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THE LADY OF SHALOTT—A POET'S CREED.

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All literature that is worthy of the name has as its theme the art of living. Life is the one great gift which is vouchsafed to man, and as a result, only that which bears a relation to life and its arts has any interest for him. It is in this fact that literature, however much misunderstood, has always had an interest for the most thoughtful minds. Men have a perennial interest in great literature, and especially in poetry, because in it the great problems of life are treated with a profundity and sympathy arising out of the poet's interest in the whole of life. Great literature thus arises directly out of life, it is the medium by means of which we hold converse with those great souls who have held the most close and fruitful relations with the world. Through literature we are brought into warm and living contact with *men*, and through them we learn to know the world and life. Under their guidance our vision is purged, and through them our lives gain an access of power, which gives life a deeper meaning and supplies us with the strength required to strenuously live true to what we have seen as the realities.

In this high and noble sense the Bible is the most real literature, for nowhere can we find purer and deeper searchings after the meaning of life than in the succession of the great prophets. And the Son of Man comprehended His own mission and that of all religion in His divine declaration that He came that men might have *life*, and that they might have it more abundantly. The secret of His power, too, lies in no other thing than in the full and perfect manner in which he finished the work that was given Him to do. His command, "Follow Me," is obeyed by so many only because it means communion with a higher soul than man's own, because by following Him, by striving to realize His life in our own, we receive into our nature a newness and fulness of life unguessed at, while the soul remained closed to the sweet influences of His life. It was the mission of Christ to bring to itself the husk-fed soul, to cause it to remember that there is awaiting it in its Father's house bread enough and to spare, and to set it gravitating toward the divine. Herein, too, is the test of the poet's greatness. The poet is great in the measure in which he performs the same work. "'Tis Life," says Tennyson,

"'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
On Life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that we want,"

and it is because the greatest poets have, in their own measure, given that needed life, that they have ever been accounted the world's greatest teachers.

Tennyson's claim on our attention rests on these grounds. He merits our careful study because he has something for us in our daily lives, and, if we are but heedful of his message, teaches us to live more worthily—more manfully, and therefore more divinely. He has, in a supreme measure, the gift of the clearer vision, and he has always a message for us who are on the lower planes. He

has never trifled with his gift, nor given a false report of what he saw from his watchtower. From his earliest maturity he has ever had an earnest message to his time, and has labored long and hard to deliver it worthily. Evidence of his earnestness is in his whole work; but we may find it more explicitly presented to us in the poems in which he speaks of his art. A study of them is most interesting and valuable.

In his first volume he expressed his conviction of the deep responsibilities which the poet holds to his time, and to all time. The poet, he says, is a consecrated spirit, set apart for the spiritual guidance of men. It is not his work, therefore, to be entangled in the things of the flesh, but to keep apart and so keep his vision purged and clear. He must be in the world, but not of it.

"The poet in a golden clime was born,
With golden stars above;"

and his mind is "holy ground," the garden of the soul, wherein is the fountain of Song whose waters are drawn from the Heaven itself,

"And it sings a song of undying love."

This was in 1830, and it was followed two years later by a similar and more elaborate statement of his poetic creed. This is to be found in the poem which stands at the beginning of the collection, *The Lady of Shalott*. The position of the poem is significant, as it most admirably gives the point of view of the poet in the volume, and, indeed, in the whole of his subsequent work. Under the guise of the story of the Lady, is given the relation which the poet must hold to the world. He labors for its redemption, and in the poem is shown the fatal effects to the poet and the world when he is entangled in the mere appearances of things, and neglects their spiritual import.

I am well aware that critics deny to this poem any serious import, that there is nothing in it but what appears on the surface. This view is represented by Stopford Brooke, who says: "It was never intended to have special meaning. Tennyson was playing with his own imagination when he wrote it. He saw the island and the girl in the tower, and then the loom and web and mirror crept into the tower; and then he saw the pictures in the mirror, and was pleased to describe them; and then he thought of the curse, and then of Lancelot, and then of death."

Such criticism as this, however well-intentioned, makes the great mistake of separating the truth and the beauty in poetry. In the highest order of poetry there can be no separation made between the thought and the emotion, and of this order of poetry this poem is an example. Tennyson never gave countenance to the cry of second-rate artists, "Art for Art's sake." He was too true an artist for that; and in all his best poetry, wherever we discover beauty, it is as the outward and visible form of some truth. Poetry which is really poetry appeals to the whole man—it must have a basis of thought appealing to the sense of truth, it must have beauty appealing to the sense of beauty, and appealing to the whole nature by the fusion of both elements in the concrete form of art.