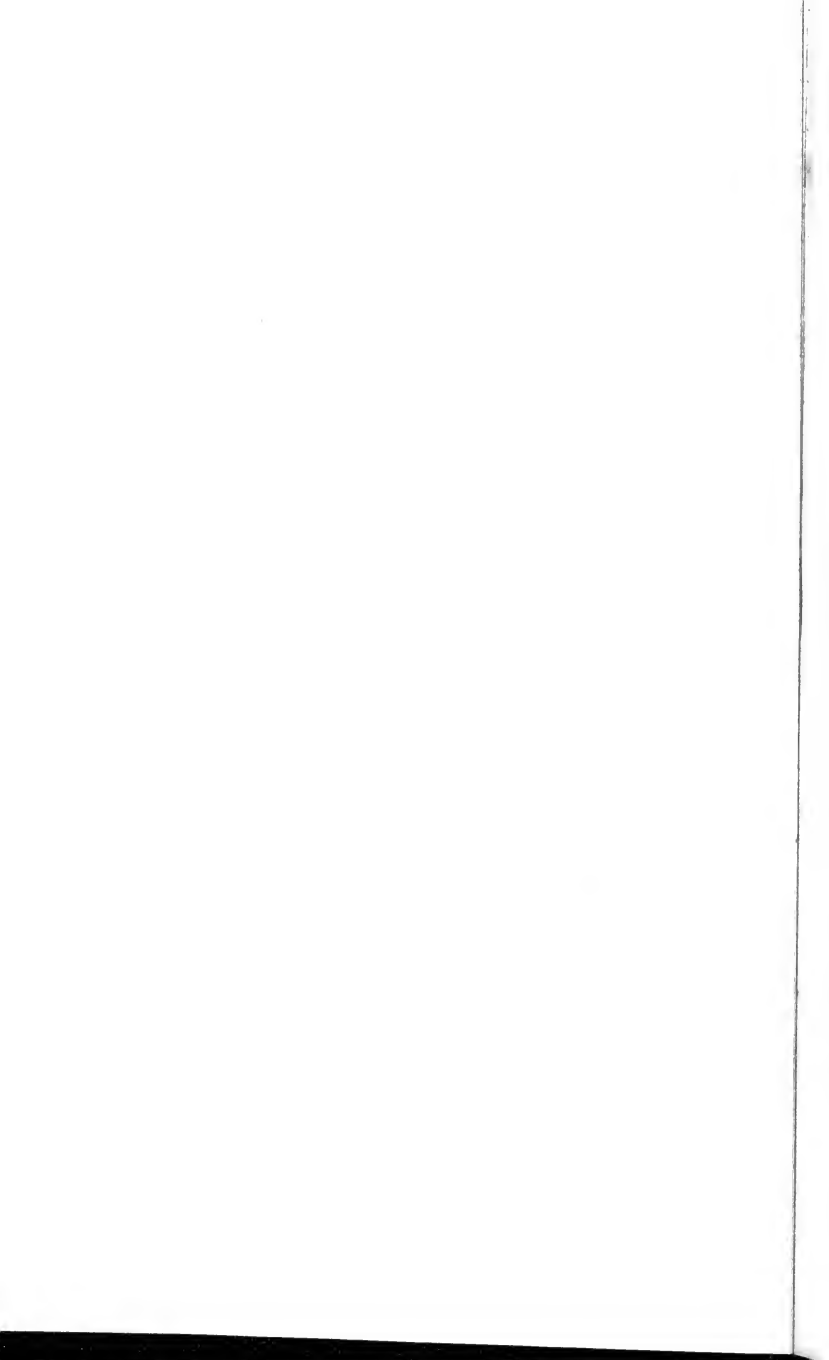




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Of great men: with special
reference to Garibaldi and



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THEOLOGICAL SEMIN

OF GREAT MEN:

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO

GARIBALDI AND SHAKESPEARE:

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHAPEL, STOURBRIDGE, ON SUNDAY
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SERMON.

NOW CONSIDER HOW GREAT THIS MAN WAS.—*Heb.* vii. 4.

OF Melchisedec—the “great man” here referred to—the Scriptures—our only source of information on the subject—tell us very little. All that relates to his personal history is contained in a short passage in Genesis which merely states that he was “king of Salem” and “priest of the most high God”; and that, on a certain occasion, he shewed hospitality and gave his blessing to Abraham,—in return for which kindness the patriarch presented him with a tenth of spoils he had taken from a vanquished enemy. In the Epistle to the Hebrews he is represented as a type of Christ. “After the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest,” “even Jesus, made an high-priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec.” To the Author of the Epistle, the “greatness” of Melchisedec evidently seems to have consisted in the fact of his being a type of the Saviour,—a distinction which to his view far outshone all priestly and regal honours. And yet, while exhorting his readers to “consider how great this man was,” his eulogist confesses—though for a purpose of mystical interpretation—that nothing was known of his antecedents, that he was “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life.”

Without at all accepting or countenancing a principle of interpretation so fanciful as that which finds in Melchisedec an actual type of Christ, we readily accept as a general truth the doctrine implied, if not affirmed, in the author’s estimate of the greatness of Melchisedec. We would interpret it as affirming the possibility of a greater “greatness” than the highest official dignities can confer, and as teaching that that greatness is not dependent on caste, or rank, or pedigree—that it may be attained by men “without father, without mother, without descent.”

Of the long line of “great men” who have blessed the world by their services rarely have ever any two borne any other relation to each other than that of being common benefactors. It is possible, we believe, by a wise cultus to secure in successive generations a prevailingly well-balanced character,—to gain and maintain a high standard of physical development, of intellectual culture, and of moral excellence; but it is not possible, by any known cultus,

to produce or perpetuate a race of "great men,"—the characteristics of the greatest being seldom perceptible in any large degree in either their immediate progenitors or their immediate descendants.

One of the earliest and most generally-received theories by which the existence of "great men" was attempted to be accounted for was the notion that they were but partly human—that one of their parents was an inhabitant of another world—a god or goddess,—a heathen notion from which even our Christian traditions are not quite free.

That this theory is an utterly inadequate solution of the problem I need not stay to shew. And yet, to what other source than the will of God can we attribute the phenomenon? The appearance of "great men" in the world is, surely, not an accident,—unforeseen, undesired, unprovided for, by the Creator! Nor is it unreasonable to expect that an all-wise and gracious Providence, who obviously desires to promote the well-being of mankind, would arrange for the appearance of "great men" as often as necessary,—now to assist an oppressed people to emancipate themselves from the thralldom of a wicked tyranny,—now to teach some new and useful art whose application would multiply human comforts,—now to aid mankind to interpret more fully the Divine Will, and to realize the higher purposes and the solemn responsibilities of human life. Why should we doubt the existence of such provision in the Divine economy? He who beneficently supplies every condition necessary for the well-being of the humblest rank of insect life is sure to provide all things needful to promote the best interests of the human family.

But "great men" are not needed in the common affairs of every-day life; and they are, therefore, not provided in large numbers;—for Providence is not wasteful. Whole races of "great men" were a mistake. It were not an improvement on the present arrangement of the natural world if every vegetable of the garden, or herb of the pasture, were made to exhibit the gigantic proportions of the forest-oak, or if every hillock were changed into a mountain. As it is not desirable that there should be whole races of "great men," it is not to be expected that the sons of "great men" shall also be "great." In saying this, we are but stating, in an abstract form, the concrete facts of history. It is quite exceptional for the child of the "great man" to inherit the distinguishing qualities of his parent. Really "great men" have been comparatively few, and they appear at considerable intervals, "without father, without mother, without descent."

Then, are "great men" the product of supernatural agency? Yes! No! In answering "Yes" I mean to assert that the plan of Creation and Providence is adequate, is perfect; that it anticipates every contingency, provides for every possibility. I answer "No"

if it is meant to be asserted that the introduction of "great men" is something not provided for in the Divine economy, and requires to be considered as occasion for them arises. In the government of the moral world the provision for the introduction of "great men" seems to me to have been as really a part of the Divine plan, as in the physical world it was the design of Providence that the waters of the earth should flow in rivers to the sea.

Nor is the phenomenon of a great river an unfitting illustration of the phenomenon of a "great man." The river at its source may be only a little streamlet; but in its course it receives tributary after tributary until what was a tiny stream becomes a mighty river,—the larger the area it drains, all other things being equal, the larger its volume, and the greater its uses. And not otherwise is it with the "great man." He is the product of the accumulated forces of his age. In the parish register he is entered with literal accuracy as the son of So and So; but in regard to his "greatness"—in the aspirations, sympathies and aims of his life—he is the Son of the Nation with its heart's blood surging in his veins,—of his Age with its spirit, its hopes, its sorrows, its desires seething in his soul. He is a Son of Man,—owing his parentage of greatness to the wants and aspirations of a people struggling for political or social regeneration, or to their agonized efforts to solve the problem of the perplexities and the mysteries of our earthly life, with its hopes and fears and issues. They all had followed their several lines of thought and action as far as they could. Each one had his own little solution or plan which, though not without its grain of truth or wisdom, every other person saw to be totally inadequate. Yet each earnest effort was an impulse, an increase of the accumulated forces, that, one day, would be strong enough to produce the desired result.

At length the stream of influences has reached its height: the crisis has come: and *the hour* brings THE MAN. The fragments of wisdom, the glimmerings of light and truth, the aspirations and aims, that lay scattered in the minds of myriads, are all harmoniously blended in the "great man." In his hand he gathers up and holds firmly the threads of faith and hope which myriads had spun out of their hearts. When he speaks, it is to give expression to sentiments which thousands had vaguely cherished,—had earnestly striven, but utterly failed, to clothe in language. And when he acts, he exhibits a tenderness of feeling, a spirit of heroism, or a purity and elevation of motive, which men, in their day-dreams, may have thought not impossible, but which they had little hope of ever seeing realized in actual life. And when such a man appears, all who from any of these causes are in sympathy with him, receive him with one accord as their rightful sovereign. Though he is their own son, born of their ardent aspirations, he is at the same time their king and leader,—being the living

embodiment of their dearest hopes and highest aims; and they cannot, even if they would, withhold their allegiance.

True greatness is often confounded with a mental quality with which it has no necessary connection, viz., Originality, the ability to produce something absolutely new. This conception of greatness is not merely erroneous, it is also practically dangerous. It is erroneous, because it is opposed to fact: the greatest of "great men" have not been original in the sense indicated. And it is dangerous, because it betrays weak men, afflicted with an ambition to be considered great, into miserable and ridiculous affectations of originality. They try as much as they can to be unlike everybody else: whereas real greatness consists rather in the likeness, if I may so express it, to the largest number,—he being the greatest in whom the largest number can from every stand-point see most of their common, yet diversified, nature in its highest conceivable perfection,—in whom each can see the choicest graces of his own soul in the full bloom of undreamt-of luxuriance, and yielding in their season a corresponding abundance of the rich fruits of wisdom and righteousness.

In reality, there is no such thing as absolute originality in human thought or action. That which we call originality is but a distincter perception, a more accurate reading, of the less obvious laws of Providence. It has its important uses, however, and we are thankful for it. Yet, it does not constitute our highest idea of human greatness, nor even form any necessary part of it. The Astronomer may, by nice mathematical calculations, determine the position of a still undiscovered planet: when he turns his telescope to the heavens the new world is found in the very place his calculations had assigned it. The Chemist, in his laboratory, by patient toil and skilful analysis, discovers that a supposed simple elementary substance is actually a compound, and he separates it into its simpler elements. The Genius, who is nothing more than a genius, soars through realms of unexplored thought, and by a sort of instinct and without effort perceives and comprehends hitherto unknown or imperfectly understood truths. But in none of these cases have we what we mean by a "great man." We have the great Astronomer, the great Chemist, the great Genius. We may admire them,—admire their intellectual gifts and attainments: we may be grateful for their discoveries; but we are not necessarily drawn towards the *men* themselves. They have no irresistible power over us: they do not constrain our sympathies nor compel our service. Nor is even their individuality of much account to us. If we have the benefit of their discoveries it is of little consequence who the discoverers were.

Very different is it with the really "great man,"—whose greatness is the embodiment of the highest qualities of humanity,—a greatness to which every zone and clime and condition of civiliza-

tion contributes its best elements. He is, verily, "the Desire of nations," and "unto him shall the gathering of the people be." To him every one feels personally related. We are drawn towards the man himself, and united to him by the irresistible force of common sympathies. His greatness is inseparable from his individuality. Even though dead he still lives. His personality is an imperishable inheritance. He lives for ever in the people's hearts.

Of "great men" there are two classes which, at the present time, fairly claim special notice. They may be variously described as consisting—the one of men great in action, the other of men of profound thought; the one of men characterized by heroic deeds, the other of men distinguished by their prophetic wisdom; the one of men who embody the aspirations and meet the wants of a particular people or land, the other of men who embody the aspirations and contribute to the instruction of mankind.

These two classes of "great men," as might be expected, meet with a very different reception from the mass of their contemporaries. Men of heroic deeds are at once recognized, appreciated and honoured. Some persons may have thought that John Howard was a little too much of an enthusiast in the benevolent work to which he devoted his life, but there was not a second opinion as to his self-sacrificing heroism. So also of Florence Nightingale and all other pure-minded and large-hearted benefactors of the suffering, the wretched, and the wronged. Our common heart instantly, as it were instinctively, recognizes the Heroes of outraged or oppressed humanity, and pours out upon them the benediction of its sympathy and love. To be fairly judged, "great men" of this class do not need to appeal from their own to a future generation. Though posterity, no doubt, will treasure their memory, their contemporaries do not fail to comprehend and appreciate their worth.

Very different from this is the fate of the other class of "great men,"—the prophets, the teachers of mankind. They are not appreciated,—they are not understood even—in their own age. Standing at the base of a mountain you can form no correct idea of its dimensions: it is only when you view it from a distance you can form any intelligent notion of its size. Socrates, and Christ, and Paul, rejected by their respective ages, are only now beginning to be understood. Among their contemporaries, no doubt, they had sympathizing admirers and zealous disciples, and have been honoured and loved in every succeeding age; still, it is no less the fact that those great prophets are better understood in the present day than they were in any preceding age; and generations yet unborn will comprehend them still more fully than we do. Thus is it ever with all great prophets. They are not thoroughly comprehended nor properly appreciated till long after they have passed away. The treasures of wisdom they have stored up, and,

dying, bequeathed mankind, it takes the united efforts of ages to estimate and distribute for the world's enrichment.

The two classes of "great men" thus indicated find striking illustration in two names that are certain to suggest themselves to all here assembled,—two names that are now sharing between them the thoughts, the reverence, and the affection of the British Nation—GARIBALDI, the Hero of Italian Liberty, and SHAKESPEARE, England's—nay, the English-speaking World's—greatest Teacher of Wisdom.

GARIBALDI.

It is impossible for anyone who is not himself at heart a despot not to admire and love the great and good Garibaldi—that pure, and noble, and generous patriot. That *Italy* is the land for whose emancipation and regeneration he lives and labours constitutes of itself a claim on our gratitude,—that Italy to which, especially under its former civilization, we are so largely indebted. But when we see the spirit in which he labours,—its unselfishness, its loveliness—we cannot but love him.

Cincinnatus, the hero of ancient Rome, who was summoned from the plough to serve his country in the hour of her need, and who, when he had achieved her deliverance, returned to his farm, refusing the honours and dignities a grateful people wished to confer,—is surpassed in patriotic spirit and disinterested service by the modern hero of Italian liberty; for he needed not to be summoned to the service of his country, but himself planned, undertook and accomplished her deliverance. I say *accomplished*,—for, though the emancipation of Italy is not completed, the despotism that still remains cannot possibly long withstand the influences Garibaldi has set to work for the establishment of freedom throughout the entire land. And then, after his great achievements, which are the admiration of the entire liberty-loving world, see the noble unselfishness and moral grandeur with which the deliverer of his beloved country, a king-maker, retires,—unenriched and untitled, yet more royal than a king,—to his humble island-home to cultivate his garden and tend his goats.

And what a great *fact* is that hearty and enthusiastic welcome with which he has been received in England!—a welcome more hearty and enthusiastic than greeted the sovereign of the greatest empire that ever visited our shores. As the first king of Israel was taller "from the shoulders and upward" than other men, so stands, in the affections of the English people, the patriot-hero, higher "from the shoulders and upward" than the crowned and sceptred monarch of imperial France or of all the Russias. "Without father, without mother, without descent," and yet honoured above kings: a true man, whose brave spirit adversity could not crush, and whose majestic simplicity the adulation of the greatest nation in the world could not spoil.

Would that the lesson of this great demonstration of English loyalty to the spirit of freedom and uncrowned royalty in the person of Garibaldi were read and comprehended by every despotism in the world; and that tyrants would learn that there is a diviner right to rule than that conferred by hereditary descent or by the formalities of a coronation. He who gains for an oppressed people their freedom, and establishes them in the love of truth and righteousness, is anointed of Heaven a king above kings, and finds a throne in every heart.

May Garibaldi long live to proclaim and exemplify this divine royalty! May he be long spared to assert and vindicate the rights of humanity, to be a terror to tyrants, and to be admired, loved and revered by the friends of true liberty all the world over!

SHAKESPEARE.

Shakespeare stands alone—unrivalled and unapproached—among English Teachers of Wisdom. Though not unappreciated during his life-time, the two-and-a-half centuries of progressing enlightenment that have elapsed since his death have but afforded constantly increasing evidence of his great prophetic power, and have raised him to the foremost place among the world's modern teachers. His influence has been something marvellous;—and that not in one but in many directions. He has done more than any other man to give shape and fixity to our language. He has, one might say, created a literature; and that not only in lands that speak the language in which he wrote but also in a foreign country with a foreign tongue, which has since more than repaid us for all we lent it by the rich productiveness of its literary soil,—I mean, of course, Germany. But his "greatest" influence has been moral rather than literary,—and addresses itself to the individual rather than to the nation.

The Tercentenary Celebration of the Anniversary of the Birth of Shakespeare is no unmeaning ceremony,—no national pageant. It is the spontaneous and grateful testimony of a people conscious of great and increasing obligations. It is not even a mere act of hero-worship, but a service of devout gratitude;—for, who is there to whom Shakespeare has not been a personal friend and benefactor;—an agreeable companion, an experienced instructor, a kindly counsellor, a teacher of profound wisdom? His writings, more than any other book in our language, excepting only the English version of the Bible, have influenced the thought and feeling and life of the civilized world. The gold of wisdom gathered from every mine acquired new beauty and worth as it passed through the mint of his mind: stamped with his mint-mark it became a coin current in every land. His apothegms are household words,—appreciated alike in the palace and in the cottage: and eminently fitted are they for the purposes of general use,—being so brief,

striking, beautiful, and so wise,—often the wisdom of a whole age condensed into a line,—which, once heard, no one could willingly forget.

Shakespeare was not original in the common acceptation of that word. In his writings there is, perhaps, not one important thought that had not found previous expression. Had he been what people call an original thinker there would be no great celebration in commemoration of his three hundredth birthday. Not only did he find many of the great characters he chose as his heroes already delineated on the page of history, but to no inconsiderable extent also are portions of his works a mere recasting of materials he found ready to his hand; and, in some instances, the trained eye can detect whole passages that he appropriated.

But, then, even the Lord's Prayer is not an original composition. It is a compilation,—one sentence taken from this source, another from that. The Book of Common Prayer owes its chief excellence to the fact that it is not an original work, but an anthology culled from the devotional literature of all Christendom. Christopher Wren did not create the materials employed in the erection of St. Paul's, nor Michael Angelo those in St. Peter's.

Shakespeare gathered up the wisdom and experience of the Ages,—the richest gems the world had produced,—and with a master's skill worked them up for the instruction and enrichment of succeeding generations. His writings, consequently, are a treasury of moral wealth. But the chief source of their influence is their thorough Truthfulness. They are photographs of nature and human life. Possessing strong and well-trained powers of observation and that love of truth which is the very soul of true philosophy, Shakespeare saw clearly and reported faithfully. No foregone conclusions distorted his vision: nor did he write in the interests of a party or the dialect of a sect. From his writings it is impossible to say to what denomination he belonged. In spirit he was catholic, devout, humane, and truth-loving. With marvellous power and skill he has given these qualities objective reality in his works; and hence their augmented value. Besides being a repository of the wisdom of all preceding ages, they are a portraiture of human life, a picture-gallery illustrating the secret workings of the human heart and conscience. The diversified motives and mysteries of human conduct are made palpable as in an object lesson. Not a mere catalogue of the varying accidents and drapery of human conduct, but a faithful revealing of its hidden springs, the writings of Shakespeare are as true a representation of the life of to-day as of that of two hundred and fifty years ago, and will continue to be so in all coming time. As long as this many-sided life of ours lasts, with its ambitions and disappointments, its virtues and vices, its joys and sorrows, its cares and struggles, its friendships and loves, its hopes and fears,—as long as

civilized man exists, we may safely affirm that the writings of Shakespeare will continue to hold their present high place,—of existing books second only to the Bible, as a revelation of the human heart, a teacher of wisdom, and sanctifier of life.

Three hundred years ago this “great man,” destined inheritor of the wisdom of all past ages and teacher of future ages, was born in a comparatively humble home in a small English village; and though much patient research has been employed to learn the leading facts of his personal history, neither the date of his birth nor the occupation of his earlier years (though it is known he had to toil for his bread,) can be ascertained with certainty. The obscure villager (some authorities affirm of no more dignified calling in youth than that of a butcher’s boy,) has become the greatest prophet of modern times,—whose fame increases, and will continue to increase, as civilization advances. “Without father, without mother, without descent,” this priest of nature will live for ever as a teacher of wisdom.

With the Bishop of St. Andrews’ we thank the Giver of all good for the writings of the Bard of Avon; and with a former Archbishop of York hope that our children “may grow up readers and lovers of Shakespeare.”

But while devoutly thankful for the rich treasure of wisdom Shakespeare has left us in his works, that truthfulness which characterizes his own writings compels us to remember and acknowledge that that treasure was contained in an “earthen vessel.” But even the sweetest rose has its root in clay. And the divinely-singing Bard had his weaker side. His life was not always as grand as his philosophy.

To find the perfection of moral “greatness” we must look for one who lived the precepts which he taught. And to God Most High be our devoutest praise that on the page of Sacred Writ we do find that One—Jesus of Nazareth—who, also, “without father, without mother, without descent,” the son of an humble carpenter, dwelling in the obscure and despised Nazareth of Galilee, became the highest High-priest of the everliving God and the greatest of the great benefactors of the race of Man.

