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CAUSES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Personal experience is the basis of all real literature – George Henry Lewes
Literature is at once the cause and the effect of social progress. It deepens our natural sensibilities, and strengthens by exercise our intellectual capacities. It stores up the accumulated experience of the race, connecting yesterday and tomorrow into a conscious unity; and with this store it feeds successive generations, to be fed in turn by them. As its importance emerges into more general recognition, it necessarily draws after it a larger crowd of services, filling noble minds with a noble ambition. There is no need in our day to be dithyrambic on the glory of literature. Books have become our dearest companions, yielding exquisite delights and inspiring lofty aims. They are our silent instructors, our solace in sorrow, and our relief in weariness. With what enjoyment we linger over the pages of some well-loved author! With what gratitude we regard very honest book! Friendships, profound and generous, are formed with men long dead, and with men whom we may never see. The lives of these men have a quite personal interest for us. Their little ways and familiar phrases become endeared to us, like the little ways and phrases of our mothers and children.

KEYWORDS:

Success and failure in Literature

1.INTRODUCTION

Success and failure in Literature has thus become not only the ambition of the highest minds, it has also become the ambition of minds intensely occupied with other means of influencing their fellows-with statesmen, warriors, and rulers. It is natural that numbers who have ones been thrilled with this delight should in turn aspire to the privilege of exciting it. Prime Ministers and emperors have striven for distinction as poets, scholars, critics and historians. Unsatisfied with the powers and privileges of rank, wealth, and their conspicuous positions in the eyes of men, they have longed also for

"Emerging Trends in English Language & Literature"

the nobler privilege of exercising a generous sway over the minds and hearts of readers. To achieve that level they have stolen hours from the pressure of affairs, and disregarded the allurements of luxurious ease, laboring steadfastly, hoping eagerly. Success in Literature is in truth, the blue ribbon of nobility. There is another aspect presented by Literature. It has become a profession to many: for some a serious and elevating profession; for some a mere trade, having miserable trade-aims and trade-tricks. As in all other profession, the ranks are thronged with incompetent aspirants, without seriousness of aim, without the faculties demanded by the work. They are led to waste powers which in other directions might have done honest service, because they have failed to discriminate between aspiration and inspiration, between the desire for greatness and the consciousness of power. Still lower in the ranks are those who follow literature simply because they see no other opening for their incompetence; such a thing urges them to make literature a plaything.

II. CAUSES OF SUCCESS AND ITS MERITS

The rarity of good books in every department, and the enormous quantity of imperfect, insincere books, has been the lament of all times. It is believed, in the belief that if a clear recognition of the principles which underlie all successful writing could be gained, it would be no inconsiderable help to many a young and thoughtful mind. There is help to be gained from a clear understanding of success; and encouragement to be gained from a reliance on the ultimate victory of true principles. Success is not an accident. All Literature is founded upon psychological laws, and involves principles which are true for all peoples and for all times. The complaint being as old as Literature itself, we may dismiss without notice all the accusations which throw the burden on systems of education, conditions of society, cheap books, levity and superficiality of readers, and analogous causes.

Gothé's aphorism says: "In this world there are so few voices and so many echoes". Books are generally more deficient in sincerity than in cleverness. Talent, as will become apparent in the course of our inquiry, holds a very subordinate position in Literature to that usually assigned to it. Indeed, a cursory inspection of the Literature of our day will detect an abundance of remarkable talent. This is of intellectual agility, apprehensiveness, wit, fancy, and power of expression. In life, as in Literature, our admiration for mere cleverness has a touch of contempt in it, and is very unlike the respect paid to character. No talent can be supremely effective unless it act in close alliance with certain moral qualities. Another cause, intimately allied with the absence of moral guidance just alluded to, is misdirection of talent. Valuable energy is wasted by being misdirected. Men are constantly attempting without special aptitude, work for which special aptitude is indispensable.

Success in any special kind of work is obvious that a special talent is requisite; but obvious as this seems, when stated as a general proposition, it rarely serves to check a mistaken presumption. A man may be variously accomplished, and yet be a feeble poet. He may be a real poet, yet a feeble dramatist. He may have dramatic faculty, yet be feeble novelist. He may be a good story-teller, yet a shallow thinker and a slipshod writer. There are many writers endowed with a certain susceptibility to the graces and refinements of Literature which has been fostered by culture till they have mistaken it for native power; and these men being really destitute of native power, are forced to imitate what others have created. They can understand how a man may have musical sensibility and yet not be a good singer; but fail to understand, at least in their own case, how a man may have literary sensibility, yet not be a good story-teller or an effective dramatist. Recognition of the aims would have pressed on their

"Emerging Trends in English Language & Literature"

attention a more distinct appreciation of the requirements.

It is with authors as with actors: mere delight in the art deludes them into the belief that authors. To an observant eye such men reveal their native endowments. Even in conversation they spontaneously throw themselves in to the characters they speak of. They imagine that if they are cultivated and clever, can write what is delusively called "brilliant style", and are familiar with the masterpieces of Literature, they must be more competent to succeed in fiction or the drama than a duller man, with a plainer style and slender acquaintance with the "best models." Had the distinctly conceived the real aims of Literature this mistake would often have been avoided. No one ever doubted that special aptitudes were required for music, mathematics, and drawing or for wit; but other aptitudes are not less special. They mimic, often quite unconsciously, the speech and gesture of the person. They dramatize when they narrate. Other men with little of this faculty, but with only so much of it as will enable them to imitate the tones and gestures of some admired actor, are misled by their vanity into the belief that they also are actors, that they also could more an audience as their original moves it.

In the midst of imitators, we see a few original writers in Literature. There are men of special aptitudes, and men who mistake their power of repeating with slight variation what others have done, for a power of creating a new. The imitator sees that it is easy to do that which has already been done. He intends to improve on it. To add from his own stuff something which the originator could not give; to lend it the luster of a richer mind; to make this situation more impressive, and that character more natural. It is a perpetual puzzle to him why the public, which applauds his imperfect predecessor, it stupidly unable to recognize his own obvious improvements.

Success, a temporary or enduring, is the measure of the relation, temporary or permanent, which exists between a work and the public mind. The millet seed may be intrinsically less valuable than a pearl; but the hungry cock wisely neglects the pearl, because pearls could not, and millet seeds could, appease his hunger. It's a subsequent success of a once neglected work is due to the preparation of the public mind through the works which for a time eclipsed it. We may lay it down as a rule that no work ever succeeded, even for a day, but it deserved that success; no work ever failed but under conditions which made failure inevitable. This will seem hard to man who feel that in their case neglect arises from prejudice. A reader cannot be expected to be interested in ideas which are not presented intelligibly to him, not delighted by art which does not touch him; and for the writer to imply that the furnished arguments, but does not pretend to furnish brains to understand the arguments, is arrogance. What Goethe says about the most legible handwriting being illegible in the twilight, is doubtless true, and should be oftener borne in mind by frivolous objectors, who declare they do not understand this or do not admire that, as if their want of taste and understanding were rather creditable than otherwise, and were decisive proofs of an author's insignificance. But this reproof, which is telling against individuals, has no justice as against the public.

The success and prosperity of a book lies in the minds of readers. Public knowledge and public taste are always unstable. There come times when works which were once capable of instructing and delighting thousands lose their power, and works, before neglected, emerge into renown. A small minority to whom these works appealed has gradually become a large minority, and in the evolution of opinion will perhaps become the majority. No man can pretend to say that the work neglected today will not be a household be covered with cobwebs on the bookshelves of our children. Those works alone can have enduring success which successfully appeal to what is permanent in human nature. In

"Emerging Trends in English Language & Literature"

Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare and Cervantes, we are made aware of much that no longer accords with the wisdom or the taste of our day. We are also aware of much that is both true and noble now, and will be so forever.

III. CAUSES OF FAILURE AND ITS DEMERITS

In urging all writers to be steadfast in reliance on the ultimate victory excellence, we should no less strenuously urge upon them to beware of the intemperate arrogance which attributes failure to a degraded condition of the public mind. The instinct which leads the world to worship success is not dangerous. The book which succeeds accomplishes its aim. The book which fails may have many excellencies, but they must have been misdirected. Let us, however, understand what is meant by failure. For want of a clear recognition of this meaning, many a serious writer has been made bitter by the reflection that shallow, feeble works have found large audiences, whereas his own work has not paid the printing expenses. He forgets that the readers who found instruction and amusement in the shallow books could have found none in this book, because he had not the art of making his ideas intelligible and attractive to them, or had not duly considered what food was assimilable by their minds. It is idle to write in hieroglyphics for the mass when only priests can read the sacred symbols.

To succeed, a man should write to the public and he should not write up to his ideal. He should produce his very best; it is certain that very best will still fall short of what the public can appreciate. He will only degrade his own mind by putting forth works avowedly of inferior quality; the common man is more directly in sympathy with the vulgar public, and can speak to it more intelligibly, than anyone who is condescending to it. A writer misdirects his talent if he lowers his standard of excellence. The reward is not always measurable by the number of copies sold; that simply measures the extent of his public. Unfortunately, writers lose the substance, and only snap at the shadow. The audience may be large, but it will not listen to them. In our daily experience, we see that writers not only lowering their standard but also in running after popularity in compatible with the nature of his talent, does many a writer forfeit his chance of success. The object of literature is to instruct, to animate, or to amuse. Any book which does one of these things succeeds; any book which does none of these things fails. Failure is the indication of an inability to perform what was attempted: the aim was misdirected, or the arm was too weak; in either case the mark has been hit.

CONCLUSION

Men's success and failure is most part of their own making. He, whose mind directs not wisely, will never take the right way, and he whose outcome is feeble, will never advance in it. Some are strong and they prove as genius. But examples of this kind are very few. A reader is interested in ideas which are presented intelligibly according to his taste. At the same time, no taste is permanent. Mathematicians do not write for the circulating library. Science is not addressed to members of a class do not understand, - if those directly addressed fail to listen, or listening, fail to recognize a power in the voice, - surely the fault lies with the speaker, who having attempted to secure their attention and enlighten their understandings, has failed in this attempt. The author who is obscure or meaningless to thinkers, the dramatist who fails to move the pit, may be wise, may be eminent, but as an author he has failed. He attempted to make his wisdom and his power operate on the minds of others. Such a person has missed his target. Successful works alone can have enduring success which successfully appeal to

"Emerging Trends in English Language & Literature"

what is permanent in human nature. It is not posterity that can decide whether the success or failure shall be enduring; for it is only posterity that can reveal whether the relation now existing between the work and the public mind is or is not liable to fluctuation. There is, however, this chance in favour of any work which has once achieved success, that what has pleased one generation may please another, because it may be based upon a truth or beauty which cannot die; and there is this chance against any work which has once failed, that its unfitness may be owing to some falsehood or imperfection which cannot be long lasting.

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