

humour like *Tam o' Shanter* or the *Jolly Beggars* have so much of intense humanity in them, that they move natural emotion, and reconcile us even to coarseness for the moment. We feel that men are kindly, even in their ill: though I must speak afterwards of the bad results of Burns' victory over the ascetic party in Scotland.

But whatever the ill results, this bright, tender, heartfelt representation of the life of the poor not only brought the rich and comfortable near to the poor and struggling, and placed both on the common platform of humanity, but it also made the poor themselves contented and in love with life, by bringing out the nobility and beauty of the simple human passions, and of the common working life of men. Even in the sharp contrast which he draws in the *Twa Dogs* between the lives of poor and rich, he himself prefers that of the poor, and gives clear reasons for it—reasons which had their root in no sentimental view of the question. He was then no mere wild revolutionist; he did not wish to level all. He preached a crusade against the selfishness of the rich, but he did not wish the poor to become as the rich. Keep to your own life, he said to them; learn to live it, to live truly and honestly in it—to recognise in it the dignity of Man, to rejoice in its hardy independence, in its simple but deep emotions.

Nor was all this without a religious basis. It was connected in the mind of Burns with the thought of God as the Father of the Poor, of God as even the universal Father before whom each man stood, stripped of wealth, of rank, of outward show—a character alone. And this God, in the poet's mind, was Love, and the source of all Love was in Him. It was impossible then for Burns to hold the strong Calvinistic view of the reprobation of the greater part of mankind. He was continually in antagonism with it, and many and shrewd were the blows he dealt it. To him, as well as to Shelley and Byron, we owe much of our freedom from this inconsiderate view of God, a view which only could have been born in a society that was rooted in an aristocratic view of the world, though strange to say, yet explicable enough if one

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had time to go into the matter, it has been the favourite religion of democracy. As to Burns, his deep conception of the universal power of God's love, led him to pity the Devil and to hope for his redemption, a hope that many who still believe in the Devil share with him.

Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken,
Hae yet a stake.

On the other side, God's love for Man would make Him indignant with those who oppressed the weak or injured the poor. And the poems of Burns are full of this indignation. Not all the rage of winds and biting frost are more unkind, he says, than the miseries

That heaven-illumined man on brother man bestows.

All his religion, he says, came from the heart; and it drove him, when he thought of his poor people and their hard lives, and how beautiful they often were with natural feeling; when he thought how much they suffered and how much was due to them, to refer the origin of their good to God, and to leave the righting of their wrongs to God.

He went further, and threw over the lives of the poor the light of God. Every one knows the scene in the *Cottar's Saturday Night*; every one has felt how solemn and patriarchal it is, and how all the charming gossip and pleasant human fun, and modest love which charm us in it are dignified by the worship of God that follows. But that poem must not be taken as representing the religious feeling of Burns; it is purposely made religious; and all we can truly say of Burns is, that whether as regards his own art, or when he speaks of the lives and love of the poor, he was one of those men who at the end of last century claimed for men a universal Father in God, and vindicated the poor as His children. It is not of course stated directly—that would not be the way of a poet—but it is a spirit in his work, and it flows through all his graver poems. It affects also distantly all his poetry, and owing to its influence, we find the grace and tenderness of human feeling used to make beautiful that

which the world calls common, even that it calls unclean. This is, indeed, the most sacred work of poetry, and it has so strict an analogy with the means Christ chose to use in His teaching, that it forms another point of union between Christianity and poetry. I have often said that if we would understand Christ's words and works, we must approach them as we approach poetry. The parables that have to do with Man are poems, in which the common lives and sorrows of men are made divine by interpreting them as symbols of God's relation to men. The world can never forget the shepherd seeking his sheep, the father's joy over his son lost and found, the blessing given to the children, the life the Saviour lived among the outcasts and strayed of earth, the glory of love which was shed over the fisher's life, the way in which the whole of humble working life was linked to God, the proclamation of the care of the Highest for the shepherd on the hill, for the sower in the field.

And whatever one may have afterwards to say of Burns' religion, the practical result of much of his poetry in his age was to do similar work to that of Christ—to exalt and beautify the life of the poor, to make them feel that they were cared for and known of God.

It was then, in this way, by upholding Manhood as first, and by exalting the poor as men, and by preaching a common brotherhood, that Burns developed the poetry of Man, and was a child of the ideas of the Revolution. But there was another human element in his poetry which I must speak of now—his strong nationality. It was connected with theology, and it was unconnected with the Revolution. One of the main ideas of the Revolution was its rejection of all nationalities for the sake of mankind. It proclaimed one country of which all men were citizens, one nation of which all men were members, of which all men were patriots, to which all men were bound to offer up their lives. A man was not, in the first instance, an Englishman, Frenchman, or Italian, he was a man. Its tendency was then to repress any strong feeling of nationality, and to substitute for it a strong Humanity. And we have found that element in the poets in England who were

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most influenced by the Revolution. We do not find it in Burns. Nor is it likely that we should; for if love of Nature is one of the distinguishing elements of all Scottish poetry, love of Scotland is the other, and Burns is the descendant of the one as well as of the other.

It seems to be doubted both by Burns and Carlyle that Scotland was fond of herself till Burns arose—by Burns in lines to W. Simpson which I shall quote afterwards; by Carlyle when he speaks of the remarkable increase of nationality in Scottish literature, and attributes it chiefly to Burns. Both of them seem to forget, or not to know, that the poetry of Scotland has never failed to be national, even after the union of the two crowns, the time of which they speak. The Lowland poetry began in Scotland with James I., and took its first inspiration from Chaucer, whom James had read while a prisoner in England. But the remarkable thing is, that while it retained the manner of Chaucer, it kept none of his spirit. It was not English, nor even medieval. It became entirely Scottish in spirit; it employed itself on Scottish subjects; and whatever form it took up, ballad, or fable or pastoral, or allegory, it gave them all a special Scottish turn. And one of its characteristics is a devotional patriotism. Ballad after ballad records it, and when we come to the greater makers, it is intense. Dunbar's *Golden Terge* is one instance; Douglas brims over with it; even Lyndsay, before he was carried away from purely poetic work to political, gives himself to glorify his land. Again, at a time when personification raged in Scottish poetry, one of the most frequent personifications is that of Scotland herself. She appears as Warden of the Land, in a noble song of Alexander Scott's, full of manly freedom and patriotism; and it is patriotism whose main desire is not for warlike glory, but for the glory which belongs to a nobly-governed country whose citizens were free from falsehood, flattery, and impurity. Or, as in Dunbar's *Thistle and Rose*, life is given to the Royal Arms, and the animals and flowers sing of the glory of the land. The same strong feeling—and in this short sketch I can give you no idea of its strength—is continued through Ramsay

and Ferguson and a number of minor poets, right down to Burns, whose *Vision* and *Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled* are the legitimate children of this long patriotic passion. A flood of Scottish prejudice, he says, has been poured along my veins, and I feel it will boil there till the flood-gates shut in eternal rest.

The roughbur thistle spreading wide
Amang the bearded bear,
I turned the weeder clips aside
An' spared the symbol dear.

In nearly all his poems we find this traditional nationality, and it entirely prevented him from receiving the denationalising idea of the Revolution. All the characteristics of the past poets belong to him. He keeps himself throughout to Scottish subjects; his scenery is entirely Scottish, his love of liberty concentrates itself round Scottish struggles; his muse is wholly untravelled; and while it gains a certain strength within its sphere from this limitation, it loses that breadth of view and depth of passion which belong to the greater poets. He may have, as Carlyle says, a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling—and he has—but all the human feeling is Scottish. There is no need to account for this; the reasons are plain in his position and his life. Nor have we any need to regret it, for if Burns had been more universal we should have lost him; he could not have built a loftier rhyme than his own rustic national one, and he knew that well. When the Muse of Scotland appeared to him, she bade him sing his own people; her mantle was adorned with rivers, hills, and boroughs of Scotland, and in her face was the character of Scotland's poets—

A hair-brained, sentimental trace,
Was strongly marked in her face;
A wildly witty, rustic grace
Shone full upon her;
Her eye, ev'n turned on empty space,
Beamed keen with Honour.

And the same "wildly witty, rustic grace" that shone

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full upon her shines in all his work. For Scotland's
glory and Scotland's beauty

I kittle up my rustic reed
It gies me ease.

And nothing can be better or brighter than the lines in
which he expresses this, written to W. Simpson,

Ramsay an' famous Ferguson,
Gied Forth an' Tay a lift aboon;
Yarrow an' Tweed to monie a tune,
Owre Scotland rings,
While Irwin, Lugar, Ayr an' Doon,
Naebody sings.

The Ilissus, Tiber, Thames an' Seine,
Glide sweet in monie a tunefu' line!
But, Willie, set your fit to mine,
An' cock your crest:
We'll gar our streams an' burnies shine
Up wi' the best.

We'll sing auld Coila's plains and fells,
Her moors red-brown wi' heather bells,
Her banks an' braes, her dens an' dells,
Where glorious Wallace
Aft bure the gree, as story tells,
Frae Southron billies.

At Wallace' name, what Scottish blood
But boils up in a spring-tide flood?
Oft have our fearless fathers strode
By Wallace' side:
Still pressing onwards, red-wat-shod,
Or glorious dy'd.

And this profound patriotism had, in that religious country, where religion lies deeper among the peasantry than anywhere else, where the strife of religion has been violent in proportion to the feeling that it was a matter of life and death, its root in God. God was claimed as the source of patriotism; it was He that made men love their country, he who inspired those who warred for its liberty. I might quote passage after passage from Douglas, from Dunbar, from Sir D. Lyndsay, from the

others; but let Burns himself answer the call—Burns, whose “warmest wish to heaven was sent” for his dear, his native soil.

O Thou! who poured the patriotic tide
That streamed through Wallace's undaunted heart;
Who dared to, nobly, stem tyrannic pride,
Or nobly die, the second glorious part,—
The patriot's God, peculiarly thou art,
His friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward—
O never, never, Scotia's realm desert;
But still the patriot, and the patriot bard,
In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard!

In these days, when we think less of a national and more of a universal God, it may strike us as limiting and dividing a great idea to speak of a patriot's God. And, when we consider well, there is a great disadvantage in thinking of a God whose peculiar care is England, or France, or Germany; indeed, if we do so, in war for example, our idea of God must become wholly confused. One or other side must be wrong in claiming God as specially theirs. God is the God of mankind; His equal love belongs to and falls on all, on the meanest as fully as on the most cultured races. That is the large conception which will free us from the national selfishness into which patriotism degenerates, and increase that international kindness and communion which are beginning to be a mark of our time; nay more, bring us slowly up to the thought which a century hence will, I hope, dominate politics—national self-sacrifice. The Christian thought of personal life is to surrender our personal life and its interests for those among whom we live. The Christian thought of social life is to surrender our personal interest for the sake of the well-being of society, not only of our own country's sake, but of human society. The Christian thought of national life, which has been prominently put forward by the Comtists, is that each nation, when the interests of the whole race are concerned in such sacrifice, should give up its national interests for those of all mankind. Till we attain that, and it will necessitate a general confederation of nations, we cannot be called Christian

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nations, for we are not regulating our national conduct by the Christian rule of life.

Keeping, however, this thought of God clear as the foundation of our life, we are then able—without ill or unreason following from it—to love God as the God of our country also, as the source of a noble patriotism. For we no longer think of God as the God of England in rivalry or contest with other nations, and claim Him as specially ours to the exclusion of others. We say to ourselves, on the contrary—“Our country has a special work to do in the progress of the whole race; work which is fitted to our national character, and which our special gifts enable us to do better than any other nation. It is God who in His education of the whole of mankind has given us that work. Within its sphere, then, and with this object before us, which is first universal, and afterwards national, God is the source of our patriotism.” We love our country then in God, when we love it for a higher reason than its own glory—for the reason that it is the instrument of God to do a special work for Man. We support and cherish the peculiar characteristics of England, because these are needful for the growth of mankind. We love and cherish its scenery because that is one of the most formative elements of our national character, and that character is needed for the growth of Man. We are patriots because we are men who believe that the decay or death of England would damage the interests of the whole race, and delay its progress to the great goal whither God is driving it.

And nothing is lost in that idea of the old power and dearness of patriotism. The old conception is taken up into the new, only all the evil of national selfishness is taken out of it. We love our country none the less because we love man more.

LECTURE XV

ROBERT BURNS—*continued*

IN my last lecture I spoke of the poetry of Man as found in Burns, and I dwelt especially on the way in which he—in accordance with the new spirit which was stealing into the world—devoted his work to the interests of the poor among whom he lived, not of set purpose like a philanthropist, but because he could not help it like an artist.

It is his natural poetry of which I shall speak to-day, and we can connect it with the previous lecture by the thought that among the joys that God has given to the life of the poor one of the deepest is the beauty of Nature, and the heart to love it; such a heart as Burns himself possessed, who

In his glory and his joy
Followed the plough along the mountain side.

Things without money or without price, beauty not hid in galleries, but spread abroad a feast of delight on every mountain-side and stream-fed meadow—this was God's gift to the poor. And strange to say, Burns seems to think, and he should know something about it, that the poor were better able than the rich and cultured to enjoy the loveliness of the world. That certainly would not be true of England now; for there are few things we have so attentively cultivated as the love of Nature. But it may have been true in his days that

The Laverock shuns the palace gay,
And o'er the cottage sings;
For Nature smiles as sweet, I ween,
To shepherds as to Kings.

Wordsworth, too, takes up the same thought; he himself is formed by Nature, step by step; it never seems to

occur to him that his companions—dalesmen, shepherds, pedlars, even the little children—can be otherwise than lovers of Nature, and able to enjoy its beauty; and we must take his witness as true, for he lived among them all his life. But this is certainly not the case further south, and the lower one goes in England, the less one finds of it, except in the upper classes, among whom it has now become almost instinctive.

We have, then, this curious problem at the very outset of our lecture—that the poor of the north-western part of England on the border, and of the west border of Scotland, are lovers of Nature, while the poor of Midland and Southern England are not. I do not say that I can solve that problem; I cannot—but I can make a few conjectures about it, and it will lead me to speak of the Nature poetry of Scotland, a poetry so distinct from that of England that it is necessary to say something about it before we touch on it in Burns.

The higher appreciation of Nature among the men of the west border may partly be owing to the grandeur or wildness of the scenery they live amongst. The imagination cannot help being awakened and impressed by desolation. Fear is easily stirred in boyhood by the storm on the moor, or the majesty of mountain loneliness, and fear awakes imagination. Afterwards, when with manhood comes courage, fear passes into a sense of the sublime, and terror has its beauty, since it stirs emotion. But when perception of the sublime exists, perception of the beautiful in the peace of nature soon follows: the one throws the perceiver into the arms of the other. That may be one explanation, but it is not a sufficient one. It does not account for this love of Nature among the dwellers in the quiet scenery of Ayr and Lanark.

Therefore I cannot help conjecturing that a great deal of the intense perception of Nature's beauty which we find in early Scottish poetry—especially the wild love of colour—the descriptions of Gawin Douglas blaze like an Oriental monarch—may be due to some far-off admixture of Celtic blood. All the Scottish poets of early date possess it, and it seems to spring out of nothing. There is no

cause for it in the influence which Chaucer and his school had on poetry in Scotland, for it does not exist among them; nor in the French, for there it does not exist at this early time of which I speak, except, indeed, where one gets a touch of Celtic influence. In the absence of any real cause that I can absolutely point to, I am forced to conjecture that this love of nature was a legacy left by the Celtic blood among the English of the Lowlands. The old kingdom of Strathclyde ran up from our present Wales to the Clyde, taking in the half of the Lowlands and the more western parts of Northern England. The Celtic poets had this intimate desire to look at Nature, this passion for colour, this wish to glorify the woods and streams, which is so remarkable in Douglas and the rest. They take, as the Scottish poets do, isolated natural objects—a rock, a tree, a glade—fall in love with them, and bring them with one magical touch into the domain of Fairyland. Their early literature, their romances, their songs are full of this. There is nothing of it in early English poetry. A few distant echoes of it are heard in Shakespeare, but scarcely any true notes of it in England, till Keats and Shelley and Tennyson. In Scotland we find it at once, not at all in its perfection, but sufficiently distinct to sever Scottish poetry from all others of the time, and to make it of a different race from English.

Now my conjecture is, that this Celtic element of natural love of the beauty of the world, this special power of seeing Nature, and delight in observing her—which came so early to Scotland, and so late to England—crept in from Strathclyde, mingled in the blood of the English of the Lowlands, and left behind it, when the Celtic race died away, its peculiar note in the Lowland mind. Anyway, this is true, that Scotland has always been a land where poets loved Nature, and that she first sent that love down to England.

The original impulse of the Lowland poetry came, as we have seen, from Chaucer through James I. We might then expect that its natural description, with which we have now to do, would retain some of the pecu-

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liarities of Chaucer's landscape. That is not the case. The intense nationality of the Scots of which I have already spoken seized on this element in poetry, and at once and for ever put aside the conventional landscape of Chaucer. The Scottish poets could not realise smooth and soft meadows and fair gardens, and trees standing so many feet apart. There was nothing of the kind in Scotland. Their own scenery forced itself on their notice, and they loved it well. In all the poems, the trees, rocks, rivers, and valleys are distinctly Scottish; the sun rises in Scotland, the months and seasons as described by Douglas have the character of his own country. We may say that the law which bids a poet describe what lies before him, and write with his eye on the object, in distinction from that which insists on the landscape being always made up of certain stock properties, is due to the Scottish poets. In England it did not *prevail* till Cowper's time—in Scotland it was carried out, owing to the love of her people for their own country, before the seventeenth century. It is a curious anticipation by many years of the love of Nature for her own sake which was first rooted in our literature by Wordsworth.

With regard to the description of Nature itself, it is absolutely unique at the time. It is perfectly amazing to find, in the sixteenth century, in Scotland, elaborate natural description full of close touches of reality, overladen with colour, minute, enthusiastic, at a time when nothing of the kind existed, or had existed in England. Here and there it is touched by the convention of Chaucer, as in the use of Latin names for the sun—a survival which we find in Burns—but the feeling for Nature of Douglas and Dunbar, and their natural description, are not only unlike anything that had ever been in England, they remain unlike anything which prevailed in England down to the very end of the eighteenth century. The only man in whom we miss this minute, observant, patient effort to represent Nature as she is, is Drummond—and he was not of the Scottish line—he was Elizabethanised. The whole thing is a curious literary problem, and one of the conclusions to be drawn from it is this—that we owe

our special natural poetry to an impulse received from Scotland. It is not too much to say that the first touches of love of Nature in Pope's time which we find in Gay were due to the influence on him of his friend Ramsay's poems. Neither is it strange to find that he who broke away from the tea-tray landscape of Pope, and was the first poet in England who painted Nature directly, was Thomson, a Scotsman, who came to London with the MS. of his *Winter* in his pocket. He started the impulse which ended in the natural poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, but he drew himself the impulse from a long line of Scottish ancestors who had loved and described Nature.

This is the ancestry of the natural poetry of Burns. If we except the extraordinary love of colour which is one of the characteristic marks of the early Scottish poets, he has the same intense love of Nature and accuracy of description that they possessed. In two things, however, he differs from a man like Douglas. First, his range is not so wide. There was nothing Douglas saw which he did not describe—I might even say catalogue, for the things are put down one after another without any power of artistic combination—but there are only certain things which strike Burns. In fact they come in so often and are so nearly always the same, that a certain amount of conventionality prevails in his natural descriptions. It is the ordinary Lowland scenery on the borders of the hills; milk-white thorns, corn-fields, running rivers under birchen shade, the singing of birds, sheep wandering on the hills, heather and its flowers, streams in spate, and certain conditions of the sea—with a special love for spring and winter—winter being always a favourite of the Scottish poets. He does not get far beyond this range, and it is, as I said, narrow. But within the range it is exquisitely true and tender, the sentiment of it is perfect, it is never exaggerated, nothing is forced or over-dwelt on; it is the natural and swift reproduction in words of the landscape, and all that is said sounds sweetly and smells sweetly to the sense.

Secondly, his natural description arises out of a deep

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and natural love of Nature, but it is never alone as that of Douglas was, never without the element of humanity. In a delightful passage, when the genius of Scotland's muse speaks to him in vision, Burns expresses his early passion for natural beauty.

I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
Delighted with the dashing roar;
Or when the North his fleecy store
Drove through the sky,
I saw grim Nature's visage hoar
Strike thy young eye.

Or when the deep green-mantled earth
Warm cherished every flow'ret's birth,
And joy and music pouring forth
In every grove,
I saw thee eye the gen'ral mirth
With boundless love.

Nature, too, was bound up with his art: it was she who gave it half its fire, she who thrilled him often with so much emotion that he broke into poetry, she who was mingled up with all his love and sorrow in humanity.

The Muse nae Poet ever found her,
'Till by himsel' he learned to wander
Adown some trotting burn's meander
An' no think lang:
O sweet to stray and pensive ponder
A heartfelt song—

and there is not a song of his which has not its background of tender landscape. But strong as this love of Nature was in Burns, it never wholly absorbed him. He could not, like Wordsworth or Shelley or Keats, sit down in a wood or on a hill-side and describe what he saw, for the love of it alone, without a thought of humanity, without a thought of self, absolutely lost in love of the world. His natural descriptions are always the background for human figures, for human love or sorrow or mirth. Man is always first in Burns; and he either wholly subordinates Nature to humanity, or he uses it as illustrative of human life. I take the lines to the *Lass of Ballochmyle*.

'Twas even, the dewy fields were green:
On every blade the pearlis hung,
The zephyrs wantoned round the bean
And bore its fragrant scents along.
In every glen the mavis sang,
All Nature listening seemed the while,
Except where greenwood echoes rang
Amang the braes of Ballochmyle—
With careless step I onward strayed,
My heart rejoiced in Nature's joy.

That is complete enough. Wordsworth would have left it there, Burns cannot—over the braes he brings a maiden—

Perfection whispered, passing by,
Behold the lass of Ballochmyle.

It is the same in the two well-known poems of *Mary in Heaven*, and the *Banks of Doon*—his landscape is always not for itself, but for the human feeling with which he links it; and where the feeling is most deep, the landscape is most lovely.

This humanisation of landscape is the transition step between a poetry like Pope's which has Man only as its subject and rejects Nature, and such poetry as much of Wordsworth's, in which Nature assumes the first place. It was made in England by such men as Gray and Collins, in whose work, if you remember, Nature is moralised for Man's sake, while it is described with a certain affection. Burns, who carefully read Gray, represents in Scotland such a standpoint, only that it is there not in progress to a future, but in retrogression from a past poetry of Nature; and also, the landscape is not moralised by Burns, but made passionate with love.

He mingled Man and Nature together, and in doing so he transfers the depth of his personal affections to natural objects, and speaks of them with often a sudden tenderness, an exquisite mournfulness of pity, or a quick sympathy with their joy. His address to the daisy makes one feel for it as if it were a beautiful child too rudely treated.

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Wee, modest crimson-tipped flower,
 Thou's met me in an evil hour,
 For I maun crush amang the stoure
 Thy slender stem.
 To spare thee now is past my power,
 Thou bonie gem.

But even here he cannot, as Wordsworth does, leave the daisy and its fate alone. He is driven to compare it with helpless maid and luckless bard—and finally with himself—

Ev'n thou who mournst the Daisy's fate,
 That fate is thine—no distant date;
 Stern Ruin's ploughshare drives, elate,
 Full on thy bloom,
 Till crushed beneath the furrow's weight
 Shall be thy doom.

The same quick, simple tenderness went to animals. One sees how Burns loved birds in almost every song. He was a hater of field sports; and even when in driving his plough he turned up the field-mouse's nest, he could not bear the sorrow he was causing; he enters into all the pain and wants of the little thing as if it were a child, till he feels that the mouse is his companion and that he has harmed a fellow-creature.

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
 Has broken Nature's social union,
 An' justifies the ill opinion,
 Which makes thee startle,
 At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
 An' fellow mortal!

But here, again, he cannot help, like Gray, moralising, nor in the end getting back to himself.

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
 In proving foresight may be vain:
 The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
 Gang aft a-gley,
 An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
 For promised joy.

Still thou art blest, compared wi' me,
 The present only toucheth thee.
 But, Och! I backward cast my e'e
 On prospects drear!
 An' forward, tho' I can na see,
 I guess an' fear.

Take one more example, which combines this tenderness of pathos towards the animal creation with one or two of his vivid natural touches of storm.

I thought me on the ourie cattle,
 Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle
 Of wintry war,
 Or through the drift, deep-lairing sprattle,
 Beneath a scour.

Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,
 That in the merry months of spring
 Delighted me to hear thee sing,
 What comes o' thee?
 Where wilt thou cower thy chittering wing
 And close thy ee?

As to the theology in all this love of Nature, there is not much of it. Burns had no special philosophy any more than Keats about the relation of God to Nature. He adopted the old simple view of God as the Creator and sustainer of the universe that the stern religion of Scotland had taught his fathers. But the poet's love of all things was so strong in him that he added to that idea the thought of God as the lover of the universe he had made and supported. And the love that God had for the universe was reflected in the breast of Burns, and so wrought that when he was most full of it, he drew nearest to God. It was a love which had no wild tempest of passion in it, which did not strive or cry in his heart. In it he did not "feel his pulse's maddening play," nor was he hurled blindly into wrong. Therefore, all the depth of his nature found in it peace which had no fierce reaction; and an uplifting of heart which was freed from over-driven excitement, and pure. It was when Nature was most softly fair or when it was sublime that Burns drew

nearest to God. He has recorded this himself in a kind of preface to one of his poems.

“There is scarcely any earthly object gives me more—I do not know if I should call it pleasure—but something which exalts me, something which raptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or high plantation in a cloudy winter day, and hear the stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving over the plain. It is my best season for devotion: my mind is wrapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him, who in the pompous language of the Hebrew bard, ‘walks on the wings of the wind.’”

In such a sentence we see Burns lifted for one moment into that imaginative but dark piety which the Covenanter had, and which was largely derived from the solemn and terrible aspects of the mountains and storms he often lived among. But such piety will often be as gloomy and cruel as the climate, and link to itself a superstition passionate and dark with fear in inferior men, stern and unrelenting in stronger men. From this Burns was freed by the tenderness of his heart, which made him, when he was devotional, love and not fear God; and the terror and gloom of Nature—never very great in the Lowlands—did not make him stern to others, nor alas! stern to himself. His love of Nature then did not lead him to that practical love of God which shows itself in doing for love’s sake what is right.

It is the case of many: love of Nature often goes with a character gifted or sometimes cursed with an intense power of sympathy which shrinks from putting itself in action; with strong passions which are not controlled by will; with a joyousness and a power of sorrow which carry the man beyond himself into a region where neither piety nor morality exists, and where he becomes of the same temper as Ariel or Puck, so that if either a call of duty then comes, or a temptation, he will be likely to ignore the first, or fall into the latter. In such a state there is no conscience. We see and feel, and no more; we do not think of acting. This was especially the case with Burns.

Has then the love of Nature no religious power? Is it

better to be without it? I cannot think so. Those who do not feel it, who see and love no beauty, may be moral, but they will never reach the nobler enthusiasms of religion: their religion itself will be without the loveliness and tenderness which attract the soul, and their theology more intellectual than spiritual in its statements. Moreover Ruskin is quite right when he says, "that, supposing all circumstances otherwise the same with respect to two individuals, the one who loves Nature most will always be found to have more faith in God than the other." For far more fully than in erring Man are certain grand qualities of God revealed in Nature, righteousness, order, justice, peace, omnipotence, beneficence, judgment. It is strange, I think, how much this knowledge of God through His works, and its natural influence in producing faith, has been neglected in religious teaching, when one remembers that the whole of the Old Testament is full of it. All the Hebrew poets were profound lovers of Nature, but of Nature seen as the revelation of God's character. When God wishes to convince Job of His unalterable goodness and justice, He makes the whole of Nature and its wonders pass before him. He gives him no theological or pious teaching, but out of the whirlwind asks, Hast thou considered, etc., etc. Through the whole range of the poets who speak in the Psalms, the same spirit is felt. The hundred-and-fourth Psalm is almost a kosmos, but it begins with the source and power of all—with God. The angels are God's messengers to direct the forces of Nature. Nature herself is the image of God, His possession and His voice. A hundred texts occur to us. The sea is His and He made it, and the strength of the hills is His also. His righteousness is like the great mountains, His judgments as the deep. In wisdom did He make His manifold works, and He himself rejoices in them. The heavens declare His justice, and His glory; and listen to this, Ps. lxxv. v. 5-13.

By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea:

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Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power:

Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.

They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens: thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.

Thou visitest the earth and watered it; thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it.

Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof; thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof.

Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.

They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness; and the little hills rejoice on every side.

The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.

No one wants to take away the work of Science, the result of which among cultivated men is by deepening the observation of Nature to increase the love of it; but we want to add to it this old Hebrew notion of a Divine life and character within it; and this ought to be the work of the poets, whose business it is to give vitality to things. For if we are left to contemplate a dead world, as much as modern science leaves us to do, the true love of Nature—that which exalts and makes tender—will slowly die away; we cannot long give affection to that which we conceive as lifeless. If we would love Nature well, we must find life in it: and when we find its life in finding God pervading it, then love of Nature leads to faith in God.

It is true little of this is found in the New Testament. The Apostles were so overwhelmed with their special practical work, and so overtaken with the multiplicity of it, that it is no wonder we find nothing of their life with Nature, or of Nature as revealing God. But that does not say that it did not exist in them; and it probably did, if they were influenced deeply by the teaching of Christ. For there alone in the New Testament is this love of Nature seen as leading to love of God, is Nature used as

revealing God. He Himself, as I have often said, has made plain in His life how dear to Him was the beauty of the world. He loved to wander by the lake, among the corn, and on the grassy hills. He marked the aspects of the sky, the growth of trees, and the beauty of flowers. He loved animals, and drew some of his loveliest teaching from their ways. When weary, He sought the hill-top by night; when uplifted by strong communion, the higher ridges of Hermon; when exceeding sorrowful, the lonely olive grove.

And His teaching lays the whole of Nature under contribution. He makes Nature a parable of which God in His relations to Man is an interpretation. The ways of the sun and wind and rain, of the grass and flowers, of the corn-field, the fig-tree and the vine, were all taken up into the religion that He taught. He bid us seek the Heavenly Father, not only in the words and life in which He manifested God, but in the book of the common things of earth and air. And he who walks with Christ through the world may feel that the love of Nature is religious.

Still more connected with a moral life, and with one which prepares the soul for God, are the same tenderness and love when they are felt for animals. I have already said that no poet ever more deeply felt the sorrows of created things than Burns, nor stronger anger against their slaughter for sport. The *Wounded Hare* will live in men's memories when hares are no longer shot for sport. To him horses, dogs, birds, the dwellers on the moors and in the grass were friends. When Mailie died

He lost a friend and neebor dear
In Mailie dead.

That is the feeling which marks civilisation. The savage must slay for life and life's support; the half-civilised man carries out the practice of the savage without his excuse; and it is the characteristic of that class of ours, which one of our own day has called the barbarian class, to find amusement in slaying. It is of course a remnant of barbarism, and it is obliged to be kept up by laws

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which bear hard on the poor, for the sake of the sport of the rich. Before an advancing civilisation such laws as the game laws, and such barbarisms as keeping whole tracts of country desert for the sake of game, must perish.

There is no doubt in my mind, that however amusing and however manly such sports may be, they are hardening to the heart; and they set men apart from the nobler thoughts and tenderer feelings of life, not altogether, but up to a certain point. They are cruel, and the indulgence of cruelty, however it may be condoned by society, barbarises it. And so far as it is cruel and accustoms to cruelty, it separates men from God and from love; and that it is unconscious cruelty and is not felt as such by the conscience, does not make the matter better, but worse. One of the things then that our Christianity has to get rid of, is the destruction of life for the sake of sport; of all sports which bring with them needless suffering of animals and needless irritation of men. The whole thing is a part of that aristocratic element which lingers still among us, but is passing to its fall.

Every poet then, who, like Burns, increases that larger tenderness of the heart which not only loves men, but hates to give pain to the lower animals, is, so far at least, religious in his poetry. And nearly all our later poets have done this sacred work, and have made it a part of their theology. Their device has been the device of Coleridge—

He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

LECTURE XVI

ROBERT BURNS — *continued*

I HAVE spent two Sunday afternoons in speaking of the poetry of Man and of Nature and of the theology in them, as represented in the work of Burns. Our subject to-day is concerned with some aspects of his life so far as they bear on the personal religion that appears in his poetry, and with his relation as a poet to a special form of theology.

We have seen how well and manfully, when he was young, he accepted his place as a poor man, and how he honoured poverty by song. But his poverty did not guard him against the temptations which beset his artist nature. He had but little power of will when his passions were excited, and whether it was love, or fame, or the pleasures of the table, he was swept away by all alike. The natural result of this course of life, combined with want of will, was that he never set himself to any ordered music, never adopted or pursued any end with any perseverance. These elements in his character were developed into unfortunate prominence by his visit to Edinburgh. He was taken out of his natural atmosphere, and though he kept his independence, and retained his free nature, his life was spoilt by the change. His frankness and audacious personality made him unwelcome to those who had lionised him at first, and he was gradually dropped. And when he was put aside he did not like it, and he could never breathe easily again the air of humble life. It was a severe trial. A few weeks before he was flying from his country, an exile and in despair, and now he was at the summit of the wave of Society, his name in every mouth. A few weeks later and the whole pageant had dissolved. He was back again in a small country place, discharging the most unpoetical of offices. He took the glory and the fall with equal good temper and

manliness, though they both intensified his errors. He was not dazzled at Edinburgh into believing that his fortune was made. He knew that he was too bold and rough to win patronage, and he went home to fulfil his duties as an exciseman, the only place that Society could find to employ the genius of Burns. It was like Society; and yet, though we are indignant, it would be unfair to lay all the blame of the poet's life on the neglect of Society. If Burns had been a little nobler in character, with some self-restraint, some purposefulness in life, he might have been happy and written his poems as an exciseman. But he could not; passions, appetites, and irregular excitement, carried far beyond what he could bear, soon ruined his life. He had gained a taste for fame, and he was continually invaded by persons who led him away from his work. His fashionable life produced results which brought him to an early death. It stimulated the fatal qualities of his nature; it spoilt the unity of his life by fixing one end of its axis among the rich and another among the poor, and it threw him into the worst company—the company of the lionisers of genius, who seek it to be amused and then mock at the source of their amusement. It was, no doubt, his own fault that he perished; but it would have been well if the big people had let him alone, or at least, if they who flattered him had done something better for him than set him to catch smugglers. It is all well summed up in Carlyle's *Lectures on Heroes*, in a delightful passage, which I remember being told by one who heard it, was closed exactly as it is in the book—Carlyle pronouncing with inimitable meaning in his voice the last word “But”—and then rapidly passing behind the curtain of the platform.

“Richter says, in the island of Sumatra there is a kind of Light-chafers—large fireflies—which people stick on spits and illuminate the ways with at night. Persons of condition can thus travel with a pleasant radiance, which they much admire. Great honour to the fireflies! But——!”

I do not think I ever see fine and fashionable people “taking up” a poor artist, or making a show in their

drawing-rooms of a struggling genius—and trying, in their blind, barbarian way, to help him on—especially when they demand that the artist should submit his individuality to their caprices—without a desire to say to him—For God’s sake, bear any poverty rather than yield to this. They do not mean badly, but they have no intelligence to mean better; and their tender mercies will kill your powers. You may not be Samson, but it is bitter to make sport for the Philistines. It degrades the intellect and corrodes the heart.

There were two things, then, in his life which spoiled him. Want of aim was one; and unrestrained passion was the other; and both characterise one type of the artist, the second or rather the third-rate type. In the highest artist, the aim of his life is clear, and he never fails to see it and to labour for it. His passion also, which he must possess, is always in his power. He may choose to indulge it, but he does so purposely, and he can check it when he will with ease; but he rarely chooses to indulge it to the prejudice of his art, whatever that art may be. For the sake of his art, he wills to be temperate and he is; and while enjoying all things to the very top of enjoyment, he is always capable of staying his hand at the point where enjoyment threatens to pass into satiety.

Burns had neither of these qualities. “The great misfortune of my life,” he says, “was to want an aim:” and bitterly he regrets it in hours when solemn thought was uppermost. The note he strikes at the end of his *Address to the Field Mouse* is still more plainly heard in the *Ode to Despondency*,—

Happy, ye sons of busy life,
 Who, equal to the bustling strife,
 No other view regard!
 E’en when the wished end’s deny’d,
 Yet while the busy means are ply’d,
 They bring their own reward:
 Whilst I, a hope-abandoned wight,
 Unfitted with an aim,
 Meet every sad returning night
 And joyless morn the same.

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At other times—and how characteristic this is of such a nature—he accepts his aimlessness as a good thing, or at least, as something which cannot be helped, and is to be made the best of. He is in good spirits, his mood is happy, and he contrasts his thoughtless and wild enjoyment with the miserable state of those that live by rule, whose hearts are never touched by impulse:—

For me, an aim I never fash;
I rhyme for fun.

I'll wander on, wi' tentless heed
How never-halting moments speed,
Till fate shall snap the brittle thread,
Then, all unknown,
I'll lay me with th' inglorious dead,
Forgot and gone!
But why o' death begin a tale?
Just now we're living, sound an' hale;
Then top and maintop crown the sail,
Heave Care o'er side!
And large, before Enjoyment's gale,
Let's tak the tide.

An anxious e'e I never throws
Behint my lug, or by my nose;
I jouk beneath Misfortune's blows
As weel's I may:
Sworn foe to Sorrow, Care, and Prose,
I rhyme away.

And then he turns upon those whose life he half despises, and at times half regrets:—

O, ye douce folk, that live by rule,
Grave, tideless-blooded, calm, and cool.
Compared wi' you—O fool! fool! fool!
How much unlike;
Your hearts are just a standing pool,
Your lives a dyke!

I have no special fondness for over-purpose in life, for living by rule. The common advice—find one aim, and pursue it to the exclusion of all others, is good worldly advice, but that is not always the best. He who allows

everything else to be absorbed in the pursuit of one aim will probably succeed in his aim, and be called by the world the most prudent and intelligent of men. He may be prudent, but he will scarcely be intelligent. For he will become a man of only one thought, and all those parts of his nature which he cannot bring into activity round his special thought will become dead for want of use. He will not, and he cannot grow. It is better to be like Burns than to be one of that type.

But if the aim you propose to yourself be one of those which, because they are ideal, seek their food from every quarter, and claim as helpers the powers of heart, spirit, and brain; if it allow not only of enjoyment and growth through variety of interests, but also of wise passiveness and healthy idleness; and yet is itself so pure and high as to prevent passiveness from producing sloth, and activity from degenerating into a disease—then to have a clear aim is absolutely right, and Man, in fact, cannot achieve greatness in life, or worthiness within, unless he have it. But if he has such an aim, its very essential difference is, that it sets its possessor free from the slavery of over-labour; that it takes him out of the class of the “douce folk who live by rule.” And the great artist possesses it: Burns did not.

The other lesson of the life of Burns is that of the evil of unrestrained passion. I do not use the word in the sense of the passion of love, though that was the special frailty of Burns; but of all deep emotion, whether arising from appetite, or sense, or the vision of ideas. In this large sense, it is not passion itself which is harmful; nay, as I have often said, nothing can be done well without emotion; nothing perfectly without intense emotion. The cold-hearted folk, however practical, have no powerful influence on the world. And in all art it is absolutely necessary. “Put your passion into it,” says Keats; and he gives in that phrase the first principle of art. We have already seen that because Burns possessed this quality, he poured new life blood into English poetry. And all that was best in the man and his poetry came out of it—his spirit of universal kindness, his indigna-

We again seek the old excitement, driven by its lash, but when we drain the cup which once was pleasure, it is pain. The "crime of sense is avenged by sense that wears with time." It is that very torture which the mediæval poets invented for the avaricious—molten gold poured down their throats; our enjoyments have become red-hot and burn our life away; nor, worst of all, can we get rid of them—we must drink them though we abhor them.

Enjoyment is a necessity of life, and its morning air. It is equally vain and wicked to lessen or decry it, for we have not half enough of it. But it is a shameful thing when men, not ruling it with temperance, degrade it in the eyes of others by making it equivalent to satiety. Enjoy then; but keep the beauty of enjoyment by self-restraint in it; and then I venture to say—though there are those so utterly base as to restrain themselves in vicious enjoyment that they may keep the pleasures of sin longer—that your enjoyments will on the whole keep pure, that there will not be much in them which will offend the eye of God, that they will serve your growth, and give you power to do all your work in a stronger and finer manner.

Again, wanting all will in passion, Burns wanted, when under its dominion, the sense of right and wrong. In the hour of excited feeling he was willing to let everything go—Law, Honour, Conscience, and Religion. Nothing remained but his passion; and it was right, and everything that stood in its way, wrong. It made its own wrong and right, and as usual the two became inextricably mixed together—for apart from the moral question, it is the oddest thing in all such states of feeling that there is often really a touch of right in the wrongness, and a shade of wrong in the rightness that we feel.

But it is not a good thing when the conscience gets puzzled; and when it gets altogether confounded, as it sometimes does, and goes, wearied out, to sleep, and leaves passion to have its own way—not only is much sin done, but this also happens—all the charm and good of passionate feeling dies or begins to die.

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I wave the quantum of the sin,
The hazard of concealing,
But och! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling.

There is no enduringness in passion of any kind when it deliberately drugs the conscience. For the conscience wakes out of its heavy sleep when the day of excitement has passed by, and wakes up so angry that it lets in remorse, and remorse is an ill companion. It does not heal, it so mauls the soul that the memory of the excitement becomes poisonous. And it finally ends by bringing on the reckless indulgence which is hated while it is going on, and which adds, when exhaustion comes, another bitter element to the curse of satiety. The glory and delight of true passion are destroyed, and the man ends as Burns ended, in a ruined and wasted life. "The wind bloweth over him and he is gone, and the place of him knoweth him no more." This is the lesson of the life of Burns. He knew it himself. He puts it at the close of the epitaph he wrote to himself.

Reader, attend!—whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,
Or darkling grubs this earthly hole,
In low pursuit:
Know—prudent, cautious self-control
Is wisdom's root.

Yes! and enjoyment's root also; though I should take exception to the words "prudent" and "cautious." For no life can be perfect which is overmastered by either prudence or caution.

Again, the special theological turn which some of his poems took, arose out of this unbridled passionateness. For their strong opposition to Calvinism was more the result of anger at the penance the kirk imposed on him for open sin than of any religious zeal. He seized on the patent objections to the doctrines of reprobation, effectual calling, and the rest, and used them as stalking horses for his avenging satire; and the bitter feud which existed on these doctrinal subjects between MacGill and Dalrymple,

the two ministers of the town of Ayr, supplied him with all the opportunity he wanted. His first satirical poem, *The Holy Tulzie* (quarrel), ridiculed a quarrel between two ministers, Moodie and Russel, on "effectual calling," and delighted the opponents of Calvinism. It was followed by *Holy Willie's Prayer*, the most ferocious blow that was ever dealt at the ugly side of Calvinism—over-ferocious, as usual with Burns, to do any really good work against it; and so full of coarseness and wild irreverence that it only shows how high religious rancour ran among the clergy when these elements in it were condoned by one side for the sake of the occasion it gave them against their enemies.

It is true that Burns, in his wiser moments, would always have been a foe to the extreme Calvinistic doctrines, on the ground that he felt, being a lover of all things himself, that they made God into a demon of selfishness. His heart, like Shelley's, hated and denied that dreadful theology. But he never saw the good or the poetry which underlie its ideas, and his attack on it was just as much, if not more, caused by the natural reaction of the Bohemian nature against the ascetic type of Calvinism. Of that type he found two forms: one the stern, righteous asceticism, which condemned all gaiety as unworthy of an immortal soul; which secluded the religious man wholly from all worldly things as in themselves profane; which chastised with the utmost severity of word and deed all sin, and especially the sins of passion; and which lived up to this standard truthfully—the other the sham asceticism—a type Calvinism is sure to produce by its unnatural strictness—the crime of men who, wearing the mask of a stern religion, in secret indulged in all kinds of wickedness, and then fell back on their election by God to eternal life to free them from fear, and to enable them to sin at their ease.

Against the first Burns proclaimed the doctrine of a more liberal religion, and claimed the right of enjoyment; and so far he was right. But he could no more put limits to the statement of this than he could put limits to his own practice of it, and the statement went so far as to con-

done immorality of every kind. Conviviality was glorified, drunkenness was exalted into an excellence, illicit love was made poetical, and in the delight of the reaction from the over-strictness of Calvinism, which the poems of Burns encouraged, the whole tone of morality in Scotland was lowered; and in nothing more than in the frightful impulse given to a hospitality which insisted on the canonisation of drunkenness, and made the pleasures of the table the true impulse of art and song. We trace this even in the works of a man like Wilson, whose *Noctes* are deformed by it.

Whatever thanks then we may owe to Burns for his exposure of the ghastly side of Calvinism, must be largely modified by the evil he did in the way he exposed it. It is a bad thing to expel an evil opinion by an evil practice, and though it sounds like a paradox, it is not so uncommon.

Against the second, that is, the sham asceticism which was a cloak of sin, the indignation of Burns was righteous. We cannot but rejoice at the way in which he flayed alive William Fisher, the Holy Willie of the poem, a leading elder, "a great pretender to sanctity, austere of speech," and rigid in observance. He died drunk in a ditch, and his life was as immoral as his death was vile. But the besetting sin of want of self-restraint is as visible here as in the former case. Burns was overmastered by his impulse to satire as he was by his impulse to indulge appetite. In attacking hypocrisy he was swept away to impute hypocrisy to nearly all who lived a strict life or were severe in speech or manners. In condemning uncharitableness he became himself uncharitable.

A free life which loses love to the unloving is on the point of drifting into that temper in which liberty is made the servant of uncharitableness; and that freedom is not freedom which is bound to be abusive. Burns often had no mercy on unmercifulness, and it often wants it as much as frailty. Nothing can be better than his address to the unco guid or rigidly righteous; these lines that I read are steeped in the spirit of Christianity—

Then gently scan your brother Man,
 Still gentler sister Woman;
 Though they may gang a kennin wrang,
 To step aside is human:
 One point must still be greatly dark,
 The moving *Why* they do it;
 And just as lamely can ye mark,
 How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
 Decidedly can try us,
 He knows each chord its various tone,
 Each spring its various bias:
 Then at the balance let's be mute,
 We never can adjust it;
 What's *done* we partly may compute,
 But know not what's *resisted*.

But he forgot, and indeed it is the hardest thing Charity has to remember, that the unco guid are often as much the victims of circumstances as the weakly sinful. They are born, many of them, with as much of the milk of human kindness in them as others, but their education—their sect and its restrictions, the severity of their parents, the whole atmosphere of gloom and terror which their religion gives them to breathe—have crushed all tenderness and mercy out of them, and when they come to be men and women, they have stones for hearts. And they are intensely disagreeable and often shamefully cruel. But, if they are not hypocrites, they are worthy of infinite pity: for their evil may partly be not their fault, and if they wish to escape from it, nothing can be more difficult. The anger they arouse in men, the way they are naturally left alone, fixes them in their moroseness and seems to excuse it. Their sin is bound upon them; if they strive to break through it, they are met by a disbelief only too well earned, and they are soured the more. It is their punishment, but it is, if we think charitably, a very pitiful thing. Our work on them should not be that of abuse, but of effort to pierce through the rock to where the springs of human kindness lie in them. We should meet half-way any effort they may make, forgive at once and say—"To-day I will abide at thine

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house;" so shall we perhaps, with Christ, save a soul by love.

But Burns became still more wrong when he made the evil lives of persons who seemed to be religious into a kind of excuse for his own evil. "At least he made no boast," we may say, and we trace the spirit of this excuse in his poetry, "he did not conceal his wrong-doing, nor use religion as a garment to cover sin." But this is the worst of sophisms. That others are very bad, worse than we, does not make our badness one whit the less bad; and that we are sincere in the midst of our sin, while others are insincere in theirs, proves, it is true, that our character is higher, and that we have more chance of repentance, but it does not make our sinfulness less.

Nor, indeed, did Burns often make such an excuse for himself. It was only when he was irritated and in opposition. He was at root true, and he never flinched from self-blame. But he had no force to make self-blame into active repentance, and he went on sinning and being sorry, and sinning again, to the end of the chapter—

To right or left, eternal swervin'
He zigzagged on.—

Knowing the right, he could not consistently do it; and the misery of that was deep and was one of the things which killed him. You may remember his epistle to Andrew Aiken, a noble piece of good advice, the last two verses of which are worth quoting. The first shows how well he knew his own wrong and the right he wanted, while nothing can be more pathetic than the quiet despair of the last two lines, "Video meliora, deteriora sequor"—

When ranting round in pleasure's ring,
Religion may be blinded;
Or if she gie a random sting,
It may be little minded;
But when in life we're tempest driven,
A conscience but a canker—

A correspondence fixed wi' Heaven
Is sure a noble anchor!

Adieu, dear, amiable youth!
Your heart can ne'er be wanting!
May prudence, fortitude, and truth
Erect your brow undaunting!
In ploughman phrase, "God send you speed,"
Still daily to grow wiser;
And may ye better reckon the rede
Than ever did th' Adviser.

His was not the temperament which drifts into irreligion. His sinfulness and his consciousness of it, which never became less bitter, kept him always from infidelity. He was always, like the Prodigal Son, coming to himself and saying—"I will arise and go to my Father"—but he never got more than half-way in this world. Even if he had been a philosopher as well as a poet, the need of his nature for sympathy and for some one to lean on would have always prevented him from Atheism. His fear and his love alike made him confess a God; but the God he confessed was never brought near enough to his heart and life to have over him the influence of a person whom he knew loved him well enough to die for him. I see no trace in Burns's poetry that Christ had any meaning to him; I see nothing but a fine Theism. God was the unknown, Almighty Cause of all his hope and fear, his judge, the author of his conscience; the giver to him of passions wild and strong, to whom he appealed for mercy since He was all-good; who could not act from cruelty or wrath, on whom with all his sins he threw himself for pity—

Where human weakness has come short,
Or frailty stept aside,
Do thou, All Good! for such thou art,
In shades of darkness hide.
Where with intention I have erred,
No other plea I have,
But, thou art good, and Goodness still
Delighteth to forgive.

It might have given Burns strength to conquer his errors

if he could have felt for Christ the same kind of personal love which he felt for Man and Nature. What he wanted is what most of us who have anything of his temperament want, a higher motive of love. The sins which arise from the weakness that passion engenders cannot be overcome by struggling with them; they are too strong for us. But when we have a higher love for a perfectly good and loving person who is our divine Friend than we have for any one on earth, then that love enables us to conquer. A heavenly passion only subdues the evil that is in earthly passion. But Burns could not get that. The Christ presented to him had, according to the teaching of that time and country, nothing in the world to do with him. He had not loved him, nor died for him, did not care about him: the Christian ministers of Ayrshire blotted out Christ for Burns, and threw him back unhelped upon himself. He had no refuge but Theism, and Theism was not enough for him, though it may be enough for some. So he died, still weak, still self-victimised, still longing for good, and still unable to realise it; and the tenderest and wisest thing we can say of his life in this world is in part of his own epitaph—

Is there a man whose judgment clear
 Can others teach the course to steer,
 Yet runs, himself, life's mad career,
 Wild as the wave:
 Here pause—and, through the starting tear,
 Survey this grave.

The poor Inhabitant below
 Was quick to learn and wise to know,
 And keenly felt the friendly glow,
 And softer flame:
 But thoughtless follies laid him low,
 And stained his name.

And the noblest thing we can say of him in the future we may say in the words of Wordsworth—words which concentrate much of what I have said as to the good and evil results of his life and work on mankind—words which finally leave the shattered life and wasted soul

in the arms where Burns would, at last, gladly nestle
and be at peace—

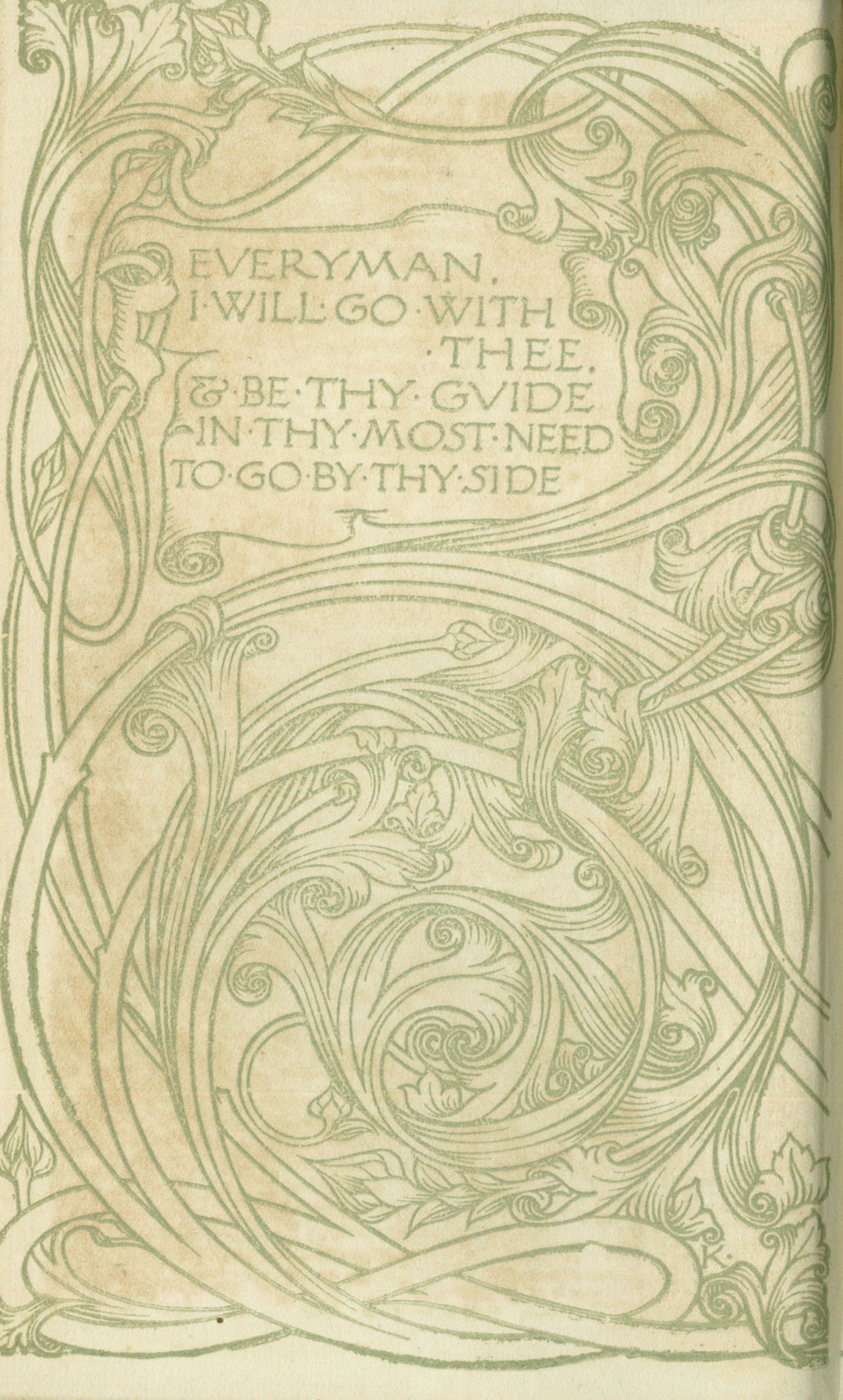
Enough of sorrow, wreck, and blight;
Think rather of those moments bright
When to the consciousness of right
His course was true,
When Wisdom prospered in his sight
And virtue grew.

Through busiest street and loneliest glen
Are felt the flashes of his pen;
He rules mid winter snows, and when
Bees fill their hives;
Deep in the general heart of men
His power survives.

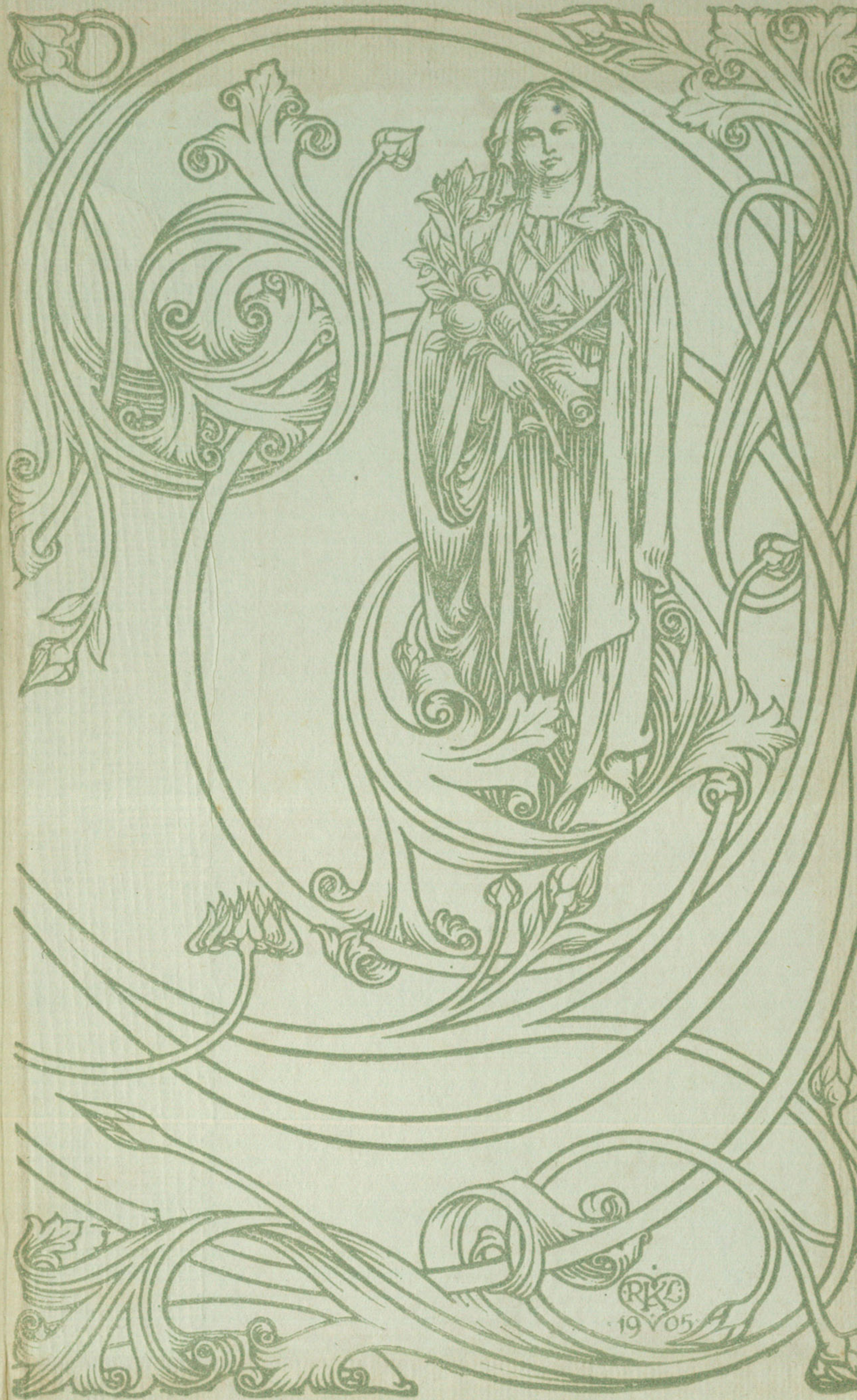
What need of fields in some far clime
Where Heroes, Sages, bards sublime,
And all that fetched the flowing rhyme
From genuine springs,
Shall dwell together till old Time
Folds up his wings?

Sweet Mercy! to the gates of Heaven
This Minstrel lead, his sins forgiven;
The rueful conflict, the heart riven
With vain endeavour,
And memory of Earth's bitter leaven,
Effaced for ever.

But why to Him confine the prayer,
When kindred thoughts and yearnings bear
On the frail heart the purest share
With all that live?
The best of what we do and are,
Just God, forgive!



EVERYMAN,
I WILL GO WITH
THEE,
& BE THY GUIDE
IN THY MOST NEED
TO GO BY THY SIDE



RKL
1905

