

## GENIUS VERSUS TALENT.



ANY biographers of the present day make the grave mistake of recording only the triumphs, an scrupulously omitting the failures of the men whose lives they write. Their biographies very much resemble novels, in which the heroes are always successful. The reader finds life different, but supposing the writer to be correct, he concludes that great and noble deeds are accomplished only by men of extraordinary gifts, by geniuses, whereas those possessed of ordinary qualities are bound to disgraceful inaction or otherwise dismal failure.

If the reading of biographies gives us such ideas, it can be but hurtful. These ideas are apt to create fatalistic notions in our minds, and surely do not encourage if they do not actually destroy that noble ambition which should be enkindled in every heart by reading the biographies of great men, such as Washington, Webster, Napoleon and many others. But if we examine even their lives, we shall see that they were by no means devoid of failures, and that failures carefully studied to prevent their recurrence, were by them made stepping-stones to attain success.

One of the most instructive lessons of this happy faculty of men of genius, of being able to bend failures so as to yield up success, is furnished by the illustrious career of that greatest of all ancient orators, Demosthenes. His first effort before a popular assembly of his countrymen, as history tells us, resulted in a complete failure, which was the more discouraging, as his oration had been composed with great care. But nothing daunted by this discomfiture, he first endeavored to find out the causes of his insuccess, and after they had been pointed out to him by friends, he strenuously applied himself to their removal. But when, after a long interval of careful and unsparing self-training, he again presented himself before his countrymen, the power of his genius, enhanced by an irresistible charm of delivery, the result of his conscientious application, so captivated their hearts, that he rose at once to the foremost place amongst the masters of oratory.

The example of Demosthenes leads us to the consideration of another point of no less importance, namely whether genius alone, without arduous application and painstaking preparation, would be of much light to its possessor. There is no doubt that in some of the arts, where technical knowledge is of minor importance and easily acquired, grand achievements are recorded by men of eminent gifts, who were not possessed of much preparatory training. Thus Homer, among the ancients, without example to follow or rule to guide him, soared to the very pinnacle of poetic fame. Whereas Shakespeare, with a scanty education, his classical lore consisting of "a little Latin and less Greek," stands pre-eminent among the dramatic writers of all ages. But examples like these are exceptional. The lives of great men teach us that generally even genius is compelled to apply itself with ardor and perseverance to the mastery of technical details before great works can be accomplished. This is so true, that a modern artist has defined genius as infinite patience, or rather as the power of taking pains. This definition at first sight seems somewhat paradoxical, nor is it intended to be taken in a literal sense. But its author intends rather to emphasize the fact, that genius without strenuous and painstaking application, will generally make use its high powers upon vain and fruitless efforts. Of the studious habits of men of energetic pursuits history furnishes us innumerable examples. Thus Napoleon, the greatest of modern warriors, in the midst of his marvellous campaigns, would seldom allow himself more than two hours of sleep, and General Grant, his distinguished rival in the new world, exhibited such an unremitting zeal, and such tenacity of purpose in the intricate performance of his duties, that some envious critics have attributed the success of his wonderful achievements, rather to his indomitable power of will, than to any high intellectual gifts. But the better judgment of a grateful nation, based on the unanimous testimony of the other great leaders of that memorable war, has placed the immortal laurels on its hero's brow, and raised him on an equality with the world's greatest leaders in war, a verdict which posterity