending, and a blast, and overhead  
Thunder, and in the thunder was a cry.  
And in the blast there smote along the hall  
A beam of light seven times more clear than day :  
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail  
All over cover'd with a luminous cloud,  
And none might see who bare it, and it past.  
But every knight beheld his fellow's face  
As in a glory, and all the knights arose,  
And staring at each other like dumb men  
Stood, till I found a voice and sware a vow.

I sware a vow before them all, that I,  
Because I had not seen the Grail, would ride  
A twelvemonth and a day in quest of it,  
Until I found and saw it, as the nun  
My sister saw it ; and Galahad sware the vow,  
And good Sir Bors, our Lancelot's cousin sware,  
And Lancelot sware, and many among the knights,  
And Gawain sware, and louder than the rest.

King Arthur has been absent on some chivalrous essay to rid his realm of injustice. He does not take the vow. When he returns, he can only mourn the rash decision of his knights. He has lost their help, and they, as he well knows, enter upon a vain search, with



nothing certain but disappointment and demoralization. He can only say :

Go, for your vows are sacred, being made :  
Yet—for ye know the cries of all my realm  
Pass through this hall—how often, O my knights,  
Your places being vacant by my side,  
This chance of noble deeds will come and go  
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fires  
Lost in the quagmire !

And it is even as he predicts. The Round Table is broken up. The return of the knights is the signal for a corruption that leaves almost no one pure. The sin of Lancelot and Guinevere is made public. The guilty wife flees to the convent at Almesbury, while Arthur ends his life in battle upon the misty western shore, and on the dusky barge tended by the three queens, Faith, Hope, and Love,

From the great deep to the great deep he goes.

So the poet has given us a picture of a lost cause. Disaster and defeat have overtaken the truth. Evil seems to have triumphed. This victory of evil would be fatal to the success of the "Idylls" as an epic, if there were not a background of good. I have tried to show that though we have here Tennyson's "Paradise Lost," we have in "In Memoriam" Tennyson's "Paradise Regained." The pathos of the "Idylls" is not the pathos of pessimism. To this disorder which man has wrought a nobler divine order shall succeed. The evil shall somehow be made to minister to good, and all human faithfulness, though it may seem to fail of its

purpose here, shall be seen at last to have triumphed even in the article of death.

O yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;

That nothing walks with aimless feet ;  
That not one life shall be destroyed,  
Or cast as rubbish to the void,  
When God hath made the pile complete.

It has been my purpose to discuss, and even to mention, the separate poems of Tennyson only as this might prepare the way for the consideration of his theology. But, before I leave the third period of his work, the period of broad humanity, I must briefly notice the dramas. Of these "The Cup," "The Falcon," "The Promise of May," and "The Foresters," may be passed by, as of no particular significance, except to demonstrate the poet's lack of supreme dramatic genius. They are slight and fanciful studies of character, which might better have been put into the form of monologue than into that of drama. Our poet is more descriptive than creative. He finds it difficult to invent situations, to diversify action, to represent passion as expressing itself in life, to make the scene supply motive and explain speech. While Shakespeare never lets our attention flag, Tennyson gives us long harangues and comparatively little movement.

Yet "Harold," "Becket," and "Queen Mary," are great historical dramas, in spite of the fact that they are better adapted for private reading than for acting

upon the stage. They constitute a trilogy, the common subject of which is "The Making of England." "Harold" depicts the conflict between Saxon and Norman; "Becket" the struggle between church and crown; "Queen Mary" the fight between Protestantism and Rome. They are invaluable pictures of three great crises in English history. Freeman declared that the poet's insight and imagination had made comprehensible to him certain intricacies of those old times, as his own studies had never done. George Eliot said that "Tennyson's plays run Shakespeare's close." And Hutton, our greatest English critic, ranks "Queen Mary," in dramatic force and general power, higher even than Shakespeare's "King Henry the Eighth."

In passing to the consideration of Tennyson's theological opinions, let me sum up what precedes. The discussion thus far has shown us, not only that our poet believes in God and in a divine order in the universe, but that these beliefs are fundamental to his whole system of thought. His view of the dignity of poetry is based upon them. They enter into his conception of the relation of man to woman, of man to his fellow-man, of man to government, and of man to God. A more omnipresent theistic spirit it would be difficult to find in the works of any poet. For this reason I regret all the more that in Tennyson's utterances about God, he has so largely fallen in with methods of expression derived from the agnostic school of modern thinkers.

Let us remember the days in which his poetry had its origin. From 1830 to 1860 the philosophy of Sir William Hamilton was the current one in England.

Mansel showed its implications in his "Limits of Religious Thought," and Herbert Spencer took advantage of it to proclaim that the Ultimate Reality is inscrutable. In spite of the Scripture declarations that "he that loveth God knoweth God," "the pure in heart . . . shall see God," "this is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God," many Christian thinkers seemed ready to return to heathen ignorance, and to build an altar "To An Unknown God." Instead of taking Jesus at his word, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," and so attributing to God the characteristics of Jesus, they made Jesus' revelation a proof that God is essentially incognizable to finite intelligences.

I find much of this agnosticism in Tennyson. In the introduction to "In Memoriam" we read :

We have but faith : we cannot know ;  
 For knowledge is of things we see ;  
 And yet we trust it comes from thee,  
 A beam in darkness : let it grow.

Here is a denial that matters of religion are objects of knowledge : since science is knowledge, such matters cannot be objects of science, and there is no science of theology. The poet adopts the vicious principle that knowledge is only of sensuous phenomena and their relations : supersensible things must be apprehended by faith, and faith is not knowledge at all. Henry Drummond challenged this whole method of representation when he said that faith in the New Testament is opposed, not to reason, but to sight. Faith is a higher sort of knowledge. It is an act of reason, of reason in

the sense of the mind's whole power of knowing, of reason therefore as conditioned upon a right state of the affections. Faith then is the higher knowledge possessed by the loving heart and the upright will.

Yet in his use of the words knowledge and faith Tennyson is not consistent. When it comes to apprehension of the inward world, even though this is super-sensible, he calls it knowledge. And at times the soul knows God as it knows itself :

Let visions of the night or of the day  
Come, as they will ; and many a time they come,  
Until this earth he walks on seems not earth,  
This light that strikes his eyeball is not light,  
This air that smites his forehead is not air  
But vision—yea, his very hand and foot—  
In moments when he feels he cannot die,  
And knows himself no vision to himself,  
Nor the high God a vision, nor that One  
Who rose again.

But his wrong conception of faith, as somehow sundered from knowledge, leads the poet to divest God to a large extent of cognizable attributes, and to clothe him with a mist of words in which all definiteness is lost.—To Christian hearts that say "Our Father, who art in heaven," it seems chilling as well as tantalizing to hear the prayer at the close of "De Profundis" :

Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah !

Infinite Ideality !

Immeasurable Reality !

Infinite Personality !

Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah !

We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and in Thee ;

We feel we are something—*that* also has come from Thee :

We know we are nothing—but Thou wilt help us to be.  
Hallowed be Thy name—Halleluiah !

I call the reader to witness, however, that this is no pantheistic prayer. Pantheism denies the separate existence and personality of God. This prayer calls God a Personality, and implies the continued and distinct existence and personality of man also. It is an expression, though in our judgment not a highly poetical or impressive expression, of the doctrine of Paul that in God "we live and move and have our being." There is unquestionably in Tennyson the belief that man is an emanation from God. "The great deep" from which King Arthur comes and to which he goes is not simply the deep of eternity, it is also the deep of the divine existence. So, in "De Profundis," written at the birth of his son, the poet writes:

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,  
From that true world within the world we see,  
Whereof our world is but the bounding shore—  
Out of the deep, Spirit, out of the deep,  
With this ninth moon, that sends the hidden sun  
Down yon dark sea, thou comest, darling boy.

For in the world which is not ours They said  
"Let us make man," and that which should be man,  
From that one light no man can look upon,  
Drew to this shore lit by the suns and moons  
And all the shadows.

The thought of this derivation of the soul from God and of its essential oneness with its divine original, is found in Tennyson's earliest poems, it crops out in the works of his middle life, and it persists in those printed just before his death. One may say indeed that this

view of the dignity of human nature is inseparable from his conception of a universal divine order: there is order, because there is one substance at the basis of all beings and all things. "The Two Voices" suggests that life may exist after the soul is sundered from the body, because we have faint reminiscences of a state prior to the soul's existence in a body.

Yet how should I for certain hold,  
Because my memory is so cold,  
That I first was in human mold?

. . . . .

Much more, if first I floated free,  
As naked essence, must I be  
Incompetent of memory :

For memory dealing but with time,  
And he with matter, could she climb  
Beyond her own material prime?

Moreover something is or seems,  
That touches me with mystic gleams,  
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—

Of something felt, like something here ;  
Of something done, I know not where ;  
Such as no language may declare.

The beginning of a human life is described in the Epilogue to "In Memoriam":

A soul shall draw from out the vast  
And strike his being into bounds,

And moved through life of lower phase,  
Result in man, be born and think,  
And act and love.

Our life in time and space is necessary to our separate personality :

So rounds he to a separate mind  
 From whence clear memory may begin,  
 As through the frame that binds him in  
 His isolation grows defined.

This use may lie in blood and breath,  
 Which else were fruitless of their due,  
 Had man to learn himself anew  
 Beyond the second birth of Death.

The physical universe exists for the sake of developing this personality. In "The Higher Pantheism" we read :

Earth, these solid stars, this weight of body and limb,  
 Are they not sign and symbol of thy division from Him ?

Dark is the world to thee : thyself art the reason why ;  
 For is He not all but thou, that hast power to feel "I am I" ?

Man's life is from God and in God, yet he feels his own distinctness and responsibility. "The Ancient Sage" recognizes both the oneness with God and the difference from God :

But that one ripple on the boundless deep  
 Feels that the deep is boundless, and itself  
 Forever changing form, but ever more  
 One with the boundless motion of the deep.

And lest we should say that the wave is but the form and manifestation of the ocean, and can have no real separateness or freedom, Tennyson tells us in "De Profundis" that God wrought



Not matter, nor the finite-infinite,  
 But this main-miracle, that thou art thou,  
 With power on thine own act and on the world.

And in his address "To the Duke of Argyll" he speaks of the will as

A power to make  
 This ever-changing world of circumstance,  
 In changing, chime with never-changing Law.

"The Higher Pantheism" then is no pantheism at all, for it asserts that both God and man are distinct personalities, and that God is not confined to the universe but is transcendent above it. There are yet further proofs that Tennyson is no pantheist, first, in his doctrine of prayer; secondly, in his doctrine of conscience; and thirdly, in his doctrine of the soul's separate existence after death. The last words of King Arthur give us the doctrine of prayer:

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice  
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
 For what are men better than sheep or goats  
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?  
 For so the whole round earth is every way  
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

*gives*

In other words, the poet believes in intercourse and communion between man and God, such as can occur only between separate persons, and such as excludes all pantheistic confounding of one personality with the other.

Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—  
Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

The commands and the reproaches of conscience are a witness against pantheism. If man has no separate personality, but is a waif upon an infinite stream, what sense in talking to him of right or wrong? Whatever is, is right; pleasure and duty are one. But we find Tennyson asserting the claims of conscience over against pleasure:

*morality*

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.  
Yet not for power (power of herself  
Would come uncalled for) but to live by law,  
Acting the law we live by without fear;  
And, because right is right, to follow right  
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.

Arthur's knights bind themselves "to reverence their conscience as their king." As the demand of conscience indicates a personal Lawgiver, so the pangs of conscience indicate a personal Judge, and to Lancelot in his sin the Holy Grail has

a stormy glare, a heat  
As from a seven times heated furnace,

which blasts and burns and blinds him, with such fierceness that he swoons away.

Nor is man absorbed in God even after this earthly life is ended. "In Memoriam" gives us Tennyson's doctrine of the soul's separate existence after death:

That each, who seems a separate whole,  
Should move his rounds and, fusing all

The skirts of self again, should fall  
Remerging in the general Soul,

Is faith as vague as all unsweet :

Eternal form shall still divide

The eternal soul from all beside ;

And I shall know him when we meet :

And we shall sit at endless feast,

Enjoying each the other's good :

What vaster dream can hit the mood

Of Love on earth ?

And Mr. Knowles, in "The Nineteenth Century" (January, 1893), writes of Tennyson: "He formulated once and quite deliberately his own religious creed in the words: 'There is a Something that watches over us; and our individuality endures; that's my faith, and that's all my faith!'"

But in his poems the spirit of the seer possesses him, and he asserts a larger and more definite creed :

I trust I have not wasted breath :

I think we are not wholly brain,

Magnetic mockeries ; not in vain,

Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death ;

Not only cunning casts in clay :

Let Science prove we are, and then

What matters Science unto men,

At least to me? I would not stay.

Let him, the wiser man who springs

Hereafter, up from childhood shape

His action like the greater ape ;

But I was *born* to better things.

Let it live then—ay, till when?

Earth passes, all is lost

In what they prophesy, our wise men,  
 Sun-flame or sunless frost,  
 And deed and song alike are swept  
 Away, and all in vain  
 As far as man can see, except  
 The man himself remain ;  
 And though, in this lean age forlorn,  
 Too many a voice may cry  
 That man can have no after-morn,  
 Not yet of these am I.  
 The man remains, and whatsoe'er  
 He wrought of good or brave  
 Will mold him through the cycle-year  
 That dawns behind the grave.

Gone forever ! Ever ? no—for since our dying race began,  
 Ever, ever, and forever, was the leading light of man.

And yet, in spite of these testimonies to immortality, there are expressions in Tennyson which might seem to teach that the souls of the departed are so merged in God that all bounds and limitations are lost. Let us interpret these expressions by the clearer passages which we have already examined. The poet means only that his dead friend is now one with God, and that this oneness with God brings with it a lifting of the soul above the hindrances of space and time. That dead friend had himself said : "The tendency of love is toward a union so intimate as virtually to amount to identification." Arthur is now inseparable from the divine. All his powers are expanded beyond our earthly measures. All things are his, because God is his and the infinite fullness of God's love.

We do not call Milton a pantheist because he addresses Lycidas as "the Genius of the shore." Shelley

is not a pantheist merely because Adonais is "made one with Nature" and "his voice is in all her music." No more is Tennyson a pantheist when he writes :

Thy voice is on the rolling air ;  
I hear thee where the waters run ;  
Thou standest in the rising sun,  
And in the setting thou art fair.

What art thou then ? I cannot guess ;  
But though I seem in star and flower  
To feel thee some diffusive power,  
I do not therefore love thee less :

My love involves the love before ;  
My love is vaster passion now ;  
Though mixed with God and Nature thou,  
I seem to love thee more and more.

Far off thou art, but ever nigh ;  
I have thee still, and I rejoice ;  
I prosper, circled with thy voice ;  
I shall not lose thee though I die.

He evidently holds that, though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, and though an inconceivable greatness is before us, we are not to lose our separate being, or to lose the personal loves that have made that being so largely what it is. Man's personality will endure after this life is over.

But another interesting question arises : Did the soul have separate personality before it entered this world of time and space ? I cannot believe that Tennyson means to imply this, for the reason that the soul's consciousness of its personality and the exercise of its freedom are made to depend upon its finite surroundings. He

can speak of "the abysmal depths of personality," because our being is inseparable from God's being, even as it is originally derived from him. But that this soul existed, as soul, before its birth into this present life, the poet nowhere asserts.

There are frequent intimations, indeed, that we remember what was before our birth. I have quoted verses from "The Two Voices," which can be interpreted in no other way. "The Ancient Sage" is the attempt of the poet to give us the wisdom of his later years :

To-day? but what of yesterday? for oft  
 On me, when boy, there came what then I call'd . . .  
 In my boy-phrase "The Passion of the Past,"  
 The first gray streak of earliest summer dawn, . . .  
 Desolate sweetness—far and far away.

One of the loveliest of his songs is made up of these "deep musings and tender broodings over the past, and not the past of human life alone, for many of them are echoes of some antenatal dream " :

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
 Tears from the depths of some divine despair  
 Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
 In looking on the happy autumn fields,  
 And thinking of the days that are no more.

. . . . .  
 Dear as remembered kisses after death,  
 And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd  
 On lips that are for others ; deep as love,  
 Deep as first love, and wild with all regret ;  
 O Death in Life, the days that are no more !

And one of his latest songs takes up the same mysterious strain :

What sight so lured him through the fields he knew  
As where earth's green stole into heaven's own hue,  
Far—far—away ?

What sound was dearest in his native dells ?  
The mellow lin-lan-lone of evening bells  
Far—far—away.

What vague world-whisper, mystic pain or joy,  
Through those three words would haunt him when a boy  
Far—far—away ?

A whisper from his dawn of life ? A breath  
From some fair dawn beyond the doors of death  
Far—far—away ?

Far, far, how far ? from o'er the gates of Birth,  
The faint horizons, all the bounds of earth,  
Far—far—away ?

What charm in words, a charm no words could give ?  
O dying words, can Music make you live ?  
Far—far—away ?

An occasional critic holds indeed that the belief in man's conscious and responsible existence before he came into this present world is found in the "Epilogue" to the "Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava" :

But since our mortal shadow, Ill,  
To waste this earth began—  
Perchance from some abuse of Will  
In worlds before the man  
Involving ours—he needs must fight,  
To make true peace his own,  
He needs must combat might with might,  
Or Might would rule alone.

But I think it plain that the poet here has in mind not an antenatal sin of man, but an antehuman sin of Satan. The "abuse of will" is "in worlds before the man," and is regarded as only indirectly "involving ours." We are left then to the conclusion that Tennyson's reminiscences are, like Wordsworth's, survivals of a knowledge possessed in a previous state of existence, not by the separate soul, but by the divine Being from whom it has subsequently sprung.

But in one very important respect Tennyson's doctrine is unlike Wordsworth's and is inferior to it. I refer to his conception of nature. Stopford Brooke, in his noble and almost exhaustive treatment of Tennyson and his poetry, has nowhere shown greater penetration than where he calls attention to the marked difference between his view of the physical universe, including the human body, and the view of Wordsworth. The difference is simply this: To Wordsworth nature is alive, and alive with God. "The splendor in the grass, the glory in the flower," are but the outward sign, the intelligible speech, of an immanent Deity. Nature can therefore be regarded with affection, and the soul can commune with her. She responds to the heart of man, counsels him, inspires him. The lonely forest and the sounding shore teach him great lessons of wisdom, for in nature's quiet or in her majesty he hears the voice of God.

To Tennyson, on the other hand, nature is rather a phantasmagoria cunningly arranged to witness of an absent God. There is no life in nature, and specially no divine life. The only life in the universe, outside of God, is found in the soul of man. Nature is but a



series of pictures or symbols, intended to instruct and to educate, but never revealing a present Divinity. I am inclined to connect this view of nature with Tennyson's general tendency to agnosticism. In this respect I think both Wordsworth and Browning far more vigorous and pronounced believers than Tennyson. And this agnosticism is accompanied by an idealism more subjective than Browning's, an idealism that at times seems to doubt the real existence of any world but that of feeling and of thought. ✓

The world is not so much the immediate product of a present God as it is the shadow of a God who is far away :

Only That which made us, meant us to be mightier by and by,  
Set the sphere of all the boundless Heavens within the human eye,  
Sent the shadow of Himself, the boundless, through the human  
soul ;  
Boundless inward, in the atom, boundless outward, in the whole.

In fact, this picture or shadow of the Infinite One does not answer to the Reality except in part. Nature, owing to our imperfect vision, is a distorted image of Him who is reflected in it :

My God, I would not live  
Save that I think this gross, hard-seeming world  
Is our misshaping vision of the Powers  
Behind the world, that make our griefs our gains.

Our mortal veil  
And shatter'd phantom of that infinite One,  
Who made thee unconceivably Thyself  
Out of His whole World-self and all in all.

I cannot understand the least flower that blows ; but such is the order of the universe, that knowledge of that one flower, if I only did possess it, would be knowledge of all :

Little flower—but *if* I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

Tennyson made it no secret to his friends that from boyhood, sometimes when he was all alone and sometimes when he was in the presence of others, he had been subject to a sort of waking trance. Four times in “The Princess” he describes such a one :

And truly waking dreams were, more or less,  
An old and strange affection of the house,  
Myself too had weird seizures, heaven knows what :  
On a sudden, in the midst of men and day,  
And while I walk'd and talk'd as heretofore,  
I seem'd to move among a world of ghosts  
And feel myself the shadow of a dream.

. . . . .  
The Princess with her monstrous woman-guard,  
The jest and earnest working side by side,  
The cataract and the tumult of the Kings,  
Were shadows ; and the long fantastic night  
With all its doings had and had not been,  
And all things were and were not.

“In Memoriam” tells of another :

So word by word, and line by line,  
The dead man touched me from the past,  
And all at once it seemed at last  
The living soul was flashed on mine,

And mine in his was wound, and whirl'd  
 About empyreal heights of thought,  
 And came on that which is, and caught  
 The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out  
 The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—  
 The blows of Death.

And similarly in “The Ancient Sage” we read :

For more than once when I  
 Sat all alone, revolving in myself  
 The word that is the symbol of myself,  
 The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,  
 And passed into the Nameless, as a cloud  
 Melts into Heaven. I touched my limbs, the limbs  
 Were strange, not mine—and yet no shade of doubt,  
 But utter clearness, and through loss of Self  
 The gain of such large life as match'd with ours  
 Were Sun to spark—unshadowable in words,  
 Themselves but shadows of a shadow-world.

A shadow-world, especially when that world of shadows only imperfectly answers to the Reality, affords no object of communion. It is only the dim symbol of Him who dwells behind the darkness and the shadow—it is never the manifestation of a present God. Yet I must make a single exception, one which has doubtless occurred to the reader, namely, the remarkable poem entitled “The Higher Pantheism.” Here, for a moment, the poet is endowed with Wordsworth’s deeper insight, and actually sees God in nature :

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills, and the plains,  
 Are not these, O Soul, the Vision of Him that reigns ?

But the vision does not tarry. Tennyson has hardly expressed the sublime thought when doubt again seizes him. The vision is a misleading vision, true only to us and only while the vision lasts :

Is not the Vision He? Though He be not that which he seems?  
Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?

Here is the old Kantian relativity. All knowledge is relative to the knowing agent. Tennyson is not content with knowing the Reality *in* the phenomena; he is trying to know the Reality *apart from* the phenomena, trying to know without fulfilling the conditions of knowledge, in short, trying to know without knowing. Agnosticism regards God as concealed by his own manifestation—it should hold instead that in knowing the phenomena we know the Reality itself. Our poet is infected with this agnostic philosophy; and, though he has a moment of insight when the truth dawns upon him, the clouds shut in again; though he listens for a little to the wise, the unwise must have their say also :

God is law, say the wise; O soul, and let us rejoice,  
For if He thunder by law the thunder is yet his voice.

Law is God, say some: no God at all, says the fool;  
For all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in a pool.

And so the conclusion is a mixture of faith and of unbelief :

And the ear of man cannot hear, and the eye of man cannot see;  
But if we could see and hear, this Vision—were it not He?

Would that the poet had grasped the principle that the laws of our knowing are not merely arbitrary and

regulative, but correspond to the nature of things! But he did not grasp this principle, and Nature remained to him a sort of dream, in which God manifested himself indeed, but only distantly and irregularly. Tennyson therefore does not care to be alone with Nature. Only when some fellow-man is by, has he interest in physical beauty or in physical grandeur. The external universe is only the setting for humanity, the background for the human figure. But, with man to interpret, the world has a meaning. Our poet's greatest art, indeed, consists in finding a fitting environment for every emotion of the soul. He can create, not dramatic scenes, but material landscapes, to reflect, symbolize, and intensify every phase of thought and emotion.

I venture to give one out of many possible illustrations of Tennyson's use of nature, not as a living, but as a symbolic thing. He makes nature express otherwise unutterable yearnings in his little poem :

Break, break, break,  
 On thy cold gray stones, O Sea !  
 And I would that my tongue could utter  
 The thoughts that arise in me.

The dull recurrence of the wave-beats answers to heart-beats even more monotonous and sad. And now the poet heightens the impression of grief by contrast :

O well for the fisherman's boy,  
 That he shouts with his sister at play !  
 O well for the sailor lad,  
 That he sings in his boat on the bay !  
 And the stately ships go on  
 To their haven under the hill ;

But O for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still !

So the glad accomplishment of the voyage of the ship increases our sympathy with one whose earthly hopes have vanished. And the last stanza intimates that, while the wave-beats are mechanical and unconscious, the heart-beats are living and unescapable :

Break, break, break,  
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea !  
But the tender grace of a day that is dead  
Will never come back to me.

A divine order, and finite intelligences watched over by an infinite Intelligence who uses nature for their instruction and discipline—this is Tennyson's faith. His idealism, combined with his belief in freedom, delivers him from the materialistic error of supposing that the universe is sufficient unto itself. He recognizes the world as under the dominion of law. In his later years he was increasingly impressed with the evidence that evolution is the method of creation. But he never loses sight of the fact that there is a law within the law, namely, the will of God. He sees that evolution is only a method, and not an agent ; that behind the method is a divine Intelligence which designed it ; that the Agent who works according to this method is God.

Tennyson made many needless concessions to agnosticism, but he never ceased to fight against materialism. In his acknowledgment of law, he did not surrender his faith in freedom. He believed that God, while

binding nature fast in fate,  
Left free the human will.

God's order is the order, not of constant miracle, but of gradual development. But God is free, as well as man; and this enabled him to trust that

God was love indeed,  
And love creation's final law—  
Though Nature, red in tooth and claw  
With ravine, shrieked against his creed.

This enabled him also to cherish hope for the world, even though many questions about the existence of evil remained unsolved :

Is there evil but on earth? Or pain in every peopled sphere?  
Well be grateful for the sounding watchword "Evolution" here.

Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good,  
And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud.

Tennyson had evidently grasped the thought that the abuse of human freedom has substituted reversion for evolution, and that sin must be taken account of, if we would explain the history of man or reconcile it with the principle of divine order. The materialism that denies freedom, and the necessitarianism that excludes sin, are combated in the drama called "The Promise of May." At the first representation of this little play in London, the Marquis of Queensbury rose from his seat in the theatre and protested against the character of "Edgar" as "an abominable caricature" of the agnostic position. It is nevertheless a faithful picture of the logical tendency and natural consequences of agnosticism :

A soul with no religion . . .  
Was without rudder, anchor, compass—might be

Blown every way with every gust, and wreck  
On any rock.

If man be only  
A willy-nilly current of sensations—  
Reaction needs must follow revel—yet—  
Why feel remorse, he, knowing that he *must* have  
Moved in the iron grooves of Destiny?  
Remorse then is a part of Destiny,  
Nature a liar, making us feel guilty  
Of her own faults.

The last gleam of an after-life but leaves him  
A beast of prey in the dark.

The two aspects of this abuse of freedom, the sin of sense on the one hand and the sin of pride on the other, have been depicted by Tennyson with wonderful power, the former in "The Vision of Sin," and the latter in "The Palace of Art." Not that he confines his treatment of the subject to these poems. As I have already pointed out, "The Idylls of the King" is one long exposition of the nature and the consequences of transgression. The song of Vivien in "Balin and Balan" gives us the insidious and lying aspect of temptation:

The fire of heaven is lord of all things good,  
And starve not thou this fire within thy blood,  
But follow Vivien through the fiery flood!  
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell!

"Thou shalt not surely die," said the first seducer;  
"ye shall be as gods, knowing both good and evil." So  
Vivien extorts the charm from Merlin:

Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm  
Of woven paces and of waving hands,



And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,  
And lost to life and use and name and fame.

“The Vision of Sin” presents temptation to sensual sin in its coarser aspect :

I had a vision when the night was late :  
A youth came riding toward a palace-gate.  
He rode a horse with wings, that would have flown,  
But that his heavy rider kept him down.  
And from the palace came a child of sin,  
And took him by the curls and led him in.

Then come song and revel, ecstasies of pleasure, the giddy whirl of the dance, an orgy of intoxication. But there is a solemn sequel. Divine retribution slowly gathers :

And then I looked up toward a mountain tract,  
That girt the region with high cliff and lawn :  
I saw that every morning, far withdrawn  
Beyond the darkness and the cataract,  
God made himself an awful rose of dawn,  
Unheeded : and detaching, fold by fold,  
From those still heights, and, slowly drawing near,  
A vapor heavy, hueless, formless, cold,  
Came floating on for many a month and year,  
Unheeded.

At length the vapor touches the palace-gate and encompasses its inmates. Penalty overtakes the sinner. The youth with curls, fairly flying in the exuberance of his vitality and passion, becomes at last

A gray and gap-tooth'd man as lean as death,  
Who slowly rode across a wither'd heath  
And lighted at a ruin'd inn.

Sense has increased the stimulant until at last no pleasure is left. The recklessness of youth is now a bitter cynicism. There is no goodness or purity. Death is approaching, but it is made matter for ribald jest. Conscience occasionally threatens, but it can be deadened with drink :

I am old, but let me drink ;  
 Bring me spices, bring me wine ;  
 I remember, when I think,  
 That my youth was half divine.  
 . . . . .  
 Youthful hopes, by scores, to all,  
 When the locks are crisp and curl'd ;  
 Unto me my maudlin gall  
 And my mockeries of the world.  
 Fill the cup, and fill the can ;  
 Mingle madness, mingle scorn !  
 Dregs of life, and lees of man :  
 Yet we will not die forlorn !

The voice grew faint : there came a further change :  
 Once more uprose the mystic mountain range.

. . . . .  
 Then some one spake : " Behold, it was a crime  
 Of sense avenged by sense that wore with time."  
 Another said : " The crime of sense became  
 The crime of malice, and is equal blame."

Penalty is the reaction of natural law, and the sin of sense is punished in kind. Man reaps what he sows, yet the operation of natural law is at the same time the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

As "The Vision of Sin" shows us sensual sin "avenged by sense that wore with time," so "The Palace of Art" is a picture of the inherent misery

of selfishness. There the soul that has built for itself a lordly pleasure-house, looks down with contempt upon the poor :

O Godlike isolation which art mine !  
 I can but count thee perfect gain,  
 What time I watch the darkening droves of swine  
 That range on yonder plain.

In filthy sloughs they roll a prurient skin,  
 They graze and wallow, breed and sleep,  
 And oft some brainless devil enters in  
 And drives them to the deep.

This palace of pride is adorned with beauty, but the pleasures sought within are not pleasures of the senses. Science, literature, and art are the soul's ministers. Everything is here to give enjoyment, except humility and love.

Full oft the riddle of the painful earth  
 Flash'd through her as she sat alone,  
 Yet not the less held she her solemn mirth,  
 And intellectual throne.

And so she throve and prosper'd : so three years  
 She prosper'd : on the fourth she fell,  
 Like Herod, when the shout was in his ears,  
 Struck through with pangs of hell.

Despair, dread, loathing of her solitude, fell on her. Art, sundered from love, had turned the palace into a veritable prison. "Inwrapt tenfold in slothful shame," she

Lay there exiled from eternal God,  
 Lost to her place and name ;

And death and life she hated equally,  
 And nothing saw, for her despair,

But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,  
No comfort anywhere.

She howl'd aloud, "I am on fire within.  
There comes no murmur of reply.  
What is it that will take away my sin,  
And save me, lest I die?"

So, when four years were wholly finished,  
She threw her royal robes away,  
"Make me a cottage in the vale," she said,  
"Where I may mourn and pray.

"Yet pull not down my palace-towers, that are  
So lightly, beautifully built :  
Perchance I may return with others there,  
When I have purged my guilt."

The remorse of a soul awakened by conscience, and "plagued by God with sore despair," has never been more vividly described. The conviction that sin must be taken away, that guilt must be purged, that the sinner must depend upon help from without, that one must come and "save it, lest it die"—all this is the voice of human nature itself, under the teachings of Scripture and of the Holy Spirit. And Tennyson recognizes the universal need of this deliverance, for in "Becket" he says :

We are sinners all,  
The best of all not all prepared to die.

In "The Promise of May" this sin is described as hereditary :

O this mortal house  
Which we are born into, is haunted by  
The ghosts of the dead passions of dead men ;

And these take flesh again with our own flesh,  
And bring us to confusion.

He was only  
A poor philosopher who called the mind  
Of children a blank page, a *tabula rasa*.  
There, there, is written in invisible inks,  
“Lust, Prodigality, Covetousness, Craft,  
Cowardice, Murder”—and the heat and fire  
Of life will bring them out, and black enough  
So the child grow to manhood.

Evil heredity, however, has not extinguished human freedom. We have still a will that can act down upon our natures and can modify them. We are responsible for the evil, and we can alter our destiny :

Follow Light, and do the Right—for man can half control his  
doom—

Till you find the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb.

For man is man, and master of his fate.

With all these abstract possibilities of good, it still remains true that man is weak, and that for his complete renovation he is dependent upon a higher power. In “Locksley Hall Sixty Years After,” the poet says of earth in general what is equally true of the individual man :

Ere she gain her heavenly best, a God must mingle with the game.

Does Tennyson recognize Christ as the divine Redeemer? I am glad to find abundant evidence of this. Doubtful as he is about nature as a direct revelation of God, he has no doubt as to the divinity of Christ, or as to Christ’s proclamation of God’s mind and will to men.

“In Memoriam” teaches this not only in its noble initial invocation,

Strong Son of God, immortal Love !

but in the subsequent attribution to him of creative power, of supreme authority, and of infinite wisdom. Christ is the Maker, the Lord, and the Light, of men. It is the larger Christ, the eternal Revealer of God, to whom the poet makes the sublime ascription :

Thou seemest human and divine,  
The highest, holiest manhood thou :  
Our wills are ours, we know not how ;  
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

Our little systems have their day ;  
They have their day and cease to be :  
They are but broken lights of thee,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

And yet this Light of the world, this eternal power and truth and love, became incarnate, so that all men might recognize and adore a present God :

For wisdom dealt with mortal powers,  
Where truth in closest words shall fail,  
When truth embodied in a tale  
Shall enter in at lowly doors.

And so the word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds  
In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
More strong than all poetic thought.

In “The Holy Grail,” the hermit tells Percivale that the model of all earthly excellence is to be found in the humility of Christ,

when the Lord of all things  
Made himself naked of glory for his mortal change.

The Model of humanity does not stand at a distance commanding us to be like him,—he enters into us and remodels us. Not imitation of him, so much as appropriation of him, is needed. Immortal Love becomes our Lord and King, by diffusing through our being his own loving spirit. Christ is “the Life indeed.” He raised Lazarus from the dead; he receives the souls of the departed; he is an object of prayer to-day. And in allusion to Paul’s words, “That rock was Christ,” and “Christ liveth in me,” the poet prays that God in Christ may pervade and purify us :

O living will that shalt endure  
When all that seems shalt suffer shock,  
Rise in the spiritual rock,  
Flow through our deeds and make them pure,  
That we may lift from out the dust  
A voice as unto him that hears,  
A cry above the conquer’ d years,  
To one that with us works, and trust,  
With faith that comes of self-control,  
The truths that never can be proved,  
Until we close with all we loved,  
And all we flow from, soul in soul.

Because Tennyson’s belief in God is combined with an agnostic philosophy, Stopford Brooke can say that our poet is more Christian than theist. Though he professes to know little about God, he knows much about Christ. When I hear him praying to Christ, I am not greatly troubled by his seeming identification of Christ with all the good :

Nay, there may be those about us whom we neither see nor name,  
 Felt within us as ourselves, the Powers of Good, the Powers of Ill,  
 Strowing balm, or shedding poison in the fountains of the Will.  
 Follow you the Star that lights a desert pathway, yours or mine.  
 Forward, till you see the highest Human Nature is divine.

It is rather the identification of the good with Christ, their Inspirer and their life. Tennyson has shown us his heart, and he has confessed to us his faith, in the "May Queen," where the dying girl says of the clergyman:

He taught me all the mercy, for he showed me all the sin.  
 Now, though my lamp was lighted late, there's One will let me in,  
 Nor would I now be well, mother, again if that could be,  
 For my desire is but to pass to Him that died for me.

The same trust in Christ as a Saviour is shown in his pathetic poem entitled "In the Children's Hospital." There the little child who has prayed to Jesus to help her in prospect of a surgical operation, and has put her arms outside the bed so that he may distinguish her from the other patients, has her prayer answered. The hard-hearted skeptical surgeon

Had brought his ghastly tools : we believed her asleep again—  
 Her dear, long, lean, little arms lying out on the counterpane ;  
 Say that his day is done? Ah, why should we care what they say?  
 The Lord of the children had heard her, and Emmie had past  
 away.

Tennyson perceives that God's work for man must be met and appropriated by man's work for God. In theological parlance, regeneration must be accompanied by conversion, and there is no conversion without repentance and faith. In "Maud," even an earthly love



has power to humble a man and to make him long to be more worthy of the object of his affection :

And ah for a man to arise in me,  
That the man I am may cease to be.

And in "Guinevere" we see the forgiving love of Arthur for his faithless Queen result in her true repentance and in the awaking at last of responsive love for him whom she had so greatly wronged. The King's forgiveness comes first :

Lo ! I forgive thee, as Eternal God  
Forgives : do thou for thine own soul the rest.

. . . . .

Let no man dream but that I love thee still.  
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,  
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,  
Hereafter in that world where all are pure  
We two may meet before high God, and thou  
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know  
I am thine husband—not a smaller soul,  
Nor Lancelot, nor another.

But Guinevere's repentance follows :

Now I see thee what thou art,  
Thou art the highest and most human too,  
Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none  
Will tell the King I love him, though so late?  
Now—ere he goes to the great battle? none :  
Myself must tell him in that purer life,  
But now it were too daring. Ah, my God,  
What might I not have made of thy fair world,  
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?  
It was my duty to have loved the highest :

It surely was my profit, had I known :  
 It would have been my pleasure, had I seen.  
 We needs must love the highest when we see it,  
 Not Lancelot, nor another.

There is a defect in this representation, in spite of its heart-moving pathos. Not enough stress is laid upon the necessity of a divine influence to enable us to see and love the highest. That divine influence accompanied and spoke through Arthur's forgiveness, or the guilty passion of the Queen would not have been replaced by contrition. I find a disproportionate stress laid upon the merely human agencies, and too little stress laid upon the direct operation of the divine Spirit. Hence, in his outlook for the world's future, Tennyson has only hope of a consummation that is far away. He does not see that God can cut short his work in righteousness, and do what commonly takes a thousand years in one day. The naturalistic method of modern science has almost banished from his mind the conviction that Nature and History are plastic in the divine hands, and that the things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

The verses entitled "By an Evolutionist" attribute more of individual progress to old age, than to the Spirit of God :

Done for thee? starved the wild beast that was linked with thee  
 eighty years back.

Less weight now for the ladder-of-heaven that hangs on a star.

If my body come from brutes, though somewhat finer than their  
 own,

I am heir, and this my kingdom. Shall the royal voice be  
 mute?

No, but if the rebel subject seek to drag me from the throne,  
 Hold the sceptre, Human Soul, and rule thy Province of the  
 brute.

I have climb'd to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a field in the  
 Past,  
 Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs of a low  
 desire,  
 But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last  
 As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a  
 height that is higher.

And while the poet expects the future triumph of good  
 in this world of ours, he hardly hopes that the ghost of  
 the brute will be laid for a million years to come :

Forward then, but still remember how the course of time will  
 swerve,  
 Crook and turn upon itself in many a backward streaming curve.

. . . . .

Forward, let the stormy moment fly and mingle with the Past.  
 I that loathed, have come to love him. Love will conquer at  
 the last.

These last quotations are from the poems of Tennyson's old age. They breathe a more unhopeful tone than the productions of his earlier manhood. The strong faith with which "In Memoriam" closes is somewhat weakened. We may indeed speak of a fourth period of Tennyson's productive activity, and may call it the period of growing despondency. Evolution has come to seem the exclusive method of God, though it has not taken the place of God. The poet's hold upon the personal Love at the heart of the Universe is relaxed. Let us believe it to be merely the decay of natural cheerfulness and the growth of egotistic petu-

lance, rather than a renunciation of the faith of his youth. "Locksley Hall" has in it more of truth than "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," for in the former faith indignantly represses doubt :

Fool, again the dream, the fancy? But I know my words are wild,

For I count the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child.

Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,  
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.

Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us range,  
Let the great world spin forever down the ringing grooves of change.

Through the shadow of the world we sweep into the younger day :  
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

I believe that these verses have in them not only more of truth, but also more of Tennyson's own faith, than the poems of his later years. Yet it is delightful to find that his last poem expresses anew the confidence of his youth. It is the poet's personal version of Stephen's prayer, "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit" :

Sunset and evening star,

And one clear call for me !

And may there be no moaning of the bar,

When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,

Too full for sound and foam,

When that which drew from out the boundless deep

Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,

And after that the dark !

And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark ;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.

And what about the future destiny of men? Will all attain to blessedness? We find two methods of representation in Tennyson. When he contemplates the freedom of the human will and the possibilities of its self-perversion, he declares that

he that shuts Love out, in turn shall be  
Shut out from Love.

How solemn is the song of the little maid in "Guinevere":

Late, late, so late ! and dark the night, and chill !  
Late, late, so late ! but we can enter still.  
Too late, too late ! ye cannot enter now.

No light had we : for that we do repent ;  
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.  
Too late, too late ! ye cannot enter now.

No light : so late ! and dark and chill the night !  
O let us in, that we may find the light !  
Too late, too late ! ye cannot enter now.

Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet ?  
O let us in, though late, to kiss his feet !  
Too late, too late ! ye cannot enter now.

"The Vision of Sin" closes with almost equally solemn words :

At last I heard a voice upon the slope,  
Cry to the summit, "Is there any hope?"

To which an answer pealed from that high land,  
But in a tongue no man could understand ;  
And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn  
God made himself an awful rose of dawn.

But when the poet considers the majesty of the divine order, he cannot believe that any human soul will fail of accomplishing the design of its creation :

The wish that of the living whole  
No life may fail beyond the grave,  
Derives it not from what we have  
The likest God within the soul ?

He trusts that in some way God will subdue all things to himself. The order of the divine administration will be vindicated, though the perversity of the human will seems almost insuperable :

Behold, we know not anything ,  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last—far off—at last, to all,  
And every winter change to spring.

“Despair,” one of his latest poems, is a travesty of the orthodox doctrines of the decrees of God, and of the fixity of self-determined character. The decrees are so described as to be not permissive, but mandatory, and punishment is made to consist in external inflictions, rather than in the natural results of transgression. If this poem reflects Tennyson’s final opinions, it indicates that calm and candid judgment of the facts of human sin and destiny had given place to arbitrary and unreasoning assumption. I prefer to believe that this poem is intended not as an exposition of the author’s own be-

liefs, but as a dramatic picture of the possible results of a materialistic and fatalistic interpretation of the scriptural utterances with regard to future punishment.

Tennyson, however, was, without much doubt, a restorationist. He was obliged to confess, at least in his earlier poems, that the ultimate blessedness of all was not susceptible of proof, and that there was much to contradict it. His evolutionism seemed inconsistent with such a conclusion. Of fifty seeds, nature often brings but one to bear. May there not be a similar survival of the fittest in the moral realm? If he had carried his evolutionary philosophy to its logical conclusion, would he not have been obliged to grant that abuse of freedom may result in reversion to the brute, annihilation of manhood but not of existence, punishment from within but not from without, eternal penalty in the shape of eternal loss? And would not this have fitted in with the observed results of sin here, better than his own restorationism? Tennyson feels the difficulties of his own position, and in "In Memoriam" he confesses:

I falter where I firmly trod,  
And falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the world's great altar-stairs  
That slope through darkness unto God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope.

A We may sum up our view of Tennyson's theology by saying that he is, first and foremost, a believer in the divine order of the universe in spite of all the confu-

sion incident to human sin; that he regards man as an emanation from God, yet for that very reason responsible and free; that he worships Christ as the manifested God who has become incarnate to take man's sin away; that nature is but the symbol and partial expression of God, while Christ is the divine Word, intelligible and complete; that God's method, both in nature and in grace, is that of evolution, though the process admits the hearing and the answering of prayer and the communion of the finite spirit with its infinite Creator; that the Christ of God is imparting himself to human hearts and is displacing the brute inheritance of love; that this love in man, being derived from God, connecting the soul with God, is immortal, and the persistence of love is the rational ground for the ultimate triumph of good in the universe.

Our poet is so much of a believer that he asks an interesting question why faith did not quell his doubts altogether and rise to the heights of unwavering assurance. So it did not; for the struggle with doubt not only did not cease, but even grew more severe, with advancing age. He had a mind wonderfully open to all the voices of his time. Its science and its philosophy deeply impressed him. They claimed to be the only sources of real knowledge. Tennyson almost took them at their word. And though his works are full of virtual quotations from Scripture, and he speaks of

The comfort clasped in truth revealed,

he seems to have trusted the Bible only when he could find some evidence in nature to corroborate it. Into the higher joys and certitudes of the spiritual life he



entered at times; but he was not native to that air, and the most of his life was passed in the valley of the shadow.

It is easy to say that Tennyson might have been a more strenuous believer; but when we review the list of his actual beliefs, and remember through what stress and storm of doubt and conflict they were achieved, we may well be thankful for what he was, rather than complain of what he was not. His very sensitiveness to every form of doubt has made him the confidant and guide of many who would never have trusted a dogmatic statement. He has done this not so much by appealing to something higher than the ordinary human understanding, namely, to the instincts of the soul, but more precisely, to the reason as conditioned and enlightened by pure affection.

Edgar Allen Poe declared that he regarded Tennyson as the greatest poet that ever lived. He is certainly the greatest poet of our century. We may put him next to Milton, if not side by side with Milton and only lower than Shakespeare. He is a master of literary workmanship. His art, at least in all the productions of his prime, is almost never-failing. His songs have a liquid melody equal to that of Shelley, and far more informed with genuine emotion. No song of our greatest dramatist in our judgment surpasses the "Bugle-song" in "The Princess":

The splendor falls on castle walls,  
 And snowy summits old in story :  
 The long light shakes across the lakes,  
 And the wild cataract leaps in glory.

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,  
Blow, bugle ; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear ! how thin and clear,  
And thinner, clearer, farther going !  
O sweet and far from cliff and scar  
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing !  
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying :  
Blow, bugle ; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,  
They faint on hill or field or river :  
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,  
And grow forever and forever.  
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,  
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

Stedman, in his "Victorian Poets," has said that there is more of English landscape in one stanza of "In Memoriam" than in all of Thomson's "Seasons." I would add that there is more of heart in one such stanza than in all the poetry of Lord Byron. Tennyson touches us at deeper depths than any other poet of our generation, simply because he has a larger view of human nature, and a soul that itself has profounder emotions. The yearning of human love, and the sense of the Infinite, go together in him. It is because he is a religious poet, that he is the most representative poet of our time. Whatever may be said to the contrary by shallow unbelievers, our time is a time, not of growing unbelief, but of growing faith, and the poets who have greatest influence and a clear title to immortality are those who deal most with that which is immortal in man.

And this is only to say that without love to man and

love to God the greatest poetry is impossible. Mere human love is not enough to stir the deepest chords either in the poet or in his readers. It is the connection of human love with the divine love that gives it permanence and security. The suggestion of the Infinite is the secret of all sublimity and beauty. The poet need not be a conscious theologian, much less can he be chiefly a dogmatist, but he must be deeply impressed with the problems of theology and must have his own solutions of them, if he is to move his age or to influence it for good. It is because Tennyson has seen the relation of nature and of man to the ineffable and eternal order, that he has commanded the affection and reverence of the world. He has done much to hasten the victory of the divine goodness and to bring men under the dominion of the divine love.

It was a tribute to the power of poetry, as one of God's chief ministers for the teaching and uplifting of the race, that there gathered in Westminster Abbey, on the 12th of October, 1892, a most notable company of representatives of the English-speaking race, to do the last honors to the mortal remains of Alfred Tennyson. He was the Poet-Laureate of Great Britain, and he had been made a peer of the realm. The universal outburst of sorrow that followed the death of the old man of eighty-three, was fitly reflected in the crowds that lined the streets through which the funeral procession passed, and that filled every nook and corner of England's grandest mausoleum. The greatest of recent poets was buried in the Poets' Corner, among the singers whose names have become immortal. Tennyson's funeral proved that the "pen is mightier than the sword," and

the closing lines of his great "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" apply to him also :

Peace, his triumph will be sung  
By some yet unmolded tongue  
Far on in summers that we shall not see.

For though the giant ages heave the hill  
And break the shore, and evermore  
Make and break, and work their will ;  
Though world on world in myriad myriads roll  
Round us, each with different powers  
And other forms of life than ours,  
What know we greater than the soul ?  
On God and Godlike men we build our trust.

Hush, the dead march wails in the people's ears :  
The dark crowd moves, and there are sobs and tears ;  
The black earth yawns : the mortal disappears ;  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust ;  
He is gone who seemed so great.  
Gone ; but nothing can bereave him  
Of the force he made his own  
Being here, and we believe him  
Something far advanced in state,  
And that he wears a truer crown  
Than any wreath that man can weave him.  
Speak no more of his renown,  
Lay your earthly fancies down,  
And in the vast cathedral leave him,  
God accept him, Christ receive him.

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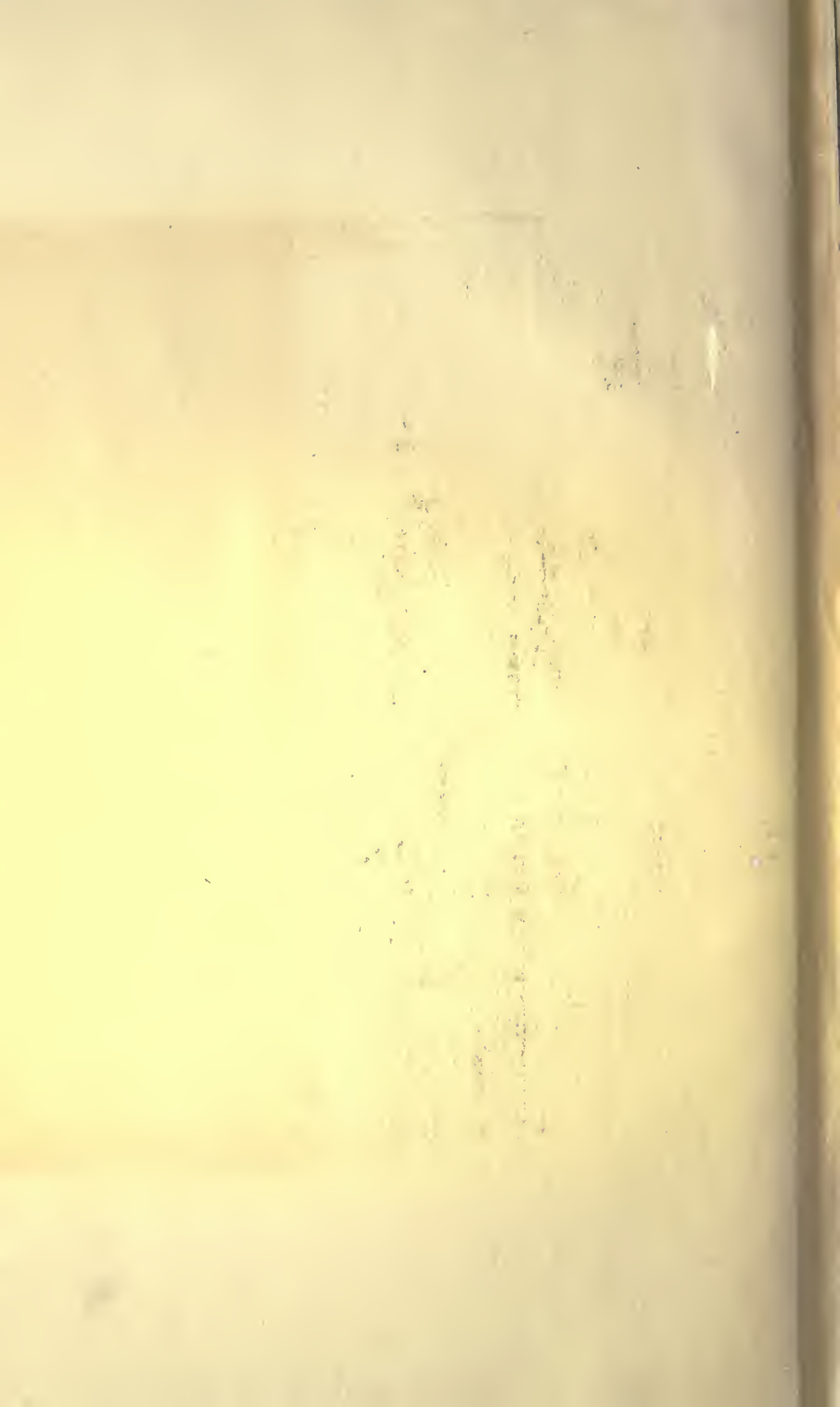
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