

From The Indian Ocean
Peecher.

Mich 13th 1887

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY NY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2013

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TOURGEE ON BEECHER.

Influence of the Preacher Who Was Pre-eminently the Christian Interpreter of Nature.

Beecher, Ruskin, and Carlyle and Their Ideals—God, Nature, and Humanity.

The Prayer in the Mountains—Beecher's Tender Outburst of Thankfulness in the Luminous Solitude.

MAYVILLE, N. Y., March 10.—*To the Editor.*
—There is no more grateful duty than the acknowledgement of obligations to the dead. The great Plymouth pastor is already embalmed in eulogy. Thousands of pulpits will to-day give utterance to critical exposition of his merits. All will find much to applaud in the remarkable life that is just ended; some will be constrained to utter words of blame, while in many voices will lurk some tone of apology. It is a curiously mixed tribute that will be offered to this man of singular genius, this restless worker, this bold almost defiant nature with its wonderful tints of sunshine and softness, its tenderness, cheerfulness and unflinching love of the beautiful.

It seems to me that the tendency at present is to consider him too much in the light of a religious teacher, rather than as an intellectual force. It is no doubt true that he was the

MOST DISTINGUISHED PULPIT ORATOR
the world has ever seen. For forty years he ministered to the most notable congregation that ever gathered to listen to a Christian preacher, and in all that time probably saw fewer vacant seats before him than ever met the eye of any other occupant of a pulpit. Old and young, stranger and familiar, friend and foe, learned and unlearned, high and low, all felt alike the charm of his wonderful personality. His words seemed to have the pentecostal power of universal comprehensibility. It might mean one thing to one heart and something different to another, but it was meaningless to none. Everybody understood and everybody felt the charm. To one his words brought smiles

and to another tears. One blamed, perhaps, and another commended, but no one was apathetic. To measure his power is quite impossible because of its unique character.

Perhaps less than any other religious thinker did his influence depend on what he taught. Indeed, hardly two of his habitual listeners could be found agreeing as to what his teachings were, yet there was no conflict between them. Whether he were right or wrong, whether he taught one doctrine or inclined to another, mattered little.

HE TOUCHED SOMEWHERE

the thought, feeling, aspiration of every one who listened—so that the mere delight of listening rendered secondary all other considerations. His speech was a sort of intellectual hasheesh which expanded and exhilarated every nature. The dullest listener dreamed wonderful dreams while under the intoxicating influence of his words. The bitterest enemy forgot his hate and followed with delight the footsteps of his fancy.

He had in a perfection unrivalled by any man of his time the faculty of obliterating himself to his hearers. What seemed oftentimes most striking and characteristic to his readers, to those who listened seemed most natural and matter of course. Men applauded what they heard and questioned what they read. He charmed and startled with his pen, and charmed and captivated with his tongue. He followed his own thought with such apparent pleasure that his hearers unconsciously engaged in a like pursuit. They forgot the man in watching the operation of his mind. The listener seemed to have the power of forecasting his utterances, which, if they startled by their boldness, seemed always to be the only thing he could naturally and reasonably have said.

THUS THOSE WHO HEARD

became in a singular degree partners in what was uttered. Each felt it to have been his own thought. He gave him credit for clothing it in new and attractive garb, but each one claimed the thought itself as a familiar child of his own consciousness. So men followed where he led them with a supreme delight, never anxious as to the end or apprehensive as to the correctness of his conclusions, but knowing that he led in the direction which their hearts and hopes pointed—along a way their feet delighted to pursue.

With the utmost positiveness, he had the least possible dogmatism. He cared little for method, but had the utmost confidence in good intentions. In a religious sense he was a gardener who did not believe in pinching and pruning—or rather they were methods it never occurred to him to use. Air and sunshine, a fresh soil, stimulating influence, and a free growth were the instrumentalities he relied on for good effects. Frames and borders, conventional forms and enforced symmetry were as irksome to his mind as his eye. He sought to trample out the weeds, clear away the overshadowing branches, and let each soul grow in its own way.

HE DID NOT SEEK

to make the vine an oak, nor compel the oak to put forth tendrils. Each heart was to him a flower to which he sought not to give uniformity of growth or hue, but to enable each to seek its own peculiar development—its especial characteristic excellence.

Because of this his influence is especially difficult to trace. Even those whose lives he has done very much to shape are often unconscious of specific influence. He seldom gave advice, and when he did its quality was not remarkable. With all his wonderful fertility of mind he was not given to suggesting new fields of action or methods of operation to others; but he had a wonderful faculty of judging the suggestions of others.

Said one who had rare opportunity to observe him in this respect: "If a man goes to him and asks, 'What shall I do?' I would not give a fig for his answer. If he lays before him three courses and asks which he shall pursue, his instinct is unerring." It is not as a religious teacher, nor even as a religious trainer, therefore, that he was greatest or most distinctively great, but

AS AN INTELLECTUAL IMPULSE—

a psychic influence. He was not so much a guide or a leader as a stimulator of mental activity and moral sensibility.

It is for this reason that his influence was harmful to some natures and weakening to others. Some people need to be led, others to be restrained. He could do neither. He encouraged—nay, he compelled, growth, expansion, enlargement. He thought it better to be deformed than dwarfed. Some natures he stimulated until efflorescence brought decay. Others ran riot under his influence and produced an abundant but imperfectly developed fruttage. Still others were weakened by premature luxuriance while others, like clinging vines, were distraught by vain searching for something to which their tendrils might cling.

For myself, and I am sure my experience is not exceptional, while I found his occasional touch most helpful and inspiring, constant or continuous following of his thought, while it did not produce satiety yet became depressing and in a sense weakening. This is no doubt due to a mental habit that can not endure over stimulation. While a

page now and then, a sermon once in a while, brought always to my mind

A MOST HEALTHFUL GLOW

indicative of renewed vigor, his frequent recurrence weakened and relaxed. For this reason I both sought and avoided him, and while regarding him with the utmost admiration it was perhaps not the unquestioning reverence with which those standing nearer to him were almost sure to be affected. Not that he seemed to me less admirable on near approach, but I seemed always to desire rest after having my imagination fired by the strange luxuriance of his thought. He always started in my mind trains of speculation which I desired to pursue to the end, while his influence was constantly leading me off into some new path. I felt something like one hurried through the main avenue of a park of wonderful beauty with a constant desire, despite its ever varying brilliancy of scene, to stop and loiter in the bosky glades which stretch away half seen on either hand.

Among the merits that will be universally accorded him there is one that seems to me pre-eminent. As an aesthetic force his influence has been singularly marked, universal, and intense. The generation to which he belonged had three high priests of the aesthetic—three great apostles of the beautiful—

CARLYLE, RUSKIN, AND BEECHER.

The one was concerned wholly with moral loveliness in man. He was a terrible frothing iconoclast, who tore down and trampled in the dust all that did not seem to him fitting and noble in individual manhood. He raved and cursed and scourged, but he raved always of moral grandeur, intellectual strength, and the essential harmony of human attributes. For externals he cared nothing. To all that appealed to sense he was absolutely dead. He saw no beauty in form and was deaf to the harmony of a sweet sound. No woman's loveliness enchained his eye nor any siren song delighted his ear. Apollo was to him only a type of senseless vanity; Venus only a flimsy cloak for villainess. The moral quality to him was everything. He did not see the toad, being blinded by the glitter of the jewel in its head. He scourged our natures to an appreciation of intellectual beauty, and a hatred of moral ugliness which the world never knew before. He was the great apostle of fitness and force—moral grandeur and intellectual uprightness. To him all beauty was human and the divine was only a grander humanity. Alas! we did not know how pitably

HE ILLUSTRATED HIS OWN IDEAL.

Ruskin's idea was the mystic unity of nature, art, and intellect. To him humanity was a harmonious compound of brain and sense. Nature was a mass of types of human passion, and art the reflection, combination, and etherealization of both. To his mind nature existed only for art's sake, art only for man's enjoyment, and man only for the development of the artistic sense, and the

perfection of artistic types. Carlyle might be termed an Anglo-Roman, Ruskin might be fitly styled a nineteenth century Greek. Both hated shams and pretense—the one in thought, the other in expression—the one in substance, the other in form. Both were pagans. Neither saw any God in nature, nor any superhuman motive in man nor art. Both thought themselves moral teachers because they hated moral ugliness. The one cared nothing for the outward expression; the other believed it inspired by essential harmony. To the one moral obliquity hid all external harmony; to the other external loveliness was an essential concomitant of inward purity. While the one saw the jewel despite the toad; the other could never believe in the jewel's existence because of the toad. Ruskin was sweet, Carlyle fierce, and both all the more intolerant.

BECAUSE EACH THOUGHT HIMSELF the especial possessor of a new and exclusive liberalism. They were both worshipers of the beautiful, but each in his own pragmatic and exclusive way. There was a certain harmony between them, and yet their teachings were mutually unworkable. Whoever would go all the way with Carlyle must some time part company with Ruskin. Yet they were the greatest exponents of the beautiful the world had ever known. Merged into one they would constitute the perfect type of human ideality. Together they stamped ineffaceably upon the intellectual life of their generation the essential harmony between the ideal and the concrete—between nature and art—between essence and expression—between form and passion—between the beautiful and the true.

To this was added a third idea, of which Mr. Beecher was almost unconsciously the chief exponent. Sympathizing alike with the moral grandeur of Carlyle's ideal of humanity and the subtle consciousness of Ruskin's interpretation of nature, he exalted and glorified them both by introducing another element—a perfect solvent of their essential differences—the thought of God. Nature, humanity, and art he saw only in their relations to the Divine. Like the others,

HE HATED SHAMS ABOVE ALL THINGS, but he believed in the true and the real, because he saw God in everything and everything in its relation to God. With Carlyle he would tolerate the toad for the sake of the jewel and like Ruskin he was inclined to the existence of the jewel because of the toad, but unlike both he felt that toad and jewel were both divine and that somewhere and somehow there was discoverable between them an essential harmony. He could not conceive of any toad without a jewel; of humanity unrelated to deity; of a nature that did not reveal the mind of a creator. He has been called a Christian pantheist. Nothing could be wider of the truth. He did not worship nature, but saw in it the evidence of God. He did not worship God as a divine man, but looked upon man with a peculiar and universal reverence as the clearest exponent—the nearest analogy of the divine.

This idea of the holiness and divinity of beauty, he impressed not only on our religious thought, but on our literature and even on our politics. The tender, exalted, and truthful religious, patriotic, and artistic ideals of the generations which have listened to his teachings owe to him the fusing, intensifying, and enlargement of the thought of his great contemporaries. He was pre-eminently the

CHRISTIAN INTERPRETER OF NATURE

He has pointed out more of the pleasant by-ways "from nature up to nature's God" than any other man has ever noted. If Darwin saw in nature the evidence of an inflexible law of development, operating through myriads of millions of years, Beecher saw in that law and in the all but unmitigable period of existence it required, new evidence of the beauty and grandeur, compassion, and glory of the One Divine. He stamped upon the human consciousness as no one else had ever done before the divinity of beauty—the divinity of its origin and the divinity of its mission to humanity. As a Christian humanitarian he was not perhaps without his equals, but as a Christian lover and interpreter of nature he is without a peer. Of the pleasant facts of nature others have taught us even more than he; but of nature as an inspired oracle no one has given such wondrous expositions. He has traced better than any other the divine harmony between God and nature and humanity—the unity that pervades, assimilates, and exacts.

Notwithstanding the fact that every page he has written, every sermon he preached, and every lecture he delivered are

LIVING WITNESSES OF THE TRUTH

I have endeavored to elucidate, I may be pardoned for illustrating it by an incident within my own knowledge.

Something more than thirty years ago a homesick Western boy wandered about the Berkshire hills. Despite their picturesque beauty they seemed petty to one accustomed to the mighty forests and vast horizons of the West. It may seem a curious thing, but the very ruggedness and irregularity of the outlook oppressed him. He longed for the silence of the great woods; the sight of its familiar denizens; the blue lake in the distance, gilded by the sunshine or flecked with white-caps by the storm. In short, he was homesick—not for home, perhaps, but for the West—for his accustomed surroundings. Of course he did not know what ailed him. He had been accustomed to the woods and a gun almost from infancy, and with a gun he sought the dwarfed and scraggy thickets upon the mountain side as a cure for the nostalgia he did not understand. Though he could traverse miles of level woodland with an instinct as unerring as a homing pigeon, he was easily lost among the hills through which the Housatonic flows in and out with puzzling uncertainty.

ONE AUTUMN DAY

When the blue haze hung over the hills;

when the maples flamed out against the hemlocks here and there in gaudy rivalry; when the beeches were growing brown; the birches beginning to show their white limbs and the willows a yellow fringe between the green aftermath of the meadows and the dark blue of the waters, he had strayed beyond the limit of his knowledge.

Perched upon the outmost point of a cliff that marks the face of one of the most noted peaks that overlook the valley, he sought anxiously but vainly for some familiar landmark. Whether it was Lee or Lennox, Stockbridge or Great Barrington that lay at his feet he could not determine. Of course everything that ought to have been familiar was absolutely unrecognizable. He was utterly lost. The only way out of his predicament was to go to some of the houses in sight in the valley, inquire his way home, and sneak back ignobly and shamefacedly along the highway.

As he was about to take this course he heard some one clambering along the rough pathway at the foot of the ledge, nigh a hundred feet below him. Screened by the thick laurels he

WATCHED THE NEW-COMER'S ADVANCE.

himself undiscovered. He knew Mr. Beecher by sight, and knew where the country house, which was then his haven of rest, was situated. He recognized at a glance the flushed face and stalwart figure then in the prime of manly strength. His brow was covered with perspiration, for besides the rough walk he had taken, he was burdened with an armful of trophies he had gathered on the way. Just at the point of the cliff a clear spring bubbled out from under a gray, mossy rock. He threw his variegated armful down, tossed off his soft hat, and, lying prone upon the ground, quenched his thirst. Then he stood up, threw back his long hair, wiped his brow, gazed at the prospect that lay outspread at his feet, sat down upon a spur of the rock, and picked up one by one the leaves and flowers he had gathered. Then he sat for a long time, silent and unmoving, looking down into the quiet valley and off at the hazy hills beyond. The boy had overcome his shyness, and was about to descend and inquire his way homeward when he heard the soft, full tones which stole with such insensible power into every ear. Looking down he saw his companion in the luminous solitude

PRAYING IN THE MIST

of the paired leaves he had scattered on the dun rock, the bright autumn sunshine lighting up the warm, brown hair and touching with unwonted radiance the soft lines of his placid face as he prayed—alone—upon the mountain, with no thought that any one but God could hear.

The boy listened in amazement. He had been accustomed to prayer. The family altar was an almost universal institution then.

Prayer as an act of duty, prayer as a religious rite, prayer as a religious service—all these were familiar things to his consciousness. He even had his own ideas about prayer and when he felt that he had been exceptionally bad or had a desire to be exceptionally good, he had sometimes tried praying on his own account over and above his share in the evening and morning devotions. He regarded it as a pretty serious business, however, a thing that needed to be done and ought by no means to be neglected, and which, if persevered in, brought at length a sort of fervid rapture which carried the worshiper into a mystic realm of supernatural bliss. But such a prayer as this he had never heard before—indeed, he has never heard such another since.

A CALM, TENDER, QUIVERING RHAPSODY of thankfulness that God had made the earth so beautiful. A burst of gratitude for mountain and valley, river and spring, rock and brake, sunshine and shadow, tinted leaf and whirring pheasant—everything that had gladdened the eye or charmed the sense during the autumnal stroll.

I have no idea how long he prayed, for the first time I thought a prayer too short. I wished he might have kept on forever. I had some curious fancies during its continuance. Perhaps, as I looked at his glowing face and saw his dewy, luminous eyes as it concluded, I may be pardoned if I thought of the Mount of Transfiguration. I trust there was no sacrilege in it. After a while I stole down and timidly asked my way home. I felt ashamed of having been an eavesdropper on his devotions. He evidently noted it, and to put me at my ease asked me if I did not think it was "a pretty cradle God had made for His children." He walked nearly a mile with me away from his house, which must have been three or four miles from our starting point, to make sure that I did not lose my way. I do not remember anything he said, but I walked all the way home in

A SORT OF DELICIOUS DREAM, full of strange, vague aspirations and sweet, tender recollections. Somehow, I came to see more in nature afterward than I had ever done before, and I have never ceased to be grateful that I heard this prayer in the mountain oratory. My relations with him were not close enough to justify recalling the incident to his memory, and I suppose he died quite unconscious of the identity of the uncouth lad whom he that day initiated not so much into nature's mysteries, for I was no mean woodman even then, but into their mystical relation to God, the giver, and man the happy recipient. It is probable he had long since forgotten the trivial incident, but for this sweet lesson, in common with many thousands, I still remain his grateful debtor.

ALBION W. TOWLER