

work, and what notes remain silent. In one we have aesthetic sensitiveness without moral discrimination; in another able logic without feeling of beauty. The whole of literature is far from being literature as a whole. The whole of literature, historically, is nothing more than a long series of limited parts, and literature as a whole can no more be imagined from grouping together these parts than could a sound man be imagined by one who knew only different forms of disease.

But to externalize literature is to miss even the ability to perceive this fact. It is to miss even the true humility characteristic of the creator, by which the creator tends to belittle poems even while glorifying poetry. The creative mind is well aware that if somehow the silent notes could be made to sound, all that literature has done in the past would seem by comparison nothing. He is impatient of his own work, knowing that its excellence is merely the power of commanding a small field. But without knowing what literature is in its essence, our reading continually goes astray. We travel the road of experience, but we travel backward. We scale the creative power by what has actually been created, rather than what has been created by the creative power; which is to measure the heavens by the highest visible hill.

Thus it seems to most students that Shakespeare is and must be supreme in literature for all time. Shakespeare, it seems, sounded all the available notes on the keyboard of life. One by one he brings every type of man and woman upon the stage, where one by one their inmost secrets are exquisitely, completely told. The gesture of good and evil, power and weakness alike he rendered in all its deepest significance.

But with the decay of personal experience, the very power of estimating values passes away. We expect nothing beyond Shakespeare, because we stand within the superficial completeness of the work and not within the profound incompleteness of the man. We do not even follow Shakespeare himself to his own consummation, his own self-estimation as a mind transcended by power unencompassed on every hand. But I recall that his old age, in the person of Prospero, deliberately broke the wand by which all those dear enchantments had been raised. Even about this mind the darkness fell. Master of motives within the range of his own experience, Shakespeare at last paid reverent homage to motives outside its ken. Breaking the magician's wand seems, to the lesser mind, merely as though the poet withdrew from poetry in the weakness of old age; but to the mind capable of standing beside Shakespeare himself the broken wand signifies nothing less than his recognition that all human drama had begun to crumble away with the perception of a greater and a beyond. Triumph is the glory of the lesser mind; humility is the glory of the great. Shakespeare's old age cannot be taken as the guttered candle, the empty lamp — it was the opening of a weary student's window at dawn, when the rising sun shames the candle to his own gladdened eyes. Shakespeare knew within himself the silent notes, and where he could not invoke masterful music he left the instrument to less sensitive hands.

Not in quantity of work, not even in what the world calls quality, therefore,

does the essence of literature lie. Shakespeare surpassed other men merely by combining in himself certain qualities other men share among themselves. There is no one element in Shakespeare not manifested since his time by many poets. He possessed no notes beyond our capacity severally to possess. But where all minds are dumb, he is dumb. What all men seek, he also sought, with an inquiry more poignant, more insistently phrased. The essence of literature consists in its power to reveal. Shakespeare's revelation is the perplexity of human life when actuated by motives resident in the personal, the outer layer of thought.

So much it is desirable to say by way of approach to the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. By minds limited to the customary closed circle of experience, these writings can be read over and over without understanding. The supreme benefit of reading them, indeed, is to learn merely how they are to be read. A lifetime might well be spent pondering them word by word, if real understanding came pure and full at the end. For in Bahá'u'lláh we have a mind whose response to the infinite creative impulse begins precisely where the "literary" effort stops. Apparently Bahá'u'lláh has not that masterful intimacy with "life" itself for the revelation of a new dominion over the generations. The truth is, however, that Bahá'u'lláh, taking "life" for granted, stands outside "life" itself for the revelation of a new motive. He does not sound the Shakespearian notes, because he sounds the notes that have been silent in us all. No comparison between Bahá'u'lláh and other writers is possible. The closest similarity to Bahá'u'lláh's writings are the utterances of Jesus. By those who love them Jesus' utterances are not comparable with literary productions. They are absorbed into the yearning spirit as from a source deeply hidden within, that the spirit may be re-actuated and transformed.

But there is a subtle distinction even here. Jesus' message was that to the infinite power surrounding our consciousness an infinite response can be made. Jesus made himself the Way for human experience to travel — every painful furlong of the Way, from the birth of the spiritual child into the indifferent flesh to the resurrection of the spiritual man at the hands of the flesh furious at its own threatened subordination. Thus the words of Jesus are the manifestation of the Christ — the power of men to respond infinitely to the infinite power of God. But Bahá'u'lláh's message does not repeat the message of Christ — it completes that message. Whereas Christ planted his words as seeds within the soul, Bahá'u'lláh's writing fertilizes those seeds as by the shining of the sun in spring. He manifests the surrounding, controlling Infinite of universal spirit just as Christ manifested the response on the part of consciousness to that Infinite control. Christ was Religion working up to its source through the painful experience of reluctant humanity; Bahá'u'lláh is Religion self-subsistent, unchanging, the beginning as well as the end of the Way.

Thus in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh there is an influence not dwelling elsewhere in literature or philosophy. That influence permeates and proceeds from a literary and philosophic form, but the power of the influence well-nigh shatters the cup of speech. Here is Truth, in distinction to facts; Reality in

distinction to logic; immovable Power in distinction to emotion. Our categories and our systems fail to contain this writing, as engineers would fail to dam the sea. Our critical faculties even prevent us from approaching its outpouring effect, for its very purpose is to create new faculties as standards in the mind. It is a Mystery, but not secretive; a Revelation, but not argumentative; Love, but not enticement. In numberless passages the flame burns visibly forth and the wine intoxicates. It is a spiritual geography for the searching mind, a home for the heart outworn. But alas, even in the abundance of midspring, the dead tree stands unmoved.

"Revelation is a fire from which proceed two effects: It creates the flame of love within the faithful, but produces the cold of heedlessness within those that hate."

"The proof of the sun is its light which shines forth encompassing the world; and the evidence of the shower is the bounty renewing the earth at its fall."

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