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POETS AS INTERPRETERS

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ABSTRACT

The poet is a heroic figure belonging, to all ages. The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the center. For the world is not painted or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe. Therefore the poet is not any permissive potentate, but is emperor in his own right.

Introduction:

The sign and credentials of the poet are that he announces that which no man foretold. He is a beholder of ideas and an utterer of the necessary and causal. The poet must move people to virtue. The poet teaches virtue to move at the command of passions. The poet's world is morally better than the world of actuality. Invention is the distinguishing characteristic of a poet; he creates a better world. The real world is brazen, the poet makes it golden. He gives a better alternative to reality.

Discussion:

The poets are not the bringers of new tidings, but are the revealers of the significance of things and of deeds. They bring the obscure to light and say the commonplace with radiant energy. Their glorious platitudes are what men need if they would keep in the paths of true progress. Their ability to gird the mind with strength. In the literature of power they stand pre-eminent. Their passions are elemental and universal. Reading them we receive the inflowing energy which comes from intellectual and moral exaltation.

Many are the men who assert their claims to lead humanity through the wilderness to safety

and fullness of Joy – Scientists, Sages, Economists, Theologians, and Philosophers – but the poets differ from all other leaders in very decided ways.

IN WHAT MANNER DO THE POETS HELP US?

Of Course we must distinguish between the greater and the lesser poets; the poets of mood and the poets of vision. Some are but idle singers of an empty day, troubadours who shorten the way of our pilgrimage by their songs. We read them for pleasure, or to feel more intimately some phase of experience.

The greatest poets without exception have been great men. A mighty torrent does not rush from a six-inch pipe; neither has the Creator yet sent a stupendous truth into the world through a trivial mind. A plain man but never a plain mind, may utter momentous things. Aeschylus, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe were comprehensive, balanced men; a civilization or an epoch could speak through them.

Poetry is the blossom and fragrance of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language. The great poets are keenly sensitive men, reacting powerfully to influences which would be unnoticed by Coarser natures.

Poets reveal to us something we should otherwise miss; they uncover a real world of beauty and significance; they apprehend qualities in objects and situations which are veiled to ordinary mortals; they lift the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and make familiar objects be as if they were not familiar: to use the fine words of Shelley. This delicate sensitivity causes them to feel keenly, to react powerfully and the strength of their emotions quickness all their intellectual processes. They seem to be lifted above themselves, and thought and emotion become inspiration, art, poetry.

The poets help us because they are mightily concerned with life. Poetry is a revelation or an interpretation of life in some of its aspects. Great poetry interprets life greatly; it reveals experience in amplest range, comprehensively and profoundly. The most gifted and permanent leaders of the world have all had the minds and usually the methods of poets. The philosophers talk about life, the poets represent it; they reveal it in its extreme moments, its raptures, its tragedies, its victories.

The poetic material is not only life; it is life as it is known to the emotions. The treasures of the mind are constantly changing; the emotions are universal and enduring. Knowledge passes away, but

Love is Love, though Latin Swords be rust,

.....

And care is still but care,

Though Homer and his seven towns be dust.

It is because the poet feels more intensely than other men that he is capable of great and authoritative expression. Meeting us through the emotions, he imparts to us the 'feel' of life: he makes us realize its quality; he holds the cup to our lips and lets us taste its bitterness and its Joy, it's worth, and its vanity.

We have been saying that the supreme poets have been balanced and full-orbed men, uncommonly impressionable and therefore vivid, emotional, and communicative of emotions, so that we feel what they feel. Moreover, we have stated

that their material is life in its many aspects and in its in tensest moments.

We wish now to call attention to the fact that the poets use superior methods to communicate their facts and truths. They put thought in its most persuasive form, for we not only understand the idea, we see it. They think in pictures and speak in metaphors. They make truth visible through action, story, symbols, and all concrete forms. They give us not only the idea but the quality and values of truth. They make it musical in the cadence of the lines. Schopenhauer may give us the ideas and moods of pessimism, but how easily Shakespeare brings the same cold mist of depression over the mind in that sad funeral March beginning.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time,

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!

The abstractions of the philosopher cannot so readily give the 'feel' of an idea, and even the novelist cannot put so much in so little space with such enchantment of language. There is a natural magic in true poetry which opens the mind and heart. That thought may enter with least opposition. The watchers at the gate are charmed and the messenger easily enters the throne room to plead his case. Said an eminent scientist after reading an equally eminent poet. He told me what to do in a way that persuaded me to do it.

The epic poet shows us life as lived by heroes, life magnified by perilous, adventure; the lyric poet sings the truth, passionately, and musically. Remember 'there is often more truth in a legend than in a document'.

We have shown, have we not; that the greater poets are qualified to be helpers of all pilgrims on this strange journey of life because their ideas are directly related to life and its experiences; they present their thought in concrete words and vivid imagery, they appeal to the emotions and the imagination as well as to the understanding, they

bring vast areas of experience and passion to an instant focus, they use language, in their best moments, in its most perfect form, making true Arnold's bold assertion that '*Poetry is the most perfect speech of man*'. They lift us into the High Mood; they give us power and the vision splendid.

The poets have always believed that their office was to make men better. The highest human interests are Virtue and Truth. The poet teaches truth and virtue better than any others. There is a deal of truth in Matthew Arnold's familiar statement; 'The noble and profound application of ideas to life is the most essential part of poetic greatness'. And Emerson testifies that 'the high poetry of the world from the beginning has been ethical. Poetry as form expresses thought which is sensuous and ideal; inwardly it is a Light, a Fire, a glimpse of the divine, a momentary harmony.

Poets unveil the hidden beauties of the world, the glory of the ideal, and the meaning of disaster. They have been the chief inspirers of the generations, calling them to virtue, heroism, and love. They are so elemental they have universal appeal; they sing of passion, its ecstasies and its terrors; they sing of sin and inevitable retribution; they sing the everlasting distinction between good and evil; they sing the glory of love and man's 'unconquerable will'.

The great poets interpret the innermost spirit of their country and civilization to the world. Through them the ages understand each other and bring the race of men to sympathy and unity.

Every nation gives peculiar honor, a rare homage, to its poets. They are the glory of a people, the exponents and measure of a civilization. In their magic words the thoughts of many hearts are revealed. They unveil the wonder of the world, give enchantment to the common place and significance to the trivial. They sense the eternal rhythm that runs through all things. In briefest manner and in clearest light they reveal life in its extreme moments and make visible realities not seen with the eyes.

The great poets stand on our horizons like mountain ranges, sublime witnesses to the fiery

convulsions of other days, now calm ministers of peace.

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