

THE LONELINESS OF GENIUS.

Beautiful Essay Presented By Miss Lillian Johnson at Psiphelian Entertainment.

Peerless and cloudless Mont Blanc towers in silence and sublimity above the hundred Alpine peaks that surround it. The eagle called by the Greeks the lone flyer; soars companionless and alone over the whitecapped mountains of the Himalayas.

"He clasped the crag with crooked hands
Close to the sun in lonely lands
Ring'd with the azure world he stands
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunder-bolt he falls."

"Littleness is gregarious; greatness is solitary." The man of genius passion-tossed by an innate power seeks fellowship in the deep untrodden silence of nature.

What is genius? Exalted intellectual power capable of operating independently of tuition, an extra-ordinary faculty for original creation and achievement? But is that all? Is it of the heart innate, soul-born and incommunicable? Some have thought it to be a combination of inherited qualities and the outcome of collective experiences of previous states of existence in this or other worlds. Is it a happy medium between the gods and man, that we must worship blindly at its throne? At any rate we are led to the conclusion that genius is volitional, intuitive power and implies penetration and concentration of mind; the power of seeing into things, and a wide mental range, a vision of the dawn. Genius beholds and understands conditions with few ideals. It solves the problems of great moment in the twinkling of an eye. It brings unity out of multiplicity, order out of confusion, harmony out of discord and light out of darkness. It can bring into language the silence and emotion of the soul. Genius by instinct withdraws from the gaities of social life and the crowded haunts of men. We do not find genius altogether inherent in the homes of the rich and great, nor in courts, nor palaces, nor classic halls, but as often in the log cabin and the humble home. From the cell at Bedford, the chamber of blindness in London, from Sinai's slope and the shores of Gennesaret have come the grandest truths ever discovered; the deepest emotions ever felt; the sublimest conceptions ever born.

"The ancients defied genius, today we venerate it. All genius deserves homage and that which is neither fortified by heroism nor protected by good fortune deserves something more—it is entitled to breathing room, to patronage, to kindness, to encouragement."

"Not oft near home does genius brightly shine."
No more than precious stones while in the mine."

The determining causes of genius have been found to be due to a combination of individual tendencies with a strong sensorial impression made during adolescence and not to hereditary and surrounding influences as was once thought. Poe, Angelo and Picardo furnish excellent proof of this statement. Sometimes surrounding influences with a predisposition and hereditary transmission determine the form that genius shall take. Sometimes

environment, particularly economic and social conditions cause genius to follow their certain bent. Dryden has said: "Genius must be born and never can be taught."

Men of genius like all other human beings have their faults. They are often careless of social duties and have but few friends. Solitude reigns on the summits. There is often found a lack of kindness among great men, envy and fear of being supplanted augments jealousy and discord. Dean Swift's stinging sarcasm caused him many lonely hours and the bitterness of being almost friendless. Pride is an important trait of a genius, for it is he who has the firmness to wound traditional customs, to bring in new ideas, to destroy cherished hopes and overturn old idols. The work of a genius is long and arduous. When a fixed idea enters his mind nothing except this exist for him. It is told of Ampere that when he was solving some problem of importance, leaving home one day he wrote upon his door the following: "Ampere is out and will not return this evening." About an hour afterwards he returned but seeing the writing he took himself for a visitor and went again not to return until night fall. When the period of meditation is over genius can assume the duties of ordinary life and be admired and envied for his brilliant qualities.

Some one has said that it is characteristic of a genius to be as individually different as possible from the rest of the world. Oftentimes it feels a depressing unworthiness. Shakespere said:

"O lest the world should task you to recite what

Merit lived in me, that you should love,
After my death, dear love, forget me quite
For you in me can nothing worthy prove."

All geniuses have a particular aversion to strangers. They feel like they are ill-disposed toward them and are making some sharp criticism. Often they are distrustful of their fellow men. It is said that Tchaikovsky, the great Russian musician when he participated in the table d'hote at a foreign hotel, fancied that every one at the table looked at him with abhorrence because he had the effrontery to force himself into their noble company.

Loneliness in men of genius is caused by superiority in endowment and delicacy in organism. The world misinterprets the thoughts and feelings of men held to be successful. They are praised, congratulated and envied when they feel far more the need of a sympathetic handshake and even the need of compassion. It is often in the most brilliant success that weakness and loneliness are more keenly felt. We reserve our sympathy for those who fail; for those who are afflicted, yet the successful often needs our sympathy more. A man once replied to a friend who had asked him if it were not a great satisfaction to have attained to such greatness. "Do you know" he said, "I think it rather the other way. To have reached a certain standard entails upon one the necessity of seeing that one never falls below it, and it is more depressing, I think to fail where one has once succeeded than never to have succeeded at

all." It hurts to fail but worse even than that is the isolation which undoubted and unquestioned success often in itself condemns in man. He can depend on no one, he can take counsel with no one, none can help or sustain him; he is surrounded with envy when he yearns for sympathy he is praised for strength when he desires to confess his weakness. "Lord Byron's life was made up of the wildest extremes and antagonism. His nature warred with its environments and his environments mocked his nature. The springs of his life were early embittered, and he felt alone in a hostile world. Born amid enemies he died amid strangers. A lyre so finely strung could not be so roughly swept and no string be broken." Our American Bryant had the temperament and nature of a delicate girl. In the great cities he was as a trembling faun in the uncouth denizens of the farm-yard; a frail plant in the sharp thistles and stunted oaks of a northern clime. The untimely death of Poe came as he lived, alone, and the brightest genius of American Literature went out in the great unknown, in whose firmament there shone no star. But these men of genius are insulated more by their fineness of intellect and their superlative sensitiveness than by neglect of the world. Their keenest grief is often utter absence of friends who are sympathetic. From Gray's Epitaph we read "He gained from Heaven—'twas all he wished—a friend." Yes! that is it, they all have admirers, patrons and flatterers, but how few have real friends! And without friends men of genius are more alone in crowded thorough-fares or parlors of a metropolis than by the sullen crater of Aetna or the voiceless shores of the Arctic sea.

Loneliness not only results from the nature of genius but enhances its power. It deepens and intensifies emotion; it gives the soul self knowledge. In the thick darkness and deep silence we come to a sense of true values and right proportions. It counteracts the undecided and dispersive influence of society. Dickens by mingling too much in society brought his literary career to an untimely end. By separation and loneliness the saints discovered the individuality of spirit, the unity of life, the breath which animates all worlds, "Now I return to the source where I came forth" said Plotinus saying, "The flight of the alone to the alone." "In whose words are summed up that sense that comes only to those who have lived inward lives. Even hence in our clay built prison the listener may now and again hear the distant silence of eternity, as in emerging from a great city into the lonely mountain fastnesses when we strain our ears to listen to the great, unbroken quiet, the vast expanse of stillness." It was in the thick still darkness that Moses heard the voice of God—Again it was in the still night time that the little boy, Samuel, heard the voice call. No great religious teachers or reformers has ever yet escaped the fasting and temptation in the wilderness. St. Paul himself the most protestant of all the apostles, the most modern minded mind in the Bible submitted to the austeries of solitude during three years of lonely preparation in Arabia for the great work he was to do. In recounting his vision to the Galatians he writes: "Immediately I conferred not with flesh and

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blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem to that were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia." Such it always is when men of genius escape the sordid life and reach the sphere of a grander, nobler purer loneliness in which they attain to the ideal.

This world would be common place indeed and drift into hopeless ruts were it not for the men of genius and their ministry to the children of men. Yet they seem like Burns to be of a nobler faith, ambassador from the courts of a high sphere and estranged from the world, the peculiarity of their nature and mission. The Scottish lad mingled in the lusiest scenes of life at the plow with simple peasants, at the board of Edinburgh's nobility. Yet he stands "among them, but not of them, in a shroud of thoughts which are not their thoughts." "Great men exist that they may be great or men. The destiny of organized nature is amelioration and who can set its limits. It is for man to tame the chaos. On every side whilst he lives to scatter the seeds of science and of song, that climate, animals, and men, may be milder and the charms of love and benefit may be multiplied, by those God fearing men on whom abides "The light that never was on land or sea!" It is they who brighten the sooty web threads of purple dwell companion angels of light the lowliest va the doors ineffa of that gold awaits.