

# Cobwebs of Thought eBook

## Cobwebs of Thought

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## OUR IGNORANCE OF OURSELVES.

Self-Analysis, apart from its scientific uses, has seldom rewarded those who have practised it. To probe into the inner world of motive and desire has proved of small benefit to any one, whether hermit, monk or nun, indeed it has been altogether mischievous in result, unless the mind that probed, was especially healthy. Bitter has been the dissatisfaction, both with the process, and with what came of it, for being miserably superficial it could lead to no real knowledge of self, but simply centred self on self, producing instead of self-knowledge, self-consciousness, and often the beginnings of mental disease.

For fruitful self analysis it is apparently necessary then to have a clear, definite aim outside self—such as achieving the gain of some special piece of knowledge, and we find such definite aims in psychology, and certain systems of philosophy—Greek, English, and German, in Plato Locke, Kant, and in the meditations of Descartes, and many others. Self-analysis is the basis of psychological knowledge, but the science has been chiefly used to explain the methods by which we obtain knowledge of the outer world in relation to ourselves. When a philosopher centres self on self, in order to know self as a result of introspection, the results have been disastrous, and have contributed nothing to knowledge, properly so-called. If religious self-examination has its dangers, so also has philosophical self-analysis for its own sake. It is a fascinating study for those who care for thought for thought's sake—the so-called Hamlets of the world, who are for ever revolving round the axes of their own ideas and dreams, and who never progress towards any clear issue. Amiel's "Vie Intime" is a study of this kind. It adds nothing to any clear knowledge of self, absorbing and interesting as the record is. It is suggestive to a great degree, and in that lies its value, but it is as vague, as it is sad. It appeals deeply to those who live apart in a world of their own, in thoughtful imaginative reverie, but its effects on the mind were deplored even by Amiel himself in words which are acutely pathetic. The pain which consumed him arose from the concentration of self on self. Self was monopolised by self, self-consciousness was produced, though without a touch of selfish egoism.

Out of this self-conscious introspection, grew that sterility of soul and mind, that dwindling of capacity, and individuality, which Amiel felt was taking place within him. A constant, aimless, inevitable habit of self-introspection was killing his mental life, before the end came physically.

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Another philosophical victim to the same habit was John Stuart Mill, at one time of his life. His father analysed almost everything, except himself, and John Stuart Mill had grown up in this logical atmosphere of analysis, and to much profit as his works show. But when he turned the microscope on his own states of feeling, and on the aims of his life, the result was melancholia—almost disease of mind. His grandly developed faculty of analysis when devoted to definite knowledge outside himself, produced splendid results, as in his *Logic*, and his *Essays*, but when he analysed himself, he gained no additional knowledge, but a strange morbid horror that all possible musical changes might be exhausted, and that there might be no means of creating fresh ones. He also feared that should all the reforms he, and others, worked for, be accomplished, the lives of the reformers would become meaningless and blank, since they were working for means, not ends in themselves. Out of this hopeless mental condition there was only one outlet possible, and that was to leave self-analysis of this sort alone for ever, and to throw himself into its direct contrary, the unconscious life of the emotions. John Stuart Mill did this, and it saved him. In Wordsworth's poetry he found sanity and healing. Happily for him that was not the age of Browning's "Fifine at the Fair." Had he fallen in with dialectical analysis in the garb of poetry, it must have killed him!

And yet "Know thyself" has always been considered supremely excellent advice, as true for our time, as for the age of Socrates. It certainly is disregarded by most of us, as fully as it was by many of the Greeks, whom Socrates interrogated so ruthlessly. Is there then a sort of self-analysis, which can be carried out for its own sake, and which can be, at the same time, of vital use? Is all self-analysis when practised for its own sake necessarily harmful, and unprofitable? It is time to ask these questions if we are ever to know how to analyse ourselves with profit, if we are ever to know ourselves. And we none of us do. As students, we are content with every other knowledge but this. After all the self probing of the religious and philosophical, during long centuries, what have we learned? Truly to ourselves, we are enigmas. To know everything else except the self that knows, what a strange position! But it is our condition. The one thing that we do not know—that we feel as if we never could know is the Self in us. Our characters, our powers, our natures, our being—what are they? Our faculties—what can we do? And what can we not do? What is the reason of this faculty, or that want of faculty? We have never reached an understanding of ourselves, which makes us not only know, but perceive what we are capable of knowing; which makes us aware, not only that we can do something, but why we can do it. We are an unknown quantity to ourselves. We can calculate on a given action in a machine, but we cannot calculate

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on our own, much less on our moods. If we would but take half the trouble to understand ourselves that we take to study a science or art—if we could learn to depend on the sequence of our own thoughts as an engineer can on the sequence of movements in his steam engine—if we could dig, and penetrate into the depths of our own being, as a miner penetrates into a seam of coal—we might then cultivate with some profit our own special lines of thought, our own gifts, that portion of individuality, which we each possess. But it is so difficult to get to know it—we are always on the surface of ourselves. What power will unearth our self and make us really know what we are and what we can do? It is because we do not know ourselves, that we fail so hopelessly to give the things which are of incalculably real worth to the world, such as fresh individuality, and reality of character. Among millions of beings how few exist who possess strong original minds! We are *not* individual for the most part, and we are *not* real. Our lives *are* buried lives; we are unconscious absorbers, and reproducers, under other words of that which we have imbibed elsewhere. We need not only fresh expressions of old statements, but actually new ideas, and new conceptions. (The fresh *subjects* people talk about, are really fresh *conceptions* of subjects.) We shall never get this bloom of freshness, and this sense of reality and individuality of view unless we cultivate their soil—to have fresh ideas, we must encourage the right atmosphere in which alone they can live. We must not let our own personality, however slight, be suppressed, or be discouraged, or interfered with by a more powerful, or a more excellent personality.

Individuality is so weak and pliable a thing in most of us that it is very easily checked—it requires watchfulness and care, and not to be overborne, for the smallest individual thought of a mind of any originality, is more worth to the world than any re-expression of the thought of some other mind, however great.

Even the “best hundred books” may have a disastrous effect upon us. They may kill some aspirations, if they kindle others. Persons of mature age may surely at some time have made the discovery that much has been lost through the dominating influence of a superior mind. Many persons, for instance, have felt the great influence of Carlyle, and Ruskin, in their youth. Carlyle could do incalculable good to some minds by his ethics of work, but irremediable harm to others; minds have actually become stunted and sterile through that part of his teaching, which was unsuited to them. Carlyle’s temperament checked their proper development. Youth has a beautiful capacity for trust and belief, and it accepts everything as equal in goodness and truth from an author it reverences. The young do not know enough of themselves, and they do not trust enough to their own instincts to discriminate. They are dominated

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and unconsciously suppressed. Ruskin, in his ethical views of art, and strange doctrines about some old masters, has done nearly as much harm to susceptible minds as Carlyle. Ruskin restricted and perverted their art ideals on certain lines as Carlyle crushed ethical discrimination. Mind have been kept imprisoned for years, and their development on the lines nature intended them to take, has been arrested, by the want of belief in their own initiative. What was inevitable for Ruskin's unique mind was yet wrong for readers, who agreed to all his theories under the influence of his fascinating personality, and through the power of his individuality. In life, we sometimes find we have made a series of mistakes of this sort, before at last we get glimmerings of what we were intended to be, and we learn at last the need of having known ourselves, and the vital necessity of cultivating the atmosphere and colour of that mind of ours, which has been used merely as a tool to know everything else.

Spiritualists and Theosophists talk of a Dominant Self, and an Astral body, and of gleams of heavensent insight. Gleams of insight and dreams do come to us, and teach us truths, which "never can be proved," and without some such intuitions the soul of man would indeed be poor,

The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar.

But the value of the intuitions is relative to the soul which has them; they cannot be conveyed to any one else, or demonstrated; they can never become Truths valid to all minds. And these last are the truths we want if we would make some orderly progress towards a given issue. And so we resort after all, to science, to see if it can solve the intellectual riddle of our being. What can it do for us? If we would really know ourselves, we want a depth of self-analysis; not a pitiful search for motives, not the superficial probings of a moralist, not the boundless, limitless, self-absorbed speculations on the nature of self of the philosopher, not the sympathetic noting of each emotion that crosses the horizon of the soul—the introspection of the Poet; these will never teach us the reason why we think and feel on certain lines, and not on others—these will never explain to us what the mind is, that is in us—what that strange thing is, which we have tried so vainly to understand. And without this knowledge how worthless is the work of the moralist; of what practical use is it for him to endeavour to alter a man's character, when he does not even know the ingredients that constitute character, still less the cause why character is good or bad. Mr. Robert Buchanan said in one of his essays: "I can advance no scientific knowledge for seeing a great genius in Robert Browning, or a fine painstaking talent in George Eliot, for thinking George Meredith almost alone in his power of expressing personal passion, and Walt Whitman supreme in his power of conveying

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moral stimulation. I can take a skeleton to pieces scientifically, but not a living soul. I am helpless before Mr. Swinburne, or any authentic poet, but quite at my ease before Macaulay or Professor Aytoun." Mr. Buchanan could presumably take the last two to pieces and analyse them as if they were skeletons; but before Swinburne, "the living soul," he is helpless. Now we want a scientific reason for all this; we want to analyse, not the skeleton, that has been done often enough, but "the living soul." We want to know the ingredients of character that constituted Mr. Buchanan's preferences. What composition gave him his special temper and character? Why did his mind tend towards Robert Browning, and away from George Eliot? Why in short did his mind work in the way it did? The more original the mind, the more its investigation would repay us. But it must be self-investigation; what we want are facts of mind, mental data and in order to get them, we must investigate the living mind. All the usual explanations of Temperament, Nature, Heredity, Education are the same difficulties, expressed in different words. Heredity is a circumstance, which has to be reckoned with, but we have to investigate, not circumstances, but results. Here is a living complex mind, no matter how I inherit it, here it is; now then, how does it work, what can I do with it? And then comes the further inevitable question—What is it? What is this thing, this me, which tends to feel and act in a certain direction—to admire spontaneously, this, and to despise with as perfect ease, that. What we need for scientific investigation into the *me* is "to utilise minds so as to form a living laboratory" *Mind* vivisection without torture, cruelty or the knife. What we want to know definitely from science is: How does this thing which I call my mind work? Science regards mind as the sum of sensations, which are the necessary results of antecedent causes. It endeavours to know how and in what way these sensations can be trained and perfected. Nearly twenty years ago, a writer in the Psychological Journal "Mind"[1] Mr. J. Jacobs, attempted to form a Society for the purpose of experimental psychology. Thinkers and scientific men have carried out this work, but the general public has not been greatly interested or interested for any length of time. No such society exists among the English public. The greater number of enthusiastic students is to be found in Italy and America. But Germany has furnished great individual workers, such as Fechner, Helmholtz, and Wundt. Collective investigation was necessary to separate individual peculiarities from general laws. Science of course aims at changing the study of individual minds/into "a valid science of mind." Mr. J. Jacobs wished a Society to be organised for the purpose of measuring mind, measuring our senses, and for testing our mental powers as accurately as weight and height are tested now, and also for experimenting



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on will practice. He believed it possible to train the will on one thing until we got it perfectly under control, and in so doing we should modify character immensely. If this proved possible, we ought to persevere until conduct becomes an art, education a principle, and mind is known as a science is known. Mr. Jacobs wanted systematic enquiries to be made into powers of attention, such as "Can we listen and read at the same time, and reproduce what we have read and heard." And into the faculties of observation and memory, with after images, and the capacity for following trains of reasoning, &c., &c., "When we read a novel, do we actually have pictures of the scenes before our minds?" Mr. Jacobs wished for enquiries into every kind of intelligence ordinary and extraordinary; out of all ingredients of character, out of early impressions, out of classified emotions to build up an answer to the question: "Is there a science of mind?" Since he wrote, much has been done in experiment by the scientific. Children's minds are constantly being investigated, and the results given to the public. Mr. Galton has to some extent popularised this sort of investigation. But it is still generally unpopular. Novelists, and artists, leisured people, women, everyone could be of use, if they would investigate themselves, or offer their minds for investigation. But after all that the scientific French, German, American, Italian, and English workers have done, we are as yet only on the threshold of mind knowledge—of what we might know—if we had ardour enough to push self-analysis in to the remotest corner of the brain, noting down, comparing, tabulating the most involuntary and ethereal sublimities that appear to flit through the mind, the most subtle emotion that hardly finds expression in language. We must push on and on till we arrive at the knowledge of a mind science. Our scientific enquirers want, as we all do, more ardour, they are dulled by a cold, uninterested public. Psychologists now seem to despair of obtaining any large results from the science. Mr. E.W. Scripture in "The New Psychology" says, in 1897, "It cannot dissect the mind with a scalpel, it cannot hope to find a startling principle of mental life." If psychological experiment could be presented somewhat apart from its technicalities, and if minds could play freely round its discoveries, how much more interesting it would be felt to be by the general public! The great experimental worker, Mr. J. Mck Cattell has given[2] some clear idea of the results he obtained by analysing and measuring sensations. The physical processes, which accompany sensations of sound and light for instance, unlike as they must be to sensations, being facts of matter in motion, yet share with them this characteristic, that sensations also have each an *order in time*, the mental processes can be measured, equally with the physical. Of course measuring sensations is only measuring "the outside of the mind"—but

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it produces among others one very suggestive result: “that as time is relative, if all things moved much more slowly or quickly than at present, we should not feel any change at all. But if our objective measures of time moved twice as fast, whilst physiological movements and mental processes went on at the same rate as now, the days of our years would be seven score, instead of three score years and ten, yet we should not be any the older, or live any the longer. If on the other hand the rate of our physiological and mental motions was doubled and we lived exactly as many years as before, we should feel as if we lived twice as long and were twice as old as now.” This is a suggestion for Mr. Well’s “Anticipations” Is evolution leading us in this direction or the other? Is it retarding or “quickenning the molecular arrangements of the nervous system?” Are we becoming “more delicately balanced so that physical changes proceed more quickly as thoughts become more comprehensive, feelings more intense, and will, stronger.” Does the time it needs to think, feel, and will become less? And we may add are the physical and mental processes of the intelligent brain, quicker, or slower than the unintelligent? For if it is the sensitive quick witted organisation, which is destined to live twice as long as it does now, how will it bear the burden of such added years? Leaving aside inquiries into Time, and Space Sense—(and what enormous faculty our minds must have that can supply these)—let us go on to Mr. J. McKeen Cattell’s analysis of memory—which is perhaps the most interesting of all to the student of mind—the analysis of memory, attention and association of ideas. Just as the eye can only see (attend to) a certain number of vibrations, for if the requisite amount is added to, the result is blankness, darkness, so the mind can only attend to a certain amount of complexity—add to the complexity and attention ceases, but, a certain degree of complexity is necessary to produce any conscious attention at all. In experiments with a Metronome and the ticking of a watch, it is found the attention at certain intervals gets weaker—from 2 to 3 seconds. The impression produced by the ticking of the watch is less distinct, it seems to disappear and then is heard again. “This is not from fatigue in the sense organ,” but apparently represents “a natural rhythm in consciousness or attention,” which interferes with the accuracy of attention. What a suggestive fact this is! Have we not all at times, felt an inexplicable difficulty in listening and attending to certain speakers, which may perhaps be explained by a difference between the rhythm of our own consciousness, and that of the voice of the speaker. In Association of Ideas the time that it takes for one idea to suggest another has been determined, but of course, it must be the average time, for people differ enormously in the speed in which ideas occur to them. It is impossible to allude here to more points, but in the same interesting

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article Mr. Mck Cattell considers it proved that “experimental methods can be applied to the study of mind, and that the positive results are significant,” and he hopes, “one day, we shall have as accurate and complete a knowledge of mind as we have of the physical world.” Beyond this knowledge of mind as a machine, the Psychologist goeth not. He ends, and what do we know more as to what mind is? Philosophy properly so-called, begins here or ought to begin. In science we experiment widely and constantly with mind and arrive at some knowledge of its workings and capacities; we learn occupation with the mind itself as a subject for observation, and we practise a self-analysis, which adds to the sum of general knowledge. Through this study we know more about our senses and their faculties, more of our own tendencies and idiosyncrasies, and in what direction they tend. We are on the way to solve some such problems as: “the influences of early impressions, the ingredients of character, the varying susceptibility to mental anguish, the conquest of the will,” and many another. These are beginnings—there is much more to attain to, if we would know mind even scientifically, for we have only attacked its breast works, but we are on the right road, as we believe, towards this most interesting of all sciences—Mind Science. From Philosophy we do not as yet know definitely that mind *is*, or what it is, or why it is. The psychologist accepts the word mind, but it is not accepted as a *philosophical* term; it is called Consciousness, Being, Ego, and anything else but mind. Notwithstanding, we all feel what we mean by the word. Though the senses divide the non-ego, the world outside us, into five separate parcels, things seen, things heard, things smelt, things touched, things tasted, there is a faculty of unifying, a sensation of unity in us, which makes us conscious of all these separate sensations as forming a whole in any object which comes into our consciousness. Kant has given this unifying faculty, or sensation, a long name, which does not make it any clearer. What is this inner power, which unifies sensations and how does it come? In some way the mind supplies it to its mental states or consciousness. And *within* us this unifying faculty, which we call Mind, is felt through the infinite number of modifications of sensations or mental states, for we are aware that what we call a mind exists in us. It is this consciousness of unity in complexity, which makes memory and identity possible. The exploded idea of mental substance and its attributes, held by the School men, was probably suggested to them by the consciousness of this mental unity. In our mentality there is something which makes each one say “My mind,” not “My minds.” Now it is this unity of sensations, which is lost, and the mind with it, if the ego is divided as Professor W. James divides it into many egos such as—the inner self—the complex self—the social self—the

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intellectual self—and so on. For how does that help us? It is the same unknown quantity in different circumstances. The self that ponders in thought, knows itself as the same that talks in society. The strange power of being able to analyse ourselves at all is one of the strangest things about us. What a world of difference lies between the unconscious self of the animal and this conscious self of man! Professor James' brilliantly written chapter of investigation into the self leaves us amused rather than enlightened. Against all arguments to the contrary, we should refuse to give up the word mind, whether it is considered vague or defective in any or every way. Mind in all its complexity, is what we have to investigate scientifically. Mind in all its complexity is what the philosopher has to explain, not mind, analysed into simple acts of consciousness. The hypnotist talks of double, treble and quadruple personalities with totally different characteristics "under suggestion," but it helps us little for we have not yet defined mind on its sane and normal sides. Considering the acuteness and the sanity of the French mind, it is somewhat strange that the French psychologists should devote themselves chiefly to the study of the insane and hysterical. Philosophy, though it gives us soaring thoughts, grand speculations, and metaphysical schemes, from Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, to Herbert Spencer, and Mr. Mallock, cannot give us any knowledge in which they mutually agree. Mr. Mallock sums up philosophy as a necessity to the mind. We *must* believe in some theory of mind, some religion, some philosophy, else life is dreary and unlivable. This appears to be the result of his book "The Veil of the Temple," and this is simply the doctrine of utility. But no philosopher, can tell us why mind works on certain lines and not on others, because they cannot tell us definitely that they *know* what mind is. Mind is a function of *Matter*: *Matter* is a function of thought: Mind is Noumenon the unseen and unknown, as contrasted with Phenomena the seen and known; the universe, the creation of the mind; the mind, the product of the universe. All these ideas and many others so widely differing can none of them receive a demonstrable proof;—these contrary statements show how far we are from possessing any real knowledge of what mind is. After all that has been written, elaborated and imagined, do we actually *know* more than Omar Khayam knew?

"There was the door to which I found no key;  
There was the veil through which I could not see;  
Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee  
There was—and then no more of Thee and Me."

Philosophy is still powerless to tell us what mind is; the self, the ego always vanishes as we seem to be nearing it, it always eludes our deepest probings—we only demonstrate our failure in regard to our knowledge of it. All this is true, but should we therefore despair? If we are born with the record on the brain of the inexorable desire to *know*, the very failure should stimulate us to further, and greater, and more fruitful questionings.

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### II.

#### CONTRASTS.

#### **CARLYLE, GEORGE ELIOT, MAZZINI, BROWNING,**

All contrasts drawn between writers, and thinkers should have for aim the setting forth of some striking and fundamental difference in thought, and it would be hard to find anywhere a greater and a more vivid contrast than that between Carlyle and George Eliot. For George Eliot's philosophy was centred in the well-being of the Race.

Carlyle's was summed up in the worth of the Individual.

George Eliot teaches in prose and still more in poetry that Personality, with its hopes, loves, faiths, aspirations, must all be relinquished, and its agonies and pains endured, should Humanity gain by the sacrifice and the endurance.

She considers the Individual as part of collective humanity, and that he does not live for himself, he has no continuance of personal life, he has no permanence, except as a living influence on the Race. This is the Positivist creed, the Racial Creed.

Beyond the influence that it exerts, spiritual personality is doomed. It is not humanity in God but humanity in itself which is to exist from age to age, solely in the memory of succeeding generations.

"Oh may I join the Choir Invisible  
Of those immortal dead, who live again  
In minds made better by their presence."

Permanence and continuance and immortality are in the race alone. George Eliot's strong accentuation of the race is the Gospel of annihilation to the individual. Yet the most personal and imaginative of poets has treated this lofty altruism in his strange, sad, beautiful poem of "The Pilgrims," with a fervour greater even than that of George Eliot.

Here are two stanzas:

"And ye shall die before your thrones be won.  
Yea, and the changed world and the liberal sun  
Shall move and shine without us and we lie  
Dead; but if she too move on earth and live,  
But if the old world with the old irons rent,  
Laugh and give thanks, shall we not be content?"



Nay we shall rather live, we shall not die,  
Life being so little and Death so good to give.”

“Pass on then and pass by us, and let us be.  
For what life think ye after life to see?  
And if the world fare better will ye know?  
And if men triumph, who shall seek you and say?”“Enough of light is this for one life’s  
span.  
That all men born are mortal, but not Man:  
And we men bring death lives by night to sow,  
That man may reap and eat and live by day.”

—SWINBURNE.

Turning from the moral grandeur of self-abnegation that fills the philosophy of humanity,  
we feel the contrast of strong human personality, which animates us with an inspiring  
sensation as we listen to the prophet of individualism.

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Few can have read Carlyle's writings in their youth, without having experienced an indescribable and irresistible stimulation, to accomplish some real work, to make some strenuous endeavour "before the night cometh." Carlyle's contempt for sloth, stings; his bitter words are a tonic, they scourge, encourage, and at times plead with poetic fervour. "Think of living. Thy life wert thou the pitifullest of all the sons of earth is no idle dream, but a solemn reality. *It is thy own; it is all thou hast to front Eternity with.* Work then like a star unhasting and unresting."

The man's soul, naked through sloth, or clothed through works, has to meet its doom, and to bear it as it best can. For Carlyle ignored the collective view of mankind, the single soul had to prostrate itself before the Supreme Power. This Supreme Power was almost as vague (to him) as George Eliot's Permanent Influence is to us. For Carlyle did not believe "that the Soul could enter into any relations with God, and in the sight of God it was nothing." There is nothing singular in this. The religious, but independent-minded Joubert thought "it was not hard to know God, provided one did not force oneself to define Him," and deprecated "bringing into the domain of reason, that which belongs to our innermost feeling."

This very well represented Carlyle's view, but it occupies but a small place in his writings. All his books, his letters, pamphlets, histories, essays show his profound living belief in the worth of individual men, as the salt of the earth, and the young are always greatly influenced by strong personalities. But the mature mind that struggles after catholicity of taste, and wide admiration, receives some rude shocks from Carlyle's treatment of humanity, as Dr. Garnett has well shown in his excellent biography of Carlyle; indeed it has led with some to the parting of the ways. For the hopes and inspirations of poet, reformer, teacher, became in great part to him as "the idle chatter of apes" and "the talk of Fools."

Mazzini's world-wide sympathies, his life of many deaths for his country, were unintelligible to Carlyle, who also described, as "a sawdust kind of talk," John Stuart Mill's expression of belief and interest in reforming and raising the whole social mass of toiling millions.

Bracing and stimulating, as is Carlyle's strong, stern doctrine of independence, of work, and of adherence to Truth for its own sake, we feel the loss his character sustained, through the contempt that grew upon him for the greater part of humanity. The Nemesis of contempt was shown in his inability at last to see even in individuals, the greatest things. Physical force came to be admired by him for itself. From hero-worship, he passed "to strong rulers, and saviours of society."



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The worth of the individual, withered and changed, and Carlyle's hopes rested finally on strength alone, just as George Eliot's thoughts centred on the influence human beings exercised on each other, and there is extraordinary beauty in this idea. How striking is her conception of the good we all receive from even the simplest lives, if they have been true lives. "The growing good of the world is partly dependent upon unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs." But some who read her books feel an underlying tone of sadness—a melancholy whisper as of a finality, an inevitable end to all future development, even of the greatest personalities. Many other writers have believed that men live in the world's memory only by what they have done in the world, but George Eliot is definite that this memory is all, that personality has no other chance of surviving. Her hopes rested on being:

"The sweet presence of a good diffused,  
And in diffusion ever more intense,  
So shall I join the Choir Invisible  
Whose music is the gladness of the world."

Both George Eliot and Carlyle over accentuated one the race, the other the individual.

Mazzini's place in thought was exactly between the two.

He believed in God *and* Collective Humanity. Humanity in God. He said: "We cannot relate ourselves to the Divine, but through collective humanity. Mr. Carlyle comprehends only the individual; the true sense of the unity of the race escapes him. He sympathises with men, but it is with the separate life of each man, and not their collective life." [3]

Collective labour, according to an educational plan, designed by Providence, was, Mazzini believed, the only possible development of Humanity.

He could never have trusted in any good and effective development from Humanity alone.

Nationality, he revered, and widened the idea, until it embraced the whole world. He said it was the mission, the special vocation of all who felt the mutual responsibility of men. But nationality of Italy meant to Carlyle, only "the glory of having produced Dante and Columbus," and he cared for them not for the national thought they interpreted, but as gigantic men. Mazzini cared for "the progressive history of mankind," Carlyle for "the Biography of great men."

Carlyle's sadness "unending sadness," came, Mazzini thought from looking at human life only from the individual point of view. And a poem by Browning, "Cleon" would have



afforded him another example of “the disenchantment and discouragement of life,” from individualism.



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Browning was as great an individualist as Carlyle; he stood as far apart from belief in Collective Humanity, and Democracy as Carlyle did, though in Italy, he felt the thrill of its nationality, as Carlyle did not. But Mazzini might have said also truly of Browning, that, with the exception of Italy, "he sympathised with the separate life of each man and not with their collective life." The sadness Mazzini attributed to Carlyle's strong individualistic point of view, ought logically then to have been the heritage of Browning also. *If* Mazzini's explanation was the true one, it is another proof of the difficulty of tabulating humanity, or of making a science of human nature. For the Individualist Browning, far from being remarkable for sadness, was the greatest of optimists amongst English poets. He had a far wider range of sympathies, than Carlyle, for failure attracted him, as much as victory, the Conquered equally with the Conqueror, indeed every shade of character interested him. Perhaps he expresses through "Cleon" some of his own strongest feelings, his insistence on the worth of individuality, his craving for deeper joy, fuller life than this world gives, and his horror of the destruction of personality. Cleon, the Greek Artist, is indeed "the other side" to the poetic altruism of "The Pilgrims" and "The Choir Invisible." Never was the yearning for Personal Continuance more vividly and more humanly presented. The Greek Artist, without any knowledge of, or belief in Immortality, hungers after it. Browning represents him as writing to and arguing with the King, who has said:

"My life.....  
Dies altogether with my brain, and arm,.....  
....triumph Thou, who dost *not* go."

And Cleon says if Sappho and AEschylus survive because we sing her songs, and read his plays, let them come, "drink from thy cup, speak in my place."

Instead of rejoicing in his works surviving he feels the horror of the contrast, the life within his works, the decay within his heart. He compares his sense of joy growing more acute and his soul's power and insight more enlarged and keen, while his bodily powers decay. His hairs fall more and more, his hand shakes, and the heavy years increase.

He realises:—

"The horror quickening....  
The consummation coming past escape,  
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—  
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,  
Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,  
Alive still, in the phrase of such as thou,  
I, I, the feeling, thinking, acting man,

The man who loved his life so over much,  
Shall sleep in my Urn. . . It is so horrible.”

He imagines in his need some future state may be revealed by Zeus.

“Unlimited in capability  
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,  
To seek which the joy hunger forces us:”

He speculates that this life may have been made straight, “to make sweet the life at large.”

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And that we are: “freed by the throbbing impulse we call Death.” But he ends by fearing that were it possible Zeus must have revealed it.

This passionate pathetic longing for joy, and life beyond death finds an echo in many hearts, which yet can admire the grand altruism of “The Pilgrims” and the selfless spirit of the Impersonal Martyr. After considering all this clash of thought, it seems as if it all resolved itself into the individual temperament which settles and modifies and adapts to itself the forms of our philosophies and religions, our Hopes and Faiths, and Despairs.

For from whence comes the real power thinkers possess over us? It is not in their forms of thought, as Matthew Arnold said most truly, but in the tendencies, in the spirit which led them to adopt those formulas. Every thinker has some secret, an exact object at which he aims, which is “the cause of all his work, and the reason of his attraction” to some readers, and his repulsion to others.

What was the secret aim then in George Eliot which made her believe so firmly in the permanent influence of Humanity, and in the annihilation of personal existence? Was the tendency of temperament developed by her life and circumstances?

What was it that developed so strong an Individualism in Carlyle and Browning and awoke in Browning such unlimited hope, and in Carlyle such “unending sadness?”

Why did the darkness and the storm of his life give Mazzini so passionate a belief in Humanity, and such an intimate faith in God? These and such-like are the problems we should have in our minds as we study the works of Great Writers, if we would penetrate into the innermost core of their nature, in short, if we would really understand them.

### III.

#### MAETERLINCK ON HAMLET.

Maeterlinck, in his first essay, “The Treasure of the Humble,” is, undoubtedly, mystical. He does not argue, or define, or explain, he asserts, but even in that book and far more so in his second, “Wisdom and Destiny,” it is real life which absorbs him as Alfred de Vigny his translator points out. In this book “he endeavours in all simplicity to tell what he sees.” He is a Seer.

Maeterlinck’s aim is to show that contrary to the usual idea, what we call Fate, Destiny, is not something apart from ourselves, which exercises power over us, but is the product of our own souls.

He takes many examples to prove this, of which Hamlet is one. Man, said Maeterlinck, is his own Fate in an inner sense; he is superior to all circumstances, when he refuses to be conquered by them. When his soul is wise and has initiative power, it cannot be

conquered by external events, and happiness is inevitable to such a soul. Maeterlinck asks: Where do we find the fatality in Hamlet? Would the evil of Claudius and Queen Gertrude have spread its influence if a wise man had been in the Palace?

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If a dominant, all powerful soul—a Jesus—had been in Hamlet’s palace at Elsinore, would the tragedy of four deaths have happened? Can you conceive any wise man living in the unnatural gloom that overhung Elsinore? Is not every action of Hamlet induced by a fanatical impulse, which tells him that duty consists in revenge alone? And revenge never can be a duty. Hamlet thinks much, continues Maeterlinck, but is by no means wise. Destiny can withstand lofty thoughts but not simple, good, tender and loyal thoughts. We only triumph over destiny by doing the reverse of the evil she would have us commit. *No tragedy is inevitable*. But at Elsinore no one had vision—no one saw—hence the catastrophe. The soul that saw would have made others see. Because of Hamlet’s pitiful blindness, Laertes, Ophelia, the King, Queen, and Hamlet die. Was his blindness inevitable? A single thought had sufficed to arrest all the forces of murder. Hamlet’s ignorance puts the seal on his unhappiness, and his shadow lay on Horatio, who lacked the courage to shake himself free. Had there been one brave soul to cry out the truth, the history of Elsinore had not been shrouded in horror. All depended not on destiny, but on the wisdom of the wisest, and this Hamlet was; therefore he was the centre of the drama of Elsinore, for he had no one wiser than himself on whom to depend.

Maeterlinck’s doctrine of the soul and its power over Destiny is very captivating, but it is doubtful if he was fortunate in his choice of Hamlet as an example of ignorance and blindness, and of failure to conquer fate, through lack of soul-power.

How Hamlet should have acted is not told us, but that it was his duty to have given up revenge is clearly suggested. We might, perhaps, sum up Hamlet’s right course, from the hints Maeterlinck has given us, in a sentence. Had he relinquished all idea of revenge and forgiven his uncle and mother, he would have ennobled his soul, gained inward happiness, spread a gracious calm around and have so deeply influenced his wicked relations, that they would have become repentant and reformed. Thus his evil Destiny would have been averted and we should have had no tragedy of Hamlet. This explanation sounds rather conventional and tract-like put into ordinary language, but, indeed, Maeterlinck’s doctrine might be compressed into a syllogism:—

All the wise are serene,  
Hamlet was not serene,  
Hamlet was not wise.

That is the simple syllogism by which Maeterlinck tests human nature. But Hamlet’s nature cannot be packed into a syllogism. A Theorist, who tries to fit into his theory a peculiar nature cannot always afford to understand that nature. The external event that froze Hamlet’s soul with horror, and deprived it of “transforming power” was a supernatural event, not “disease, accident, or sudden death!” The mandate laid on his

soul was a supernatural mandate, and as Judge Webb said in a suggestive and interesting paper:

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“The Genuine text of Shakespeare,” October number of the “National Review, 1903,” “it was utterly impossible for that soul to perform it,” or it might be added, to cast it aside. He was betrayed by the apparition “into consequences as deep as those into which Macbeth was betrayed by the instruments of darkness—the witches.” We cannot reason about Maeterlinck’s thought that if expressed “would have arrested all the forces of murder” because we do not know what the thought was, nor can any one gauge or estimate rightly the power of Hamlet’s soul to conquer external events, without taking into careful account that the Vision from another world came to Hamlet, when he was outraged at the re-marriage of his mother and full of emotion that the sudden death of his father called forth in his meditative mind.[4] But Maeterlinck never refers to anything of this sort. He does not seem to realise what the effects of the vision must have been on a complicated character—on “a great gentleman in whom the courtier’s, scholar’s eye, tongue, sword, were all united.” Hamlet was *not* an example of the normal type of the irresolute man—but the mandate laid upon his nature, it could not perform. The vision was his destiny—for Destiny lay in the nature of the mandate, as well as the nature of the man, and unhappiness was inevitable; yet Maeterlinck says, “No tragedy is inevitable, the wise man can be superior to all circumstances by the initiative of the soul. To be able to curb the blind force of instinct is to be able to curb external destiny.” Did not Hamlet curb his instincts of love for Ophelia, and love for books and philosophy, under pressure of the great commandment laid upon him? He could not curb the power of his intellect—it was too subtle and supreme, but he concealed all else. Yet Hamlet could not escape his Destiny, by curbing his instincts. The initiative of his soul worked against the duty he had to perform. And it was through his “simple, tender, good,” thoughts of, and love for his father that he kept to his task, and could not “withstand his complicated destiny.” Maeterlinck is surely wrong, too, in saying Hamlet was moved by a fanatical impulse to revenge for he spent his life in weighing *pros*, and *cons*, and in combating the idea that he must fulfil the duty laid upon him. So unfanatical was he that he even doubted at times whether the apparition was his father’s spirit. But supposing there had been “one brave soul to cry out the truth” (Maeterlinck does not say what the truth was); we will suppose that Hamlet had resolved to forgive fully and generously, would he, then, have gained the fortitude and serenity, which Maeterlinck evidently means by inner happiness? Not if he kept a shred of his inner nature. Hamlet “saw no course clear enough to satisfy his understanding.” Could such a nature be serene? But was it unwise? Judicious, wise, and witty when at ease; he could not escape the dark moods that made him indifferent to the visible world.



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"If OEdipus had had the inner refuge of a Marcus Aurelius, what could Destiny have done to him?" asks Maeterlinck. Fate we suppose would have had no power over him, if he had calmly reasoned over the terrible circumstances in which he found himself involved, and if he preserved his equanimity to the end, as M. Aurelius would have done. Does this prove more than that the two men may have had very different temperaments? But, individuality cannot be made to agree with theory, and can be tabulated in no *science* book of humanity. When Maeterlinck says, "Hamlet's ignorance puts the seal on his unhappiness," we may well ask ignorance of what? Was it ignorance of the power of will? Certainly his intellect was greater than his will. "He would have been greater had he been less great." The "concentration of all the interests that belong to humanity" was in Hamlet. Except the gifts of serenity and calmness, what did he lack? And because he was not inwardly serene, Maeterlinck considers him blind and ignorant. It is strange to connect blindness and ignorance with a wit of intellectual keenness, an imagination of a poet, and the unflinching questioning of the philosopher. Maeterlinck says: "Hamlet thinks much but is by no means wise." How does Hamlet show he had not the wisdom of life? Maeterlinck, no doubt, would dwell on his varying moods, his subtle melancholy, his nature baffled by a supernatural command. If he was not wise how strange he should have said so many words of truest wisdom both of Life and Death, "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all." We feel that Hamlet was "a being with springs of thought and feeling and action deeper than we can search." But the elements in his nature could not resolve themselves into an inner life of calm. Therefore, according to Maeterlinck, he was not wise, for he could not conquer his inner fatality—destiny in himself. Maeterlinck's ideas are very beautiful, and he writes delightfully, but his test of wisdom is questionable, for Hamlet's thoughts have captured and invaded and influenced the best minds and experiences of thinkers for centuries. How many a Shakespearean reader has *felt* that Hamlet is one of the very wisest of men as well as one of the most lovable and attractive! Not his ignorance, but his wisdom has borne the test of study and time. He did not bear the tragedy of life when the supernatural entered it, with an unshaken soul, but ourselves and the realities of life become clearer to us, the more we read his thoughts. If "it is we who are Hamlet," as Hazlitt said, it is a great tribute to his universality—but a greater one to ourselves. Indeed, we learn wisdom, not only from the lucubrations of the serene and calm, or from Hamlet, magnificent in thought, acute and playful, but also from Hamlet in his mortal struggles, in his deep questionings, and his melancholy.

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For wisdom “dwells not in the light alone  
But in the darkness and the cloud.”

### IV.

#### AN IMPOSSIBLE PHILOSOPHY.

Philosophers talk of a philosophy of art, ancient and modern. But this is unnecessary. Art is always art, or never art, as the case may be; whether it is art in the days of Pheidias and Praxitiles, of Rafael, or of Turner, or whether it is not art as in the days of its degeneration in Greece and Italy. The outward expression of course, changes, but it changes through individual and national aptitudes, not from Chronology. That indispensable and indescribable thing which is of the essence of art, is the same in all times and countries; for art is ever young, there is no old, no new, and here is its essential difference from science. In its essence, art is neither ancient or modern, because it is incapable of progress, it is the expression of an illimitable idea. We find before the Christian Era more beautiful sculpture than after it. “Ah!” Victor Hugo says in his “William Shakespeare,” “You call yourself Dante, well! But that one calls himself Homer. The beauty of art consists in not being susceptible of improvement. A *chef d’oeuvre* exists once and for ever. The first Poet who arrives, arrives at the summit. From Pheidias to Rembrandt there is no onward movement. A Savant may out-lustre a Savant, a Poet never throws a Poet into the shade. Hippocrates is outrun, Archimides, Paracelsus, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, La Place, Pindar not; Pheidias not. Pascal, the Savant, is out-run, Pascal, the Writer, not. There is movement in art, but not progress. The Frescoes of the Sistine Chapel are absolutely nothing to the Metopes of the Parthenon. Retrace your steps as much as you like from the Palace of Versailles to the Castle of Heidelberg. From the Castle of Heidelberg to the Notre Dame of Paris. From the Notre Dame to the Alhambra. From the Alhambra to St. Sophia. From St. Sophia to the Coliseum. From the Coliseum to the Propyleans. You may recede with ages, you do not recede in art. The Pyramids and the Iliad stand on a fore plan. Masterpieces have the same level—the Absolute. Once the Absolute is reached, all is reached.” And Schopenhauer says, “Only true works of art have eternal youth and enduring power like nature and life themselves. For they belong to no age, but to humanity—they cannot grow old, but appear to us ever fresh and new, down to the latest ages.” Let us disclaim then any such word as Modern in relation to art, particularly in relation to a philosophy which has to do with the principle and essence of art. Is a Philosophy of Art possible? There must be some who will think it is impossible. Have we a philosophy that explains such an apparently simple thing as how one knows anything—or of simple consciousness? Every philosopher that has attempted to explain consciousness or how we know, takes refuge

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in assumptions. At any Philosophical Society, if you ask for the explanation of simple Consciousness, the avalanche of answers, each differing from the other, will bewilder you. We know the outward appearance of an object, of which we say that we know it, but what is it *in itself*? Of that we are as much in the dark as we are of the mind that knows. We say, each of us—I know, but in philosophy we are not clear whether there is a thing that knows. We know we are conscious, but we know nothing but that bare fact. We do not know how an object swims into our consciousness. We do not know in the scientific meaning of knowledge, how we come to know any object. Our abysmal ignorance is this, that, of the thing known, and of that which knows, and of the process of knowing, we know nothing. Who can tell us how the movement of matter in the brain causes what we call thought. Is it a cause, or merely a concurrence? When we can know this much, then art may have a philosophy in which we can all agree. But, what signs are there of even the beginnings of agreement? Certainly art is not known as we know a science—perhaps we do not wish it ever to be so. And the process of art is as indescribable as the process of knowing. The advance we have made in philosophy seems to be this, that whereas one philosopher after another according to his temperament has thought he knew and has supplied us with hypotheses, and with successive clues to the mystery of Being, and with many systems of thought, we know now that none of them were adequate to supply even initial steps, and so, for the most part, we fall back on the knowledge that comes to us from living, from being, from knowing appearances, from action, and from feeling; on that position in short which Schopenhauer thought so despicable in a human being, *i.e.*, Refuge in the common sense attitude, and practically the giving up of philosophy. The outcome of all the brain work on philosophy, since the time of the Greeks, is that despair has entered into our minds of ever achieving any knowledge of the *Real*, beneath and beyond Phenomena, of a knowledge which *commands* assent. Can even a Hegel write a convincing Philosophy of Art—which implies a philosophy of complex knowing and feeling; the feeling or emotion, or sensation, which vibrates in music and colour and poetry. Could Hegel himself answer this objection: that poetry eludes all tests—that that which you can thoroughly explain in any way is not poetry, as Swinburne has said? It is the inexplicable, then, which lies at the essence of art and it is this, which if there is to be a Philosophy of Art must be its object. The Inexplicable must be the object for the thinker with his orderly sequences, his logical search for causes and results. It is not that artistic feeling is too subtle as a subject; it is that we cannot get hold of it at all. It is where? Here, in our emotion, our feeling, our imagination; it flies from us and it comes again.

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We do not ask for a philosophy of artistic *creations* (whatever they may be, in music, painting, or poetry), for a Philosophy of Art must be a philosophy of the artistic *faculty* that creates, and that admires and understands and is absorbed in the creations. Philosophy of Art is the philosophy of the creative—receptive qualities. We feel these qualities, but we are not able to explain them, we cannot even help another to feel them. The capacity comes from within. In ourselves is a nameless response to Beauty. All art is an expression of the artist thrown out towards a reproduction of some intuitive Idea within, and what artist has ever satisfied his inward aspiration? Why tell us that harmonies of art may be traced down to the simplest lines, and, that at the root, lies an aim of edification? Simplify the lines, as we will, let the basis of edification lie at the root of all beauty, still the initial question remains unanswered. Why do certain lines in a poem, curves of beauty in a statue, colour in a picture, produce in us the feelings of beauty and delight? Why does edification, if it is such, produce in me, the sense of a nameless beauty?

There is that in us which we call the sense or Idea of beauty, and we recognise it in works of art. What causes it in us? It is a sentiment, but it is more than a sentiment. It is indissolubly connected with expression, but it is more than expression. It raises all kinds of associations, but it is more than associations. It thrills the nerves, it stimulates the intellect, but it is more than a thrill, and other than the intellect; it is treatment, but who can give laws for it? The answer which explained the sense of beauty that we feel in works of art would go straight to the revelation of the essence of beauty. All that aesthetic teachers tell us is, that certain lines and colours and arrangements are harmonious, and the philosopher fails in telling us why they are harmonious. Does Hegel? Even if we are told there is an Idea in us which is also an Idea in Nature, and, therefore, we can understand the Idea, because We are It, does that throw light on what the Idea really is? We are the human side of nature, and have the same human difficulty as before in interpreting the Idea. Yet there is one philosopher, as many readers must have felt, who has brought us nearer to the interpretation of the artistic attitude, than any other, and this is Schopenhauer on what we may call his mystical side in his book of “Will and Idea.” Perhaps most philosophers have erred in too rigid an exclusion of feeling and imagination. It is impossible to help feeling that his philosophy is largely moulded and created by his feeling for art—and by his oriental mysticism. He can be curiously prosaic at the same time, and this is another proof of the infinite complexity of the mind:—he can be inartistic and unpoetic so that he almost staggers us, as in his unilluminating remarks on Landscape Art. Vegetation, according to Schopenhauer’s theory, is on a lower grade of Will Objectification or Manifestation, than men and animals are, and landscape painting is, therefore, altogether on a different plane. Through his theories he loses the power of seeing that art is concerned with treatment, with conception and expression, that beauty depends not on the object, but on the treatment of the object.

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But if we turn to his mystical theory of the Unconscious, we do get a beautiful description of the absorption, that is, of the essence of the artistic nature. He shows how the artist loses his own personality in the object of contemplation, so completely that he identifies himself mentally with it. Schopenhauer describes the artistic mind when it is affected by the beautiful and the sublime. By losing all sense of individuality and personality the artist is so possessed by his object of thought and vision that he is absorbed in it and feels the Idea, which it represents. This theory put into ordinary language, is that the artist has in him the sense of a great Idea, such as Beauty, and in his power of vision into objects of beauty he lives in the sense of Beauty, which they represent. They represent to him the Idea of Beauty itself. He lives in the Idea, is isolated in it, absorbed in it, and by the privilege of genius can keep the sense of the inner world of beauty and can produce beautiful works of art.

With joy and innocence, his whole soul absorbed in the beautiful forms which he creates, he represents the ideas within him, and he loses the sense of life and consciousness and Will, which, according to Schopenhauer, is to be freed from constant demands, and strivings. He is no longer bound to the wheel of desire—he has no personal interests—no subjectivity.

He is a “pure will-less, time-less subject of knowledge” of “pure knowing,” which means complete absorption. He excites and suggests in others the knowledge of the Ideas, which, beautiful objects represent. Thus, through the works of Genius, others may reach an exalted frame of mind, for, indeed, if we had not some artistic capacity for seeing and feeling the Ideas which works of art represent, we should be incapable of feeling or enjoying them. Perhaps, to make this abstract thought clearer, it would be well to endeavour to find some examples which will illustrate Schopenhauer’s meaning. And Shakespeare offers us incomparable examples. In his great tragedies—such as *Othello*, for instance—we feel the knowledge or Idea of Life, in all its varied human manifestations. Life, manifold, diverse, and abundant—and all felt intuitively from within. Into his creations, Shakespeare pours wide and overflowing knowledge of life; there is nothing narrow or shut in, in his conceptions, but every character is alive in the great sense, illustrating no narrow precept or trite morality, no cut and dried scheme of a petty out-look on life, but the great morals of life itself, as varied, as intangible and as inexplicable. He represents this sense of varied life as manifested or objectified in his creations, *i.e.*, his characters. In *Othello*, for instance, we have suggestions of love and jealousy that go down to the very depth of the heart, through imaginative insight. And what we are brought close to, is the vivid intense life of feeling that Shakespeare’s

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creations hold, and that we, ourselves, are capable of holding in our own hearts. In this presentation, Shakespeare flashes the sense of life with all its complexities of heart and brain into us. He does not stand, as it were aside, as a commentator on the faults or weaknesses of his characters, but he wafts us out of our circumscribed lives, out of our limitation of thought, we know not how, into an atmosphere quivering with passion, and felt by us all the keener, because we recognise that the Poet never thought about *us* at all. He excites our sympathies by his own intuitions into the clashing ideas, which he represents in the tragedy of a passionately loving and a jealous nature. We learn truths, not of fact, but of life, focussed and arranged as an artist arranges them, and permeated with that strange sense of wonder which only Life can give. We feel the suggestion of an inevitable dim something beyond, to explain the unexplainable, the tragedy of character, and the tragedy of circumstance.

These make the great crises which break up lives. But the play goes on with all the wild force of life itself. We feel the Idea of jealousy forming itself in the noble nature of Othello, and bringing with it anguish, the bitterer throes of life, those intense and hopeless moments when struggle only makes the coil close tighter round the victim. And after we have felt these, no nature remains quite the same as before. There has entered into us a power of imaginative sympathy which Art alone can inspire and only when it most inwardly reveals Life itself. Of all things, the “Too late” and the “Might have been” are the most sorrowful, and the divine possibility, cruelly realised too late, gives the sharpest edge to Othello’s mental agony, when the whole truth of Desdemona’s life—an “objectification” of loyalty, love, and purity—is only revealed to him as she lies there dead before him, killed by his own hand. All that it means rushes then like a torrent on his soul; when Othello falls on the bed, by Desdemona’s body, the remorse and love that rend him with their talons are beyond even Shakespeare’s power of expression.

With groans scarcely uttered, Othello gives the only outlet possible to the blinding, scathing storm of passions within him. There is one touch, and only the intuitive artist of humanity and of life could have known it, and given it—only one touch of consolation that could be left him, and it comes to Othello as he is dying! “I kiss’d thee, ’ere I kill’d thee.”

He fastens on this as a starving man fastens on a crumb of bread.



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Why is this so true as to be almost intolerable—and yet so beautiful? The characters have art necessities. Schiller said Art has its categorical Imperatives—its *must*, and Shakespeare's characters fulfil them. We feel how inevitable is their fate. They make their own tragedy. The Poet compresses a Life Tragedy into a few pages of manuscript. He, with the great sense and Idea of Human Life in him, has to choose what he will portray, and the greater an artist the more unerring is his selection. Then begins his own absorption in the characters. Conception and expression come to him and come nobly and spontaneously—and so spontaneous is his touch—so completely is he absorbed in, and one with his characters—that it makes our rush of sympathy as spontaneous as his own.

We feel the Identification of Shakespeare with Othello—with Iago—with Desdemona He *is* them *all*. He, William Shakespeare, is “the will-less—time-less—subject of knowledge,” living in “pure knowing” and absorbed in the creations that represent his varied and his intuitive knowledge of the great Idea of Life. And he excites and suggests in us the same absorption in his creations—that is, if we have the capacity to feel it.

It is a land of marvel and of mystery when all personal interests and all consciousness of individual temperaments are lost, fall off from us, and nothing remains, nothing exists to us but the love, the betrayal, the agony, and the struggles of the noble nature, that “dies upon a kiss.” We are so much part of it, we become so possessed by it, that we do not even know or feel that we are knowing or feeling. Shakespeare *is* Othello—and so are we, for the time being. Shakespeare had the insight and power of genius, and so could retain and reproduce his vision into the inner life. We alas! often cannot; when the play is over we become again, a link in the chain that binds us to the ordinary world of consciousness; the veil of illusion has fallen again between us and real vision, we are again among the shadows, with some general impressions more or less blurred, but the vivid vision of the Poet which made us feel in the manifestations he created, the very Idea of Life itself—has faded from us, we are no longer in the Ideal world which is the real world.

We will take one other example, not of a play, but of a picture. The Ascending Christ for instance at the Pitti Palace, Florence, by Fra Bartolomeo.

It is well enough known, with the rapt faces of the four evangelists, two on either side, gazing at their Master, with more of love for Him than of understanding even then, in their expression. And the two lovely little angels beneath, oblivious of everything but the medallion they are holding, as is the way with old Masters. It is the Christ alone that rivets our attention. The majestic, noble form, and the sad, grave, beautiful eyes, revealing the Victor over Life and Death, as He leaves the earth, triumphant

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indeed, but with the solitariness of triumph of the Divine Man, Who knows now the awful sorrow of humanity. It is Life human and divine in the Artist's Conception or Idea. How absorbed must he have been in his representation of this idea since he could suggest, and that spontaneously, such problems of unutterable thoughts in those divine eyes. The whole vision of humanity, as it might be in the mind of Christ, and as it was felt in the artist's vision, is flashed into our own minds—it is an artistic inspiration. Art suggests, it does not explain. A picture focusses into a few inches of space a whole drama of life and thought. We read it there, we feel it, and with no conscious effort, for this is the gift of Genius.

And our absorption in a work of genius is untouched even by consideration of technique. The methods of conveying the impression may be noted afterwards, and we may delight in form and colour, and light and shade. But it is the *result* of all these that the art lover feels so spontaneously and unconsciously. Learned art critics and dealers will study the size of ears, the length of noses, the breadth of thumbs, the manner of curving the little finger in order to make sure of the authenticity of the artist. It is more important to them than the enjoyment of the work of art itself. The lover of art has a receptive nature, so that he does not concern himself much, with these considerations, he does not even compare pictures. All *that* may come afterwards, if he is a student, as well as a lover. But, at all events, at first, he will find a response simply in his own soul to the picture, which represents to him an idea. His own personality and individuality leave him; unconsciously he is possessed. Instead of getting to understand it, and attacking a work of art as if it were a mathematical problem, he discovers that the picture is possessing him, and that is what Schopenhauer means. Art has daemonic power, it takes hold of us wholly, and in proportion to our faculty of receptiveness we understand it more or less fully. Architecture can hold us in this way, sculpture can, a great city can with its architecture and associations combined. Rome *does*. The very essence of the artistic quality hangs round the old walls of Rome. Rome itself can teach us, enter into us, possess us in a way of its own. The great bond of similarity between all the arts is their having this *possessing* power, this revelation of ideas, in whatever form they are expressed. Rafael in the exquisite outline of the peasant girl's face, saw without conscious effort the vision of maternity, as the perfect form of the Madonna della Seggiola rose before him. This is idealism—seeing the idea in the object of contemplation. And the spectator, gazing at the picture, also without consciousness of effort, is moved into "a passionate tenderness, which he knows not whether he has given to heavenly beauty or earthly charm"; he feels motherhood, and



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to quote again Mr. Henry James in “The Madonna of the Future,” he is intoxicated with the fragrance of the “tenderest blossom of maternity that ever bloomed on earth.” Critics may question its manner, method and style; but the art lover feels its “graceful humanity,” he does not “praise, or qualify, or measure or explain, or account for”—he is one with its loveliness—one with the purity and the truth of the ideal which it represents.

This may explain something of the attitude towards art in Schopenhauer’s philosophy, though to reproduce and exemplify thought is always difficult, and abstract philosophical thought is especially so. The real comprehension of a philosopher’s mind depends mainly on how far we are able to get into the atmosphere of his thought; it depends upon affinity in fact, and this is why philosophy must be the study, mainly, of the lonely thinker. Explainers and lecturers necessarily intrude their own individualities into their explanations, which have to be discounted. Yet when discounted, certain individualities do help us in philosophy, and even in poetry. Some minds may be more akin with the philosopher’s or poet’s than are our own, and a thought will become more vivid and clear to us, and a poem more lovely, when we understand it or view it, through a mind to which it appeals *directly*, and to us through that other. And now, after endeavouring to grapple with Schopenhauer’s theory of art, what does it come to at last? Is it more than this that the philosopher explains it as unconscious absorption in the manifestation of an Idea, and that it is a refuge from life and its woes *We* may have *felt* all that he has described, and, for a philosopher, Schopenhauer has a great gift of expression, indeed the love of art and literature glows on almost every page of his book. But his theory is surely scarcely more than a re-statement of what we *feel*, and if we ask whence comes the artistic quality—from the heart or the nerves—or the brain;—what is the philosophical definition of the *compulsion* in art; how does philosophy account for its strange compelling, unique, possessing, power—we get no answer at all, it eludes all tests. We get no explanation of what the strange insight is which we find in the man of Genius, or of the faculty that gives the capacity for absorption and that excites it in us. The genesis of this wonderful faculty remains unknown to us, undefined. Unconsciousness is a necessary ingredient in it, according to Schopenhauer, and this helps us to realise the difficulty of expressing it. What thinker will reduce the quality to intellectual symbols? Until that is done, however, Philosophy of Art must remain a philosophy of the Undefined, and the Undefinable!

## V.

### IMPRESSIONS OF GEORGE SAND.

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Perhaps the keynote to the charm of George Sand's art is given in her preface to her exquisite novel "La Derniere Aldini." Here is none of the accuracy and patience of the scientific enquirer into the "mysterious mixture" man, which we find in George Eliot's preface to "Middlemarch." Indeed these prefaces sum up the remarkably differing characteristics of the two writers. George Eliot is occupied with "the function of knowledge" in regard to the "ardently willing soul." She explains in her preface that the aim of her book is to trace the fate of the Saint. Theresas of a past age, in the ordinary environment and circumstances of our time. The problem was, how were detachment of mind and spiritual longing and love to find their developments in a modern prosaic setting. George Eliot brought to bear on this enquiry all her great powers of observation, discrimination and thought. Each page of the novel reveals the conscious endeavour of the born thinker to express in artistic form some conception that would help to clear the outlook on which the answer to the problem depended. George Sand, who had also her philosophising, and her analysing moods, was yet capable of feeling that novels may be romances. She could write under the sway of pure emotion and apart from theory. George Eliot never regarded her novels as mere romances. "Romances," said George Sand in *her* preface, "are always 'fantasies,' and these fantasies of the imagination are like the clouds which pass. Whence come the clouds and whither do they go? In wandering about the Forest of Fontainebleau tete a tete with my son I have dreamed of everything else but this book. This book which I wrote that evening in the little inn, and which I forgot the next morning, that I might occupy myself only with the flowers and the butterflies. I could tell you exactly every expedition we made, each amusement we had, but I can not tell you why my spirit went that evening to Venice. I could easily find a good reason, but it will be more sincere to confess that I do not remember it."

The mind of George Sand, instead of being engaged with a problem, was like an AEolian harp breathed upon "by every azure breath,

"That under heaven is blown  
To harmonies and hues beneath,  
As tender as its own."

So responsive was she that she gave back in wealth of sentiment and idea, the beauty wafted to her by the forest winds. So instinct with emotion, so alive and receptive and creative that a passing impulse resulted in a work of art of the touching beauty of "La Derniere Aldini." So unanalytic of self, that she could not remember the driving impulse that caused her to write the novel. Impulses like clouds come and go, and the artist soul is the sure recipient of them. It sees and "follows the gleam"—it feels the mystic influences. This is the foundation of that inexplicable thing inspiration, genius. This receptive-creative faculty is the gift George Sand received, and this preface is the keynote to it.

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It is this gift, which is power, and in George Sand it is a liberating power; it freed her own soul, and it freed the souls of others. She herself felt—and she made readers feel, as in “Lelia,” that outward limitations and hindering circumstances were as nothing compared to the great fact of freedom within, freedom of heart and soul and mind from “the enthrallment of the actual.” We are *free*;—it is a great thing to be as sure and as proud of it as St. Paul was of having been “Free born.” Some of us achieve freedom with sorrow and with bitter tears and with great effort—sometimes with spasmodic effort, and George Sand obtained inward freedom in that way.

But however obtained, the first time a mind feels conscious of it, it is a revelation, and it may come as an influence from an artist soul. George Sand had “l’esprit *libre* et *varie*.” George Eliot “l’esprit fort et *pesant*.” George Sand was widely, wisely, and eminently human. She felt deep down in her heart all the social troubles and problems of her day—and created some herself! But she was true to the artist soul in her—to the belief in an ideal. Art was dormant when she wrote disquisitions, and sometimes her social disquisitions are very long treatises. But her art was not dormant when from her inmost soul she sketched the fate of the Berri peasant whom she loved so well. In the introduction to that simple delightful Idyll “La Mare au Diable,” which should be read by all social reformers and by all who really care for the poor and the causes of poverty, she conveys her conceptions of the mission of art towards the oppressed unhappy labourer; oppressed and unhappy, because with form robust and muscular, with eyes to see, and thoughts that might be cultivated to understand the beauty and harmony of colour and sounds, delicacy of tone and grace of outline, in a word, the mysterious beauty of the world, he, the peasant of Berri, has never understood the mystery of the beautiful and his child will never understand it; the result of excessive toil, and extreme poverty. Imperfect and condemned to eternal childhood, George Sand recounts his life, touching gently his errors, and with deep sympathy entering into his trials and griefs. And a deeper ignorance, she adds, is one that is born of knowledge which has stifled the sense of beauty. The Berri peasant has no monopoly in ignorance of beauty, and intimate knowledge of toil and extreme poverty, but not many of us feel with the peasant’s fate, as George Sand felt it. She never ceased to care for the cause of social progress, just as she was always heart and soul an artist. George Eliot has written words “to the reader” about the ruined villages on the Rhone. In “The Mill on the Floss,” she writes, and again the remarkable difference between the two writers appears as forcibly as in the two prefaces. “These dead tinted, hollow-eyed skeletons of villages on the Rhone, oppress me with the feeling that human

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life—very much of it—is a narrow ugly grovelling existence, which even calamity does not elevate, but rather tends to exhibit in all its bare vulgarity of conception, and I have a cruel conviction that the lives, of which these ruins are the traces were part of a gross sum of obscure vitality that will be swept into the same oblivion with the generations of ants and beavers.” George Eliot saw in imagination these unhappy and oppressed peasants with clear, unsparing eyes. She was right in calling her conviction “Cruel,” for she saw merely the outside of the sordid lives of oppressive narrowness, which seemed to irritate her, these lives of dull men and women out of keeping with the earth on which they lived. She never alluded to any possible explanatory causes, such as excessive toil and extreme poverty, which if she had realised, as George Sand realised them, would have brought the tender touch of sympathy with individual lives and griefs that we find so often in George Eliot’s novels. But George Sand could *never* have written of any peasants as “part of a gross sum of obscure vitality,” because she could never have felt towards them in that way. She was too imaginative and tender. She did not look at the peasantry “en masse”—but individually, and loved the Berri peasants individually, as they loved and adored her. Her artistic sense and her humanity illumined her view of them, and she saw their latent possibilities, and knew why they were only latent. She knew indeed, many—if not all kinds of humanity. Once it is recorded she said to Pere Lacordaire, “You have lived with Saints and Angels. I have lived with men and women, and I could tell you (and we may well think she could) some things you do not know.” She had indeed run through the gamut of feeling, and it was in one of those moments when her experiences of life were overwhelming her—that she exclaimed “J’ai trop bu la vie.” But her gift of genius kept her always vivifying. She never depresses. From her first years at Nohant to the end of her long life, she was always *alive*. In the political troubles of 1848, when she wrote of herself as “navre jusqu’au fond de l’ame par les orages extérieurs,” and as trying to find in solitude if not calm and philosophy, at least a faith in ideas, her soul shrank from blood shed on both sides. “It needed a Dante,” she thought, “with his nerves, and temper, and tears to write a drama full of groans and tortures. It needed a soul tempered with iron, and with fire, to linger in the imagination over horrors of a symbolic Hell, when before one’s very eyes is the purgatory of desolation on the earth.” But “as a weaker and gentler artist,” George Sand saw what her mission was in those evil times;—it was to distract the imagination from them, towards “tenderer sentiments of confidence, of friendship, and of kindness.” Her political and social hopes and aims were always dear to her, but to interpret nature, to live the quiet life of

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the affections were the phases of her middle life. And so she wrote a “sweet song” in prose, one of the most delightful of her *Bergeries*, “La Petite Fadette.” It was her contribution to the hatreds and agitations of the time—she gave a refuge to the souls that could accept it—an “Ideal of calmness and innocence and reverie.” “La Petite Fadette” and “Le Meunier d’Angibault” reveal her fascinating intelligence and her idyllic imagination. “Le Meunier d’Angibault,” she tells us, was the result of a walk, a meeting, a day of leisure, an hour of *far niente*, followed by Reverie, that play of the imagination which, clothes with beauty and perfects, and interprets, the isolated and small events and facts of life. There are books of hers in early life that are simply self-revelations—outpourings of her indignations. She is not at her best in these. “Indiana,” written in her age of revolt, is too obviously a pamphlet to reveal her passionate hatred of marriage. In it she looked on marriage as “un malheur insupportable.” But “Consuelo,” “La Comtesse de Rudolstadt,” “Lettres d’un voyageur,” Lelia, Spiridion, Valvedre, Valentine, “History of her Life and letters,” and many other books reveal her agonies and agitations, her hope and power, her love of beauty both outward and inward as represented in Consuelo herself, who is contrasted with the mere beautiful “animal” Anzoletto, the artist in his lowest form. He cared only for physical loveliness, he was a great child, who needed nothing but amusement, emotion and beauty. But George Sand herself felt the delight of existence. She says of Joy “It is the great uplifter of men, the great upholder. For life to be fruitful, life must be felt as a blessing.” In all she wrote we feel the rare charm of perfect ease and naturalness, combined with the cadences of beauty. We never feel that she is “posing.” And yet the author of the bitter attack “Lui et elle,” accused her of continual “posing.” Edonard de Musset wrote with an envenomed pen, (but we must remember he was defending a brother), in that strange literary duel between him and George Sand. Alfred de Musset had accused her of assuming the maternal “pose” towards poets and musicians who adored her, whilst she absorbed their loves and lives and then deserted them. It is certainly very striking how her strong vitality seemed to sway and overpower some of those with whom she came in contact. She was the oak, and the others were the ivy. When they were torn apart, the oak was scarred but not irreparably injured, it was the ivy that was destroyed. In, “Elle et Lui,” George Sand claims that hers was a protecting love for the wayward, gifted child of art, the poet whose ingratitude she bore with, whose nerves she soothed, and whom she cared for and nursed in illness. Kindly time throws a softening veil over the acutest differences, and the clash of temperaments, even where they remain inexplicable. But the answer to Alfred de Musset’s reproaches

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must be looked for not in one book, but in the whole tenor of her life. Does this show that her maternal attitude was a “pose.” It is often said that women are born wives or born mothers. George Sand was undeniably a born *mother*. Mrs. Oliphant resembled her in this respect. They both show the deep passion of maternity in books and autobiographies and letters. Both were devoted to their children, there was no company they cared for in comparison, and they spared neither trouble or time in their interests. But George Sand cared much, not only for her children but for the peasants—for the poor and oppressed. Yes, and for the poets, the painters—the singers and the musicians, with their temperaments of genius, their loves, jealousies, and their shattered nerves. For upwards of six years she treated Chopin with a mother’s care; she had the passion of maternity in her towards them all, with whatever feelings it may have been complicated in her life of manifold experiences and with her artist temperament. She may have leant heavily on it at times, it may have served as a weapon of defence when she was attacked, and used thus it may well have suggested a “pose.” But however used, whatever the purpose—that the maternal instinct was strong in her there is no denying. To explain definitely her social and personal moral standards requires a biography that has not yet been written. Socially she had a hatred of feudalism, of religious and military despotism. She sympathised with and helped the aspirations towards a wider, a more humane view of a social system, and fraternal equality and social liberty were to her holy doctrines. Perhaps fully to understand George Sand from within may require the genius of a French mind and one of her own generation; for the French of the present day neither study her, or appear to care much for her books. Her letters should aid in giving a discriminating record of her intense and intricate life as viewed from within, and the ideas on which that life was lived. What then were the leading principles, and what was the force in George Sand, which while conquering life and harmonising it enabled her to realise herself? If heredity influences moral standards the mystery certainly is whence George Eliot derived not her morality, but her “fire of insurgency.” It is not difficult to account for it in George Sand when we remember her mother’s life and temperament, and her own early years. Her father was a good soldier, but had also many literary gifts. George Sand herself said: “Character is hereditary, if my readers wish to know me, they must know my father.” George Eliot’s creed and pervading view of life was the supreme responsibility of it, and the inevitableness of the struggles of the spirit warring against the senses. Her ideal is attainment through great trial. George Sand, the born hater of conventions, developed life into a harmony. We feel ultimately in her, a sense of peculiar serenity and peace, of



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self realisation, more akin perhaps to Plato's ideal of a character in harmony with itself, whose various impulses are so attuned that they form practically a single desire and this desire satisfies all the forces of the nature. What was this desire that was involved in the whole aim or system of George Sand's life? The ethical poet who affirmed emphatically that "conduct was three-fourths of life," expressed the highest admiration of George Sand's aims and ethics, and according to Matthew Arnold, her ruling idea was, that this ordinary human life of love and suffering was destined to be raised, into an ideal life, and *that* ideal life is our real life. Matthew Arnold has written one of his most beautiful and eloquent and touching essays in this record of his impressions and estimate of George Sand. Well does he say that "her passions and her errors have been abundantly talked of." She left them behind her, and men's memory of them will leave them behind also.

There will remain the sense of benefit and stimulus from that large and frank nature, that large and pure utterance. Matthew Arnold gives three principal elements in her strain. Instead of the hopeless echo of unrealised ideas we hear from her the evolution of character: "1, Through agony, and revolt; 2, Through consolation from nature and beauty; 3, Through sense of the Divine ('Je fus toujours tourmente des choses divines') and social renewal, she passes into the great life motif of her existence;" that the sentiment of the ideal life is none other than man's normal life as we shall one day know it. Matthew Arnold saw George Sand in his enthusiastic youth when she was in the serenity and dignity of middle age at Nohant.

Browning came across her in her journalistic career in Paris, and he was not touched with the same admiration.

Mr. Chesterton suggests in his biography of the poet that Browning was conventional by nature—and through the greatness of his brain he developed. He certainly developed on many sides, but his development did not include admiration for George Sand and her circle. It was social tone, his biographer believes, more than *opinions*, which created this strong aversion in the author of "The Statue and the Bust."

But Mrs. Browning, though her life had been mainly one long seclusion on her sofa, was unhampered by these conventional barriers. What she felt was the attraction of the massive and fascinating brain and heart of the great French woman, what she heard was "that eloquent voice," what she saw was "that noble, that speaking head." She had warm, quick sympathies and intuitional appreciations of genius. In regard to so wide and so complicated a character as George Sand's, we cannot be astonished at finding very different judgments and impressions; indeed we are prepared to feel in all of them some note of inadequacy and of incompleteness. But in our relation to her as a Great Writer, of this, as readers, we are assured, we *know* that it is no common matter to have

come into contact with so gifted and great a nature, with a genius that possessed “a current of true and living ideas,” and which produced “amid the inspiration of them.”



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### NOTES:

[1: 1886. "Mind" Vol. 11. "The need of a Society for experimental Psychology."]

[2: 1888. "Mind" Vol. 13. "The Psychological Laboratory at Leipsic."]

[3: Essays. On the genius and tendency of the writings of Thomas Carlyle. "The Camelot Series."]

[4: See supplementary notice of "Hamlet" in Charles Knight's Pictorial Edition of Shakespeare.]