

A Classic.



UR acceptance of literature in the present day has become so much a matter of course that it seems well nigh impossible to bring men to a realization of the momentous force exerted by writers as "purifiers or poisoners of the public taste and morals." The world has at all times been slow to recognize genius and when we consider the many times that true and honest effort has been rewarded with poverty and death it is little wonder that so much of the world's intellect has enlisted in the cause of its corruption. If an age demands "intellectual monstrosities," a man, rich only in the riches of thought, is tempted to pervert his genius to please the general taste. Men characterized by strength of principle, by moral courage combined with genius, and who have striven to bring the actual world nearer ideal perfection, may well be designated intellectual heroes. The world breathes freer from knowing that such men have lived in the past, that such men live in the present: "Those gifted beings who have been the choicest companions of our best and happiest hours, who have kindled or exalted our love of the beautiful and good, who have given us knowledge and power, whose words rebuke us for our own moral as well as mental inferiority." These are the men whose works we term our classics. Time has thrown the light of concentration over their works. We see them now in all the radiance of their grandeur and beauty. It will be interesting to account for the high estimation in which we hold such works as these and to determine the requisites of a true classic in its double bearing, the writer's relation to his work and that work as a force in the world at large.

Any great work in literature is a noble mind product; in other words

"the spiritual and invisible is made flesh through expression." Any masterpiece in letters, therefore, will embody truth, beauty, and sublimity as its content and a conveyance of that truth to human consciousness by means of fitting and harmonious nobility of mind expression. The spirit of truth in any classic is perhaps its most dominant feature. It is this which is guarding and guiding the world in its faltering but onward march to knowledge and freedom. For ages men have been thundering rebuke to all that betrays freedom and virtue, to all that seeks to instil in us ideals other than those of moral justice and right. Evil and falsehood will receive no sanction in the work of a classic; there must be faithfulness to the facts of nature and life. In descriptions of nature not merely a complication of detail as it meets the eye must be given. The poet must touch on the reality of its being as a manifestation of a divine hand. In that which treats of human life, all that is noble and good and true must be exalted. We should be filled with a hatred for all sham, evil and falsehood. We should be taught to love truth for its own sake.

Closely allied with truth is a disregard for conventionalities. "There our minds have a free range, our hearts a free utterance." We feel when walking with these master minds of thought, as if our intellect, our taste, indeed our whole being had burst the fetters which long had held it in restraint. We make no use of enforced nomenclature. We respond only as our hearts are touched. We yield obeisance only to what is good and true. "We despise only the despicable, honor none but the honorable." The veil of rank and fashion is cast aside. Here at least it may not serve to shield a knave or dunce.

There are certain primary forces which necessarily influence a master mind in the production of his work—race, surroundings and epoch. There