

They are, of course, not both true in the same sense of the terms. In what senses they are respectively true we shall now proceed to explain.

The enemies of a great man sometimes endeavour to decry his genius and deny his inventive faculty, by showing that he has only re-constructed old materials—that he has invented no new power, but has only brought old powers to serve his uses—that he has discovered no new principle, but has only applied an old and well known principle to the attainment of a new end—that the wisdom which he puts forth as new, is only a collection of scattered fragments from the wisdom of the ancients—that he is merely an editor and compiler, who selects, arranges, and puts together—not an original thinker or worker.

Now, the first proposition which I wish to establish is, that if such objections as these are to be allowed validity—if the true meaning of the word Originality be that which these objections imply—then no man is, has been, or can be, original. Man cannot create, like the Almighty; he can only build with the materials which God has given him. The most original man that ever lived did no more than put together single things which God has given to mankind in common.

The Poet borrows his images from the broad page of nature which lies open to the view of all. The Mechanician can only produce adaptations and new combinations of old and well known mechanical appliances. The Novelist composes his plots of incidents which have occurred singly in real life. Most of the plays of Shakespeare, the most original of Dramatists, are founded either upon real history, or upon stories which had been worked up into plays by other poets before him; and if you analyze any one of his characters, even those which belong to the fairy world and the regions of imagination, you will find that though the character *as a whole* may strike you as unique, there is no *single feature* of it that is so.