

In like manner the "language, quaint and olden," in which Goethe describes flowers as "stars in the firmament of earth," which has been made so charmingly familiar to us all in the melodious verse of Longfellow, is but the distant echo of the words of an Andalusian Arabian, who wrote centuries before the "philosophic dweller on the castled Rhine" penned the curious refrain.\*

Emerson has given some very amusing instances of the doubtful paternity of some celebrated proverbs and *bon-mots*. He has also shown very beautifully that, notwithstanding the large amount of mental absorption, and all the cases of verbal identity and quotations that exist in the republic of letters, there is still a very fair amount of originality in the world at present. He teaches truly that there is an individuality in the mind of every active thinker which will shew itself, which receives, and uses, and creates, because it is alive and assimilates all the elements of his mental constitution, however varied may be their original form.

This brings us definitely to the main point at issue: In what does Originality consist? According to the gifted essayist just referred to, it is simply *being*—real, intellectual existence, or, as he himself unfolds the idea, "being one's self, and reporting accurately what we see and are." This agrees well with Lord Lytton's definition that "a writer's true originality is his form—is that which distinguishes him from the mintage of any other brain." In illustration of this he refers to "Tristram Shandy," which, in spite of passages taken almost literally from "Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy," bears, he contends, the most striking marks of "sovereign genius"—genius which has "preserved unique, unimitating, inimitable, its own essential idiosyncrasy of form and thought."

\* Don Pascual de Gayangos, in his valuable translation of Al-makkari's History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain, has bestowed an English dress on the Arabic verse referred to above, of which the following is a specimen which may interest the reader, serving at the same time as my authority:—"When the stars in our globe vanish before our eyes, 'tis not in the West that they hide their luminous orbs; indeed, they come to deposit them in the midst of these parterres."

The substantive idea presented by these critics is the same as that which forms the basis of this paper, namely, that mental vitality implies assimilative force, and that, where mental assimilation exists, there must also be that peculiarity or individuality of thought and its expression which constitutes originality: M. Joubert, a philosophic Frenchman, of whom too little is known, has tersely expressed the same idea in a somewhat different form: "*Toute vérité une et crue n'assez passe l'ame.*" It is certainly as true in regard to seed-thoughts as with seeds of a more material nature, that, unless they die, lose their crude form and thus become the vital elements of new existences, they abide alone and fruitless.\*

As a fine illustration of "noble borrowing" by one whose gifts and originality are beyond all question, I will refer to Tennyson's beautiful description of Enid's restlessness in the "Idyls of the King":—

"She found no rest, and ever failed to draw  
The quiet night unto her blood—"

which a friendly critic (and surely none of his readers are otherwise) has pointed out as having Virgil's graphic picture of the more miserable agitation of the injured Dido as its prototype:—

"Neque unquam  
Solvitur in somnos, oculisque aut pectore noctem  
Accipit."

—ÆNEID IV., 529-531.

It does, however, sometimes happen that a gifted and original writer gives utterance to ideas which have *not* remained in his soul long enough to lose their crudity—truths from foreign sources which have not germinated in his own mind. If this be done *consciously*, it is, undoubtedly, *plagiarism*. But what man of letters does not know that sometimes an idea imbibed in the course of reading, and long forgotten, *in alta mente repostum*, will, in process of time, come to the surface of the soul again, and haunt the mind and memory like a strain of sweet music from "auld lang syne," without the least shadow of remembrance in regard to its original source. There it is—changed, perhaps, just enough to defy your efforts to ascertain its true parentage. Where is it from? Is it mine?

\* St. John, xii., 24.