

women souls have inhabited bodies like fractured vessels which always threatened to break under the weight of the treasures they contained. Such people as Robert Hall, Thomas Carlyle, and Mrs. Browning, were tortured by diseased constitutions. Watts, Wesley, and similar samples of diminutive manhood were sent to show how mind can rise superior to matter. But the great orators—the Punshons, Simpsons, Chalmers—of the ages are usually “from the shoulders upward higher than any of the people.”

Thomas Chalmers was born in Fifeshire, Scotland, on the 17th of March—the day that gave birth to another Scotchman, who became the most famous of Irishmen, St. Patrick—and in the year 1780, eleven years before the death of John Wesley. His father was “dignified and handsome, highly honourable, courteous and kind.” He was “of the business class, and related to some of the clergy and a sprinkling of the landed gentry.” Dignity, honour, courtesy, clerical and semi-aristocratic relationship—there we have the origin of great body and brains.

Secondly, Culture. Till twelve the common school, of the parochial system which John Knox planted in Scotland, from which have risen many poor men’s sons to eminence in science, literature, and religion. Here he was “one of the idlest, strongest, merriest, and most generous-hearted of the boys.” Then—at twelve he it noticed—the university of St. Andrew’s adopted him. He was “volatile, bovish, and idle.” No wonder! The home mother would have suited him better for a few years longer. But he laid the foundation here for that mathematical skill which was to make his tutorship and astronomical lectures the wonder of the age. He devoured mathematics.

The passion carried him and not he it.

Thirdly, Piety. Like too many young men, Chalmers had not thought out the question of his adaptation to any special life-work. No very serious apprehensions of responsibility troubled him. He had always been noted for a love of the Bible, but chiefly because he delighted in its majestic passages, some of which he repeated while still in the nursery, walking the floor while he declaimed. This love of the sublime was one indication of what he was to become at maturity, when the thunders of pulpit and platform would reverberate throughout the land.

Calvinism, the creed of his training, was sufficiently sturdy and rugged to challenge his analytical powers. Here, too, broke out another glimpse of the coming giant—he insisted on looking into and discussing decrees which he was taught to regard as hidden from human knowledge. He found contradictions. “His mind was clouded with doubts and scepticism,” as whose has not been who has stood at those granite portals and attempted to follow the labyrinths beyond? Butler’s “Analogy,” truth in a vast jungle to little minds, was a stately forest to Chalmers. Edwards’ “Freedom of the Will” gave him clearer views of human responsibility. Now came his year of jubilee—the first of his emancipation. Like Adam Clark, Chalmers gave little promise of eloquence in earlier years; but unlike Adam Clark, whose style became smooth and flowing as a summer rivulet, Chalmers’ address grew to be turgid and overwhelming—a Niagara of delivery. At college prayers he addressed the Deity with surprising humility, vivid views of the divine character and awful consciousness of human depravity.

He began teaching as tutor in