The Elevating Power of Literature.

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Outline

Subject:

The Elevating Power of Literature.
Its definition.
Other conceptions.

Ancient:
Greek
Rome

Modern:
Old England
New England

Its influence
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The Elevating Power of Literature.

Literature is the expression of ideals. It is the crystallization of thought. It is the character of a nation written in its books; its emotions throbbing in its drama, songs and ballads.

In its true sense, literature deals with the emotions of the human soul. Its true study is not a study of words, of grammatical constructions, or of rhetorical figures. It is nothing less than a study of life itself of whatever is life and highest in life expressed in the best and highest way.

Every work of art, be it a cathedral, a statue, a
painting or a poem, is the expression of some idea in the mind of the artist, the worth of which is determined by its manifestations of truth and beauty. It must appeal not only to the reason but also to that faculty which is the domain of intuition—the imagination. Through this faculty, all art has its origin. It is that element in man which enables him to see things with his mind, that he has never seen with his eyes, to hear things with his mind, that he has never heard with his ears, to live in distant lands as well as at home, to live in the past as well as the present. It is the force by which other powers are lifted, and so unified as to act together. When man is raised by the
powers of this higher reason and into it are marshalled all the facts that have been recognized by the intellect; all the experiences that have been felt by the human heart there in that high realm, all these are united — transcendent he is. The possibilities of the human mind cannot be measured until the imagination is inspired, until it that has been trained, until it shows that the human soul has no limit. I think of the hard conditions of the lonely New England life, devoid of all beauty and pleasure; of its unreality and pleasure; of its unreality had it not been touched by the ideal created by the poet, and yet we omit the important and element in the lives of the Pilgrims if we overlook the means they had of
living above their lower circumstances— they had their Bible, which opened to them a boundless realm of poetry and imagination; it was to them the unequalled record of thought and emotion; the reservoir of poetry, traditions, stories, parables, exhortations, consolations and guess—imaginative adventure, for which the spirit of man is always longing. It supplied to them, as no other book did, that want in human life which is higher than the wants of mind, ordinary facts or common place knowledge. Poetry is the united harmony of imagination and beauty. Strictly and artistically, and not considered merely as poetic feeling, which is more or less shared by
all the world, but as the
expression of that feeling, is
the utterance of a passion
for truth, beauty and power.
It stands between nature
and convention, keeping
alive among us the en-
joyment of the external
and spiritual world. Its
means are whatever the
universe contains. It has
constituted the most endur-
ing name of nations.
"Poetry," says Shelley, "lifts
the veil from the hidden
beauty of the world, and
makes familiar objects to-
be as it were familiarized.

The great secret of morals is
love, an identification of
ourselves with the beauti-
ful existing in thought, ac-
tion or person, not our own.
A man to be greatly good
must imagine intently and
comprehensively; he must put himself in another's place. The great instrument of moral good is imagination to which poetry administers. Now rich in this art was classical antiquity! Greece in her eight centuries of literary productivity gave the world its greatest epic poet, Homer, the finest of lyric poets, Pindar, and Sappho, the prince of orators, Demosthenes; aside from our own Bacon and Whitman, the greatest philosophers of all ages, Plato and Aristotle, the greatest writers of pure imagistic beauty, Aeschylus, who in singleness of purpose has never been surpassed. For nearly two thousand years, these immortals have been the delight and inspiration...
of men of genius and are as marvellous to us to-day, as they were to the Athenians. They reveal to us the Considered sentiments of a splendid age. Who can estimate the value of the works that have been handed down to us, labelled with the names of Aristophanes, Pindar, Sappho and Homer? Have they not been the beacon lights of all subsequent ages?

Though Rome taught the world, the arts of war and law, its literature as a whole is on a lower plane than that of Greece. She has however produced some of the world's greatest lights—Lucino, whose genius and influence was directed to
what was most precious in civilization. His writings appeal to what is noblest in the soul—love of country and feel in every one inspiring the highest sentiments that exist in human life. He gave higher beauty to the Latin language. He added to its richness, copiousness, and strength. He gave it music.

If the Romans did not produce a Homer, they can boast a Vergil, whose work takes its place among imperishable works.

Lucretius has not yet been fully appreciated but for depth of meditation and as a painter and worshiper of nature he stands supreme to all poets of antiquity.
where then would have been the literature of the early church, of the Reformation or of modern nations, had not the original writers of early Athens and Rome been our schoolmasters.

These nations fell prey to the barbarism around about them. Their ideals slept for a thousand years buried beneath the ignorance of their surroundings. Popular insurrections arose inspired not by ideals of liberty but by a sense of oppression and degradation.

The 14th century was marked by protests and warfare. The first great genius to arouse Europe from its torpor was Dante, the Shakespeare of Latin race.
Poetry when, which of all literature is the most-stimulating, broadening, and beautifying was the first influence which elevated the human mind amid the miseries of a gloomy period. Writ by his immortal comedy gave the first great impetus to Italian thought. Nation after nation kindled with the audor of the new spirit. England drew from Italy, knowledge and inspiration. "A very breeze," says Lowell, "was dappled with the golden pollen of Greece and Rome." In the midst of these agitations, public miseries, and reviving taste for literature and art, Chaucer arose. He is the union of what-
separate elements, the end of the old and beginning of the new. His "Canterbury Tales," are interesting and instructive to the student of language and literature. They paint the age more vividly than any known history. The men and women there represented stand out to us in fresh and living colour. They are alive to the same sentiments that move us. They enjoyed friends as we do. What people can live without friendship, sympathy and love are not these the sentiments of the soul? Do not the Hebrew Psalms written twenty five hundred years ago feel the same emotions in the minds of people to-day.
as they did among the Jews. Is it not because they appeal to the common humanity—the same today as it was in the beginning and will be to the end? Shakespeare, the summit of our literature, on the literature of the world is studied, admired and loved because of his fidelity to nature. He brings us life in the greatest force, volume, and beauty. His unique faith—everyday sentiment—like the Psalms of Solomon will be recognized by all nations and ages, because they touch the common and that—humanity. Milton too ranks high in English thought, but it is impossible to particularize further.
have reached the peaks in the history of our literature. What is so prolific of great writers in all the vastly multiplied departments of thought, that it is impossible to mention them all. However, the year 1809, was a proud year for England and America. It saw the birth of Abraham Lincoln, the greatest of Emancipators, of Charles Darwin, the greatest scientist, since Isaac Newton. The essence of white tracts has become a part of modern thought that floats in the air we breathe. Of William Gladstone, the greatest statesman of the Victorian Era, who stands forth like some mountain peak.
supremely great in many sides of his character and career. This year also saw the birth of Tennyson, who though among the poets of this age ranked with the greatest of any age. His "In Memoriam" is the finest monument erected to the memory of man. He was a lover of human progress. Doubtless his greatest service to its course was rendered in the "Idylls of the King". The simple qualities which he here glorifies are the foundation of human life-reverence, loyalty, obedience were the watchwords around which the Idylls grew. They found their inspiration as do we in the love of mankind, of family and
native land.

Surely then it is true
that literature is a world-
wide art expressive and
interpretative of the spirit
of humanity. No man
can make full acquaint-
ance with that spirit
who fails to make com-
panionship, with its great-
ful master and interpretor.

This close intimacy af-
fords a personal enrich-
ment which is the fin-
est and highest result
of personality. The great-
est service rendered by
the world's literary artist,
the greatest service that
can be rendered is the en-
largement, enrichment, and unfolded
of ourselves. They unfold
and develop that mys-
terious personality which
lies behind all feeling, thought and action; that spiritual force within which feeds the specific activities through which we give ourselves to the world. It leads us to recognize the visible world as a symbol of the invisible, a changing vesture, veiling the unchanging goodness and loneliness of Lowell. No grander field does this world offer than the world of thought and the field of ideas pictured in language.