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The Influence fliterature you Morality.

By

Sant Goffen.

# The Influence of Leteraluse upa Morality

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in immorality and over, we shall find a corresponding day radation in their literacy character. But as knowledge increase
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as the was just to wesdom of his philosophers, the laberts of her poets and the Laguardy of her Males men was ignally remarkable jointer moral degeneracy.

Remans was of rather a siegalar character. The people were wart the in this manner and disposition. But with the light of secrece they derose from their moral darkness, and in the clays of their procedom many brilliant stars of lamed their horizon. Though the golden age of Reman literaluse was in the regging Augustas, get their were colour country which it was greatly modified. He was the Capture of Important power and in consequence it, influence in parifying the morals of the people was contraded having become the ciction of disposite saxy, it, diction is as as proposed and remarkate as its previous questions had been yerious.

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With the reaval of literature and religion the more of condition of Europe improved, and has Continued ever Lince on the advance. The healthjul Stream that there arose has reached the Western world, and on long it will have refreshed the whole carth with its waters cherch literatur has oflato been extensively Cultivated, and its influence afon the world has been immense The Bible has given tone and direction to the literature and Morality of Every Mation where it beastren andely arcalated Writings that are formerly grateful to the taste are soon detested, and almost forgotton. The fabric of Dociety has undergone a radical Change through the influ ince of Christianely and the Christian Revolation. Il may be edjected that the English of the Belle is not lite all rebuted bet men it as a literary production, but to the fact of its Containing a vivilation from Jean. We reply that ele notes knowledged by all a he come under to influ lace to contain a revolation get they are affected by et, and compelled to admired As a composition it for Surpasses the best relices fantiquity. Itie Ro it from the moral and literary heavens, and WE Shall be immediately plunged in to heatherish darkneys and Im morality. This the vinist atheist wall deprecate.

We find in thoden history a confermation of our assertation that the other of a realien vary with it leteralan Many thought hat were Jonesty Considered within the bounds of morting are now regarded as Commer al The Bible existed a Outury ago, but the morality fasing Mexicaling liques, of War, and Marry was travely ever questioned. But how isil sow " He that parteter ofthe inchreating drought Count be a Christian Har ingarded as a Scourge and a Calamily, and by many it sall Uscatisare denounced as enemies of the perceful rign of Messich. Marry is considered by many a moval Evel, and double poply so. The dimen alizing leading of theatres has been greatly restricted, and moral ref ormation has been felt in Every department flocisty. This has breathe effect of the orward warch of bristianty and its litera lure. The general diffusion of bearing and the lebesty the prep have Contributed greatly to these hop by stralls. It of in the power to pour forthe Safety or destruction formy Galeresponsibilities that of the authorist great stows histerdings may live and exertan influence for agesafter he has gone down to the grave allange writer when he has beheld how he has blighted to be stinterests of many would rejoice could be but consign to iternal oblivion the moxices Musions of his planned brain But it is impossible Semil Empum volatinevocabile or bun. I of the literalan of the Bill be the model, let whatever is Contrary but be condemned, and authors Convinced of their responsibility and Such an influence will go jorth into the carth waite purify it, inhabitants, make the wilderney blom, and prepare the world for the jubilee of heaven. Then & Han.

June 1840.

### <u>Commencement Oration of Samuel George Hare, Class of 1840</u> <u>Transcribed by Sarah Skalak, June 2008</u> Edited by Tristan Deveney July 2008

#### The <u>Influence</u> of <u>Literature</u> upon <u>Morality</u>

It is universally characteristic of man that he exerts an influence upon the world around him. It is impossible in the nature of things that he should not. Even the unfortunate idiot does not live for himself alone; his very condition speaks forth volumes whose language cannot be misunderstood. The splendid but mournful ruins of a mind deprived of reason cannot fail to excite the sympathy of the spectator or strongly impress him withe the frailty of human nature.

The occasions, modes and degree of this power of mind over mind are exceedingly numerous and diversified. A few however, stand forth with peculiar prominence. While the great majority of earthly scenes pass away with the rapidity of thought, these in their effects are lasting as eternity. Among them maybe justly ranked the influence of literature. Expressed as it is in words, the literature of a nation must live forever. Words are but the embodiment of the mind's actions, the mirrors which reflect the images of the soul, specters which flutter forth to enlighten or darken, to cheer or torment, and as they are the product of the intellect, whose action precedes that of the sensibilities they must exercise an important power over the emotions of the heart. The divinely inspired

language of eloquence flowing from Parnassus' height and the heavenly strains of poesy from the Castalian fount will ever sway their magic sceptre over the human mind. The voice of the orator and of the poet may be hushed in the silence of the tomb, but who can say they depart as though they never were?

Morality in its restricted meaning is the system of relative duties. Duty can only arise upon the feeling of obligation consequent upon the perception of relation, relation can only be perceivably the intellect, hence the action of the intellect is at the foundation of morality. But as literature is the mere expression of the perceptions of the intellect it must also be intimately connected with morality. The history of the world esablishes this conclusion and shows that the morality of a nation varies with its literature.

If we look at the condition of the heathen world sunk in immorality and [orce?], we shall find in corresponding degradation in their literary character. But as knowledge increases and letters are cultivated they advance in morality; their ideas expand and their conceptions are enlarged. Thus it was with the early Greeks. Simple in their manners and uncontaminated by other nations they sang the deeds of their heroes and the praises of their gods; their literature, unshackled by the chains of bondage, exerted a healthful influence upon their morals, elevated their sentiments, and inspired them with devotional feelings. But as the age of simplicity rolled away, and the <u>aristocracy</u> of <u>learning</u> arose, there followed a universal declension in manners. Greece, distinguished

as she was for the wisdom of her philosophers, the talents of her poets and the sagacity of her statesmen was equally remarkable for her moral degeneracy.

The literature, as well as the morality of the early Romans was rather a negative charactar. The people were warlike in their manners and dispositions. But with the light of science they arose from their moral darkness, and in the days of their freedom many brilliant starts illumed their horizon. Though the golden age of Roman literature was in the reign of Augustus, yet there were certain causes by which it was greatly modified. It was the captive of imperial power and in consequence its influence in purifying the morals of the people was

contracted having become the victim of despotic sway, its decline was as rapid and remarkable as its previous existence had been glorious.

The moral condition of Europe during the Middle Ages is well known. She slept in ignorance profound. True, the spark of genius was not extinguished, nor like nature entirely unknown. It was cultivated, but not for the people; it was the resident of the cloister, and partook of the same gloomy character as the cells it inhabited. Mankind has suffered much loss from that execrable policy of the pontificate, which kept the people in ignorance. How much farther advanced in learning and piety might the world have been had the light of science and revelation been allowed free access to every mind. Had the same zeal been manifested during the Middle Ages, in distributing the word of life, the liberation of the Bible, as then is now,

where would there be an isle or nation unblessed by its divine radiance? Fortunate was it for the world that the Augustan Monk snatched the torch of truth from the dying embers of pure morality. Then arose a light destined to envelope the earth in the mantle of Heaven's benignant smiles. Then was the horrid policy of the Church exposed and the doom of Anti-Christ sealed.

With the revival of literature and religion the moral condition of Europe improved, and has continued ever since on the advance. The healthful stream that there arose has reached the Western world, and ere long it will have refreshed the whole earth with its waters. Sacred literature has of late been extensively cultivated, and its influence upon the world has been immense. The Bible has given tone and direction to the literature and morality of every nation where it has been widely circulated. Writings that were formerly grateful to the taste are now detested and almost forgotten. The fabric of society has undergone a radical change through the influence of Christianity and the Christian Revelation. It may be objected that the influence of the Bible is not to be attributed to its merits as a literary production, but to the fact of its containing a revelation from Heaven. We reply that it is not acknowledged by all who come under its influence to contain a revelation; yet they are affected by it, and compelled to admire it. As a composition it far surpasses the best relics of antiquity. Strike it from the moral and literary heavens, and we shall be immediately plunged into heathenish darkness and immorality. This the veriest atheist would deprecate.

We find modern history a confirmation of our assertation that the ethics of a nation vary with its literature. Many things that were formerly considered within the bounds of morality are now regarded as immoral. The Bible existed a century ago, but the morality of using intoxicating liquors, of war and slavery was scarcely ever questioned. But how is it now? He that partakes of the inebriating draught cannot be a Christian. War is regarded as a scourge and a calamity, and by many its advocates are denounced as enemies of the peaceful reign of Messiah. Slavery is considered by many a moral evil, and doubtless justly so. The demoralizing tendency of theatres has been greatly restricted, and moral reformation has been felt in every department of society. This has been the effect of the onward march of Christianity and its literature. The general diffusion of learning and the liberty of the press have contributed greatly to these happy results.

It is yet in the power of genius to employ the pen for the safety or destruction of society. Of all responsibilities that of the author is the greatest; as his writings may live and exert an influence for ages after he has gone down to the grave. Many a writer when he has beheld how he has blighted the best interests of men would rejoice could he but consign to eternal oblivion the noxious effusions of his phrenzied brain. But it is impossible.

"Semel emissum volat irrevocabile verbum."

Let the literature of the Bible be the model; let whatever is contrary to it be condemned and authors convinced of their responsibility, and such an influence will go forth into the earth as will purify its inhabitants, make the wilderness bloom and prepare the world for the jubilee of heaven.

Samuel G. Hare

June 1840