

Just when the western mind had broken away from the traditions of a philosophy and a faith equally debased, bursting through the vexatious meshes thrown over it in the lapse of years, metaphysically by a Thomas Aquinas or a Duns Scotus, and physically by a Hildebrand ; and when it had not yet had time to forge again for itself, as in a few years it proceeded to do—on anvils Greek and Latin and Jewish, new chains—just at this happy juncture, his astonishing gifts of intellect began with a natural freedom to unfold themselves ; and by degrees to become mature,—not by what would have been to him the cramping discipline of schools and books, but by dint of a quick and keen observation ; by an immediate experience of life, an early implication in family joys and cares ; by a large intercourse with men—with men at length, of the highest refinement, the greatest mental endowment, the most extended familiarity with the daring enterprises of the age.

§ 7. *To the British Race pre-eminently a Seer and an Interpreter.*

The entrance of the divine words had given light, had given understanding unto the simple : and in him, to a degree without parallel, in a manner, and in directions, without example among the normal sons of men, were awakened intuitions and visions which, clothed in words with an ease, a brevity, a power never before or since attained—have for their perfect human kindliness and grace rendered all after-ages grateful and loving towards him. In this way he has become, in respect of the common life of man in all its aspects and experiences, especially as developed amongst ourselves and the other English-speaking portions of the human race, pre-eminently THE SEER and THE INTERPRETER.

This is indeed, what all poets are, whose words men do not willingly let die : one in this direction, another in that. We cherish their utterances because they say what we would like to say : they express for us what we have on some occasion, dimly thought or vaguely felt ; they define and embody the faint, transient mental glimpses, the otherwise quickly forgotten glimmerings of phantasy, imagination, inward light,—call it what you will,—which have mysteriously visited ourselves. But our national poet has deserved the titles—SEER—INTERPRETER—beyond all other men, because his field of view, his sphere of insight and open speech, embraced with an astonishing completeness the areas great and small, ethereal and earthly, of every other poetic thinker.

The manifestation of such an one in the midst of the yeasty seethings of British and European society three hundred years ago—made the programme, so to speak, of the commenced renovation more rounded and complete.