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‘THE CHARACTER OF MAN IS FORMED FOR,—NOT BY HIM.’—ROBERT OWEN.

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[REVIEW.]

“THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE:”
a Poem, by Robert Buchanan. Heywood, Manchester.

We have somewhere seen it gravely stated, among the numerous objections—frequently contradictory of each other—with which our magazines and newspapers abound, that Socialism will prove the grave of all lofty thought and imagination, and that the higher manifestations of the human intellect, the visible embodiments of the abstract longing after perfection, beauty, and harmony, which flow from the labours of the Painter, the Poet, the Sculptor, and the Musician, will be unknown among us; all is to become hard, gross, material, grovelling. Our minds are to be made quadrangular, and be laid out with formal mathematical exactness, like our buildings; and if we do chance to retain the “feast of reason,” we are most assuredly to lose the “flow of soul.” The sunlight of Fancy is never to brighten, with its witchery, our monotonous course of existence.

What can have put such curious notions into the brains of these sage critics and objectors, we cannot imagine. If they knew any thing of the living principle from which emanated the strains of HOMER, of SHAKESPEARE, and BURNS, or which lights up the studio of the solitary, but rapt and enthusiastic votary of any of the sister arts, they would know that this principle is deeply enshrined in humanity, but that it depends, like all others, on surrounding influences for the bias given it and direction it may take. HOMER sang of the wars of Greece; SHAKESPEARE of English and antique history; BURNS of the simple loves and every day doings of the peasantry and people among whom his lot was cast: but the breath of genius was, in each case, infused into the external forms which lay around it, and they “became living souls.” There is nothing wonderful or strange in a rude and unsettled age of tribes of semi-savages, seizing, by force, upon the coveted goods of their neighbours; and these, in turn, visiting their plunderers with the stern and vindictive retaliation which is proper to such early stages of civilization. But battle after battle, foray after foray, might take place and be forgotten, as thousands have been, were it not that minds of superior grasp, and possessing the power of forcible expression, seize upon them, and, embalming them with their own essence, gift them with a charm which resists the destructive ravages of time. Yet, as may be seen in the case of the glorious trinity we have named, the mental powers, while they possess this conservative and elevating influence, are, in turn, dependent on the circumstances which surround them for their external manifestations. It is curious to observe how strongly the times in which they lived, modified

the genius of these three men; although, undoubtedly, had they been merely conventional writers, they would, like all such, have long since passed away to oblivion. But they observed humanity itself; they watched its utterances in joy, in sorrow, in love and hate, in prosperity and adversity. They dealt with the hopes and fears of men and women, and peopled, with prolific pen, the varied scenes of nature, with human aspirations, human feelings; thus giving humanity, in all times, an interest and excitement in their works. While the species continues, there will also continue an ineradicable sympathy with “the past, the present, and the future;” and whither shall we turn for its gratification, with similar chances of success, as to the pages of the poets who, with strong feelings and powerful modes of expression, have transfused into their pages the pulsations of the universal heart of humanity?

If, then, upon retrospection, we find that the principle, from which radiates the light of genius, has always existed and developed itself in accordance with the tastes and pursuits of the times of its possessor; if the song of love echoes alike in the bowers of the far off-Pacific Isles,* and the broomy glens of Caledonia, or the fertile meadows of Albion; are we not justified in saying, that they will continue to produce their wonted effects, similarly modified, by the new influences which will operate on man?

It may however be objected that this is the very question at issue: whether the arrangements contemplated by the Socialists will not destroy the sense of the beautiful and the sublime, upon which depend the revelations of genius itself. We confess that we wonder the question should ever have been raised. If under the comparatively inferior circumstances of past ages, the world has given birth to the men whose names shine like stars through the darkness of antiquity, how can it be doubted, that with the same faculties of human nature to operate upon, starting from a high vantage ground, raised by the very discoveries and talent of the illustrious departed, and aided by careful, unceasing, and judicious instruction, that higher altitudes may yet be attained than even the mightiest of the dead have reached?

Already the peaceful and philosophic muse of WORDSWORTH is insinuating its own gentleness and deep beauty into the public mind, and giving us a foretaste of the nature of the poetry of the future. Lacking all sympathy with the fierce contests of the “olden time” with its blood and tears, its fury and revenge, he has devoted himself to nature and humanity. The wild flowers of his mountain solitude,

* Mariner, in his interesting account of the Tonga Islands, gives some beautiful specimens of amatory and descriptive poetry.