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Men of Literary Genius and Christianity

Jeremiah Eames Rankin

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MEN OF
LITERARY GENIUS
AND
CHRISTIANITY.

By
JEREMIAH EAMES RANKIN, D.D., LL.D.,
PRESIDENT OF HOWARD UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Reprinted from CHRISTIAN THOUGHT.

NEW YORK:
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MEN OF LITERARY GENIUS AND CHRISTIANITY.

[A lecture delivered before the American Institute of Christian Philosophy, July 25th, 1889.

BY JEREMIAH EAMES RANKIN, D.D., LL.D.,

President of Howard University, Washington, D. C.

A RTHUR SCHOPENHAUER, the pessimist, has said: "Religions are necessary to the people, and an inestimable benefit to them. Just in proportion as they hinder the progress of humanity in the knowledge of the truth, they must be disposed of, but with all possible wisdom. But to exact of a great genius, a Goethe, a Shakespeare, that he implicitly accept, in good faith and exact sense, the dogmas of any religion, is to compel a giant to put on the shoes of a dwarf." The idea of this writer seems to be that, to keep humanity together with any degree of safety, while men of great intellectual gifts study out what is the truth, and make its proper demarcations, the common people need the conservative and cohesive power of religion. But like the scaffolding around a magnificent marble temple, when the structure is fairly up, then religions are to be dispensed with as quick as may be; nay, if possible, are to be clandestinely disposed of, during the process of erection. If dispensed with prematurely before the structure is complete, there might be danger to the philosophers, to their temple, to the whole human family of the generation witnessing the process; indeed, to the whole human fabric. Dr. Munger sets it down against Christianity, as up to his time formulated, that it has been rejected by Hume, Burns, Carlyle and McDonald.

This statement of Schopenhauer, as well as the stricture of Dr. Munger, contains several fallacies. In the first place, it is implied that the religious wants of humanity are not one and the same in every grade of life and society; that Goethe and Shakespeare, walking the serene heights of their sublime thoughts:

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having a wider æsthetic and mental horizon than the vast multitudes of the human family; having larger instincts and quicker intuitions, are exceptional in their relations to God and the things of God; that they are not like-conditioned; not made of the same stuff with the humbler ranks of the human family; that like the Pharisee in the parable, they need no usher to present them to God's sacred things; they can press their unobstructed way to the very altar of the temple, thanking God that they are not as other men; while the great mass of mankind, the great common people, must stand afar off, and smite upon their breasts, crying, "Unclean; God be merciful to us sinners"; waiting there in the outer courts until the incubation of the truth, the evolution of the religion of the future, by their intellectual superiors; until the men whom, because of their exceptional endowments humanity has agreed to regard as demi-gods, shall teach them what they must do to be saved; or, show how they need to do nothing, not being lost.

Men of genius are what they are, only because they are more human, unite in themselves more human characteristics, touch human nature at more common points, than the rest of mankind. Emerson says, "The young man reveres men of genius, because, to speak truly, they are more himself than he is." The works of such men are less individual than typical and universal. In their creations—their stories, plays, poems,—they give us touches of our common nature which prove the whole world to be kin. They give us the key which unlocks the life of humanity, because God has given it to them. Faust is a kind of microcosm; just as Goethe himself was; full-lived, many-sided, cut like a diamond to get the largest possible number of facets; reflecting all lights, from things in earth, sea, and air; from things in hell or Heaven; red, lurid and blasting, or glowing with the pure light of God. Shakespeare expressly defines his dramatic art to be that of holding the mirror up to Nature; and so, if a man's imaginations are foul as Vulcan's stithy, he portrays them to the life; and we have Lady Macbeth, and Tarquin the Proud, as well as Cordelia and Hamlet; but neither one of them more our common humanity than all the rest. This chameleon-like function of taking color from what is next them

in humanity; this power to eat the leaf humanity, and convert it into silk, in which they wind themselves in some cocoon of a work and die to earth, that they may live forever, is characteristic of men of genius, and determines them as such.

Few men of genius have professed to hold themselves strictly accountable to God's moral standards. Are they not creators too? The poet Burns was already the husband of Jean Armour in her eyes, and in the eyes of God, when he spent those days of delight, making love to his Highland Mary, which he has immortalized in his verse. With so little sense of the moral fitness of things did he move among his surroundings. Shall Robert Burns give man his religious faith? And the florid, unblushing animalism of the great painter Rubens, with but a single exception, his "Madonna at the Cross," marks the products of his art, in the very holiest of his pictures, even under the very shadows of God's highest mysteries. Indeed, all the earlier artists have seemed to delight in seizing every opportunity of putting upon canvas scenes from ancient mythology, in which could be made to figure physical forms of beauty where might revel their imagination and their art, whatever the moral effect of the delineation. If you could ask even the well-balanced Shakespeare why he selected "Venus and Adonis," or "The Rape of Lucrece," as the subjects of his productions, he would probably answer that they were suited to furnish him such opportunities of describing physical beauty as would display his poetic genius. Though this was his earlier work. And this, doubtless, is why Rubens chose many of his subjects. For example, no one can analyze such a painting as his "Judgment of Paris" without the conclusion that this subject was selected with reference to the display of the physical beauties of the female form as Rubens knew how to delineate them. And those well acquainted with the triumphs of his pencil will tell you which of his several wives was the original of each; so that many of his greatest works constitute quite as much a family picture-gallery as anything else.

"Faust" is supposed to be Goethe's masterpiece. If you ask the author why he wrote this play, this is his answer: "As if I knew myself, or could tell you. It was not in my line as a poet to embody anything that was abstract, that is, to

write with an ethical object"! What did he regard in his line as a poet? Simply to reproduce in his verse impressions physical, moral, spiritual, made upon his own soul by life as he had seen it and lived it: by its temptations, labors, mysteries, joys, sorrows, remorse, as he had witnessed them and encountered them. It has been the great unsolved problem of literature: What did Goethe mean by "Faust"? Almost every student of Goethe has a new theory. Goethe himself had no theory at all. If Goethe did not know, how can anybody else know? He goes on: "That man, continually struggling from degrading error towards something better, should be redeemed, is an effective, and to many a good and elevating thought; but it is no idea which lies at the foundation of the whole and of every individual scene of 'Faust.' It would have been a fine thing, indeed, if I had strung so rich, varied, and highly diversified a life, as I have brought to view in 'Faust,' upon the slender string of one pervading idea. The puppet-fable of 'Faust' murmured with many voices in my soul. I, too, had wandered into every department of knowledge, and had returned early enough, satisfied with the vanity of science. And life, too, I had tried under various aspects, and always came back sorrowing and unsatisfied." "Faust" is only Goethe himself in all scenes, real and imaginable. This great German writer here repudiates allegiance not only to any single standard of excellence, but especially to any high moral standard, such as the redemption of his hero from evil. This is not his conception of a poet's function. He defines genius to be "that power of man which, by its deeds and actions, gives laws and rules." "Every highly gifted man," he says, "is called upon to diffuse whatever there is that is divine in him." And he means not whatever is Godlike, but whatever is creative. "In attempting this," he adds, "he comes in contact with the rough world, and, in order to act upon it, he must put himself upon the same level. Thus, in a great measure, he compromises his high advantages, and finally forfeits them altogether. The heavenly, the eternal, is buried in a body of earthly designs, and hurried with it to the fate of the transient." Again he says: "The greatest men are connected with their own century through some weakness." And, it is implied

above, needfully; else there would be no connection between themselves and their century.

Thomas Carlyle, who was always a very intemperate admirer of the great German, whom he did so much to introduce into English literature, and to interpret to English-speaking people, says of "Wilhelm Meister's Travels," that it is "one of the most beautiful books Goethe ever wrote; full of meek wisdom, of intellect and piety, strangely illuminative, and very touching to those who have eyes to discern and hearts to feel it." He doubtless intended to limit himself to the Travels. For he himself says of the Apprenticeship: "In many points, both literary and moral, I may have wished devoutly that he had not written as he has done. The literary and moral persuasions of a man like Goethe are objects of a rational curiosity. Accordingly, except a few phrases and sentences, amounting not in all to a page, which I have dropped as evidently unfit for the English taste, I have studied to present the work exactly as it is in German." Any man who reads "Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship," and then reads "Tom Brown's School Days at Rugby," or "Tom Brown at Oxford," or even Thackeray's "Pendennis"—books which take a young man over about the same period in life—will discern at once what Carlyle means by English taste. He means English regard for purity in thought, speech, and life. "Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship," with all its wise philosophy respecting life, with its wonderful criticisms on Shakespeare, with its sad but fascinating pictures of Mignon—that beautiful waif, weeping between the two eternities, has been produced under no law; least of all, any moral law! This its author admits. Hamlet may be studied as a work of art, wrought out in accordance with certain great principles of art; but, if we may believe Goethe himself, who made them, neither "Wilhelm Meister" nor "Faust." As that drama, so this story is a book recording impressions—impressions made by a many-sided human life upon the many-sided creature Goethe, who seems to have thought himself privileged to try life in all its vicissitude of good, bad, and indifferent, that he might have the power of recording what he thinks of it and how it impresses him. And Friedrich, one of the characters in "Wilhelm Meister," seems to have hit the case

pretty accurately when he says to Wilhelm at the close of the book: "Thou resemblest Saul, the son of Kish, who went out to seek his father's asses and found a kingdom." As though this hero's life had been one consecutive series of blunders which chance had prevented from being fatal.

The second fallacy of Schopenhauer, and those who agree with him, in his claim that high creative genius should be exempted from belief in religious dogmas, is the implication that there can be any truest work of genius without the practical and working recognition of the very fundamental things in religion which, it is claimed, that great geniuses like Goethe and Shakespeare will inevitably repudiate as unsatisfactory to themselves. The fundamental things in religion are God the Creator and Judge, man the creature, sin, the conscience, punishment, redemption. There is no literature worthy of the name which does not directly or indirectly imply all these things. If these things are absent, there is no place for creative genius, no material for it to work with. It is life without an atmosphere. Just as a painter needs a sky, a horizon, clouds, trees, the presence and works of man, for a picture, so a great literary artist needs all these elements for his work. Take even the drama of the ancients, imperfect as were their conceptions of God and His moral economy, as we understand them, they had all these elements, or their equivalent. This is true of the "Prometheus" of Aeschylus. Here is a drama in which there is an elevation of thought, a sustained and severe dignity like that of Isaiah or Milton, and coming from the same great themes: an avenging God, a penalty never exhausting itself because of a constant renewal of the power to suffer, and the hope of deliverance only through the interposition of Heaven, as though were foreshadowed the Incarnation; God made flesh! As Mercury says to Prometheus:

"Expect no pause, no respite, till some god
Comes to relieve thy pains; willing to pass
The dreary realms of ever-during night;
The dark descent of Tartarus profound."

It is God, as He is in nature, art, and life, who gives genius the necessary conditions of its work. The true artist cannot free himself from God as thus immanent. There is nothing more

stimulating than to study the works of Shakespeare with reference to this very fact, to find there the environment of the living God. It is not possible to conceive of such creations as Macbeth, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, Julius Caesar, without implying all the great doctrines of the Bible. Whatever the period, kingdom, whatever the clime, it all must occur in the Republic of God; be enacted as between the day when God made man in His own image, and the day when man shall give account to Him for the deeds done here in the body. All tragedy, whether in story or drama, must presuppose the government of God, or of some other judicial power or force, which stands for God and does His work. The doctrine that there is "a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will," is needful to justify and explain the ways of the human creator, as well as the divine. Indeed, all art has to be tested in this manner: Does it fulfil the conditions of real life? of man and God as they are in such a life? Macready, the great Shakespearian actor, says that "Shakespeare's work had always seemed to him nearest to that of the great Creative Mind of any that man has ever done." This is the highest praise which could be framed. This is the secret of its power. For just as the true art of the painter is not to make a fine painting, but to put upon canvas some of the thoughts of God in nature, so the true art of the dramatist, is to give us upon the stage, man as God has made him and as sin has marred him.

In his lecture, "The Hero as a Poet," Carlyle has subdivided the poetic function thus: "The Vates prophet has seized the mystery, life, on the moral side; that is, duty and prohibition, right and wrong. The Vates poet has seized life on the æsthetic side, as the beautiful, and the like." But he afterwards adds that "these two provinces run into each other, and cannot be disjoined." "Without hands," he says further, "a man might have feet and could still walk; but consider it, without morality intellect were impossible for him; a thoroughly immoral man could not know anything at all. To know a thing, a man must be virtuously related to it." Carlyle is not alone in this: our own Emerson has said it in this form: "The spirit only can teach. Not any profane man, not any sensual, not any liar, not

any slave, can teach; but only he can give who has; he only can create who is. Courage, piety, love, wisdom, can teach; and every man can open his door to these angels, and they shall bring him the gift of tongues." And Goethe himself has said, that "unless the heart is in perfect sympathy with the head, the comprehension of any work of art is impossible." While a greater than all the great men of the earth has taught that "if any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine"; "he that doeth truth, cometh to the light." That is, a man must love an art before he can understand it; must obey the laws of virtue before he can comprehend them, and must, in some true sense, be ready to walk with God in nature, art, and life before he can find God there. The soul must be polarized by the truth in order to find the truth.

After these statements, it will not be so surprising to find Ulrici, the great German critic of Shakespeare, claiming "that Shakespeare's invention, composition, language; in short, his dramatic style derives its most decided peculiarity from his particular view of that relation between God and the world, from which the nature, life and the history of humanity first derive their true import: namely, his poetical apprehension of the universal system of things, which is essentially based upon Christianity and its leading ideas." Nor shall we be surprised to find, as we turn again to Carlyle, this admission, that "The Christian faith, which was the theme of Dante's song, had produced that practical life which Shakespeare was to sing."

The life which constituted Shakespeare's material grew out of Christianity. Turn from the 51st Psalm to the soliloquy of Hamlet's uncle, and you will see what Ulrici means. These two royal sinners belong to the same race, and are shut in by the same limitations. Here is no longer the struggle of a god like Prometheus, bound by the iron chains of necessity to a rock in the midst of the sea; but a free man, as a ship caught in the breakers, is struggling to right himself, before the God of all the earth, as he tries to pray, before he goes to pieces forever. As face answers to face in the water, so the man in the 51st Psalm answers to the men in this soliloquy. And, I say, Christianity made that soliloquy possible. It is indeed always somewhat difficult to find

the author in his works. And yet in such a case as this, where a condition is under discussion which is fundamental, reaching down to the bed-rock of being, there can be no doubt that we discover the author, in his inmost soul. This is what Shakespeare himself knows of great inward conflicts. Recall extracts from some of his sonnets, for example, this:

“ Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
 Fooled by those rebel powers that thee array;
 Why dost thou pine within, and suffer dearth,
 Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
 Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
 Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?”

Or again, this, in allusion to sinful pleasure:

“ Perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame,
 Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust.
 Enjoyed no sooner, but despised straight;
 Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
 Past reason hated.”

Or finally this, which refers to some attractive one, whose charms are a perplexity and a mystery even to his magnificent nature:

“ O from what power hast thou this powerful might,
 With insufficiency my heart to sway;
 To make me give the lie to my true sight,
 And swear that brightness does not grace the day?
 Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
 That in the very refuse of thy deeds,
 There is such strength and warrantise of skill
 That in my mind thy work all best exceeds?
 Who taught thee how to make me love thee more,
 The more I hear and see just cause of hate?”

Here is a man in whose bosom is going on the eternal warfare between good and evil; and you can witness it, as the work of bees is watched under a glass case. And this warfare is recognized by him as in every human being; and this gives verisimilitude, truth’s likeness, life-likeness to all his works. Shakespeare’s characters are men whose very dreams may be haunted by sinful thoughts, as Job fears his children may have cursed God in their joys unwittingly; as a chained watch-dog growls in his sleep. Much as I admire the great and varied intellectual endowments of Goethe, who towers up among men as a kind of

colossus, as though superbly conscious of his great proportions, there is something almost like the frigid nonchalance of his own Mephistopheles; something almost fiendlike in the manner in which he alludes to his intimacies with the various young women who in his early life were fascinated by his rare physical beauty and the brilliancy of his genius, giving a literal interpretation to his philosophy: "New love, new life!" Evidently, he was using all life to furnish him material for his work as an artist; counting the heart-beats, which quickened at his footfall, to write them down in his book. And the spirit in which he tries to console the young friend Kestner, the secret privacies of whose family had been laid bare to the public eye, simply to furnish him material for his "Werther," shows this to be the fact. It shows also, dare a man say it, the poverty of his inventive faculty. As though a man had taken his subject for morbid anatomy in his own social circle!

All Shakespeare's plays presuppose the great fundamental doctrines of the Bible. These great doctrines are their spiritual stage-scenery. Indeed, it is one of the providential things in him as a phenomenon, as himself from God in history, that this is true. It is a wonderful fact that you can hear the voice of God walking in all his plays. Here is the most princely mind the world has ever produced, made to conserve for all generations the fundamental truths of the Bible: embalm them with more than Egyptian embalmment; nay, better, constitute them as the English drama's immortal environment. A student of English literature finds the same moral atmosphere in Shakespeare which he finds in his Bible; the same nearer and remoter horizons which he finds in his own soul. The whole trend of his works is just as really to justify the ways of God to men, as that of Milton's works: another phenomenal man raised up by God on another plane to put the fundamental things of His government into English literature. It is these doctrines of God and of God's things in Milton that differentiate him from Homer and Virgil. And so long as Milton and Shakespeare stand as high priests at the portals of the great temple of English literature, it seems utterly impossible for cultivated English minds to believe in unbelief. Shakespeare has given immortality to a vast organic, living,

breathing world. It is in one sense imaginative. In another sense it is the most real world in existence. These men and women of his never will die. They cannot die, unless you annihilate the whole human family. The time will no more come when the soliloquy of Hamlet's uncle will be forgotten than when the 51st Psalm will be forgotten. They will go into eternity with every soul that reads them; they are elemental in every soul, read them or not. They are both of them on the bed-rock of humanity's life. The human soul responds to them everywhere; in all ages, in all latitudes, languages. The vitality of these creations of Shakespeare, may seem to some people to consist in the fact that they have been delineated by an immortal genius. It does consist in the fact that Shakespeare has given them the image and likeness of real humanity, has environed them as man is environed, has endowed them as man is endowed, has given them horizons eternal. It is more than true of them: all, as he wrote to the Earl of Pembroke:

"Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'eread ;
And tongues to be, your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead ;
You still shall live, such virtue hath my pen,
Where breath most breathes, e'en in the mouths of men."

There must be such a thing as genius for spiritual truth in nature. It is the highest kind of genius as to nature. It is not characteristic of all gifted men. Some men of genius magnify that only which is beautiful to the natural eye, that which is purely sensuous, things seen and temporal. There are things in nature, art and life, which are not seen and eternal. There is not in all men a sense of moral responsibility as though they were acting as in the eye of their great Taskmaster in their minds or in their work; such, for example, as was in the mind of Milton. The endowment of creative genius without this genius for spiritual truth, may be the source of almost immeasurable temptation. An unusual sense of beautiful things and enjoyment of them as they are in nature and art and life, an exuberance of fancy and sensibility, as though one were drinking life's elixir as from the original fountain, as though he were living always in life's springtime, breathing the

scent of apple-bloom, basking in the rays of the genial sun, just back from his trip southward : a kind of luxury of living in a gifted nature; this, no doubt, makes one especially susceptible to temptation through the outer man. For example, when he is depicting the passion of love, we notice that Burns derives almost all his similes, pictures and fancies from outer nature. He has found them in her book, nay, he has felt them in his own environment there, and so sets them down. The foliage of the woods, the murmur of the waters, the fragrance of the hawthorn and birch, the wanton springing of the flowers, the amorous twining of the branches and the vines, the love-songs of the birds, as these are introduced into his poems, show us the susceptibility of his nature to sentiment and passion even as outward objects addressed him. And Burns seems to have something of this kind in his mind, in his address to the "Unco Good," where he writes:

" Think when your castigated pulse
 Gi'es now and then a wallop,
 What raging must his veins convulse,
 That still eternal gallop."

Take, by way of contrast, the genius of Christopher North. In his "Life," by his daughter, occurs this passage, illustrating her father's susceptibility to the higher influences proceeding from nature : " At no time did my father ever appear so free from care as when communing with nature. With him it was indeed communion. He did not, as many do, when in the presence of fine scenery, show any impatience to leave one scene in order to seek another ; a restless desire to be on the top of a mountain, or away in some distant valley, but he would linger in and about the place his heart had fixed upon to visit. All he desired was there before him. It was almost a lesson to look at his countenance at such moments. There was an expression of melancholy, awe, and silent gratitude ; a fervent, inward emotion pictured outwardly. His fine blue eyes seemed in and beyond nature ; it saw some vision that beatified the sight of earth, and sent his spirit to the gate of Heaven." Christopher North was a born naturalist. I use the word in its broader sense.

Language all comes directly or indirectly from nature, thought, beauty. Language is derived from nature's hieroglyphics. Nature is all the while moving in panorama across the eye's field of the true naturalist, giving intimations of the deep things of God. But the surface-observation of nature, that use of nature, for example, which Burns made to depict or give setting to his own personal sentiments and passions, legitimate as it is, and even employed in some passages of the Bible, is not the highest use to which she can be put. In her flowing vesture of spring-time, nature speaks thus; but it is not all her language. There is nothing more beautiful in any language than some of the allusions to nature in the Song of Solomon: the book is a treasure-house of sweets, is like poetical ointment poured forth. It is redolent of all the amorous sensuousness of material things, rhythmical with bird-songs, odorous with sensuous delights as a garden. There never was a completer picture of awakening life and love, nature pulsating again, as though the great Creator were stooping over her, and breathing into her nostrils the breath of life as at first; man, God's creature, even in his materialistic vestment, rising up to go forth and regale himself with the sights, and odors, and sounds, which make glad the earth. But there are deeper things in nature than these, better things, holier things. Says Emerson: "This beauty of nature which is seen and felt as beauty is the least part. The presence of a higher, namely, of a spiritual, element is necessary to its perfection. The high and divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy is that which is found in combination with the human will. Beauty in nature is not ultimate; it is the herald of inward and eternal beauty, and is not alone a solid and satisfactory good. It must stand as a part, and not as yet the last and highest expression of the final cause of nature."

This is all true, and the highest and best poetry illustrates its truth. Even Shelley moralizes in his brilliant poem to the skylark. He turns at last from the rollicking abandon of the bird, which he calls first a spirit, then a cloud of fire, then an unbodied joy, which he compares to moonbeams, raindrops, a hidden poet, a maiden in a tower, a glow-worm golden, a rose embowered, the sound of vernal showers, whose utterance he

never heard equalled by song in praise of love or wine, by chorus hymeneal or triumphal chant ; and sadly says of humanity :

“ We look before and after,
And pine for what is not,
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught ;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.
Yet if we could scorn here,
Hate and pride and fear,
If we were things born here
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.”

He does not indeed come to the conclusion that if man were as true to what his Creator meant when He made him in His own image, his song would have some of the same qualities ; but he thinks that if the lark could teach a poet how to sing, he would soon have the world at his feet. The highest elevation of this thought is so inferior to that of Wordsworth on the same theme that it is worth noticing. Wordsworth closes his poem thus :

“ Joyous as morning,
Thou art laughing and scorning ;
Thou hast a nest for thy love and thy rest,
And though little troubled with sloth,
Drunken lark, thou wouldst be loth
To be such a trav'ler as I.
Happy, happy liver,
With a soul as strong as a river,
Pouring out praise to the Almighty Giver ;
Joy and jollity be with us both !
Alas, my journey, rugged and uneven,
Through prickly moors or dusty ways must wind ;
But, hearing thee, or others of thy kind,
As full of gladness and as free of heaven,
I with my fate contented will plod on,
And hope for brighter raptures when life's day is done.”

The spiritual interpreter of nature finds in her what the great Creator has put there, to tone up man's mind for his life's struggle and conquest—the moral element. That it is there is seen from the insensible influence of nature upon different nationalities, upon national characteristics, upon language, upon history. The grand free peoples of the earth are among the hills whose

language is strength; breathe the invigorating air of high elevation; endure the hardness of stern winters; battling with the storms; confronting the elements; finding inspiration to encounter obstacles and to conquer difficulties in the very environment of their natural heritage. God puts them to tuition there for great deeds. The weaker peoples are among the effeminating influences of the tropics. Their whole lives are day by day. They are the human ephemeræ, breathing not the breath of eternity which fits a man for his daily duty as in the sight of God, but the breath of a day. Nature is the material analogue of the Creator's mind. Nature is the material mentor of her foster-child man, who is impressed by her whether he will or not; who learns to walk by clinging to her skirts; who catches his first sounds from her mother lips.

The parables of the Man, Jesus of Nazareth, who was more a man than any other born of woman, are not artificial things. They are in the very way the world has been made. Here in them is the Creator, the moral Governor, interpreting His own works. How simple these thoughts to us! The archetype of man's fatherhood is the fatherhood of God. The archetype of the prodigal son is a fallen race. The archetype of the shepherd's life is the life of the Good Shepherd. It is not what might be spoken of as originality, as though these correspondences had been for the first time constituted by Him, as in Palestine He unfolded them for all time. They had been put by Him into nature herself when He laid her foundations. He was brought up with her. The Sower was there among men, teaching the great moral principle, that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He was there from the beginning. The Shepherd was there with the spiritual meaning of His avocation; the everlasting hills teaching God's godhead.

When you come to compare the fables of *Æsop*, for example, with these parables of the great Teacher, with similar work attempted by any mere human teacher, the failure is right here; there are no such correspondences in nature. *Æsop* makes his animals talk *Æsop's* language; there is ingenuity, there is wit, there is moral instruction; but they are not founded in nature herself. They are often violations of nature. She says, "They

are not in me." The Saviour taught through correspondences, not through cunningly devised fables; correspondences which are eternal facts, and therefore His teaching never can be eliminated from the soul. He taught through correspondences which were just as really in nature as the science of geology, or any other physical science, is there. And just as puerile as are the spurious Gospels, so puerile are the teachings which have sometimes been put into the mouth of nature by men uninspired. It is just so in the matter of poetry. The Vates-prophet finds in nature what moral lessons God has put there; the Vates-poet, what lessons of beauty. And where the two combine in a single archetype, God's work is reproduced. The Saviour's parable of the lilies of the field has as much natural beauty as moral. "They toil not, neither do they spin." They live by simple trust in God, for that sentiment is implied in their fragile structure, their exposure to the rough winds of heaven, and the foot of man and beast. What tender thoughts Burns derives from the crushed daisy! God put them there. Wordsworth closes his "Ode on Immortality" with these words:

"Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

He implies here that the moral meaning of nature is eternally conditioned in the soul of man; in the tenderness, joys and fears of the heart of man. Of course, what is called the language of flowers is largely artificial. But for all that they have a language, just as really as the great deep calling out across the continents to brother deep; the great mountains lifting up their eternal baldness to the Ancient of Days, and greeting each other as the morning sun puts on their daily coronets of gold; the great worlds which furnish their eternal circuits of obedience, singing as they go.

But there is a genius for spiritual things in human life as well as in nature. Why not? There was something in Shakespeare, the greater greatness of the man, which led him to select such themes as "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "Othello," "The Merchant of Venice," "King Lear," and to find in them the moral and

spiritual significance which lay hidden there. It is not intellect alone which turns the mind to great themes, which gives it recognition of what deep things are in them. It is a genius for moral and spiritual things. Goethe finds in Hamlet mostly this: a great task put upon an incompetent agent; an oak planted in a flower-pot, and the pot going to pieces as a tree grows. He does not define why that task is too great. But the truer interpreter of "Hamlet" will find far more than this. In the appearance of the spirit of Hamlet's father he will discover how a crime against the family, God's creative unit; nay, any great crime against God's creature man, awakens against it the forces of the eternal world; goes beforehand unto judgment to testify there; cries up to God from the ground. In Hamlet's bewilderment and indecision he will find the incompetency of any finite mind to take upon itself the function of vengeance which is God's; how it goes utterly to pieces when it thinks of doing upon a fellow-mortal that infinite thing which belongs only to God, not merely because God has reserved it to Himself, but because He only is competent to it. Viewed in this light, the ghost does not appear for spectacular effect, as it seems to the child-mind, whether in man or child, but to overshadow the whole play with an atmosphere of the supernatural; to bring down about it the eternal horizons with the worlds wheeling there; to stir the listeners with thoughts beyond the reaches of their own souls; to awaken the sense of things not seen and eternal. It is very wonderful how Christian is the environment in this whole play. The soliloquy of Hamlet's uncle is perhaps the best heart-searching analysis which a poor, struggling mortal ever administered to himself as he looked at his unforgiven sin; the most accurate delineation of natural and moral ability ever put into an object-lesson. Hamlet's father has been sent to judgment without the last offices of the Christian Church, which were in theory administered only when a sinner has repented of all his sins. And Hamlet will not take the life of his uncle while he is praying, lest he send him straight to Heaven, showing that he has the correct idea about forgiveness as something between the soul and God, as dissociated from priestly offices. If we turn, again, to the history of King David, we find his crime

like that of Hamlet's uncle, while in character Uriah deserves the tribute Hamlet pays his father. And the parable of the prophet Nathan is in part for the purpose of doing for David what the internal play in Hamlet was expected to do for his uncle, to bring him to self-recognition, to make him blush his guilt. Here, too, the supernatural is introduced because it was really there, as it always is in all human history; nor is it mere poetry that finds the moral and spiritual in the story, finds retribution there. Absalom appears on the scene by the wholesale and under the open sky, to dishonor his own father, as that father had clandestinely dishonored Uriah; while Solomon, the proud son of this dishonorable alliance, in his own person, in his own fate shows how sinful tendencies go to seed in a single generation; and in spite of all his love for nature and knowledge of it, and phenomenal wisdom, disappears from the sacred history under a moral cloud, as though that of eternal darkness.

This analogy between Shakespeare and the Bible, because both are alike true to what is really in human life, is seen also in another play—that of “Macbeth.” The great dramatist begins with the same expert handling of the supernatural, but now with reference not to retribution, but to the knowledge of the future and the certainty of the future, as affected by such knowledge; while no other play so thoroughly lays bare what it is to have a conscience and to have offended against it. Just as the witches meet Macbeth and tell him of his coming honors, so the prophet Elisha meets the great captain of Syria. Just as these witches say to Macbeth,

“All hail Macbeth, that shall be king hereafter,”

so the prophet says to Hazael, “The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.” And the moral effect of this knowledge is the same in both cases. It is the occasion of an overmastering temptation. It stimulates to sin. At first Macbeth replies :

“If chance would have me king, why chance may crown me,
Without my stir.”

At first Hazael says, “Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?” But in the end the result is the same; the thing suggested is the thing that is done; they both ascend the throne

over the dead body of their king. They both take guiltily what they might have had innocently. Hazael is conditioned just as was Macbeth, with the exception that, so far as we know, there was no Lady Hazael to stir him up to the deed, though doubtless it would be artistic to create one, as even Pilate's wife figures in the death of our Lord. Here, as in Hamlet, are Christian conditions. "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed." "And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

It is true, indeed, that a man may have this spiritual sense as to his work and not obey it in his life. He may see the eternal laws of right and wrong, according to which God governs the world; he may put them into his creations, as by a divine art-impulse, as by a creator's instinct, and not be ready or able—as we use the word—to conform to them himself. He may immortalize his own name in connection with that even of some sacred character or sacred subject, and yet not come under the influence of either; he may cut his name into the wood of the cross, and yet never take it up for himself. For example, the man who has put into imperishable stone the group of Christ and His Apostles at Copenhagen; the man Thorwaldsdén, who almost died with his chisel in his hand as he was at work upon the unfinished face of his "Martin Luther"; whose mind seemed to have had a natural appetency for the morally sublime; who made his statues with the beauty of Greek art, and yet with the austerity of his own native Northland, and who turned away in his last years to especially Christian themes as most satisfactory to his genius, did his Christian work in a philosophic rather than Christian spirit. A friend having said to him, one day, that the fact that he had no religious faith must make it difficult for him to succeed on religious subjects, his reply was: "If I were altogether an unbeliever, why should that give me any trouble? Have I not represented pagan divinities? Still I do not believe in them." And here arises the fallacy of the argument against the doctrines of the Christian system, derived from the fact that so many men of pronounced genius have not been technical Christians. Men of genius have too often been men whose lives

made it inconsistent in them to believe in the Bible. It is claimed that Burns did not believe in Christianity. On what ground? Because he travestied false professors of it; because he wrote "Holy Willie's Prayer," "The Holy Fair," and other satirical pieces. But does he not speak reverently of his father's religion? And has he not told us what he thinks of true piety in "The Cotter's Saturday Night"? It is more than possible that the religion of the Saviour was as much travestied by the lives of some of his contemporaries, who were nominal Christians, as by Burns himself. It has been said by one of his biographers that the religion of his period was "coarse, fierce, vulgar, wrathful, repulsive." And we may add that those who possessed it were often guilty of the most flagrant departures from the precepts of Christianity, as well as the rules of morality; though I think that we are not to believe all of Burns' intimations and allusions to this effect. No doubt there was misrepresentation on both sides, and on his side the misrepresentation is immortal. But as to Burns' opinion of himself, take this passage from his own hand: "I have been this morning taking a peep through 'the postern of time long elapsed,' as Young finely expresses it. 'Twas a rueful prospect. What a tissue of thoughtlessness, weakness, and folly! My life reminded me of a ruined temple. What strength, what proportions in some parts! What unsightly gaps, what ruins in others. I kneeled down before the Father of Mercies, and said, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son.' I rose, eased and strengthened."

I never had a doubt that Burns accepted the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. I find them implied in all he wrote. Indeed, in a letter to Mr. Dunlop, dated June 21st, 1789, he says so, in so many words. He acknowledges belief in God, in accountability, in an eternal distinction between right and wrong, in a future judgment, and in the divinity of the Saviour. And yet with his strong nature, his fondness for the admiration of his associates, his wonderful gifts, it is not strange that he should be out of relations with the kind of Christianity of his period; especially as there would be very little charity for his improprieties and vagaries, his vices and sins, and as his own conscience

could not be at rest respecting them. I say there is no evidence that Burns ever rejected the Christian system. But if there were, it would be enough to say that the conditions of his life made it necessary for him.

Take now such a man as Carlyle. There is nothing to say against the purity of his character. If not a model husband he was, at least, the husband of one wife. He began housekeeping with his new wife, with the good Scottish custom of family prayers. And when his noble father died, he sent word to his brother at home to keep up the old family custom, not to let the family fire go out on God's altar. But the whole tendency of his maturer writings is to lead one to doubt whether he retained the old traditionary belief; nay, the rather to believe he drifted far away from it. In John Sterling's analysis of the hero of "Sartor Resartus," we have a pretty correct idea, probably, of Carlyle's later religious belief. Sterling says of Teufelsdröckh that "though he has a deep feeling of the beautiful, the good and the true, and a faith in their ultimate victory, yet he does not believe in a personal God! And, therefore, wanting peace himself, his fierce dissatisfaction fixes on all that is weak, corrupt and imperfect around him, and instead of a calm and steady co-operation with all those who are endeavoring to apply the highest ideas as remedies for the worst evils, he holds himself aloof in a savage isolation, and cherishes a stern joy at the prospect of that catastrophe, which is to turn loose again the elements of man's social life, and give, for a time, the victory to evil, in hopes that each new convulsion of the world must bring us nearer to the ultimate restoration of all things, fancying that each may be the last." This analysis of Teufelsdröckh is, as it strikes me, really an analysis of Carlyle himself. There was that in Carlyle which unfitted him for all co-operation with the men of his own generation, in their efforts to make better a lost world. He could not appreciate the grand movements in history which have made possible America. Any conception that this world is to be regenerated by convulsions, and not by downright hard work under the captaincy of the Great Captain, just throws a man out of the ranks, makes him a sore-head and a grumbler, a cynic and a fault-finder; and all these was Carlyle.

To this same John Sterling, too—whom, alas, Carlyle succeeded in corrupting from the simplicity of the Gospel—are we indebted for a good analysis of the characteristics of Goethe, Carlyle's great master, though it has always seemed to me that, with the exception of the power to put his thoughts into lyric form, Carlyle was greater than was his master. I do not know of anything in the prose of Goethe which is comparable to "Sartor Resartus," or "Hero Worship." I mean as evincing creative genius. But to the analysis as Sterling gives it: "Goethe was the most splendid of anachronisms, a thoroughly, nay intensely, pagan life in an age when it is men's duty to be Christian. I never take him up without a kind of inward check, as if I were trying some forbidden spell; while, on the other hand, there is so infinitely much to be learned from him, and it is so needful to understand the world we live in, and our own age, and especially its greatest mind, that I cannot bring myself to burn my books, as the converted magicians did, or sink them, as did Prospero. There must, I think, have been some prodigious defect in his mind, to let him hold such views as his, about women and some other things, and I find so much coldness and hollowness as to the highest truths, and feel so strongly that the Heaven he looks up to is a vault of ice, that these two indications, leading me to the same conclusion, go far to convince me that he was a profoundly immoral and irreligious spirit, with as rare faculty of intelligence as ever belonged to any one. I never take him up without high admiration, or lay him down without real sorrow for what he chose to be."

The French Vinet, who is certainly one of the most acute of critics, and a great man and great literary teacher, too, says: "All literature is profane; Christianity can have no literature of its own; it must wait till it has a world of its own." I do not quote this as wholly true. For he admits that one must be a Christian, rightly to read Moliere, Lafontaine, or Goethe. While in his judgment, strictly speaking, the only real Christian work ever done by a great mind thus far is the work of Milton. Of course the work of John Bunyan deserves the same classification. We would rather say, what we have found out in this discussion, that all highest work of genius must be conditioned in the great

doctrines of the Bible. The Margaret character—always so touching to human sensibilities—figures very largely in literature. In Walter Scott she is Jeannie Deans, in George Eliot's "Adam Bede" she is Hetty Sorrel. But there is no ideal treatment of this character which does not necessitate the interposition of the powers of Christianity, of the blood of cleansing, the words, "Neither do I condemn thee." In Faust, indeed, there is a voice which comes from Heaven, after Margaret has died: "She is saved!" But this announcement is as different from salvation by repentance, from the "Depart in peace" of our Lord, as theatre-thunder is different from the genuine article, where the Creator is riding upon His chariot in the sky. Read over the scenes in "Adam Bede," and see how emphatically the author conditions the salvation of Hetty on that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto life; and then recur to Goethe's flippant and superficial treatment of the same theme. It will show how the highest art comes at last to the foot of the Cross, and lays all its real successes there.

Inasmuch as literature is the picture of real life, perhaps it is not to be expected that literature shall be any more Christian, than Christianity, nominally so called, is Christian. This, however, we have a right to demand, that literature shall leave the destiny of historic characters—especially those of the Bible—where history has left them; shall not seek to supplement the decisions of God in history, or in revelation, by a poetical treatment which the facts, so far as known, do not seem to warrant. For example, when Robert Browning closes his poem on King Saul by holding up to him an anticipation of salvation through the Atonement, it seems, at first glance, a handling of sacred things which is not only unwarranted, but irreverent, if not blasphemous. Let me quote, as put into the mouth of the boy David, who is seeking to allay the dark spirit within him:

"Oh, Saul, it shall be

A Face like my face, that receives you ; 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 !"

This is no less unhistoric than it is an anachronism of centuries. And yet there is a kind of rhapsodic, of prophetic, speech which

might make even such language on the lips of him who saw in vision his Lord and our Lord, a poetic possibility, perhaps permissible; though the morality of the conception is questionable.

Christianity is the highest thought of the infinite intelligence of the universe. If this is true, what kind of treatment has she a right to demand of the most gifted minds which God sends into the world? There can be but a single answer to this question. If there are minds princely in their endowments, where shall we look for the recognition of the wisdom of God if not to them? When Daniel Webster died, Mrs. Stowe, in substance, said: "What a grateful thought that such a magnificent mind as this man's should be ushered into the presence-chamber of the great Creator to study His works forever." Earth herself is such a presence-chamber. Such minds are already here amidst God's works, material, moral, spiritual. If the bestowment of great intellectual gifts brings immunity from anything, it is not from recognizing God, where He is, and where He is to be found; nay, where He is found by those who diligently seek Him. The Apostle Paul, confronting the best things that Greek philosophy had ever done, bringing the academy into the presence of the Cross, of the truth as it is in Jesus, asked: "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" And a greater than the Apostle has put this in a prayer to His Father: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." And this does not mean that Christianity is for the weak-minded. It means that it is not for the great-minded alone. It means that when such a mind as that of Bacon, Newton, Bayle, Clarke, Leibnitz, Grotius, Pascal, Arnold, Nicole, Malebranche, Bruyere, Bossuet, Fenelon, Massillon, Bourdaloue, Chalmers, Shakespeare, Milton, Agassiz, accepts Christianity, it is on the same basis of the wayfaring man though a fool! It is not greatness of mind which leads any man to reject Christianity. It is intellectual pride. It is when men by wisdom know not God; agnosticize God. It is the determination that every thing that is claimed for Christianity shall be subjected to intellectual tests, shall be accepted or rejected on such tests alone.

The final test of Christianity is an obedient spirit. He who enters Christ's kingdom comes as a little child; lays even his agnosticism there as belonging to God.

The pursuit of literature is a guild by itself. It constitutes a new brotherhood; nay, more, it is a kind of religion; as Carlyle has shown, a hero-worship. The great teachers in literature, in proportion as they are not Christian, are teachers who in some true sense become the substitutes for the teachers of Christianity to its votaries, as with some men a secret society takes the place of the Church of Christ. Goethe, Carlyle, Emerson even, just in proportion as they are guilty of looking at the present economy of things, as though God were ignorant of it, or helpless respecting it, or as though there were no God at all, or they had nothing to do with Him, become to their readers the priests and prophets of no religion. To be treated as a literary lion; to be regarded as an authority in matters of taste, of creative art; to be at the head of a coterie of literary worshippers—this is one fascination and temptation to the man of genius. "I must tell you something," writes Goethe to the Countess Von Stolberg, "which makes me happy; and that is, the visit of many excellent men, of all grades and from all parts, who call on me often, and stay some time. We first know that we exist, when we recognize ourselves in others." Goethe was not more than twenty-six before this homage was proffered him. His residence at the court at Weimar, where the poets of the period thronged to meet him; so near to Jena, which, as Lewes says, was to science what Weimar was to poetry, was to him what Burns found in his tavern cronies. What if Burns had had other admirers? "Well," says Carlyle, "these men of letters, too, were not without a kind of hero-worship. The waiters and the hostlers of Scotch inns, prying about the door, eager to catch any word that fell from Burns, were doing unconscious reverence to the heroic. Johnson had his Boswell for a worshipper. Rousseau had worshippers enough; princes calling on him in his mean garret; the great, the beautiful doing reverence to the poor moonstruck man." Every literary person of eminence has his courtiers, and courtiers are proverbial for homage that is as fascinating as it is misleading.

The point which I wish to make is this: that the inhaling of this incense, sincere or otherwise, offered by contemporaries, is not always helpful to Christian character. Add to this the fact that men of genius are so often endowed with a peculiarly imperial, not to say imperious, nature; are accustomed to do unusual things, and to do them unchallenged, defiantly; to set themselves above the common class of humanity in the matter of conduct, as God Himself has made them peculiar in intellectual gifts; and it is apparent that they may easily persuade themselves that whatever the moral and spiritual legislation of God respecting other people, they are in an important sense a law unto themselves. "It sank into my heart," says Jean Paul, on one occasion, "how easily is man forgotten, whether he lies in the urn or the pyramid, and how our immortal self is regarded as an actor, as absent, as soon as it is once behind the scenes, and frets and fumes no more among the players on the stage." This is the one great corrective to the unreligious, not to say irreligious, tendency of genius: to remember that God only is great; that the highest work which any man can do, is to find out what are his endowments from God; to find out where God would have him lay out his divine gifts on humanity; and then act as in the sight of God. Lewes gives us a picture of Goethe with his left hand throwing his knife into the river to decide whether he should be an artist or not! If he saw the knife strike the water, the omen was to be regarded favorable to art. How different the spirit of Milton:

"Yet, be time less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure, even
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Tow'rd 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."

Milton felt his way heavenward, as a blind man feels his way through space, with outspread palms; his other senses quickened to make good the one lost. He felt after God, to find Him in his life's work. He found Him. And his reward is, that no change of time ever can remove the mind of man away from his work. Goethe, on the other hand, never can have a germinating

immortality, never can renew the youth of his immortality as the eagle, never can be to the race any more than the old Greek poets; a study preparatory to the reign of Christianity in literature, as she already reigns in so many departments of human life, and as she will reign in literature when He who is the Word shall have put on His many crowns!

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