

FESTUS.¹

AGLAURON. Well, Laurie, I have come for you to walk; but you look very unlike doing anything so good. What portend that well-filled ink-horn, and yet that idle pen, and that quire of paper, blank, I see, as yet? And your face no less so. Pray what is the enterprise before you?

LAURIE. A hopeless one! To give some account of the impression produced by a great poem.

AGLAURON. Hopeless, indeed! To “drink up Issel, eat a crocodile,” is not hard task enough for ambition like yours. You must measure the immeasurable; while growing calculate your growth; as the sunbeam passes, you must chronicle the miracles it has yet to perform before it is spent.

LAURIE. Such are the tasks proposed to man; he needs not propose them to himself.

AGLAURON. Nay, I cannot blame the poor infant. To be sure his little hands can never reach the moon, nor grasp the fire, but he would be dullard, if he did not stretch them out just so boldly. But this task of yours seems to me not only bold, but perfectly idle. A man capable of criticising a great poem has something else to do.

LAURIE. And that is? —

AGLAURON. Writing another.

LAURIE. That is not a just way of thinking. It is not the order of nature for every man to express the thought that agitates the general mind, or interpret the wonders that nature offers to all alike. What matter who does it, so it is done? When a great thought has been expressed a proportionate receptivity should be brought out. The man who hears occupies a place as legitimate in the unfolding of the race, as he who speaks. Would you have the stem insist on flowering all along from the earth to the topmost branch, instead of contenting itself with telling its history in a few blossoms, and those half-hid amid friendly leaves?

AGLAURON. Well, even if it be so, what is the use of your giving an account of the great poem? There it is; all men can read it, according to their measure. It speaks for itself; it has no need of you to speak for it; at best you only write poetry into prose.

LAURIE. My reasons, O scornful Spartan, are three, and good, because founded in nature. Men are thus acquainted with the very existence of the work. The trumpet now goes before the lyre, or the crowd are not arrested by its tones. The bookseller’s advertisement no more apprises them of the good that waits their call, than the announcement of the birth of a noble child draws a multitude to gaze on its early beauty. We tell our friends, when we have read a good book, that they may read it too; and tell our reasons for liking it, as well as we can, that they may believe us.

AGLAURON. That might be done in a simple form without any attempt at criticizing what, if it be indeed a poem, is sacred, or translating its thoughts into one’s own prose.

LAURIE. The lower kind of criticism, which cavils, measures, and strives to limit the scope of an author, is, when honest, merely the struggle of self-recovery. A great mind has overshadowed us, taken away our breath, paralyzed our self-esteem by its easy mastery; we strive to defy it, to get out of its range, that we may see it clearly, and settle its relations with ourselves. We say, ‘you would make me believe that you represent the universe; you are imperial; you conquer, you bind me; what good to me is your empire, if I am a slave at your feet? Better to me is a narrow life of my own, than passive reception of your vast life. You may have

all; but you must not be all to me. Let me find your limits; let me draw a line from you to the centre; you indicate it, but are not it. I must be freed from you, if I would know you.’

But as the cause of this is the weakness of the individual character, it bears no fruit of permanent value; it is only excusable as the means of progress. The only noble way is that of reproductive criticism. This is the natural echo of a fine and full tone; it serves to show the poet that his music has its vibration; that he is not alone in an exhausted receiver.

AGLAURON. The last I admit as a good way and a good reason. Now, which of the three is to fill that quire about “Festus?”

LAURIE. The first certainly. It is very difficult to get a copy of the work, and I wish curiosity enough might be excited to cause its republication. The last, too, is in my heart. For cavils and limitations there is no room; they follow the *conscious* of genius. Where the Delphian stands, proudly conscious of sending forth the unerring dart, this reaction may follow our involuntary burst of homage. But where, as in this “Festus,” the poet wanders, pale, possessed by the Muse, through tangled wilds of invention, awed and filled, half-unwillingly divine, the work is not triumphant artist-work; it does not dazzle us in the pride of the constructive faculty; it is a simple growth and no more, and in no other wise likely to “alternate attraction and repulsion,” than the tall forest or the heaving wave.

AGLAURON. In a hasty perusal of the book it did not seem to me so great. Why do you think it is so great?

LAURIE. I shall answer you from its pages.

“Who can mistake great thoughts?
They seize upon the mind; arrest, and search,
And shake it; bow the tall soul as by wind;
Rush over it like rivers over reeds,
Which quaver in the current; turn us cold,
And pale, and voiceless; leaving in the brain
A rocking and a ringing, —glorious,
But momentary; madness might it last,
And close the soul with Heaven as with a seal.”

AGLAURON. That passage has, indeed, a greatness, yet not untinged with —bombast.

LAURIE. You say so because you see the thought out of its natural relations.

AGLAURON. I should *not* say so, if I read a passage from Shakspeare or Milton out of its natural relations.

LAURIE. I admit it. This is no full and pregnant work of maturity, each line of which is a sounding line into the depths of a great life. You must know the atmosphere, the circumstances; you must look at it as a whole to appreciate parts, for much of its poetry is subjective, not universal, and it is the work of a boy, but a boy-giant.

AGLAURON. Why did he write, and on the only great theme too, if the soul’s progress, prematurely, and therefore unworthily? Why not, like the great bards, let his great task glitter before him like a star, till he had grown tall enough to draw it down and wear it on his brow? Such haste is no mark of greatness. It is most of all unworthy in our age, where mushroom growths exhaust and deface the soil. It is the work of genius now to reprove haste by calm,

patient, steady aspiration. Now, a man who has anything to say will be slower than ever to speak. These many-colored coats of glittering youth only get the wearer sold into the hands of the Egyptians. I must read you thereupon a passage left in my tablets by the diamond pen of one who practises on his own text.

“Who turns his riches into decoration,
To deck his glittering, motley coat withal,
The wealth that he can owe must be full small;
Little he knows what joy in contemplation
Of treasures the general may not know,
His own peculiar profit and possession,
That his own hand for his own use did fashion,
Plants that beneath his hand and eye did grow;
'Tis such alone can give; the others only show.”

LAURIE. All your censure would be just, if in this case the act of publication had its usual significance, that is, that the poet supposes he has now built a worthy monument of his life. Here nothing of the kind is implied. This book was indeed written with a pen, printed, and given to the world in the usual way; but it is as simply and transparently the expression of an era in the life, a mood in the mind, as if, like the holy books of the Jews, it were recorded in the hour of feeling, to be kept in the ark, secure from profane eyes, and only to be read to believers on days of solemn feasts. I know no book in our time so subordinated to nature. Do not consider it as a book, as a work of art at all; but as a leaf from the book of life. His postscript gives a faithful account of what he has done.

“Read this, World? He who writes is dead to thee,
But still lives in these leaves. He spake inspired;
Night and day, thought came unhelped, undesired,
Like blood to his heart. The course of study he
Went through was of the soul-rack. The degree
He took was high; it was wise wretchedness.
He suffered perfectly, and gained no less
A prize than, in his own torn heart, to see
A few bright seeds; he sowed them—hoped them truth.
The autumn of that seed is in these pages.
God was with him; and bade old Time, to the youth,
Unclench his heart, and teach the Book of Ages.”

AGLAURON. This does not remove my objection. Why give the “bright seeds,” as seeds? Why not let them lie in the life and ripen in the fulness of time? It is that very fulness that the bard should utter or predict; yours gives us but a cloudy dawn, though a sun may be behind the clouds.

LAURIE. I pray thee forgive him at once, and take him from his own point of view, even if it be not the highest. I can see reasons in himself and his time why he has done what, nevertheless, you are not wrong in blaming.

This book is the first colossal sketch made by the youth upon the Isis veil, which hung before the mysteries of his eternal life. A corner of the veil was uplifted in reply, and strains of strange and solemn music answered to his thought. He felt commanded to impart to others what has caused the crisis in his own life. Beside, by writing down the facts and putting them from him in the shape of printed book, he made them stepping stones to the future. He put from him his fiery youth, and could look calmly at it.

Then he has no way profaned himself. His book with all its faults answers to the call of the age for a *sincere* book. It is as true as if it lay in his desk, a private journal, and will not be more in his way. It reminds us of the notions we get of a holy book from the way in which Michel Angelo's Persian Sibyl is reading. This one is worthy of her devout intentness, for in its imperfections and beauties it is equally life, fluent, natural life; and surely the Sibyl would find there a divine spell, for such is couched in every truly living form.

It answers the call for sincerity, and also that for homeliness, and for the majestic negligence of nature as opposed to artificial polish, and traditional graces. And here he has the merit, which scarce any other author possesses, of being as free from the pedantry of simplicity, as the tameness of convention. What Wordsworth strives to express by clothing his muse too obstinately in hoddan grey and clouted shoon; what the good Germans fancy they attain by washing the dishes before the reader they invite to dinner, he does and is without an effort; for, through all his young life, he has never wandered from the feet of nature, not lost the sound of the lullaby to which she cradled his infancy. There is no faintest tinge of worldliness in his verse, neither obstinate ignoring of the great Babel man had reared upon the harmless earth. He perceives vice and wo, as he perceives the whirlpool and volcano, sure that there is a reason for their existence, since they are permitted by the central power which cannot err.

A friend says, "I think of the author of *Festus*, as an uncombed youth, standing on a high promontory, his hair blowing back in the wind; his eye ranging through all the wonders of sky and sea and land."

Look at him in this way, not as a man and an artist, but as a boy, though one of the deepest and most fervid nature, and also as a Seer, and you will appreciate the greatness of his poem, a sort of greatness which, if he had waited till a period when he might have made it more perfect, it would not have possessed. In boldness of conception, and in delicate touches of wild nature, wild passion, it is unsurpassed. It speaks from soul to soul; and claims the intervention of reflective intellect, almost as little as one of those luxuriant growths of popular genius, a Greek mythus.

Again, the work reminds me of the theory of the formation of the firmaments from nebulæ. If you look steadily through a telescope of sufficient power, great part of the milky streak, that cleaves the blue of infinite space, is resolved into star-dust. Between, lie large tracts, which, at least to our vision, seem mere nebulæ still. But we perceive in this universe, as a whole, a law which, if it has not yet, will, in due time, evolve systems of exquisite harmony, manifold life, from the still flowing, floating, cloudlike mists.

AGLAURON. Well! I will use your telescope, and lay Milton and Dante on the shelf for today. I know the coral-reef is, in truth, as much a sculpture as the Jupiter of Phidias. You shall lecture to me on your poem, and I will write down what you say; thus shall we easily fill the quire of paper, and that beautiful afternoon with happy intercourse as well.

LAURIE. With all my heart. The blank sheets look formidable no longer, for, maugre all my faith in the public mind, I do confess, I am more easily drawn out by the private one, whose relations with mine are so established, that it can draw me up from the deepest water, or bewildering quicksands, with one pull at the net of gold in which it holds so large a portion of my thoughts. I shall begin by making you copy extracts.

AGLAURON. I read best so; but deal more, I bed, with star-dust than the yet unresolved mists.

LAURIE. I do not know how the work was received in England; probably, if much spoken of, with the same bat-like indignation usual at the entrance of a new sunbeam on this diurnal sphere. But in *Heraud's Monthly Magazine*, it was warmly praised, and the author answered by publishing in that periodical an "Addition Scene to Festus," from which I shall quote largely; for it speaks both of the poet and poesy better than any other could.

It is a conversation between the Student introduced in *Festus*, and Festus himself, (redivivus.)

"STUDENT.

When first and last we met, we talked on studies;
Poetry only I confess is mine,
And is the only thing I think or read of.

FESTUS.

But poetry is not confined to books,
For the creative spirit which thou seekest
Is in thee, and about thee; yea, it hath
God's every-where-ness.

STUDENT.

Truly it was for this
I sought to know thy thoughts, and hear the course
Thou wouldst lay out for one who longs to win
A name among the nations.

FESTUS.

First of all,
Care not about the name, but bind thyself,
Body and soul, to nature hiddenly;
Lo, the great march of stars from earth to earth,
Through heaven. The earth speaks inwardly alone.
Let no man know thy business, save some friend,
A man of mind, above the run of men;
For it is with all men and all things,
The hard must have a kind, courageous heart,
And natural chivalry to aid the weak.
He must believe the best of everything;
Love all below, and worship all above.
All animals are living hieroglyphs.

The dishing dog, and stealthy-stepping cat,
 Hawk, bull, and all that breathe, mean something more
 To the true eye than their shapes show; for all
 Were made in love, and made to be beloved.
 Thus must he think as to earth's lower life,
 Who seeks to win the world to thought and love,
 As doth the bard, whose habit is all kindness
 To everything.

HELEN.

I love to hear of such,
 Could we but think with the intensity
 We love with, one might do great things.”

He goes on to describe himself as if telling the story of a friend.

* * * * *
 “I mean not
 To screen, but to describe this friend of mine.

STUDENT.

Where and when did he study? Did he mix
 Much with the world, or was he a recluse?

FESTUS.

He had no times of study, and no place;
 All places and all times to him were one.
 His soul was like the wind-harp, which he loved,
 And sounded only when the spirit blew,
 Sometime in feasts and follies, for he went
 Life-like through all things; and his thoughts then rose
 Like sparkles in the bright wine, brighter still,
 Sometimes in dreams, and then the shining words
 Would wake him in the dark before his face.
 All things talked thoughts to him. The sea went mad
 To show his meaning; and the awful sun
 Thundered his thoughts into him; and at night
 The stars would whisper theirs, the moon sigh hers,
 He spake the world's one tongue; in earth and heaven
 There is but one, it is the word of truth.
 To him the eye let out its hidden meaning;
 And young and old made their hearts over to him;
*And thoughts were told to him as unto none,
 Save one who heareth, said and unsaid, all.*

* * * * *
 All things were inspiration unto him,
 Wood, wold, hill, field, sea, city, solitude,

And crowds, and streets, and man where'er he was,
 And the blue eye of God which is above us;
 Brook-bounded pine spinnies, where spirits flit;
 And haunted pits the rustic hurries by,
 Where cold wet ghosts sit ringing jingling bells;
 Old orchards' leaf-roofed aisles, and red-cheeked load;
 And the blood-colored tears which yew-trees weep
 O'er church-yard graves, like murderers remorseful,
 The dark green rings where fairies sit and sup,
 Crushing the violet dew in the acorn cup;
 Where by his new-made bride the bridegroom sips
 The white moon shimmering on their longing lips;
 The large, o'er-loaded, wealthy looking wains
 Quietly swaggering home through leafy lanes,
 Leaving on all low branches, as they come,
 Straws for the birds, ears of the harvest home;
 He drew his light from that he was amidst,
 As doth a lamp from air which hath itself
 Matter of light although it show not. His
 Was but the power to light what might be lit.
 He met a muse in every lonely maid;
 And learned a song from every lip he loved.
 But his heart ripened most 'neath southern eyes,
 Which sunned their sweets into him all day long,
 For fortune called him southward, towards the sun.

* * * * *

We do not make our thoughts; they grow in us
 Like grain in wood; the growth is of the skies,
 Which are of nature, nature is of God.
 The world is full of glorious likenesses,
 The poet's power is to sort these out,
 And to make music from the common strings
 With which the world is strung; to make the dumb
 Earth utter heavenly harmony, and draw
 Life clear and sweet and harmless as spring water,
 Welling its way through flowers. Without faith,
 Illimitable faith, strong as a state's
 In its own might, in God, no bard can be.
 All signs are signs of other and of nature.
 It is at night we see heaven moveth, and
 A darkness thick with suns; the thoughts we think,
 Subsist the same in God, as stars in heaven,
 And as those specks of light will prove great worlds,
 When we approach them sometime free from flesh,
 So too our thoughts will become magnified
 To mindlike things immortal. And as space
 Is but a property of God, wherein

Is laid all matter, other attributes
 May be the infinite homes of mind and soul.
 * * * * * *
 Love, mirth, woe, pleasure, was in turn his theme,
 And the great good which beauty does the soul,
 And the God-made necessity of things.
 And, like that noble knight in olden tale,
 Who changed his armor's hue at each fresh charge
 By virtue of his lady-love's strange ring,
 So that none knew him save his private page,
 And she who cried, God save him, every time
 He brake spears with the brave till he quelled all—
 So he applied him to all themes that came;
 Loving the most to breast the rapid deep,
 Where others had been drowned, and heeding nought
 Where danger might not fill the place of fame.
 And mid the magic circle of these sounds,
 His lyre rayed out, spell-bound himself he stood,
 Like a stilled storm. It is no task for suns
 To shine. He knew himself a bard ordained,
 More than inspired, of God inspirited,
 Making himself like an electric rod
 A lure for lightning feelings; and his words
 Felt like the things which fall in thunder, which
 The mind, when in a dark, hot, cloudful state;
 Doth make metallic, meteoric, ball-like.
 He spake to spirits with a spirit-tongue,
 Who came compelled by wizard word of truth,
 And rayed them round him from the ends of heaven;
 For, as be all bards, he was born of beauty,
 And with a natural fitness, to draw down
 All tones and shades of beauty to his soul,
 Even as the rainbow-tinted shell, which lies
 Miles deep at the bottom of the sea, hath all
 Colors of skies, and flowers, and gems, and plumes,
 And all by nature, which doth reproduce
 Like loveliness in seeming opposites.
 Our life is like the wizard's charmed ring,
 Death's heads, and loathsome things fill up the ground;
 But spirits wing about, and wait on us,
 While yet the hour of enchantment is,
 And while we keep in, we are safe, and can
 Force them to do our bidding. And he raised
 The rebel in himself, and in his mind
 Walked with him through the world.

STUDENT.

He wrote of this?

FESTUS.

He wrote a poem.

STUDENT.

What was said of it?

FESTUS.

Oh, much was said—much more than understood;
 One said, that he was mad, another, wise;
 Another, wisely mad. The book is there,
 Judge thou among them.

STUDENT.

Well: but who said what?

FESTUS.

Some said that he blasphemed, and these men lied
 To all eternity, unless such men
 Be saved, when God shall raise that lie from life,
 And from His own eternal memory;
 But still the word is lied; though it were writ
 In honey-dew upon a lily-leaf,
 With quill of nightingale, like love-letters
 From Oberen sent to the bright Titania,
 Fairest of all the fays-for that he used
 The name of God as spirits use it, barely,
 Yet surely more sublime in nakedness,
 Statuelike, than in a whole tongue of dress,
 Thou knowest, God, that to the full of worship,
 All things are worshipful; and Thy great name,
 In all its awful brevity, hath nought
 Unholy breeding in it, but doth bless
 Rather the tongue that utters it; for me,
 I ask no higher office than to fling
 My spirit at my feet, and cry thy name
 God! through eternity. The man who sees
 Irreverence in that name, must have been used
 To take that name in vain, and the same man
 Would see obscenity in pure white statues.
 Call all things by their names. Hell, call thou Hell;
 Archangel, call Archangel: and God, God.

* * * * *

HELEN.

There were some
 Encouraged him with good will, surely?

FESTUS.

Many.

The kind, the noble, and the able, cheered him;
The lovely likewise: others knew he nought of.

STUDENT.

Take up the book and if thou understandest
Unfold it to me.

FESTUS.

What I can I will;
Poetry is itself a thing of God;
He made his prophets poets; and the more
We feel of poetry, do we become
Like God in love and power.

STUDENT.

Under-makers.

FESTUS.

All great lays, equals to the minds of men,
Deal more or less with the Divine, and have
For end some good of mind or soul of man;
The mind is this world's, but the soul is God's,
The wise man joins them here all in his power.
The high and holy works, amid lesser lays,
Stand up like churches among village cots;
And it is joy to think that in every age,
However much the world was wrong therein,
The greatest works of mind or hand have been
Done unto God.

STUDENT.

So may they ever be;
It shows the strength of wish we have to be great.

FESTUS.

It is not enough to draw forms fair and lively,
Their conduct likewise must be beautiful;
A hearty holiness must crown the work,
As a gold cross the minster dome, and show,
Like that instonement of divinity,
That the whole building doth belong to God.
And for the book before us, though it were,
What it is not, supremely little, like
The needled angle of a high church spire,

Still its sole end is God the Father's glory,
 From all eternity seen, making clear
 His might and love in saving sinful man.
 One bard shows God as He deals with states and kings;
 Another as he dealt with the first man;
 Another as with heaven, and earth, and hell;
 Ours writes God as He orders a chance soul,
 Picked out of earth at hazard, like oneself,
 It is a stuated mind and naked heart
 Which he strikes out. Other bards draw men dressed
 In manners, customs, forms, appearances,
 Laws, places, times, and countless accidents
 Of peace or polity; to him these are not;
 He makes no mention, no account of them;
 But shows, however great his doubts, sins, trials,
 Whatever earth-born pleasures soil his soul,
 What power soever he may gain of evil,
 That still, till death, time is; that God's great heaven
 Stands open day and night to man and spirit;
 For all are of the race of God, and have
 In themselves good. The life-writ of a heart
 Whose firmest prop and highest meaning was
 The hope of serving God as poet-priest,
 And the belief that he would not put back
 Love-offerings, though brought to Him by hands
 Unclean and earthy, even as fallen man's
 Must be; and, most of all, the thankful show
 Of his high power and goodness in redeeming
 And blessing souls which love him, spite of sin
 And their old earthy strain, these are the aims,
 The doctrines, truths, and staple of the story.
 What theme sublimer than soul being saved?
 'T is the bard's aim to show the mind-made world
 Without, within; how the soul stands with God,
 And the unseen realities about us;
 It is a view of life spiritual
 And earthly.

STUDENT.

Let us look upon it, then,
 In the same light it was drawn and colored in.

FESTUS.

Faith is a higher faculty than reason,
 Though of the brightest power of revelation,
 As the snow-peaked mountain rises o'er
 The lightning, and applies itself to heaven.

We know in daytime there are stars about us
 Just as at night, and name them what and where
 By sight of science; so by faith we know,
 Although we may not see them till our night,
 That spirits are about us, and believe,
 That to a spirit's eye all heaven may be
 As full of angels as a beam of light
 Of motes. As spiritual, it shows all
 Classes of life, perhaps above our kind,
 Known to tradition, reason, or God's word.
 As earthly, it embodies most the life
 Of youth; its powers, its aims, its deeds, its failings
 And, as a sketch of world-life, it begins
 And ends, and rightly, in heaven, and with God;
 While heaven is also in the midst thereof.
 God, or all good, the evil of the world,
 And man, wherein are both, are each displayed;
 The mortal is the model of all men.
 The foibles, follies, trials, sufferings
 Of a young, hot, un-world-schooled heart, that has
 Had its own way in life, and wherein all
 May see some likeness of their own, 'tis these
 Attract, unite, and, sunlike, concentrate
 The ever-moving system of our feeling;
 Like life, too, as a whole, it has a moral,
 And, as in life, each scene too has its moral,
 A scene for every year of his young life,
 Shining upon it like the quiet moon,
 Illustrating the obscure, unequal earth
 And though these scenes may seem to careless eyes
 Irregular and rough and unconnected,
 Like to the stones at Stonehenge, still an use,
 A meaning and a purpose may be marked
 Among them of a temple reared to God,
 It has a plan, but no plot; life has none."

AGLAURON. Well; the plan is grand enough! and how far has it been fulfilled?

LAURIE. In the main, nobly.

The tendency of the poem is sublime, its execution vigorous, simple, even to negligence; but the majestic negligence of heroic forms. The page beams with thoughts; I say beams, rather than sparkles, because the lights are so full and frequent. The great thought of the poem, Evil the way to good; God glorified through sin and error, is inadequately expressed, and why? — Because the author, though in steadfast faith he follows its leading, sees, as yet, only glimmering or flashing lights. This is a constant source of disappointment. It is painful at last to find the mind, which seemed worthy to fathom the secretest caverns of this deep, content with superficial

statement of the orthodox scheme of redemption through grace alone. We looked for deeper insight from such passages as these.

“There lacks
In souls like thine, unsaved, and unexalted,
The light within, the life of perfectness;
Such as there is in Heaven. The soul hath sunk
And perished, like a lighthouse in the sea;
It is for God to raise it and rebuild.

* * * * * *

Evil is
Good in another way we are not skilled in.
* * * * * *
The wildflower’s tendril, proof of feebleness,
Proves strength; and so we fling out feelings out,
The tendrils of the heart to bear us up.

The price one pays for pride is mountain-high.
There is a curse beyond the rack of death,
A woe wherin God hath put out His strength,
A pain past all the mad wretchedness we feel,
When the sacred secret hath flown out of us,
And the heart broken open by deep care, —
The curse of a high spirit famishing,
Because all earth but sickens it.

* * * * * *

It is a fire of soul in which they burn,
And by which they are purified from sin —
Rid of the grossness that had gathered round them
And burned again into our virgin brightness;
So that often the result of Hell is Heaven.”

The force of these statements of faith, and the earnestness with which the problem of redemption is proposed, lead us to expect far more philosophical insight as to the *how*, than he knows, and the splinters, which his almost random blows strike from the block of truth, suggest hopes of a far nobler edifice than he has taken the trouble to build.

From Goethe he has borrowed, what Goethe borrowed from the book of Job, the grand thought of a permitted temptation. Neither poet has gone deep into the thought, which so powerfully fixed their attention. Goethe has shown the benefits of deepening individual consciousness. The author of *Festus* dwells rather upon an all-enfolding love, which brings a peculiar flower from the slough of Despond. Neither author has given more than intimations of the truth, which both felt, rather than saw. But Goethe left his unfinished leaves loose, as they fell from his life; the more juvenile poet borrowed from the church a cover in which he bound them. I mean he has accepted by religious minds, partially false, because it neglects many processes, silences many requisitions of the soul.

AGLAURON. What could you expect from such a boy on heights where Angels bashful look?

LAURIE. Verily, Aglauron! it must be some boy-David, some lyrist in the first flush of a youth anointed by the Divine Love, that should give me any hope on a theme, where the Goliaths of intellect will always fail, for they are, in their need of heavy armor, Philistines.

But though our new friend fails in this respect, the poem has given him stuff for the introduction of any thought possible to man, and his range is very wide, and often through the highest region.

He has not experience enough to lead us into many of the paths known to older pilgrims. He speaks of man, as when he nestles too close to the bosom of mother earth, and loves her warm, damp breath, better than the free but chill breeze of the sea which sternly calls him. He tells of beauty, often too passionately pursued to be found as truth, of feverish alternations, languid defiance, and thoughts better loved in the chase than the attainment.

AGLAURON. What paths does he take?

LAURIE. Only those naturally known to his age. Woman's love, and speculation on the great themes.

AGLAURON. Had he loved long and well?

LAURIE. No! The beautiful vision named us as Angela, who inhabits the planet Venus, and shines into his soul like a call to prayer, so that after the wild banquet scene his first thought is,

“Where is they grave, my love?
I want to weep,
High as thou art this earth above,
My woe is deep,”

seems rather the ideal of a possible love, than one that had been symbolized by a tangible form, and daily breathing, receiving, pervaded the whole nature of the man with its proper life. Yet in the beautiful picture of her, which is one of the finest passages in the poem, are touches which speak not only of love, but a love, and have a fragrance of the past, especially where he compared her to “a house-god.”

“I loved her for that she was beautiful,
And that to me she seemed to be all nature
And all varieties of things in one;
Would set at night in clouds of tears; and rise
All light and laughter in the morning; fear
No petty customs nor appearances;
But think what others only dreamed about;
And say what others did but think; and do
What others would but say; and glory in
What others dared but do; it was these which won me;
And that she never schooled within her breast
One thought or feeling, but gave holiday
To all; and that she told me all her woes

And wrongs and ills; and so she made them mine
 In the communion of love; and we
 Grew like each other for we loved each other;
 She, mild and generous as the sun in spring;
 And I, like earth, all budding out with love.
 * * * * * *
 The beautiful are never desolate;
 For some one alway loves them; God or man.
 If man abandons, God Himself takes them,
 And thus it was. She whom I once loved died,
 The lightning loathes its cloud; the soul its clay.
 Can I forget that hand I took in mine,
 Pale as pale violets; that eye, where mind
 And matter met alike divine? ah, no!
 May God that moment judge me when I do!
 Oh! she was fair; her nature once all spring
 And deadly beauty like a maiden sword;
 Startlingly beautiful. I see her now!
 Whatever thou art thy soul is in my mind;
 Thy shadow hourly lengthens o'er my brain
 And peoples all its pictures with thyself,
 Gone, not forgotten; passed, not lost; thou wilt shine
 In heaven like a bright spot in the sun!
 She said she wished to die and so she died;
 For, cloudlike, she poured out her love, which was
 Her life, to freshen this parched heart. It was thus;
 I said we were to part, but she said nothing;
 There was no discord; it was music ceased;
 Life's thrilling, bursting, bounding joy. She sale
 Like a house-god, her hands fixed on her knee;
 And her dank hair lay loose and long behind her,
 'through which her wild bright eye flashed like a flint,
 She spake not, moved not, but she looked the more;
 As if her eye were action, speech, and feeling.
 I felt it all, and came and knelt beside her,
 The electric touch solved both our souls together;
 Then comes the feeling which unmakes, undoes;
 Which fears the sealike soul up by the roots
 And lashes it in scorn against the skies.
 Twice did I stamp to God, swearing, hand clenched,
 That not even He nor death should tear her from me.
 It is the saddest and the sorest night
 One's own love weeping. But why call on God?
 But that the feeling of the boundless bounds
 All feeling! as the welkin doth the world.
 It is this which ones us with the whole and God.
 Then first we wept; then closed and clung together;

And my heart shook this building of my breast
 Like a live engine booming up and down.
 She fell upon me like a snow-wreath thawing.
 Never were bliss and beauty, love and woe,
 Ravelled and twined together into madness,
 As in that one wild hour to which all else,
 The past, is but a picture. That alone
 Is real, and forever there in front,

* * * * *

After that I left her
 And only saw her once again alive.”

AGLAURON. I admire this as much as you can desire.

I have rarely seen anything like this lavish splendor of beauty fresh from its source, combined with such exquisite touches of domestic feeling. The form and the essence are both manifest to the two-fold nature of the beholder. Usually the poet detains your attention too much on the beauty of the form, and the fondness it inspires, or else, rapt towards the Ideal, he makes the spirit shine too intensely through the form, so that it no more touches your human feelings, than would an alabaster mask.

But Festus has many other loves.

LAURIE. By this is merely indicated the easy yielding of a poetical nature to each beautiful influence in its kind. The poet, who wishes to weave his tapestry broad, and full of various figures, will not choose for his *motiv* a character either of the ascetic or heroic cast. Such cleave through the rest of the music with too piercing a tone, which obscures the meaning of the general harmony, and fix the attention too exclusively on their own story to let us contemplate on all sides the destiny of wider comprehension, figured in the motley page. Festus, like Faust and Wilhelm Meister, is so easily taken captive by the present, as to admit of its being brought fully before us. Had he conquered it at once, the whole poem would have been in the life of Festus himself; now it is the common tale of youth.

“He wrote of youth as passionate genius,
 Its flights and follies; both its sensual ends
 And common places. To behold an eagle
 Batting the sunny ceiling of the world
 With his dark wings, one might well deem his heart
 On heaven; but no! it is fixed on flesh and blood,
 And soon his talons tell it.”

And though of any one of his loves Festus could say,

“When he hath had
 A letter from his lady dear, he blessed
 The paper that her hand had travelled over,
 And her eye looked on, and would think he saw
 Gleams of that light she lavished from her eyes.

Wandering amid the words of love she had traced
 Like glow-worms among beds of flowers. He seemed
 To bear with being but because she loved him,
 She was the sheath wherein his soul had rest,
 As hath a sword from war.”

Yet with regard to *all* beauteous being—

“He could not restrain his heart, but loved
 In that voluptuous purity of taste
 Which dwells on beauty coldly, and yet kindly,
 As night-dew, whensoever he met with beauty.”

AGLAURON. I admit the wisdom of this course where, as in Wilhelm Meister, the aim is to suggest the various ways in which the whole nature may be educated through the experiences of this world. Were Festus throughout treated as

“A chance soul
 Picked out of earth at hazard,”

No farther expectation would be raised than is gratified in the Meister. But in both Faust and Festus, by leading a soul through various processes to final redemption, we are made to expect an indication of the steps through which man passes to spiritual purification, and here our author, notwithstanding his high devotional flight, disappoints us even more than Goethe. You smile; one must always expect to be ridiculed when addressing you *Æsthetics* from the moral point of view. Yet you cannot deny that the scope of his poems subjects your author to the same canon, by which we judge Milton and Dante.

LAURIE. I only smiled, Aglauron, at the unwonted air of candid timidity with which you propose your objection. I admit its force. I admire my poem, not for its coherence, or organic completeness, but for intimations and suggestions of the highest dignity.

The character of Festus has two fine leadings, the delicate sense of beauty which causes these many loves, and the steadfast, fearless faith, which, if it does not always direct, never forsakes him. The golden thread of the former is shown distinctly where he speaks of Clara.

“Happy as heaven have I been with thee, love,
 Thine innocent heart hath passed through a pure life,
 Like a white dove, sun-tipped through the blue sky.
 A better heart God never saved in Heaven.
 She died as all the good die—blessing—hoping.
 There are some hearts, aloe-like, flower once, and die
 And hers was of them.”

In this, as in many other passages, it is shown how the sensibility to beauty, as distinguished from the desire of appropriating it, must always, even in error and excess, have a power to

sweeten and hallow. It is thus that sentimental, as distinguished from noble beings, often disarm us, just as we are despising them.

The aspiration, which directs the course of Festus, with magnetic leading, through all the various obstructions, is shown, in the scene laid in Heaven, by his resolve, not to be shaken by threats from the demon or the dissuasions of angels, to look on God. The thoughts which are to enlighten his cloudy fatalism beam through the gentle pleadings of his mother's spirit.

“FESTUS. *Scene, Heaven.*

Eternal fountain of the Infinite,
 On whose life-tide the stars seem strown like bubbles,
 Forgive me that an atomic of being
 Hath sought to see its Maker face to face.
 I have seen all Thy works and wonders, passed
 From star to star and space to space, and feel
 That to see all which can be seen is nothing,
 And not to look on Thee, the invisible;
 The spirits that I met all seemed to say,
 As on they sped on their starward course,
 And slackened their lightning wings one moment o'er me,
 I could not look on God, whatever I was,
 And thou didst give this spirit at my side
 Power to make me more than them immortal;
 So when we had winged through thy wide world of things,
 And seen stars made and saved, destroyed and judged,
 I said-and trembled lest thou shouldst not hear me,
 And make thyself right ready to forgive—
 I will see God, before I die, in Heaven.
 Forgive me, God!

GOD.

Rise, mortal! look on me.

FESTUS.

Oh! I see nothing but like dazzling darkness.”

He then, overwhelmed, is given to the care of the Genius of his life.

“FESTUS.

Will God forgive
 That I did long to see him.

GENIUS.

It is the strain
 Of all high spirits towards him. Thou couldst not
 * * *behold God masked in dust,
 Thine eye did light on darkness; but, when dead,

And the dust shaken off the shining essence,
 God shall glow through thee as through living glass;
 And every thought and atom of thy being
 Shall lodge His glory—be over-bright with God.
 Come! I will show thee Heaven and all angels.

FESTUS.

How all with a kindly wonder look on me;
 Mayhap I tell of earth to their pure sense.
 Some seem as if they knew me; I know none.
 But how claim kinship with the glorified,
 Unless with them, like glorified? —yet—yes
 It is—it must be—that angelic spirit—
 My heart outruns me—mother! see thy son!

ANGEL.

Child! how art. thou here?

FESTUS.

God hath let me come.

ANGEL.

Hast thou not come unbidden and unprepared?

FESTUS.

Forgive me if it be so —I am come;
 And I have ever said there are two who will
 Forgive me aught I do—my God and thou!

ANGEL.

I do—may He.

* * * * *

Son of my hopes on earth and prayers in Heaven,
 The love of God! oh it is infinite
 Even as our imperfection. Promise, child,
 That thou wilt love him more and more far this,
 And for his boundless kindness thus to me.
 Now my son, hear me; for the hours of Heaven
 Are not as those of earth, and all is all
 But lost that is not given to God.
 Oft have I seen, with joy, thy thoughts of Heaven,
 And holy hopes which track the soul with light
 Rise from dead doubts within thy troubled breast,
 As souls of drowned bodies from the sea,
 Upwards to God; and marked them so received,
 That, oh! my soul bath overflowed with rapture,
 As now thine eye with tears. But oh! my son,

Beloved, fear thou ever for thy soul;
 It yet hath to be saved. God is all-kind;
 And long time hath he made thee think of Him;
 Think of Him yet in time! Ere I left earth,
 With the last breath that air would spare for me,
 And the last look which light would bless me with,
 I prayed thou might'st be happy and be wise,
 And half the prayer I brought myself to God;
 And lo! thou art unhappy and unwise.

FESTUS.

* * * * *
 I am glad I suffer for my faults;
 I would not, if I might, be bad and happy.
 * * * * *
 God hath made but few better hearts than mine,
 However much it fail in the wise ways
 Of the world, as living in the dull dark streets
 Of forms and follies which men brick themselves in.

ANGEL.

The goodness of the heart is shown in deeds
 Of peacefulness and kindness. Hand and heart
 Are one thing with the good, as thou shouldst be.
 Do my words trouble thee? then treasure them.
 Pain overgot gives peace, as death does Heaven.
 All things that speak of Heaven speak of peace.
 Peace hath more might than war; high brows are
 Great thoughts are still as stars; and truths, like suns,
 Stir not, but many systems tend around them.
 Mind's step is still as Death's; and all great things
 Which cannot he controlled, whose end is good."

In these passages we see the truth of what the Genius of his life says to Festus.

"I am never seen
 In the earth's low, thick light, but here in Heaven
 And in the air which God breathes I am clear."

And, again, are reminded of what is said in the "Additional Scene."

"Thus have I shown the meaning of the book
 And the most truthful likeness of a mind,
 Which hath, as yet been limned, the mid of youth
 In strengths and failings, in its over-comings,
 And in its short-comings; the kingly ends,
 The universalizing heart of youth;

Its love of power, heed not how had, although
 With surety of self-ruin at the end;
 * * * some cried out,
 'Twas inconsistent; so 'twas meant to be.
 Such is the very stamp of youth and nature;
 And the continual losing sight of its aims,
 And the desertion of its most expressed,
 And dearest rules and objects, this is youth."

The poor Student, naturally enough replies,

"I look on life as keeping me from God,
 Stars, heaven, and angel's bosoms."

AGLAURON. I feel in these passages the fault which I have heard attributed to the poem, a want of melody and full-toned rhythm.

LAURIE. I will once more defend the poet in his own words.

"Write to the mind and heart, and let the ear
 Glean after what it can. The voice of great
 And graceful thoughts is sweeter far than all
 Word-music."

Yet admitting the force of this, and that he has chosen the better part, in an age which deals too much in the pleasures of mere sound, and had rather be lulled to dreams by borrowed and meretricious melodies, than roused by a rude burst of thought, we must add, the *great* poet will be great in both, sense and sound. His verses flow about oftentimes as negligent and sere as autumn leaves upon the stream. His melodies, when sweetest, want fulness; they are not modulated on the full-sounding chords of the lyre, but on the imperfect stops of Pan's pipe. Yet they have wild charms of their own, a childlike pathos derived from pure iteration of the cadences of nature, that reminds us of passages in the Old Testament, and makes the full-wrought sweeping verse look stiff and brocaded beside its simple Pythian haste.

I hear in this verse the tones of waves and breezes, the rustling of leaves and the pleading softness of childhood. Single phrases are far more powerful than their meaning would indicate, for a throb is felt of the heart, too youthful to be conscious. It is a charm, like the outline of the half-developed form, that borrows its beauty from imperfection, the beauty of promise, as where he calls his love

"My one blue break in the sky."

or

"The more thou passest me the more I love thee,
 As the robin our winter window-guest,
 The colder the weather, the warmer his breast;"

or

“The hawk hath dreamt him thrice of wings
 Wide as the skies he may not cleave;
 But waking, feels them clipt, and clings
 Mad to the perch ’twere mad to leave
 * * * * *
 I have turned to thee, moon, from the glance,
 That in triumphing coldness was given;
 And rejoiced as I viewed thee all lonely advance,
 There was something was lonely in heaven.
 I have turned to thee, moon, as I lay
 In thy silent and saddening brightness;
 And rejoiced as high heaven went shining away,
 That the heart had its desolate lightness.”
 * * * * *

or

“The holy quiet of the skies
 May waken well the blush of shame,
 Whene’er we think that thither lies
 The heaven we heed not—ought not name.
 Oh, heaven! Let down they cloudy lids,
 And close thy thousand eyes;
 For each, in burning glances, bids
 The wicked fool be wise.”

AGLAURON. I recall a host of such passages. But I think their charm is not so much in the melody as in the picture they present, the personalities of look and gesture they bring before the mind. It is like the repetition of some fine phrase by a child, the unexpectedness of the tone and gesture makes it striking.

LAURIE. It may be so! I admit there is nothing that will bear a critical analysis. Yet beside this pathetic beauty of tones and cadences, there are passages that indicate a capacity for what may be more strictly styled music, as in the song of the Gipsy Girl. I wish I could quote it.

AGLAURON. The quire is almost filled already.

LAURIE. Well! the extracts speak for themselves without much aid of mine. Yet I wish to say a few words of his powerful conception of two actors on the strange ethereal scene.

The Son of God, as Redeemer, as Mediator, is more worthily conceived by this believing heart than by almost any before. Such beseeching tenderness, such celestial compassion is seen in one or two of Raphael’s heads of the Christ, is prophesied by one of the angels who announces the birth of a Saviour of mankind to his Four Sibyls. Such tones are breathed by Herbert’s Muse.

“ANGEL OF EARTH.
 To me earth is
 Even as the boundless universe to thee;
 Nay, more; for thou couldst make another. It is

My world; take it from me, Lord! Thou Christ
 Mad'st it the altar, where thou offeredst up
 Thyself for the creation! Let it be
 Immortal as Thy love;

Oh I have heard
 World question world and answer; seen them weep
 Each other if eclipsed for one red hour;
 And of all worlds most generous was mine,
 The tenderest and the fairest.

LUCIFER.

Knowest thou note
 God's Son to be the brother and the friend
 Of spirit everywhere? Or hath thy soul
 Been bound forever to thy foolish world?

SON OF GOD.

Think not I lived and died for thine alone,
 And that no other sphere hath hailed me Christ;
 My life is ever suffering for love.
 In judging and redeeming worlds is spent
 Mine everlasting being."

Nay, among the very fiends.

"FESTUS.

Look! who comes hither?

LUCIFER.

It is the Son of God!
 What dost thou here not having sinner?

SON OF GOD.

For men
 I bore with death — for fiends I bear with sin,
 And death and sin are each the pain I pay
 For the love which brought me down from heaven to save
 Both men and devils; and if I have sinner,
 It is but in wishing what can never be —
 That all souls may be saved; for it is wrong
 To wish what is not; as the Father makes
 And orders every instant what is best.

FESTUS.

This is God's truth; Hell feels a moment cool.

SON OF GOD.

Hell is His justice—Heaven is His love—
 Earth His long—suffering; all the world is but
 A quality of God; therefore come I
 To temper these—to give to justice, mercy;
 And to long-suffering, longer. Heaven is mine
 By birthright. Lo! I am the heir of God;
 He hath given all things to me. I have made
 The earth mine own, and all yon countless worlds,
 And all the souls therein; yea, soul by soul,
 And world by world, have I redeemed them all—
 One by one through eternity, or given
 The means of their salvation.

* * * * *

These souls

Whom I see here, and pity for their woes—
 But for their evil more—these need not be
 Inhelled forever; for although once, twice, thrice,
 On earth or here they may have put God from them—
 Disowned his prophets—mocked his angels—slain
 His Son in his mortality—and stormed
 His curses back to Him; yet God is such,
 That lie can pity still; and I can suffer
 For them, and save them. Father! I fear not,
 But by thy might I can save Hell from Hell.
 Fiends! hear ye me! Why will ye burn forever?
 Look! I am here all water; come and drink,
 And bathe in me! baptize your burning souls
 In the pure well of life—the spring of God,
 I came to save all souls that will be saved.
 Come, ye immortal fallen! rise again!
 There is a resurrection for the dead,
 And for the second dead.

* * * * *

A FIEND.

Thou Son of God! what wilt thou here with us?
 Have we not Hell enough without thy presence?
 Remorse, and always strife, and hate of all,
 I see around me; is it not enough?
 Why wilt thou double it with thy mild eyes?

SON OF GOD.

Spirit! I come to save thee.

FIEND.

How can that be?

SON OF GOD.

Repent! God will forgive thee then; and I
Will save thee; and the Holy One shall hallow.”

Surely the mystery of the Trinity never yet was uttered in so sweet and pathetic a tone.

AGLAURON. Does he construe it spiritually?

LAURIE. Spiritually, if not in the spirit of profound philosophy.

The other powerful conception is that the Demon, the rebel in the heart, the Lucifer. This is in perfect harmony with his great thought, which, as I said before, he has not been successful in bringing out, of the evil the way to good.

AGLAURON. A thought to whose greatness how few are equal! While one party would ignore and annihilate by denial the soil from which we grow, others, again, lie too near the ground, ever trailing along its surface their languid leaves, and forget that it must be penetrated with the divine rays to be transmuted into beauty and glory. How much we need a great thinker who shall reconcile these two statements! Does the poet prophesy such an one?

LAURIE. He does by his fulness of faith, that what we call evil is permitted, that nothing can exist an instant which contradicts divine law. But his intimations have the beauty of sentiment only; he has not thought deeply on the subject. He understands, but does not illustrate what was so profoundly said of the joy in heaven over him who repenteth, and worships rather than interprets the divine Love. His Lucifer, however, shows the searching tendency of his nature more than anything in the poem. The demon of the man of Uz; the facetious familiar of Luther, cracking nuts on the bed-posts, put to flight by hurling an ink-horn; the haughty Satan of Milton, whose force of will is a match for all but Omnipotence; the sorrowful satire of Byron's tempter; the cold polished irony of Goethe's Mephistopheles; all mark with admirable precision the state of the age and the mental position of the writer. Man tells his aspiration in his God; but in his demon he shows his depth of experience, and casts light into the cavern through which he worked his course up to the cheerful day.

The demon of Festus finds its parallel in a deep thought of the Hindoo Mythology, its symbol in the fabulous dragon of a poetic age. The dragon is the symbol of loneliness. It guards the hidden treasures. It must live and do its office, else they would not be accumulated in the silent caverns; it must at last be slain by some knight of the pure faith, else they can never be revealed for the use of the world.

The fault of this soul is, that its love and purity are not equal to its involuntary faith. Festus is not tempted through pride, but through coldness of purpose, instability of nature, an isolation of his particular being, hopes, and aims, from the great stream of life. The rebel comes to him, too calmly grand for deceit like that of Milton's demon, or sarcastic impudence like that of Goethe's.

“LUCIFER.

To test its worth and mark I held it brave,
In shape and being thus myself I came;
Not in disguise of opportunity;
Not as some silly toy which serves for most;
Not in the mask of lucre, lust, nor power;
Not in a goblin size nor cherub form;

But as the Soul of Hell and Evil came I
 With leave to give the kingdom of the world;
 The freedom of thyself.”

How penetrating his expression of the cold isolation which arises from wanting of a *living* faith.

“It is not for me to know, nor thee, the end
 Of evil. I inflict and thou must bear,
 The arrow knoweth not its end and aim;
 And I keep rushing, ruining along
 Like a great river rich with dead men's souls;
 For if I knew I might rejoice; and that
 To me by nature is forbidden. I know
 Nor joy nor sorrow; but a changeless tone
 Of sadness like the nightwind's is the strain
 Of what I have of feeling. I am not
 As other spirits; but a solitude
 Even to myself; I the sole spirit sole.

* * * * *
 Mortality is mine; the green
 Unripened Universe. But as the fruit
 Matures, and, world by world drops mellowed off
 The wrinkling stalk of time, as thine own race
 Hath seen of stars now vanished: all is hid
 From me. My part is done. What after comes
 I know not more than thou.”

When preaching to the multitude he shows the practical working of his mood.

“LUCIFER.
 I am a preacher some to tell ye truth.
 I tell ye too there is no time to be lost;
 So fold your souls up neatly, while ye may;
 Direct to God in Heaven; or some one else
 May seize them, seal them, send them—you know where.”

The ebb and flow in the life of the youth Festus, which gives the demon opportunity to rise upon the waters, are represented in the following passages.

“Night brings out stars as sorrow shows us truths;
 Though many, yet they help not; bright, they light not.
 They are too late to serve us; and sad things
 Are aye too true. We never see the stars
 Till we can see nought but them. So with truth.
 And yet if one would look down a deep well,
 Even at noon; we might see these same stars,

Far fairer than the blinding blue; the truth
 Stars in the water like a dark bright eye,
 But there are other eyes men better love
 Than truth's, for when we have her she is so cold
 And proud, we know not what to do with her.

* * * * * *

Sometimes the thought comes swiftening over us,
 Like a small bird winging the still blue air,
 And then again at other times it rises
 Slow, like a cloud which scales the skies all breathless,
 And just over head lets itself down on us.
 Sometimes we feel the wish across the mind
 Bush, like a rocket roaring lip the sky,
 That we should join with God and give the world
 The go-bye; but the world meantime turns round,
 And peeps us in the face; the wanton world;
 We feel it gently pressing down our arm,
 The arm we had raised to do for truth such wonders;
 We feel it softly bearing on our side;
 We feel it touch and thrill us through the body;
 And we are fools and there's an end of us."

These are fine glimpses, and such openings into the sky promise a look out into infinity. But our author is not yet of imagination all compact. He does not degrade his thought; but he does not sustain it. With master's hand he strikes out the outline, but cannot, with skill equal to his force, recreate in anatomical perfection the entire body. Throughout the poem, the Lucifer does not grow upon you, does not more deeply disclose its secret. The thought of making him love, and then give up his love to Festus, is so fine, that we are disappointed that nothing more is elicited from it than splendid passages in the scenes, which are overflowed by the "golden, gorgeous loveliness" of Elissa, whose eyes of "soft wet fire" do indeed closely encounter our own.

AGLAURON. Yet, as we look over the portfolio of bold crayon sketches, ragged, half-finished, half-effaced; the poem of great opportunities, thrown heedless by, is more impressive than the achievement of any one great deed.

LAURIE. That is not in accordance with your usual way of thinking.

AGLAURON. No! but I begin to feel the starlight nights shining, and the great waves rushing through the page of this author, and agree that he can only be judged in your way.

LAURIE. A conquest this, indeed! and I, on my side, will admit that, if you are sometimes too severe from looking only at the performance, I am too indulgent from taking into view the whole life of the man. Yes, as you, Aglauron, are in no danger of ceasing to demand excellence, your concession to the side of sympathy pleases me well.

My poet, negligently reclining, lost in reverie, soiled and torn by the long rambles, charms my fancy, as the little fisher boys have seen, half listlessly gazing on the great deep, seem to my eye, in their ragged garb and weather-stained features, more poetically fair, more part and

parcel of nature's great song, than the young and noble minstrel, tuning his lute in the princely bower, for tale select, or dainty madrigal.

AGLAURON. To return to your Lucifer; let us observe how the thought has deepened in the mind of man. If we compare the Mephistopheles and Lucifer with the buskined devil of the mob, the goblin with cloven foot and tail, we realize the vast development of inward life. What a step from slavish fears of outward injury or retribution, to representations, like these, of inward dangers, the pitfalls, and fearful dens within our nature. And he who thoughtfully sees the danger begins already to subdue.

LAURIE. The poet, my friend, the poet, ah! he is indeed the only friend, and gives us for brief intervals an Olympic game, instead of the seemingly aimless contests that fill the years between. Yet that they are only *seemingly* aimless his fulfilment shows. We date from such periods, where we saw the crown on worth brows. We cannot adjudge the palm to the aspirant before us, yet will not many thoughts and those of sacred import take birth from this hour? We have not criticized; we have lived with him.

AGLAURON. And shall we not meet him again?

LAURIE. He forbids us to expect it. But a mind, which has poured itself forth so fully, and we must add so prematurely, claims seclusion to win back "the sacred secret that has flown out of it." Its utterance has made it realize its infinite wants so deeply, that ages of silence seem requisite to satisfy in any degree the need of repose and undisturbed growth. But the reactions of nature are speedy beyond promise. Who, that paces for the first time a strand from which the tide has ebbed, and sees the forlornness of the forsaken rocks, and the rejected shells and seaweed strown negligently along, could find in the low murmur of the unrepenting waves any promise of return; yet to-morrow will see them return, to claim the forgotten spoils, and clothes in joy and power every crevice of the desolate shore. So with our poet! Here or elsewhere we must meet again.

AGLAURON. He says,

"The world is all in sects, which makes one loathe it."

LAURIE. It claims the more aid from the poet "wont to make, unite, believe." He says too of Festus, in the "Addition Scene,"

"Like the burning peak he fell
Into himself, and was missing ever after."

But we do not believe that the internal heat has been exhausted by one outbreak, and must look for another, if not of higher aim, yet of more thorough fulfilment, and more perfect beauty.

F.

Author's Notes:

1. Festus; a Poem. London. William Pickering. 1839

Source: *The Dial*, Vol. II, No. II. October 1841, pp. 231-261