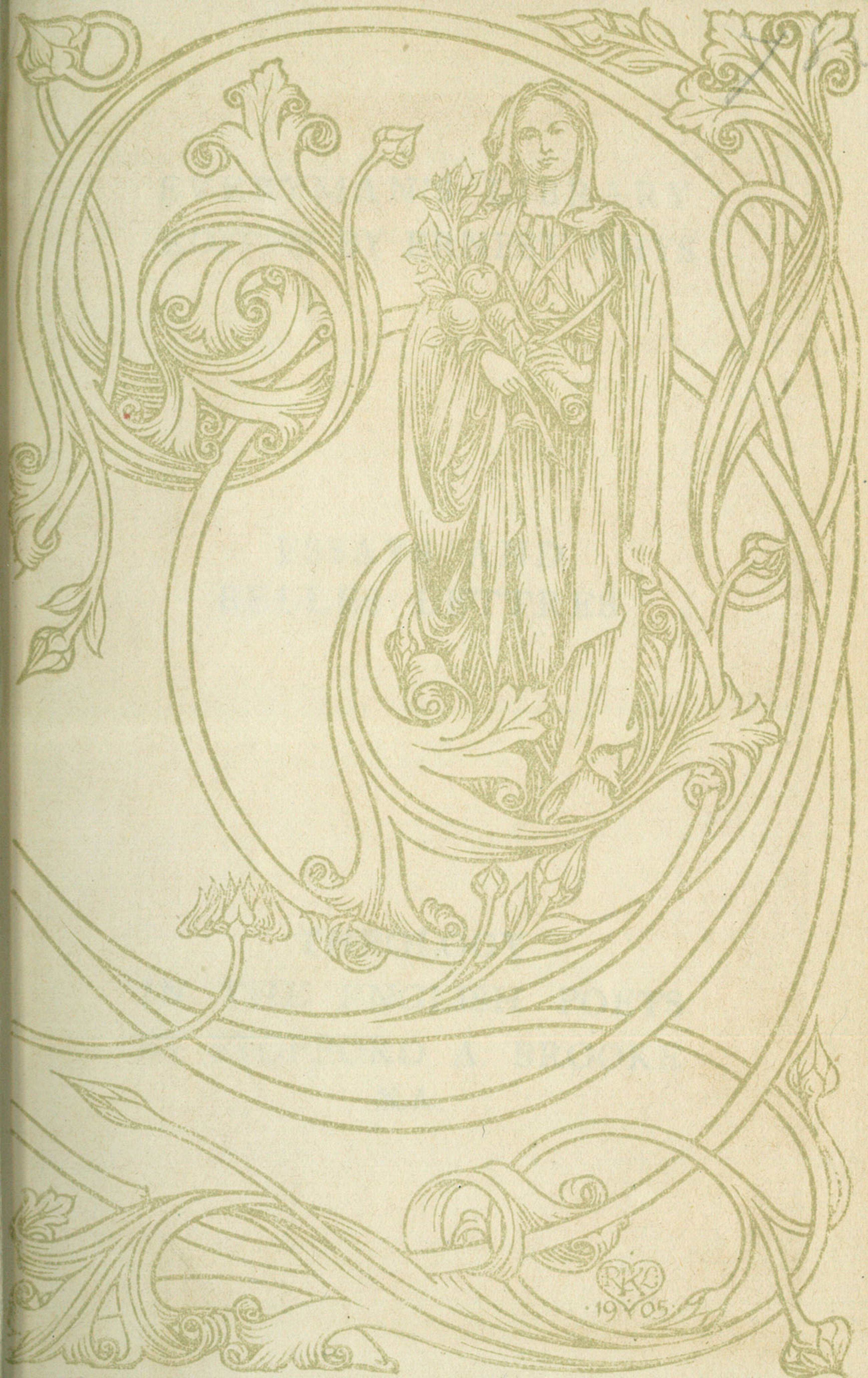
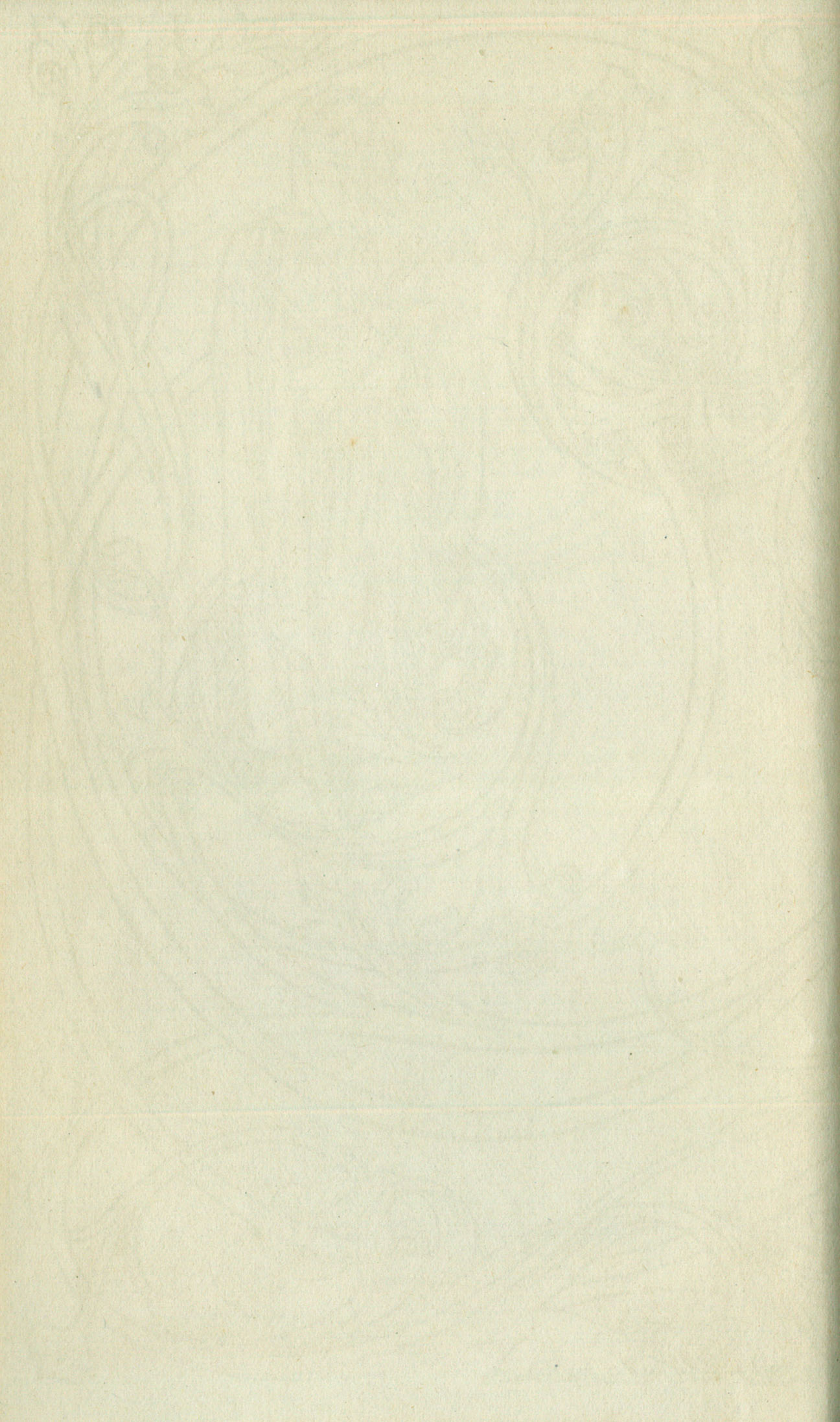


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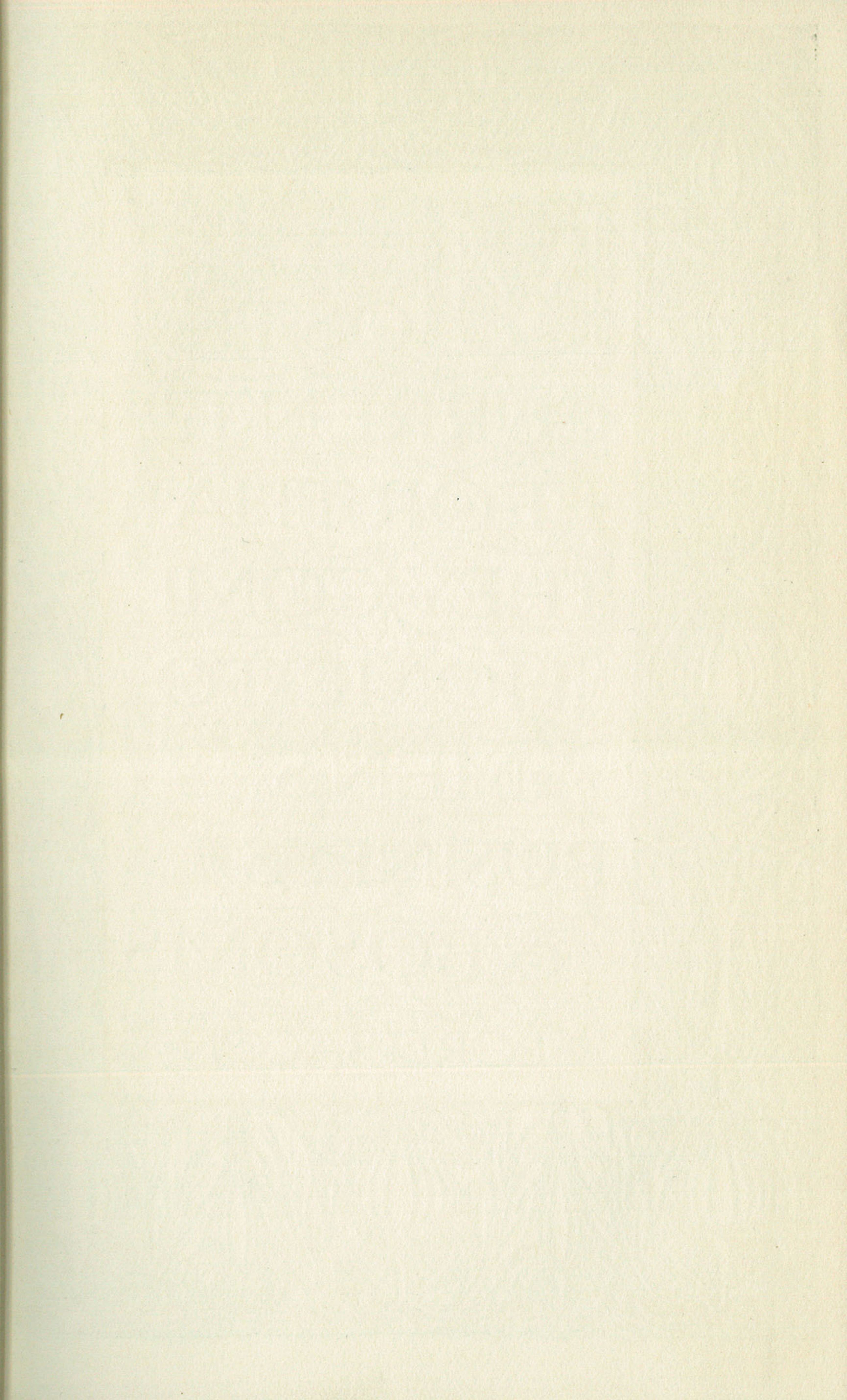
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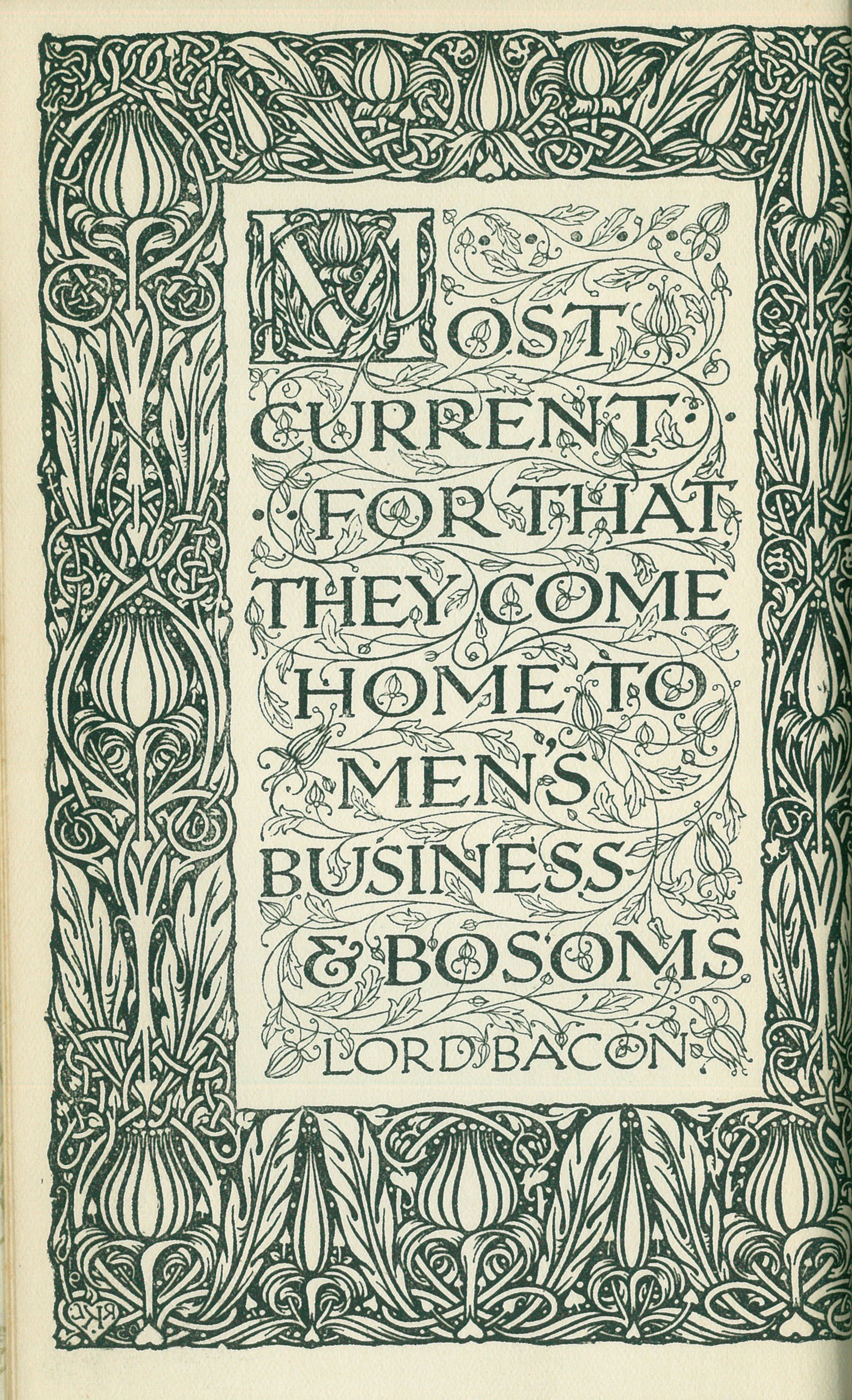
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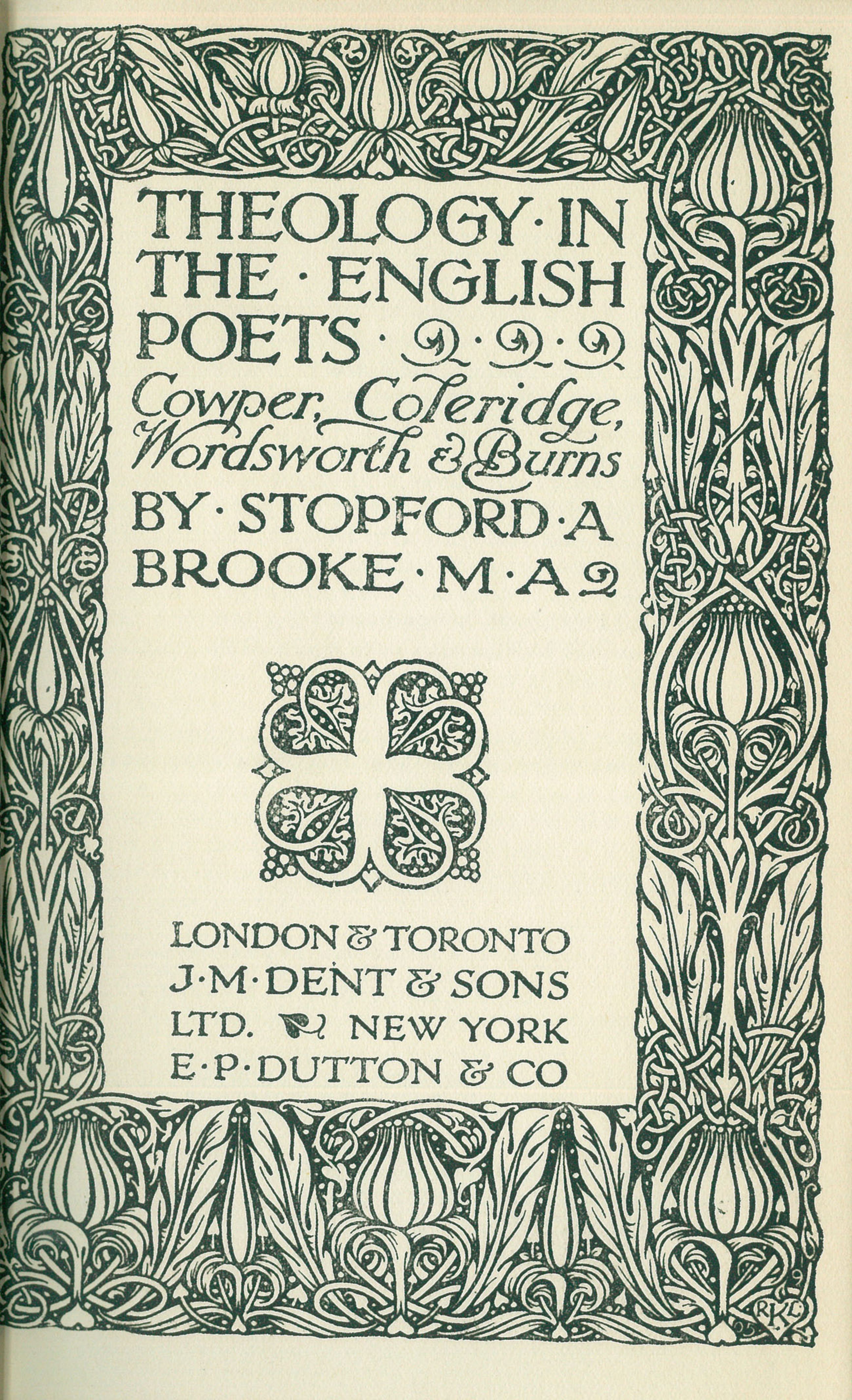
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THEOLOGY · IN
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*Cowper, Coleridge,
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FIRST ISSUE OF THIS EDITION . 1910
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EDITOR'S NOTE

IN giving his consent to the reprinting of the present volume, Mr. Stopford Brooke has preferred that the lectures should still retain their original form, and not be in any way altered or modified. This decision will without doubt gratify all those who first learnt to know the book in previous editions, and who would as certainly resent any change in it, seeing that a specific part of its charm consists in its use of the wisdom and knowledge of criticism, applied with the discursive art of the lecturer, and with a spontaneity which any after-thought might spoil. There is no need now to point out how much of that criticism and how many of its lucid terms and sympathetic distinctions have entered into the very currency of our time. The account it gives of the evolution in the English poets of a new idea of Nature is of a part with its author's abiding faith and philosophy expressed in divers ways and books, and both in prose and verse. A nobler appreciation of Wordsworth is not to be found anywhere, not even in Coleridge, than we have in the lectures here devoted to him. At the heart of it lies the thought which may be found concentrated in one of its author's own poems—

“ Impose your moods on Nature, and the moods
Alone return to you. Her joyful ways
Where great and solitary Beauty broods,
And makes the world—are hidden from your gaze.

But love her for herself, unfold your breast
To hear her music, and receive her fire—
You shall have joy, and beauty, and the rest
Of self-forgetfulness and dead desire.”

There is the whole law of the Nature-worshipper expressed in eight lines; and in true accordance with its principle, these spiritual portraits treat of the essential

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religion of the inspired men they describe—"theology in the rough," as it is expressively termed in the opening lecture.

E. R.

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INTRODUCTION

THE Lectures contained in this volume were delivered on Sunday afternoons in St. James's Chapel, during the season of 1872. The thing was an experiment. I began it in May 1871, when I asked the Rev. J. M. Capes to deliver a course of lectures for me, which should not take the form of sermons, but, on the contrary, should avoid it. He chose as his subject the "Inner Life of the Romish Church," and afterwards the "Relation of Music to Religion." When he had finished his lectures on these subjects, which were as well attended as they eminently deserved to be, I began another course on "Theology in the English Poets," which I have continued to the present time. Since I began to carry out the experiment in 1871, the lectures on week-days in St. Paul's have been established, and in St. James's Church, Piccadilly, discourses have been preached on a few Sunday afternoons on such subjects as the Drama and the Press, by eminent clergymen. I believe if a similar effort could be made in many of the London churches in the Sunday afternoons, that much good might be done. It would give variety to clerical work on Sunday, and much knowledge that now remains only as latent force among the clergy might be made dynamic, if I may borrow a term from science. If rectors of large churches would ask clergymen who know any subject of the day well to lecture on its religious aspect in the afternoon, and give them half the offertory, if needful, for their trouble, they would please themselves, enlighten their congregations, and fill their churches. And they would assist the cause of religion among that large number of persons who do not go to church, and who think that

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Christianity has nothing to do with Politics, Art, Literature, or Science.

When I made this experiment, I had long desired to bring the pulpit on Sunday to bear on subjects other than those commonly called religious, and to rub out the sharp lines drawn by that false distinction of sacred and profane. If what I believed were true, and God in Christ had sanctified all human life; if every sphere of Man's thought and action was in idea, and ought to be in fact, a channel through which God thought and God acted—then there was no subject which did not in the end run up into Theology, which might not in the end be made religious. I wished then to claim as belonging to the province of the Christian ministry, political, historical, scientific, and artistic work, in their connection with Theology; and to an extent greater than I had hoped for, the effort, so far as I have carried it, has succeeded. The blame of many accustomed to hear nothing but sermons from the pulpit has been wholly outweighed in my mind by the fact of the attendance of many persons who were before uninterested in religious subjects at all. And then, neither the blame nor the praise of the present is any proof of the goodness or badness of a thing.

The Poets themselves formed the only text book I have used, but in the two first lectures, when treating of the growth of the Poetry of Man and of Nature, I have had much help from an admirable Essay of Mr. F. Palgrave's, which appeared in the *Quarterly Review* of July 1862.

STOPFORD A. BROOKE.

MANCHESTER SQUARE,
LONDON, *April*, 1874.

THEOLOGY

IN THE ENGLISH POETS

LECTURE I

FROM POPE TO COWPER

THE Lectures which I begin to-day, and which I hope to be able to carry on Sunday after Sunday in the afternoons, are on the Theology which may be found in the English Poets. Spoken from this place, they will not enter into poetical criticism, or attempt to estimate the poet; for that would carry me too far from the main subject, within the limits of which I shall endeavour always to remain. The subject is delightful, and it is not difficult to define its special interest.

The poets of England ever since Cowper have been more and more theological, till we reach such men as Tennyson or Browning, whose poetry is overcrowded with theology. But the theology of the poets is different from that of churches and sects, in this especially, that it is not formulated into propositions, but is the natural growth of their own hearts. They are, by their very nature, strongly individual; they grow more by their own special genius than by the influence of the life of the world around them, and they are, therefore, sure to have a theology—that is, a Doctrine of God in his relation to Man, Nature, and their own soul—which will be independent of conventional religious thought. They will be, as poets, free from those claims of dogma which influence ordinary men from their youth up, and from the religious tendencies of surrounding opinion. Their theology will therefore want the logical order which pre-

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vails in confessions and articles: and as each will give expression to it in vivid accordance with his natural character, it will be a different thing in each.

The great interest, then, of looking into this subject lies in the freedom and individuality of the thoughts on a subject in which men are so seldom free or individual. We see theology, as it were, in the rough; as, at its beginnings, it must have grown up in the minds of earnest and imaginative men around certain revealed or intuitive truths, such as the Being of God, or the need of redemption.

At the same time I shall confine the inquiry to their poetry. I shall not seek in their letters or in their everyday talk for their theology. For in their ordinary intercourse with men they were subject to the same influences as other men, and if religious, held a distinct creed or conformed to a special sect; and if irreligious, expressed the strongest denial of theological opinions. It is plain that in ordinary life their intellect would work consciously on the subject, and their prejudices come into play. But in their poetry, their imagination worked unconsciously on the subject. Their theology was not produced as a matter of intellectual co-ordination of truths, but as a matter of truths which were true because they were felt; and the fact is, that in this realm of emotion where prejudice dies, the thoughts and feelings of their poetry on the subject of God and Man are often wholly different from those expressed in their everyday life. Cowper's theology in his poetry soars beyond the narrow sect to which he belonged into an infinitely wider universe. Shelley, when the fire of emotion or imagination was burning in him, is very different from the violent denier of God and of Christianity whom we meet in his daily intercourse with men. He does carry his atheism and hatred of religion into his verse, but these are the least unconscious portions of his poetry. When he is floating on his wings, he knows not whither, his atheism becomes pantheism, and his hatred of Christianity is lost in enthusiastic but unconscious statement of Christian conceptions.

Therefore I put aside the letters and conversations of

the poets as sources for these lectures, except so far as they illustrate the treatment of theological subjects in their poetry.

The theological element in English poetry becomes strong in Cowper; but before lecturing on its development in him, it will be necessary to trace its growth up to his time, along the lines on which English poetry mainly ran. This will be the work of the first two lectures, and in carrying it out I shall lay down the mode in which the main subject will be treated.

The devotional element in our English poetry which belonged to Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, and some of the Puritan poets, died away in the critical school which began with Dryden and ended with Pope. The *Religio Laici* of Dryden is partly a reproduction of the scholastic theology, partly an attack on the Deists, and it does not contain one single touch of personal feeling towards God. The *Essay on Man* is the preservation in exquisite steel-work of the speculations of Leibnitz and Bolingbroke. It is true the devoutness which belonged to Pope's nature modified the coldness of his philosophy, and there are lines in the *Essay on Man* which in their temperate but lofty speech concerning charity, are healthier than the whole of Cowper's hymns, while the *Universal Prayer* is of that noble tolerance and personal humility which, whether it be called deistical or not, belongs to the best religion all over the world.

It has not been sufficiently said that Pope was sincerely devout in heart, just as it has been ignorantly assumed by many that the century in which he lived was irreligious. His age may seem so in contrast with the two centuries that preceded it, in which religious subjects took so overdue a part, and theological feeling ran into bitter uncharitableness. But it was most useful for the whole future of English religion and theology, that with the newly-awakened interest in science, philosophic inquiry, and commerce, religion also should learn to extend its influence over other realms; and, in the reaction from intolerance which a wider intellectual life taught it, learn to do more justice to all opinions, and to

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teach and practise a wider charity. We have not so learned Christ as to call that irreligious. The work of the Latitudinarian School was distinctly a work of charity, and they and the scholars of the age of evidences are not to be accused of want of religious feeling, because it seemed to them that to submit their faith to the challenge of free inquiry, and to establish a kindly tolerance for the sake of more united work for God, was better and more needful for the time than the zeal for doctrine which condemns one's neighbour, or the passionate expression of devotional feeling which tends to isolate oneself from one's neighbour. It is still more absurd to call the century irreligious, when we remember that in its very midst—not so much in opposition to this sober religion as in reaction from its lower tone in the less educated clergymen, and in the indignant desire to make a religion for the common people, who were certainly neglected—the revived religious life of the personal soul took its rise with the preaching of Wesley.

With this movement, however, the critical school of poets had nothing to do. They had written much before it arose; they belonged not to the country and the people, but to the city and the cultivated classes, nor did they, any more than the theologians, speak much of their religious feeling, or indeed possess much. But it is a very different thing to say that they had no devotion, and the change, of which I shall speak, does not assume that there was no personal religion, but that there was no predominance of it, and that therefore it was not expressed. Now and then, to our surprise, it breaks out, and it does so in the *Universal Prayer*. Beginning with the ordinary and systematic view of God as universal Ruler, but graced with the wider charity of a poet, it passes in the end into personal devotion. No one can read the following lines without hearing in them something of the same melody which afterwards was varied through every key by Cowper.

If I am right, Thy grace impart
Still in the right to stay;

If I am wrong, oh teach my heart
To find that better way.
Save me alike from foolish Pride,
Or impious discontent
At aught Thy Wisdom has denied,
Or aught Thy goodness lent.
Teach me to feel another's woe,
To hide the fault I see;
That mercy I to others show,
That mercy show to me.
Mean though I am, not wholly so,
Since quickened by Thy Breath;
Oh lead me wheresoe'er I go,
Through this day's life and death.

Nevertheless, this devoutness is of a wholly different quality from that which we find in Cowper. It is man bending before an infinite God whom he cannot understand; it is not man rejoicing in being redeemed and living with God as a child with its father. It is without deep emotion, without that sense of personal union or personal absence from God which comes of a vivid realisation of Christ as the master and redeemer of the soul. It is a religion which the absence of Christ made cold, and it so little tinges the poetry that one can scarcely say that the poetry was religious at all.

At the same time we must not imagine with those who lay down the rule that the poets always represent their age, that there was little or no personal feeling of devotion at this time in England, because its poetry was not in that way devout. That poetry was of the city, representing the disputes of the sharp wits who argued on theology as they argued on Whig or Tory politics: but outside the city, where intellectual life was not vivid and discussion scarcely known, there was a world of quaint and homely piety of which we get no inkling in the poets. Many a grave Puritan household, hidden in its orchards, handed down the tradition of the deep devotion of their forefathers; many a quiet parsonage held in it men who had succeeded to the spirit of Herbert, who ministered to English homes where dwelt, behind the village green and among their clipt yews and grassy plots, women who devoted their lives

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to God, and men who prayed with all the spirit of Wilson.

It was this religious life in the country which in the growth of the religious element in our poetry first took form in verse. But how did it happen that English poetry got face to face with this devouter tone, with this simpler religion? One reason may be that the deistical struggle, having reached its height for a time, began to need some repose before its new outbreak. Both sides had, in fact, exhausted all they had then to say on the subject, and men, wearied with looking after God through the labyrinth of the intellect, now turned to see if they had any chance of finding Him in their hearts, and in that region naturally passed from an intellectual to an emotional religion which at once sought relief in poetry. Another reason was that a slow change had begun to work in our poetry even before the death of Pope, and the change may be described as a migration from the town to the country. Poets began to look at Nature, not as it was around the villa at Twickenham, but as it was in its own solitudes. Thomson took men to the moors and placed them in the woods; Gray went to the country churchyard, Collins to the hilltop in the evening, Goldsmith to the village and its rustic life. At last we reach Cowper, in whose verse the town is as wholly disliked as the country was by Pope, and Crabbe, in whom the whole interest centres round the morals and manners and annals of the agricultural poor.

In this wonderful passage of change, poetry found religion in the country and took it up into itself. That devotional element entered our poetry which in one form rose to its height in Cowper; but which, in different forms, each created by the individuality of the poets, has continued with a few exceptions to influence it to the present day.

Green, in his *Spleen*, 1737, a gay little poem too much neglected, marks a transitional period in this change. He retires to the country to seek contentment and quietude, but the influence of the city lingers round him, and he

takes his trip to town to amuse his life, to purchase books, and hear the news,—

To see old friends, brush off the clown,
And quicken taste at coming down.

He is tired of the theological contests between Non-conformists and the Church, between the opinions of the enthusiast and those of the cooler inquirer; and he resolves, in the peace of his retirement, to win his own way to a religion of his own. It is almost the first touch we get at this time of that individual work on theological subjects which we find so strongly developed in the poets of our century. He is largely influenced by Pope and the prevailing Deism, but he works out his own belief, and makes his own speculations; and though he is not Christian, he expresses his belief in a personal relation between himself and God. It is more personal than Pope would have made it, it is infinitely less than Cowper would have made it, and the absence of Christ makes it of an altogether different quality. But the transitional element in it makes it interesting enough to quote. After saying that his verse cannot dare to try and express God, nor paint His features, "veiled by light," he goes on—

My soul the vain attempt forego:
Thyself, the fitter subject, know.
He wisely shuns the bold extreme,
Who soon lays by the unequal theme,
Nor runs, with wisdom's sirens caught,
On quicksands swallowing shipwrecked thought
But, conscious of his distance, gives
Mute praise, and humble negatives.
In One, no object of our sight,
Immutable and infinite,
Who can't be cruel or unjust,
Calm and resigned, I fix my trust:
To him my past and present state
I owe, and must my future fate.
A stranger, into life I'm come,
Dying may be our going home;
Transported here by angry fate,
The convicts of a prior state.

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Hence I no anxious thoughts bestow
On matters I can never know;
Through life's foul way, like vagrant, passed,
He'll grant a settlement at last,
And with sweet ease the wearied crown,
By leave to lay his being down.

He for His creatures must decree
More happiness than misery,
Or be supposed to create,
Curious to try, what 'tis to hate:
And do an act which rage infers,
'Cause lameness halts, or blindness errs.

There is more of the speculative audacity of the century in that than there is of piety; there is a fine moral certainty that God, however unknown, must be just and loving, but the point in it on which I dwell is its individuality. It is not a systematic philosophy of religion like Pope's, it is a personally wrought out religion, and it owed that to his country life. For in such a life, men, removed from the conventional thought of the literary circles in London, had room for individual development, if they had received some previous culture. This was especially true of religious feeling, and a little before the *Essay on Man* was written, a true devotional element entered into our poetry in the hymns of Watts, and entered it outside of the town. Watts lived an easy retired life, in a great country house, from 1712 to 1748. There is in his hymns that pleasant devotion to God which arises from piety and comfort, from placid enjoyment of the beauty of the world, from a distant contemplation of the sufferings of the poor beyond the gates of the park and from the gratitude to God which both these enjoyments are likely to create. Many of them strike a note of very fine praise, others of a didactic charity; and some are touched with a quaint and simple joy. Few hymns are better and brighter than that which begins—

I sing the Almighty Power of God,
That made the mountains rise;
That spread abroad the flowing seas,
And built the lofty skies.

But still, we have in them no special tendency in doctrine, and no passionate or personal feeling of devotion.

It is the quiet, sober, moral religion of England on which we touch; but even so, it is a wholly different atmosphere from that which Pope breathed, and I doubt if he could have drawn a single breath in it. It is impossible to fancy Pope "abroad in the meadows to see the young lambs," still less to fancy him linking religious feeling to such a sight. The kind of devotion, and the scenery that stirred it, were both out of his sphere. Half a century passes by and the change has deepened; the seed Watts sowed has sprung into a mighty tree; the quiet and sober religion of his hymns has become the impassioned and storm-tossed religion of the hymns of Cowper. The praise which filled the heart of Watts when he looked abroad on Nature has become the agonised prayer of Cowper as he looked into the depths of his own soul.

What was the cause of this change, what new influence from without had come upon English poetry? It was the great religious movement, led by the Wesleys, joined afterwards by the fiery force of Whitfield, which descended through Newton to the hymns and poetry of Cowper. It was a preaching which, beginning in the year 1739, seven years after the first books of the *Essay on Man* appeared, woke up, and into fierce extremes, the religious heart of England. The vast crowds which on moor or hill-side, in the deserted quarries of Devon and Cornwall, listened to Wesley, excited by their own numbers, almost maddened by his passionate preaching and prayer, lifted into Heaven and shaken over Hell in turns as the sermon went on, crying aloud, writhing on the ground, tears streaming down their cheeks, could not find in the hymns of Watts or the metrical Psalms any expression of their wild experience; and the inexpressible emotion of their hearts demanded voice for itself in poetry and in music, the two languages of emotion. Both the Wesleys, but chiefly Charles, had already, in 1738, seen and prepared for the want, and a new class of devotional poetry arose. It was impassioned, personal, and doctrinal; it was im-

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passioned, for its subject was the history of the heart in its long struggle with sin, in its wrestling with God, in the horror of its absence from Him, in the unspeakable joy of its presence with Him, in its degradation, its redemption, and its glory, above all in its personal relation to Christ, and the world of feelings which arose from that relation; nor was there a single chord of religious feeling left unsounded, nor any that was not strung to tension. It was also made especially personal. The first person was continually used, so that each who sung or read the hymn spoke of himself and felt Christ in contact with himself. And it was doctrinal, for whether it sprang from the party of Wesley or that of Whitfield, or from their subdivisions, it was built on clear lines of theological thought; and the opposition between the parties, who knew well the power of verse as a teacher and fixer of doctrine, caused the lines to be drawn with studious clearness.

Three things then belonged to it—passion, the personal element, and expression of doctrine. Neither of the first two were by their nature apart from poetry, and the fact is that so much are they of the essence of poetry, that most of these hymns are by force of them, poetical. Passion had been long asleep in English poetry, ever since the time of Elizabeth, and though I do not say that this religious movement made the passion of the coming poetry, yet it was one of its elements; and it is quite plain that its emotional element was not out of harmony with a school which in a few years, in Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, and Keats, was destined to express almost every phase of emotion. Neither was its insistence on personal feeling out of tune with the work of a class of men like the poets who "in themselves possess their own desire." In fact both these elements are characteristic of the poetry which was now about to arise in England. They both took root in Cowper, but they were sown and watered by religion. He struck the first note of the passionate poetry, but the passion in him was in connection with religion. He struck the first note of that personal poetry which was afterwards carried so far in

the *Prelude* of Wordsworth, the *Alastor* of Shelley, the *Childe Harold* of Byron, but he struck it in connection with religion. Other poets led their passions and their personal history into other realms, but Cowper kept them within the sphere of his relation to God. Other poets derived their passion from different sources—from Nature, from Beauty, from the ideas of political rights and freedom, but Cowper derived it from the daily wrestling of his soul with God. And both the passionate and the personal element came down to Cowper from without, from the great Methodist movement. For the friend of Cowper was Newton, and Newton was the child of Whitfield.

Both these elements run through the whole of Newton's well-known book, the *Cardiphonia*, and (expanded over the whole range of the relations of the soul to Christ constitute what was then called experimental religion. As such they appear in the *Olney Hymns*, written jointly by Newton and Cowper. Of Newton's share in them, with the exception of the beautiful hymn—"How sweet the name of Jesus sounds," I know nothing; but if they are anything like the *Cardiphonia*, they must be characterised by a robust and insensitive piety, and an ardent display, somewhat too public, both of his own sinfulness and of his love of Christ. Those which are written by Cowper are passionate indeed, but it is passion modified by the poet's tender and reserved individuality; are personal indeed, but it is egotism decently veiled, and where it is outspoken it is so sudden, so spontaneous—the hymn seeming to burst out of his heart with a cry—that it is redeemed from the charge of deliberate exposure of the sanctuary of the soul. Nothing can be finer, for example, than the swift rush, as if feeling could no longer be repressed, with which this hymn begins—

Hark, my soul! it is the Lord;
'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word;
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee:
"Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me?"

The same elements in connection with religion run through the whole of his poetry, and they deepen into

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tragedy at the last. But on that I will not touch at present. I only ask you now (for I am but sketching the growth of the religious element in our poetry, not as yet distinctly touching on Cowper) to think of the new world into which we have entered. Compare the *Universal Prayer*—

Father of all, in every age,
In every clime adored,
By saint, by savage, or by sage,
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.

with “O, for a closer walk with God,” or with “There is a fountain fill’d with blood,” and it is not that they are different, it is that owing to the overmastering presence of Christ, as the Saviour of the personal soul, there is scarcely any point of comparison. Compare the two following quotations, the first from the *Essay on Man*, the second from the *Task*—the lines of Pope, impersonal, apart, touched with scorn, thinking of God as Creator alone—with the lines of Cowper, so personal, so self-compassionate, so intense in their realisation of Christ, that though no devotion is expressed, they yet thrill with devotion. We step from the one to the other as from a frozen to a tropic isle of religion.

Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A Being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic’s pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a God, or beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reas’ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little or too much:
Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused, or disabused;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all:
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl’d;
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world.

There is no passion and there is no personal feeling. Now listen to this in which both these elements are intense:—

I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infix'd
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by one who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts
He drew them forth and healed, and bade me live.

The other element which came from the Methodist movement to Cowper was the doctrinal, and coming to him early in life it was afterwards beaten into his heart by Newton. It took with him the special form of Calvinism, and we shall see what a terrible power it had over him. But at present, we ask what there could be in Calvinism, whether derived from Whitfield or from the Puritans, which could find a home in poetry? Its mere doctrinal scheme, set out with logical severity, its debtor and creditor account, its hard outlines supplied little food to the imagination. But there was one doctrine among others which did supply food, and that of a terrible kind, to the imagination. It was the doctrine that God had created some men for destruction, that they were born into the world the victims of a stupendous fate. They might struggle, they might desire to love God, they might cry passionately for redemption, but there was no hope. Over them always hung the thundercloud, and out of it, sooner or later, would issue the lightning of their eternal doom. This mastery of some by a divine and unpitying fate, and their long struggle against it is distinctly poetic; and wherever it has taken form and in whatever manner, it has created poetry. The same sort of idea, only in a less revolting form, was at the root of Greek Tragedy, which represented the freedom of Man struggling with destiny, but preserving or attaining to moral force through the struggle. And the tragic element was deepened when, in spite of the moral victory, the victor yet received the blow of Fate. Something of the

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same element we find in the dramas of Shakespeare, as, for example, *Romeo and Juliet*, where, from the very beginning of the play, we feel that all the passionate force of young love is doomed to be broken by the iron hand of irresistible circumstance. But the religious form it took in Calvinism did not enter our poetry as a personal element till the time of Cowper and Burns. It has deeply influenced it ever since. And the manner in which it worked was twofold. One was when the poet accepted it and gave tragic importance to his life by it, either by yielding to it in heartbroken humility, as Cowper; or by yielding to it in pride, since it marked him from mankind, as Byron did. And in both these men the emotions it roused were creative of poetry.

The other mode in which it bore upon the poetic power in men was in the hot hatred, the fierce emotion of anger, which it stirred in hearts full of love to men, either in those who, like Burns, disbelieved in it as having anything to do with Christianity, or in those who, like Shelley, believed that it was Christianity, and poured out all the passion of their heart against it. Introduced by Cowper as a personal question into our later poetry, no one can doubt the influence it has had; in fact, its introduction into it has led to the whole question of the relation of the soul to God becoming a distinct element in English poetry up to the present day.

Again I ask you, on this doctrinal side of the question, to look back to the critical school and to compare its theological poetry with that of Cowper. In the fourth act of Dryden's *State of Innocence*, Gabriel and Raphael and Adam discuss all the arguments which can be urged on the subject of Fate and Freewill with the greatest precision and clearness. But the matter is treated wholly from the outside, as an abstract question which interested the poet intellectually. To Cowper the question was one which tortured his heart; it was a personal matter on which hung his whole life; and it made all the difference to him between reason or madness. In this matter also the whole poetic atmosphere is changed, we are again in a different world.

I have now traced, and in brief outline only, the growth of the devotional element in our poetry from Dryden to Cowper. With it statements about the theological element have necessarily been mingled, but in accordance with the plan of my lectures, and indeed in accordance with the actual facts, I have spoken of the theological element as it appeared when modified by the distinct personality of the poet. That is one of the lines on which these lectures are to run; the theology of each poet as created by his special individuality.

There were two other lines of thought on which I resolved to place these lectures; the theology imported by each poet into the poetry of Man, and the poetry of Nature. For a poetry which had to do with all the questions which belong to man as a whole, and to the growth, origin, and destiny of the individual man:—and a poetry which had to do especially and separately with Nature, with the whole of the outward world and all its parts, with the emotions it stirred and the thoughts that we gave to it, took clear form for the first time towards the close of the eighteenth century, and has never ceased to grow and to add branch to branch, up to the present time. It may be truly said to date from the publication of the *Task* of Cowper in 1785, of the *Village* of Crabbe in 1783, of the first poems of Burns in 1786. But nothing is born all in a moment in this world, and the poetry which dealt specially with Man, as well as that which dealt specially with Nature, though they first became clearly defined in Cowper, had been slowly growing into form before him. The different stages of the growth of each I must be permitted to sketch with as much conciseness as possible. I will do that for the poetry of Man to-day, in the rest of this lecture. In the following I shall do the same work for the poetry of Nature, and then take up the poets themselves, and show how in each the poetry of Man, the poetry of Nature, as well as their personal poetry, became tinged by theology. In each poet, then, we shall trace the theology in his human, natural, and personal poetry.

Our object now is to trace the growth of the poetry of

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Man up to the time of Cowper, when theology distinctly entered into it.

In Dryden, Pope, Swift, Prior, Roscommon, and the rest, we find the searching and critical spirit of the eighteenth century looking on Man as an intellectual and social being, and their poetry reflects with clearness the leading thoughts about Man of that masculine and vigorous time. They seek from the intellectual point of view for an explanation of the problems which beset us; they go on to ask how such circumstances as riches and poverty, the follies of society and its oddities of taste, bear upon his life; they describe the variety of characters in men and women. Even the new scientific discoveries of the time, its credulity and scepticism are touched on in this poetry, and an attempt is made in the *Essay on Man* to reduce to a system the dim questionings with regard to the spiritual nature which science and scepticism had awakened.

Pope said that the proper study of mankind was Man. But he approached that study from the side of the intellect alone. It was by the criticism of the understanding, not by the emotion of the heart, that he worked on his subject. The result was cold speculation and brilliant satire, and in neither of those tempers is any one fit to write fairly or nobly about the whole of human nature; though he is fitted to write about that which Man does, or Man has, up to a certain point. The surface of the "study of mankind" is touched, it may be, in all its points, but the writer does not penetrate into its depths. It is just the difference between Ben Jonson and Shakespeare: the one not seriously caring for his characters, but only how he may develop them; the other loving, pitying, being personally indignant with his characters: so that in the one we study not men but the humours of men; in the other we study men, nay mankind. The one creates images of men, and dresses them and makes them play their part by strings upon his stage: the other creates living men, and bids them act, and sits by watching them with passion. There is the same kind of difference between Pope's study of Man and that study

of him to which Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron have accustomed us.

Again, we find no large study of mankind as a whole in Pope. It is classes of men whom we meet, not the conception of the race. The idea of the Universal Man, of one common mankind, rising above all distinctions of clan, caste, race, and nation, did not exist in Pope's time; we owe it to the Revolution. There were dreams of it, suggestions, hints, but of the clear, concise, world-subduing conception there is little or no trace; no real poetry of Man in the true sense of the word existed. Whereas since Wordsworth's time it breathes in every English poem. In both the particular and universal view the change is immense.

The same kind of study of Man lasted during Pope's life, and after his death in 1744. It lives in Johnson's *London*, 1738, and in his *Vanity of Human Wishes*, 1749, as observant and indignant satire; it lives in that poem of Akenside's which continued the speculations of Hutcheson and Shaftesbury. It was the spirit of Pope enduring after Pope was gone, and even less than Pope did Akenside bestow human emotion on his speculations. But even before the death of Pope a change had begun. Pope's study of Man did not carry him beyond the city; he has no interest in the rustic, in the uneducated, in the relation of Man to Nature apart from society, in the past history of Man, even of Englishmen. But, in 1726, Thomson makes us touch the farmhouse and the labourer, the traveller lost in the snow, the far-off lives of men of other nations where winter rules over half the year. We have got out of England, as we have in Dyer's *Ruins of Rome* in 1740. In Warton's poems, though his own personality overshadows everything, we again find ourselves among country people, the milkmaid singing and the woodman at his work. In the exquisitely pencilled *Elegy* of Gray we are brought face to face with the ploughman, the rude forefathers of the hamlet, the village of Hampden, the solitary who, far from cities and society—

Along the cool sequestered vale of life
Has kept the noiseless tenor of his way.

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Again, the speculative study of Man, his origin, duties, and destiny, from the point of view of the inquiring intellect, has now passed away, and there is a tender, but somewhat sentimental treatment of Man, as the subject of the musing moralist, as the victim of the passions and changes and ills of life, and as listening to the soothing or warning voice with which Nature speaks to him in his enjoyment or his pain.

There is also a distinct delight shown in the history of Man in the Past, a thing almost impossible to the previous school in which the Present was so powerful that it filled all the view. Both the *Bard* and the *Progress of Poesy* illustrate this new element. The poetry of the two Wartons, about the same date, continually goes over the past glories of the English nation, and Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry* was but the beginning of that vivid delight in what our forefathers did, to which Chatterton afterwards gave a fresher life, and which runs through all the minor poets of the time. This new interest in the men of the past—though it is necessary to observe that it did not travel beyond the men of our country, so as to become an interest in mankind—was afterwards stimulated by the influence of the elder Pitt, whose whole life and work exalted England in her own eyes.

The interest in Man was defective then in that it did not embrace mankind. It had also lost, in losing Pope's interest in social life, and in the intellectual and speculative side of human questions, and in its transference from the town to the country, elements which were afterwards to be revived. But though it lost something for the time, it gained new elements, and in a few years after the death of Pope we have seen that we are in a new poetic world upon the subject. Still the interest even in Man in the country, in a simpler, kinder, more rugged, human life, was not the living, close, direct thing it afterwards became. It is the distant, rather dainty, interest nursed by college life, which scholars, like Warton, or like Gray, looking out on the world from the window of Peterhouse, would be likely to take—a quiet contemplative interest such as

he describes in lines, which, written in 1742, embody the spirit in which he looked on Man,—

Where'er the oak's thick branches stretch
 A broader, browner shade,
 Where'er the rude and moss-grown beech
 O'ercanopies the glade,
 Beside some water's rushy brink
 With me the Muse shall sit and think
 (At ease reclined in rustic state)
 How vain the ardour of the Crowd,
 How low, how little are the Proud,
 How indigent the Great!
 Still is the toiling hand of Care:
 The panting herds repose;
 Yet hark! how through the peopled air
 The busy murmur glows!
 The insect youth are on the wing,
 Eager to taste the honied spring
 And float amid the liquid noon;
 Some lightly o'er the current skim,
 Some show their gaily-gilded trim
 Quick-glancing to the sun.
 To Contemplation's sober eye
 Such is the race of Man:
 And they that creep, and they that fly
 Shall end where they began.
 Alike the Busy and the Gay
 But flutter through Life's little day,
 In Fortune's varying colours drest:
 Brushed by the hand of rough Mischance,
 Or chilled by Age, their airy dance
 They leave, in dust to rest.

Changed as that is from the spirit of Pope, it is a still greater change to turn from its spirit to the stern severity of Crabbe's painting of the human life of the country in the *Parish Register*.

If we pass on from Gray a little further to Goldsmith's *Traveller* in 1764, and to his *Village* in 1770, we find that the village life is more homely, more truly sketched, but that its ruder realities are hidden. It is the same sort of interest which Gainsborough took in his rustic children and his cottages, the interest of the artist more than of

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the man. But in the *Traveller* a new element is added to the poetry of Man—interest in other peoples than the English people; the horizon of mankind has widened, and this enlargement of our poetic interest in Man beyond the bounds of England which began in Goldsmith, rapidly developed in Cowper, and in the next age grew so intense in Wordsworth that in order to save a great idea necessary as he thought for the progress of the race, he wished in lines which thrill with excitement, that the fleets and armies of England might be beaten by the foreigner. It is perhaps needless to say here that one of the causes of this wider sympathy with man was the growth of prosperity and wealth under the peaceful administration of Walpole. Men had money to travel, and peace and new openings for commerce made it easier to see the world.

In the meantime, the interest in the poor deepened. Adam Smith, 1776, and afterwards others, set on foot a series of inquiries which forced men to look sharply into the relations of capital to labour, of landowners to tenants, of the poor to the rich; and these, combining with the sentiment which had been growing up for country life and its indwellers, entered as a power into men's hearts, and naturally struck with emotional force upon the poets; and a few minor poems of the day served as heralds to the intimate treatment of the life of the poor by Crabbe and Cowper. Along with these, as a continuous subject, and indeed always a poetic subject in England, were poems that touched on or glorified Liberty. The change of which I speak enters into them in the way they altered from vague declamations about English liberty to deliberate attacks, for the sake of human liberty, on slavery and oppression—either imposed by England on subject races, or by nations beyond our doors on their own subjects. We shall find this element in the change fully set forth by Cowper.

We have now arrived at Cowper. After 1770, a pause in poetic production took place, and not till more than twenty years afterwards did the new school spring to light along with the dawn of freedom. The interval is filled with Cowper and Crabbe and Burns. Burns,

who stands somewhat apart from the influences of the day, belongs to so different a poetic descent from that of the English poets that I shall leave him aside for separate consideration; but on Cowper and Crabbe the influences which led men to investigate the wrongs and pains of the poor, to extend their human sympathies, to be indignant with oppression, to see the Man in every one, however miserable like the cottager, however degraded like the slave—fell with immense force, and became creative of a new poetry of Man. The poetry of Man in relation to intellect and fine society, the poetry of satire and speculation, the sentimental poetry of Man, the light and graceful treatment of the subject of the pastoral man by Goldsmith—all have vanished; and in Crabbe, in his *Village*, 1783, and in the *Parish Register*, 1807, we are brought face to face with the sternest portraiture of the crimes, the miseries, the starvation of the labourer. We see the same passions moving him as moved the fine gentlemen of Pope, and the scholars who exchanged letters with Gray, and the wits who met Goldsmith at Johnson's club; only the passions are coarser and the sorrows uglier. We find in his tales, not only the darker but the nobler side of this humble life, its sacrifices, its struggles, its purity in temptation; and the effect of it all in deepening and widening human sympathy cannot be overestimated. We are shown the cottages of the poor, the life of the ploughman, the bargeman, and the fisher; they are sketched, filled in with an unrelenting hand. We are led into the dreadful prisons which disgraced that time, but which Howard had bettered already. We are brought over the wretched hospitals, and find ourselves in the poorhouse, where the neglected, the vain, and the extravagant were rudely housed till death. Nothing is omitted, and as we turn back fifty years, and read the *Essay on Man*, we rub our eyes and ask, In what new world are we?

This is the history of the change in the poetry of Man from 1730 to 1790; and its literary and historical interest is considerable. Enough has been said, for our purpose, about this human element in Crabbe. It needs but a

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slight touch, for it was not tinged in him by any special religious colour. His theology was not individual but conventional, though it was profoundly felt. But when the new poetry of Man was directly connected with the individual emotions of a religious mind like Cowper's on the subjects of theology—and doctrinal as he was, his heart ran continually beyond doctrine—it becomes of special interest to us, and of still more special interest when we find that his religion was one of the causes of its much wider development. When, therefore, I have sketched in my next lecture the growth of the poetry of Nature to the same point as I have brought to-day the poetry of Man, I shall begin the lectures on the separate poets with Cowper.

LECTURE II

FROM POPE TO COWPER—*continued*

THE Poetry of Nature which I have already defined, and which is a distinct thing in our poetry after 1790, did not come into being without previous warning, and the object of this lecture is to sketch its growth from the time of Pope to the time of Wordsworth. In the previous lecture I sketched the growth of the poetry of Man, and of the doctrinal and theological elements in our poetry, and sketched them separately for the sake of greater clearness; but in this lecture I shall throw the theological and poetical subjects together, and while I trace the growth of the poetry of Nature, trace along with it, step by step, the theology that accompanied it, or the elements in it which resisted the presence of a theology.

The poetry which speaks directly of Nature for its own sake is not to be found in England till the time of Cowper, when it distinctly began, is not developed till Wordsworth, when it rapidly reached its full growth. Chaucer's landscape is for the most part conventional, though what there is of it is touched with the dewy brightness and affection of the poet. But he saw but little, and nothing solely for its own sake. The Elizabethan poets introduce bits of landscape, but these are chiefly as a background for the setting off of their own feelings or for the display of their characters; and though the natural poetry of Shakespeare has his quality of perfectness, it has little personal love of Nature. It is not till we get to Milton, to the *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, that we find any pure natural description, any deliberate choice of natural beauty as a thing to be studied for its own sake. When we arrive at the Critical School, Nature is wholly put out of the field. It is looked at, when it is at all touched, from the windows of the suburbs; the country is despised,

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and life in it considered inconceivably dull. Pope condoles with those who are driven from the city, who dream in the rural shade of triumphs in the town and wake to find the vision fled, left in "lone woods or empty walls." The descriptions in his pastorals have no resemblance to Nature, and when he steps aside to praise natural beauty, it is when it has been subjected to the critical hand of Art. It was characteristic of the time that Nature had to undergo the same sort of polish as verse. Wild Nature was as bad as wild poetry, and the art of the landscape gardener must be employed to check her extravagance and lessen her horrors. We will try Pope, however, when he describes a piece of pure landscape that he had seen,—Windsor Forest, in the pastorals:

There, interspers'd in lawns and op'ning glades,
Thin trees arise that shun each other's shades.
Here in full light the russet plains extend:
There wrapt in clouds the bluish hills ascend.
Ev'n the wild heath displays her purple dyes,
And midst the desert fruitful hills arise,
That crowned with tufted trees and springing corn,
Like verdant isles the sable waste adorn.

That is concoction, not composition; it is full of stock phrases, and it is plain that Pope made it up in his study with no recollected pleasure of the scene, with even a recollected distress at the distance he was then from town, which expresses itself in such absurd terms as the desert and the sable waste. Indeed, one can scarcely imagine the physical discomfort, the confusion of mind, the boredom which Pope, and Belinda and her court, would have suffered if they had been placed side by side with Wordsworth,—

when from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up and bathe the world in light!

or asked, with Byron—

Where mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been,
To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,
With the wild flock that never seek a fold.
Alone o'er steeps and foaming falls to lean.

But if we can imagine it for a moment, we have some idea of the change in the temper of society with regard to Nature, some cause for wonder at the new world into which, since the days when Pope wrote, we have been brought by the poets.

The Nature, then, of which Pope thought was a wholly different thing from that which we conceive; and the theology which he connected with it was just as different. The Nature of which Wordsworth conceived, the living things of earth, and air, and water, that spoke to him like friends, and moved by their "own sweet will," was separate from Man, and God spoke through it to Man. In Pope's idea it was mingled up as a part of the system of the universe with Man, and both had the same kind of life from the immanent presence of God. In fact, the Nature of which Pope spoke was nothing more than that order of the universe which the recent scientific activity had begun to impress on cultivated men; and in that order, and not in the disorder of revealed religions with their supernatural interferences, God, the Great Unknown, so far as Man could presume to scan Him, was most clearly to be seen. Here is his view in well-known lines, which seem, but are not, pantheistic, for Pope, as in the line, "The workman from his work distinct was known," takes care always to separate the first cause from the things caused.

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is and God the soul;
That changed through all, and yet in all the same;
Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame;
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glow in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent:
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part;
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart;
As full, as perfect in vile man that mourns
As the rapt seraph, that adores and burns
To him no high, no low, no great, no small—
He fills, he bounds, connects and equals all.

That is not the Nature we love or we know; we give a

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wholly different meaning to the term; and we approach Nature in a different way. Pope, looking on it as a great system, considered it from his study with all the means of the observing and inquiring intellect, and never thought of its beauty as a source of pleasure. We look on it as the storehouse of some of our deepest pleasures; we consider it with a love which may be called passionate, and we study it by all the means with which emotion furnishes us. Owing to this—and especially to its being seen as separate from us—we are forced, when we come to think of God in connection with it, to have a theology of Nature wholly distinct from this of Pope's, and we shall see how in Wordsworth the whole of the natural theology of the eighteenth century disappears. It is this change we shall trace to-day.

It was during the life-time of Pope that the change began; it was when the English heart had been almost exiled from the woods and hills, that the door into the Paradise in which we have wandered with Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats, and a hundred other lovers of the wild world of earth and air and sea, was opened for our entrance. In 1726, nearly twenty years before the death of Pope, James Thomson published his *Winter*, and in 1730 the whole of the *Seasons* was given to the world. The greater part of it must have been, so far as its feeling went, incomprehensible to Pope. That "recollected love," which Thomson said he embodied in his descriptions of Nature, could never have been felt by a single one of the followers of the Critical School.

It is true that the taint of the artificial spirit lingered in his poetry, but for all that it was a new world to the English people. The woods, the rivers, the moors, the cornfields, the mountain floods, the summer skies, the tempests, all the broad aspects of Nature were seen and detailed with some real care and affection. One sees that he is often painting directly from the scene; that sometimes his monotonous and turgid style is forgotten, that the beauty and peace of the outward world bring him so much emotion that his verse becomes spontaneous and tender. But for the most part he wants the simplicity of

description which passionate love of Nature produces, and, above all, the sweetness and pathetic truth that comes of self-consciousness being lost in the life of Nature. We stand only on the threshold of the new world when we read Thomson. He has none of that solitary emotion for Nature herself which complains and creates and trembles with its own excitement in Shelley; none of that intense quiet of enjoyment which broods like sunlight over Wordsworth's soul when he steps into a nook in the woods, and treads lightly lest he should disturb its living spirit.

For there is as much difference between the feeling of Thomson about Nature and the conventional coldness of his descriptions, and the feeling of a poet like Shelley, as there was between Thomson and Pope. It is worth while to compare them at the same work. Here is Thomson treating an autumn noon,—

For now the day
O'er heaven and earth diffused, grows warm and high,
Infinite splendour! wide investing all.
How still the breeze! save what the filmy threads
Of dew evaporate brushes from the plain.
How clear the cloudless sky, how deeply tinged
With a peculiar blue! The ethereal arch
How swelled immense, amid whose azure throned
The radiant sun how gay—how calm below
The gilded earth!

Contrast the note of that—how heavy, elaborate, and yet how true in parts, how unemotional—with this, and think how wonderful the change,—

Noon descends around me now:
'Tis the noon of Autumn's glow,
When a soft and purple mist
Like a vaporous amethyst,
Or an air-dissolvéd star
Mingling light and fragrance, far
From the curved horizon's bound
To the point of heaven's profound,
Fills the overflowing sky:
And the plains that silent lie

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Underneath; the leaves unsodden
Where the infant Frost has trodden
With his morning-wingéd feet
Whose bright print is gleaming yet;
And the red and golden vines
Piercing with their trellised lines
The rough, dark-skirted wilderness;
The dun and bladed grass no less
Pointing from this hoary tower
In the windless air; the flower
Glimmering at my feet; the line
Of the olive-sandalled Apennine
In the south dimly islanded;
And the Alps, whose snows are spread
High between the clouds and sun;
And of living things each one;
And my spirit, which so long
Darkened this swift stream of song,—
Interpenetrated lie
By the glory of the sky;
Be it love, light, harmony,
Odour, or the soul of all
Which from heaven like dew doth fall,
Or the mind which feeds this verse
Peopling the lone universe.

It is not a development of the former, it is a different thing altogether. In Thomson, the poet stands apart and apostrophises Nature; in Shelley, the poet is absorbed into Nature, and his voice is the voice of Nature herself. Whatever theology Shelley had about Nature would naturally, owing to this interpenetration of himself and her, become pantheistic; or would be content, since delight was so great, not to know and not to care whether it were love from without, or his own mind from within, that made or peopled the universe; but Thomson's theology of Nature, because he was not interpenetrated by her, would recognise a separate First Cause. His nearness to Pope would also lead him to share in the systematic view of the universe, but this would be deeply modified in him by his close study of natural beauty. He sees the world no longer only as a great order under a great Governor. He sees it as full of varied landscapes of infinite beauty,

and each of these as the work of God—as revelations of His character. He hovers round, though he does not clearly touch, the thought of Nature as a living personal image of God. He has begun that separation of Nature from Man which led afterwards to the half pantheistic theology of Nature that Wordsworth worked out, to the wholly pantheistic theology of Shelley.

The impulse given by Thomson to the study of Nature went on increasing. That migration of the poets from the town to the country of which I spoke, began: men visited the more accessible parts of England and recorded their impressions; Dyer's *Grongar Hill* is the record of a landscape in South Wales; his *Fleece* and Somerville's *Chase* are both descriptive poems, but they are too slight to contain any theology of Nature. Foreign travel next enlarged the sphere of love of Nature. Every one knows the letters of Gray, and remembers the lucid simplicity and directness, mingled with the fastidious sentiment of a scholar, of his description of such scenes as the Chartreuse. That is a well-known description, but those in his journal of a *Tour in the North* have been neglected, and they are especially interesting since they go over much of the country in which Wordsworth dwelt, and of which he wrote. They are also the first conscious effort—and in this he is a worthy forerunner of Wordsworth—to describe natural scenery with the writer's eye upon the scene described, and to describe it in simple and direct phrase, in distinction to the fine writing that was then practised. And Gray did this intentionally in the light prose journal he kept, and threw by for a time the refined carefulness and the insistence on human emotion which he thought necessary in poetic description of Nature. In his prose, then, though not in his poetry, we have Nature loved for her own sake.¹

¹ I insert here two of these descriptions; they may perhaps induce some to read Gray's letters, and few letters in the English language are so good:—"I walked out under the conduct of my landlord to Borrodale. The grass was covered with a hoar frost, which soon melted and exhaled in a thin bluish smoke. Crossed the meadows obliquely, catching a diversity of views among the hills over the lake and islands, and changing prospect at every ten paces; left

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It was different, as I say, in his poetry. The exquisite choice and studious simplicity of the natural description in such poems as the *Elegy* and the *Ode to Eton College* is the result of art more than of the pure imagination; and Gray weighed every word, especially every adjective, till he reached what I suppose to be his ideal—that every line was to suggest a sentiment and a landscape. We feel, then, too much the art and too little the emotion

Cockshut and Castlehill (which we formerly mounted) behind me, and drew near the foot of Walla-crag, whose bare and rocky brow cut perpendicularly down above 400 feet, as I guess, awfully overlooks the way; our path here tends to the left, and the ground gently rising, and covered with a glade of scattering trees and bushes on the very margin of the water, opens both ways the most delicious view that my eyes ever beheld. Behind you are the magnificent heights of Walla-crag; opposite lie the thick hanging woods of Lord Egremont, and Newland valley, with green and smiling fields embosomed in the dark cliffs; to the left, the jaws of Borrodale, with that turbulent chaos of mountain behind mountain, rolled in confusion; beneath you, and stretching far away to the right, the shining purity of the lake, just ruffled by the breeze enough to show it is alive, reflecting woods, rocks, fields, and inverted tops of mountains, with the white buildings of Keswick, Crosthwaite Church, and Skiddaw for a back-ground at a distance.”

Mr. Gray to Dr. Wharton.

“ Past by the little chapel of Wiborn, out of which the Sunday congregation were then issuing. Past a beck near Dunmailrouse, and entered Westmoreland a second time, now begin to see Helm-crag, distinguished from its rugged neighbours, not so much by its height, as by the strange, broken outline of its top, like some gigantic building demolished, and the stones that composed it flung across each other in wild confusion. Just beyond it opens one of the sweetest landscapes that art ever attempted to imitate. The bosom of the mountains spreading here into a broad basin, discovers in the midst Grassmere-Water; its margin is hollowed into small bays with bold eminences, some of them rocks, some of soft turf, that half conceal and vary the figure of the little lake they command. From the shore a low promontory pushes itself far into the water, and on it stands a white village with the parish church rising in the midst of it; hanging enclosures, corn-fields, and meadows green as an emerald, with their trees, hedges, and cattle, fill up the whole space from the edge of the water. Just opposite to you is a large farm-house at the bottom of a steep, smooth lawn, embosomed in old woods, which climb half-way up the mountain side, and discover above them a broken line of crags, that crown the scene. Not a single red tile, no flaring gentleman's house or garden walls, break in upon the repose of this little unsuspected paradise; but all is peace, rusticity, and happy poverty in its neatest and most becoming attire.”

in his work; but then work like this introduced an ideal of style and expression into our poetical language about Nature—a demand for perfection—which it has never since lost, but which it never, except in Milton, possessed before. After lines like these, for example, in which every word tells,—

There pipes the woodlark, and the songthrush there
Scatters his loose notes in the waste of air,

it was quite impossible to go back wilfully to the careless profusion of epithets, and the hazarded meanings of the Elizabethan writers. Gray established a standard of careful accuracy in natural description which has never left our poetry, and in the great writers of our century nothing is more delightful than the mingling of imagination and emotion with a close and minute truthfulness in their work on Nature.

We find the same exquisite choice and care in Collins. His *Ode to Evening* is as finished and concise in description as it is finished and subtle in sentiment. The key of feeling in which it is written is not for one moment transposed. The landscape and the emotion of the poet interpenetrate one another, so that a pleasure made up of both blended into one impression is given to the reader. Evening, “maid composed,” is to teach him some softened strain,—

Whose numbers, stealing through thy darkening vale,
May not unseemly with its stillness suit.

Every epithet is chosen and weighed by an art which, first submitting itself to the work of observation, and then letting emotion work on the materials, at last creates such a distant landscape as this,—

Or if chill, blustering winds or driving rain
Prevent my willing feet, be mine the hut
That from the mountain's side
Views wilds and swelling floods,
And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires;
And hears their simple bell; and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.

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But in neither Gray nor Collins is Nature, I do not say first, but on an equality with Man, in interest. Nothing is distinctly written for her and her alone. On the contrary, Man is always the centre, the landscape clusters round him; it is used as a means of pleasure for him, or as echoing his feelings, or as an illustration of moral lessons useful to him. It is never the first thing in the poetry. And Gray put it himself in this position. For, in writing to Beattie about the Minstrel, he says, "As to description, I have always thought that it made the most graceful ornament of poetry, but never ought to make the subject." I need scarcely say how different it is in the poetry of Wordsworth, in which man and his emotions are frequently left out altogether. And yet it is worth saying, for it was this predominance of man in the poetry of which we speak, that prevented in it any distinct theology of Nature. We know that both Gray and Collins were religious men, but there is not a trace in their poetry of any religious feeling connected with Nature.

The next step in this poetry of Nature is a curious one. Both Gray and Collins in the midst of natural scenery speak of Man, and not of themselves. But the Wartons and Logan, and others of that time, when they retire to the woods or hills, speak of themselves alone. They see only their own feelings in Nature, and use her as the mirror to reflect their melancholy and morbid moods. They are without any joy or gratitude for her brightness and life. Seeking only sympathy for their spleen, they prefer darksome shades, and gloomy valleys, and autumn in its decay, and, above all, night. Nor can they bear company; they fly from the face of man to the solitudes of Nature, and find there not misery, as Pope would have found, or rapture, as Wordsworth would have found, but a sentimental and faded pleasure.

"Oh tell," cries Warton,—

How rapturous the joy, to melt
To melody's assuasive voice; to bend
The uncertain step along the midnight mead
And pour your sorrows to the pitying moon;

By many a slow trill from the bird of woe
Oft interrupted; in embowering woods,
By darksome brook to muse, and there forget
The solemn dulness of the tedious world.

How remote from Pope! but in the following description of the delights of the woodman's life, note the genuine enthusiasm for beauty and the fresher feeling which, with all their sentiment, these poets did not want.

When morning's twilight-tinctured beam
Strikes their low thatch with slanting gleam,
They rove abroad in ether blue
To dip the scythe in fragrant dew;
The sheaf to bind, the beech to fell
That nodding shades a craggy dell.
Midst gloomy glades in warbles clear
Wild Nature's sweetest notes they hear;
Or green untrodden banks they view
The hyacinth's neglected hue;
Each native charm their steps explore
Of Solitude's sequestered store.

We find, then, the poets bringing to Nature that personal element which we traced in the devotional poetry: and though they only saw themselves in Nature, a kind of personal affection for her could not but begin to grow in poetry. They were led to look more directly at Nature, though it was only to find additional food for their own pensiveness; they were led to look at the smaller beauties of Nature, to count the primroses on a woodland bank, to mark the changing lights on a mountain pool. And for the first time the pleasure of being alone with Nature in her solitudes now became a distinct element in modern poetry. It was freed from its sentimentality by Wordsworth and others; it was freed also from its habit of self-consciousness. The new poets felt the frank joy of Nature, and could not burden it with faded sentiment; they felt ravished by her beauty and could not think of themselves. Logan or Warton walking by a brook would have compared it with the sorrows and solitude of their hearts: Wordsworth writes as if from another world than theirs—hearing no echo of himself or of human pain in

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the rapture of life that he feels around him by the brook-side,—

The spirit of enjoyment and desire
And hopes and wishes, from all living things
Went circling, like a multitude of sounds—

. up the brook

I roamed, in the confusion of my heart,
Alive to all things, and forgetting all.

Lost, you see, in the gaiety and life of Nature!

It is no wonder where self intruded so much into natural contemplation as with these poets, that one finds no religion linked to their love of Nature. It is no wonder that, when self, as in Wordsworth, is lost, one finds religion.

The next step, in the order of growth in the poetry of Nature, is made by Goldsmith. We possess from him clear descriptions of natural scenery, uninfluenced by human feeling, untroubled by moralising thought. The landscapes in the *Traveller* are pure pictures; but they are wholly uncoloured with emotion. Not for a moment does he feel such love to a place for its own sake as Wordsworth expresses forty years after the *Traveller* was published, about a glade of water and one green field,—

And if a man should plant his cottage near,
Should sleep beneath the shelter of its trees,
And blend its waters with his daily meal,
He would so love it, that in his death hour
Its image would survive among his thoughts.

Nor is another touch in the same poem—

This spot was made by Nature for herself—

less remarkable as a proof of the great change of thought and feeling about Nature between Goldsmith and Wordsworth. Goldsmith coldly delineates the landscape, and never dreams that it may have a life of its own, or share in the life of a spirit. Wordsworth thinks of the whole of Nature as a living person, and of a landscape as dwelt

in, even chosen as a special retreat, by Nature, through a special love of it. It is all the distance between a dead and a living universe, and with the conception of a living universe our true poetic theology of Nature begins. But we could not get to that theology till we had conceived Nature as having a life distinct from ours, and Goldsmith made one step forward to that when he freed the landscape in his descriptions from the burden of human feeling which Gray, Collins, Beattie, and Warton had imposed on it.

The next step, and an immense one, was made by Burns, Crabbe, and Cowper.

Leaving Burns aside for separate treatment, I pass on to the two others in whose work we have for the first time Nature distinctly studied and loved for her own sake. The moralising of Gray on the landscape, the transference of emotion to it by Burns, the sentimental note of Warton, have passed away, and we see Nature as a whole, and separated from Man.

Crabbe's poetry of Nature is as direct in description as his poetry of Man. He was a botanist and mineralogist, and his close study of flowers and stones made him look accurately into all things. He paints the very blades of grass on the common, and the trail of the shell-fish on the sand. It is the introduction into our poetry of that minute observation, and delight in minute things in Nature, which is so remarkable in the subsequent poets, which led Coleridge to paint in words the dancing of the sand at the bottom of a tiny spring, and Wordsworth the daisy's shadow on the naked stone, and Shelley the almost invisible globes of vapour which the sun sucks from a forest pool. The difference is that Crabbe writes without the imagination which confers life on the things seen, while the later poets, believing that all Nature was alive, conceived a living spirit in the sand, the daisy, and the vapour. And this distinction, as we shall see, has its force in relation to the poetical theology of Nature.

Cowper's natural painting is not like Crabbe's, pre-Raphaelite. He paints broad landscapes, and his range is as extensive as the scenery he lived among, and often