

## The Poet.

The poet, like the prophet and the priest, is one man chosen from many. Like the prophet and the priest, he is chosen by God. It is not through emulation of the fame or of the beauty of the poetry before him that he consecrates himself to his calling. He is a poet in response to some natural instinct or desire, and not through any deliberate choice on his own part. Long before he fully realizes what true poetry signifies, he feels the yearning to be a poet. The impulse to think and to create is born in him.

This impulse the poet can, and must, foster to the best of his ability, but he can neither control its birth nor prevent its death. The power which endowed him with his genius can take it from him. God makes poets and unmakes them. That poet who has failed to make proper use of his talents will inevitably lose them. A poet's intellect is no light gift, to be obtained or spurned at will. No man has ever yet become a poet through an over-fondness for pretty measures, or a desire to sweep into fame astride the winged steed. Nor can the real poet, when once the need for his peculiar teachings is past, hope to cling to the ardor and the vision of his earlier days. A poet has his little second of time, to do his little bit in the development of humanity, and then his fire turns to ashes, and his day to night. He is no longer a poet.

The true poet, prompted to his calling by nature, has a slow, and not too steady, growth. He may, by practice or by native ability, attain some immediate skill in the technique of his verse; but only through experience and the wisdom that come with well-spent years can he arrive at any ripened perfection of thought. While still a boy, not yet sure in his knowledge of himself, he feels stirring within him emotions which he cannot recognize: hopes and aspirations which

seem to him to leap the barriers of his own universe, and to strike off into infinity. He cannot analyze himself. At one time, when his star-treading thoughts make him feel almost like a god, he is all good, and he builds himself new creations each moment of his waking existence; at another, when the monuments of his fancy have all fallen into dust beneath the terrible blows of the world about him, he is all bad, and he views with distrust each new sensation and each unaccustomed thought. His life, in these early years, is one of tumult, of emotion followed by counter-emotion, of action followed by reaction. He is not happy, yet he is not unhappy. His soul is in the shaping.

Later, when he goes beyond himself and ceases to consider his own emotions as being the final end of his existence, he observes for the first time that there is a world outside of him. His whole interests now are wrapped up in this newly-discovered world; his whole happiness comes from contemplation of its beauties. He stands alone, upon some handy cliff, and, in a sort of delirious joy, wonders at the vast ocean, and the waves dashing themselves to pieces at his feet. He wanders along the beach at night, gazing into the heavens, and learning to know and to love the stars. He listens to the thrush or to the lark, and his soul longs to echo the gladness which he hears. He writes verses to Spring, to Summer, to Autumn, to Winter, and he means every one of the dozens of adjectives that he uses to describe them. The icicles which hang from the eaves of his father's house, and which he sees as he dozes in his bed of a frosty winter morning, are miracles of nature, and must be enshrined as such in stanzas which he modestly hopes will be immortal. He is at the transition stage of his growth. He is not yet conscious of the greatness that lies within him, and which is his heritage as a poet; he is not attempting in any way to further his development as a thinker or a poet. Whatever growth he experiences is gradual. He developes, but he does not



change.

So far, the poet has been kneeling before the shrine of Poetry, worshipping his muse. He has not yet learned to love her. He is like a young man in love with love. The knowledge that love, that vague mystery, that x quantity of life, exists, is sufficient to make him desire to know it, to experience it, to fathom it. At the first, of course, he plunges madly into love, and he feels in the heart of him that he has met his true love. It is not until the unfolding of the years has brought to him one true love after another that he is able to differentiate between true love and puppy love. So it is with the poet. At first, that strange impulse which sets him apart from other men makes him dizzy by its presence. He does not know what it is; indeed, he does not conceive of it as a potent influence upon him. Later, when he composes with more or less difficulty his odes to the Evening Star, and to the Snow that Crowns the Peaks of Mountains, he is suffering from a sort of calf love. He believes sincerely that he is a poet, and that he is writing poetry. He is in love with the idea of being a poet; he does not yet love poetry.

The passing years bring to the young man a deeper insight into himself, and the first evidences of true love. As a youth, he loved the songs of birds, and the millions of suns which spoke to him of immensities. He loved then the mountains, and the waste places where his soul might rest for breath. He loved the coming of the spring, and white of Christmas. All these things were part of his very existence; but one greater thing had slipped his notice altogether. The one force which is mightier in its latent power than the mightiest cataract, which is more beautiful to look upon than the Evening Star or the waning moon; which is, in its ability to conceive ideas and to give birth to these ideas in words, more wonderful than the infinity of the universe: he had absolutely overlooked. In listening to the music of the birds and in marvelling at the greatness of the earth, he had

forgotten the supreme creation of creations, which was to have dominion over both of these, and over all things that live or have lived: man.

Now, grown a poet indeed, that former lover of love, that one-time stripling worshipper of poetry, hearkens for the first time to the solemn music of humanity; marvels for the first time at the immeasurable greatness of man. He realizes now that the thoughts which have made him feel almost a god are thoughts common to all men; that the mighty emotions which have tossed him about like a shuttlecock, are emotions shared in by all men; that all the hopes of immortality and of the triumph of good over evil which have strengthened him in his days of trial are the safeguards of humanity. Now, he is indeed in love. He knows now how deep and how eternal is a true love. Now, no longer uncertain of his destiny or of his ability to cope with the demands of that destiny, he takes to himself the rank of poet, and he prepares to justify that assumption before the eyes of the world.

During those years of doubt and of timidity which separated his first yearnings to be a poet from the realization of those yearnings, he has not neglected the tools which, as a poet, he must employ to convey his message to those about him. "What is art?" he questioned himself, and found his own answer. "What is perfection?" he asked again, and again he found his own answer. The road to true art and to that degree of perfection attainable by mortals is hard. Many times, on his course, he has faltered; but the sight of the goal was too far off to be seen, the very thought of it, has heartened him, and give him courage to continue.

His tools, then, are at his hand. He must now prepare his message; he must now enter upon his mission. What is the mission of the poet? It is two-fold. He must first seek the truth; he must then convey that truth, or that belief which he considers to be the truth, to his



fellowmen, that, under his guidance, they may follow the paths by which he has attained his goal.

It may be that the poet will fail in one or both of these endeavors. It is only the supremely great poet who can penetrate through error to the truth, and who can persuade men to follow in his tracks. The true poet is not necessarily a great poet. A great poet is the result of intellect and opportunities. A true poet, though he have all the genius and farseeing vision which will make him a great poet, will be debarred from that consummation by lack of opportunities. A great poet has a brilliant intellect, and an all-embracing love for humanity. A true poet, who has missed greatness, may have three parts of each of these and lack the fourth. It is not so much the equipment of a man which determines his right to the title of poet, as it is the purpose which animates him.

A poet is a philosopher by instinct. The truths, or the theories, which schools of philosophy, by years of tedious reasoning and by the erection of countless pillars of logic, finally unearth or develope, the poet, by a sort of inspiration, arrives at overnight. Many times the poet arrives at false conclusions; but there are many false philosophies. The world is divided into sects and into schools, each claiming for itself the title of truth. One only of all these warring camps can be justified in its claim; nevertheless the camps go warring on. We, who are but fallible ourselves, can not judge a man's soul by the evidences of his intellect. The reason is but one faculty of the soul. In like manner, we do not measure a poet's greatness by the accuracy of the conclusions which he draws. We judge the poet by his fruits.

The fruits of a poet are not the truths which he is seeking to teach, or the verses by which he conveys these truths. The fruits of a poet are the thoughts of beauty, of nobleness, and of good, which, through the use of his art, he makes the common property of men. No poet can hope to earn his

title, unless, in the long run, he makes his readers think ; and it is by the depth of his own thoughts that he will probe the depth of his readers' thoughts. To be able to make his readers appreciate his way of thinking, the poet must first know and appreciate the way in which they think. The good a poet can accomplish by his works depends, then, almost wholly upon the knowledge which he has of man ; and this knowledge of man depends to an even greater extent upon the love which a poet has for his fellow-men, upon his love for humanity.

This love for humanity is the greatest of the attributes of a poet, without which his task in this world can be but half accomplished. Humanity is the greatest of great things ; and to love it should not be too difficult for man. And yet, few poets have loved humanity with a great love ; few poets have realized that the "sad sweet music of humanity" was a music almost too low for mortal ears. A poet is the melting-pot of all the finer and more subtle thoughts and emotions of man. Unless a poet love his fellow-men, and know mankind through that love, he can not hope to be able, even in the slightest degree, to value rightly the greatness of his station or the nobility of his calling. The poet is both a prophet and a priest. He has the vision of the one and ardor and simple faith of the other. He is not the greatest of men ; but he is among the greatest.

Prof. R. B. Drummey