

In November, 1886, he retired from his active duties as inspector of schools, and in April, 1888, he went to Liverpool to meet his daughter, who had sailed from New York. While hastening toward the dock, he fell, and died without regaining consciousness.

**SHOULD GENIUS BE ENDOWED?**

In this day of endowment, when the government pensions every soldier, and rich men, who spend their lives making money, and in the end of like look out upon brains and genius struggling in poverty, and then give to pension these poverty-stricken ones, it is an interesting question as to whether brains and genius should be endowed. A little time ago "Current Literature" gave some interesting information as follows on the subject and about literary men:

Years ago, when he was himself poor, unknown and almost friendless, Mr. Upton Sinclair registered a vow that, if he could help it, no other young author should ever suffer what he had suffered. He wrote a book, "The Journal of Arthur Stirling," in which, with a wealth of harrowing detail, he pictured the life-struggle of a young poet who strived and starved and finally committed suicide. He wrote an article for The Independent in which he told of a "cause" he had found that summoned all his devotion:

"I sum it up for you in this one sentence: That the salvation of American literature depends upon the saving of the young author from the brutalizing slavery of 'What the Public Wants.' It is my thesis that the thing we call 'the world' never has been and never can be such that a man of genius should be submitted to its control; that 'control' is the shame and the blot and the agony of the long, long story of literature. It always has been possible, and always will be possible, in no way but one—by the world's denying to the man of genius a living, and a chance to do his work, unless he will conform to its ways."

He proposed for a remedy for this enslavement of genius "an institution to be subsidized by rich men for the purpose of endowing young authors of talent."

Mr. Sinclair's proposed institution has not been realized, but he is hopeful that it may be. He has talked of his plan to a well-known philanthropist, who evinced considerable interest, and suggested that the opinions of representative writers be obtained. In pursuance of this suggestion, Mr. Sinclair addressed an open letter to fifty of the leading authors of Europe and the United States.

What he had in mind, he made clear, was a permanent endowment analogous to the Nobel Fund. Its purpose would be "the encouragement of vital creative literary work, by the establishment of scholarships or prizes, to be given for a period of two or three years with the possibility of continuance if the candidate's work should make it seem worth while." He said, more specifically:

"The provision of such an endowment would have to be drawn with care. They should make clear that what is sought is young work rather than perfect work; work of a forward-looking tendency, by writers whose future is before them; and work of a new and path-breaking nature—not simply conventional and well-bred and

academic work. The competition should be open to manuscripts published and unpublished; but only to writers who are dependent upon their own efforts for a living. Also we should exclude books which have had a considerable sale; for there is no need to help successful authors."

The success of the undertaking, Mr. Sinclair conceded, would depend upon the selection of judges; and in view of the fact that there is no such thing in this world as infallibility, it would be impossible to please everyone. But surely three men could be found who (1) have produced vital work themselves, and (2) have shown penetration, sympathy and balance in their judgments upon the work of others. A certain number of the prizes, he thought, should be by the award of all three judges; there should be at least one prize for each judge to award on his own individual opinion. "In matter of importance such as this," he proceeded, "it would be worth making many mistakes to achieve one success. If we could save one Chatterton or Keats it would be worth all the cost and trouble."

"The awards should be for three classes of work: poetry, fiction, and prose writing of an inspirational character. There should be in each class one prize of one thousand dollars for three years, and two prizes of five hundred dollars for three years. I estimate the other expenses: salary of manuscript readers three thousand dollars, salaries of judges three thousand dollars, office expenses one thousand dollars—a total of \$25,000 for three years' experiment."

Mr. Sinclair added the following facts to clinch his argument:

"1. Milton, Shelley, Byron, Browning, Ruskin, Swinburne, Hugo and Goethe were all men of means.

"2. Wordsworth, Southey, Tennyson, all received incomes or pensions.

"3. Marlowe, Chatterton, Poe, Keats, and recently George Gissing and John Davidson died miserably.

"4. Men like Johnson, Carlyle, Whitman and Meredith have left testimony to the neglect and poverty which handicapped them.

"Of the few poets we have now, ——— has a pension, and ——— recently went into bankruptcy, ——— and ——— are disgracefully poor, and ——— lives like a hermit in a hut. I might tell you of a score of other men who are in utter destitution, or who have to cheapen and degrade their work deliberately; for instance, ———. Men like this do not cry their woes from housetops, and they do not write begging letters. But they would accept an award which was made under conditions which made it a public honor."

Nearly twenty of the authors took the trouble to reply, and their letters are printed in a recent issue of The Independent. The opinions expressed are very diverse. A few unreservedly indorse Mr. Sinclair's plan. The strongest letters, however, are from those who contend that financial endowment of genius is impossible and undesirable.

The poets, Edwin Markham and Bliss Carman, are among the stoutest champions of the plan. "There are many things to commend it," says Markham, "and nothing to condemn it. For one thing it would tend to give dignity to poetry and hope

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to poets. While it might call out more poetasters, it would also tend to increase the work of the bards, the authentic sayers. And anything that will add to the poetic treasure of the nation will add to the nation's glory. Verily, in these times of materialistic fatalism, anything should be welcomed that will add to the ideal element in our civilization." Mr. Carman writes, similarly:

"In the plan you outline I can see no objections; and I believe that the most ardent theorist for social reform must eventually come to your way of thinking.

"For even in the most perfectly organized society, poetry would still be in need of somethings more than popular support. In the very nature of poetry there will always be something a little in advance of our common aims, understand-

ing, and aspirations. If it is worth while, it cannot ever be quite fully valued in its own day, or rather, I should say, widely enough valued to be self-sustaining. And as you truly point out, the best poets who have come to maturity have always had some means of livelihood at their command. The idea that any sort of an artist or workman is all the better for being doomed to a life of penurious worry, in such a silly old fallacy, one wonders it could have persisted so long.

"A little hardship is good for every man at the beginning of his career, no doubt. Gives tone to his moral system, and tempers his character. But a continuity of it is crushing. The plight of bewildered and struggling genius is a disgrace to us all, but one which your noble purpose would do much to remove, I believe."