CHARLES KINGSLEY

LECTURES DELIVERED IN AMERICA IN 1874

Charles Kingsley

Lectures Delivered in America in 1874

Kingsley C.

Lectures Delivered in America in 1874 / C. Kingsley — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Charles Kingsley
Lectures Delivered in America in 1874

DEDICATION

to

CYRUS FIELD, J. A. C. GRAY,

and all those valued american friends who welcomed

my husband to their great country,

and through whose generous kindness he was enabled

in the last year of his life

to realise the dreams of his youth

by the sight, not only op the eastern states and cities,

but of the far west, the rocky mountains,

and the yo semite valley,

i dedicate these lectures with deepest gratitude

In Memoriam

FANNY E. KINGSLEY.

Byfleet: *August* 1875.

LECTURE I
WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Reverence for age, at least so it has long seemed to me, reverence for age, I say, is a fair test of the vigour of youth; and, conversely, insolence toward the old and the past, whether in individuals or in nations, is a sign rather of weakness than of strength. And the cause, I think, is this. The rich and strong young natures, which feel themselves capable of original thought and work, have a corresponding respect for those who, in the generations gone by, have thought and worked as they hope to do hereafter. And this temper, understand me, so far from being servile, or even merely conservative, usually accompanies true independence of spirit. The young athlete, like the young race-horse, does not despise, but emulate, his sire; even though the old victor be long past his prime. The young soldier admires the old general; the young midshipman the old admiral, just in proportion as he himself is likely to be a daring and able officer hereafter. The son, when grown to man's estate, may say to his father, I look on you still with all respect and admiration. I have learnt, and desire always, to learn from you. But you must be to me now, not a dictator, but an example. You became what you are by following your own line; and you must let me rival you, and do you honour, by following mine.

This, I believe, is true of nations as well as of individuals. I do not hesitate to say that, paradoxical as it may seem, the most original races—those who have succeeded best and left their stamp most broadly and permanently on the human race—have also been the most teachable, provided they were allowed to learn in their own way and to adapt to their own purposes any higher ancient civilisation with which they came in contact. What more striking instances of this truth—for truth it is—than the reverence of the free Republican Greek for the old despotic civilisation of Egypt? and of the free Norseman, our own ancestor, for the old and equally despotic civilisation of Rome?

These—the two most originative and most progressive races of Europe—had a faith in, an awe of, the supposed or real wisdom of the men of old time, which was often exaggerated into a superstition; but never—thanks to their own innate force—degenerated into a bondage.

Pardon me this somewhat dry proœmium; and pardon me, too, if it leads me on to a compliment to the American people, which I trust you will not think impertinent.

For I have seen, and seen with joy, a like spirit in those Americans whom it has been my good fortune to meet in my own land. I mean this:—That I found in them, however self-teaching and self-determining they might be, that genial reverence for antiquity which I hold to be the sign of a truly generous—that is in the right sense of the grand old word—a truly high-bred, nature. I have been touched, and deeply touched, at finding so many of them, on landing for the first time at Liverpool, hurrying off to our quaint old city of Chester to gaze on its old girdle of walls and towers; Roman, Mediæval, Caroline; its curious 'Rows' of overhanging houses; its fragments of Roman baths and inscriptions; its modest little Cathedral; and the—really very few—relics of English history which it contains. Even two banners of an old Cheshire regiment which had been in the Peninsular war were almost as interesting, to some, as an illuminated Bible of the early Middle Age. More than once have I had to repress the enthusiasm of some charming lady and say, 'But this is nothing. Do not waste your admiration here. Go on. See the British Museum, its marbles and its manuscripts—See the French Cathedrals; the ruins of Provence and Italy; the galleries of Florence, Naples, Rome.'

'Ah, but you must remember,' was the answer, 'these are the first old things I ever saw.'

A mere sentiment? Yes: but as poets know, and statesmen ought to know, it is by sentiment, when well directed—as by sorrow, when well used—by sentiment, I say, great nations live. When sentiment dies out, and mere prosaic calculation of loss and profit takes its place, then comes a Byzantine epoch, a Chinese epoch, decrepitude, and slow decay.

And so the eagerness of those generous young souls was to me a good augury for the future, of them, and of their native land. They seemed to me—and I say again it touched me, often deeply—to be realising to themselves their rightful place in the community of the civilised nations of all lands, and of all times—realising to themselves that they were indeed

Heirs of all the ages, foremost in the ranks of time;

and minded, therefore, like wise and noble heirs, not to despise and squander, but to treasure and to use that inheritance, and the accumulated labours of the mighty dead.

I saw this, I say, at Chester. And therefore I was not surprised to find the pleasant experience repeated, and to even a higher degree, at Westminster. A pleasant experience, I say. I know few more agreeable occupations than showing a party of Americans round our own great Abbey; and sentimentalising, if you will, in sympathy with them, over England's Pantheon.

I pause to confess once more that it is almost an impertinence in me to pay you such a compliment. You have a right to answer me—How could it be otherwise?—Are we not educated people? Has not our taste been trained by native authors, who were at least civilised enough to value the great past, without the need of any European crossing the seas to tell us of its wealth?

If you reprove me thus, I can but say that the reproof is just, and will remain just, as long as your poets are what they are; and as long, above all, as you reverence as much in America as we do in England, the poetry of Mr. Longfellow. He has not, if I recollect aright, ever employed his muse in commemorating our great Abbey; but that muse is instinct with all those lofty and yet tender emotions which the sight of that great Abbey should call out. He knows, as few know on our side of the wide water, the effect, chastening and yet ennobling, of such architecture, consecrated by such associations. He has not only perceived and drank in all that is purest and noblest in the now sleeping last ten centuries: but he has combined it, again and again, with that which is purest and noblest in the waking and yearning present; and combined it organically and livingly, as leaf and stem combines with flower and fruit. Yes; as long as the poet who could write both the *Belfry of Bruges* and *The Village Blacksmith* is read among you, there is no need for me to bid you reverence the past; and little need, I trust, for me to tell those whom I leave at home to reverence the present. For it is a fact—of which some Americans may not be as well aware as they should be—that your exquisite poet has exercised an influence in Britain it may be as great as, and certainly more varied than, that which he has exercised in his native land. With us—as, I presume, with you—he has penetrated into thousands of Puritan homes, and awakened tens of thousands of young hearts to the beauty and the nobleness of the old pre-Reformation age, and of that romance and art from which their too exclusive hereditary training had, until his time, shut them out. And he has thus, truly, done a sacred deed in turning the hearts of the children to their fathers. That was enough: but that is not the whole. He has, conversely, turned the hearts of the fathers to the children. The world-wide humanity of his poems, and, to be just, of all your American poets who have studied in his school, has produced throughout Great Britain a just reverence and affection for the American mind which will have—which has had already—large social and political results. Be sure, be sure, that in spite of passing jars, our empire will never be long unjust to yours, while Mr. Longfellow and Mr. Lowell remain not merely the household bards—though that is much—but counsellors, comforters, and trusted friends to hundreds of thousands of gentle and earnest souls; from the palace to the parsonage, from the little village shop to the farm-house on the lonely down.

But there is another American author—who was the delight of my own youth, and who should have been my teacher also, for he was a master of our common tongue, and his prose is as graceful and felicitous as poor Elia's own, and it is certainly more manly—another American author, I say, who, with that high-bred reverence for what is old, has told you already more about Westminster Abbey, and told it better, than I am likely to tell it. Need I say that I mean the lamented Washington

Irving? Ah, that our authors had always been as just to you as he was just to us; and indeed more than just; for in his courtesy and geniality he saw us somewhat *en beau*, and treated old John Bull too much as the poet advises us to treat young and fair ladies—

Be to their faults a little blind,
Be to their virtues very kind.

But what a charming book is that old 'Sketch-book.' And what a charming essay that on our great Abbey, set with such gems of prose as these,—

'The sun was pouring down a yellow autumnal ray into the square of the cloisters, beaming upon a scanty spot of grass in the centre, and lighting up an angle of the vaulted passage with a kind of dusty splendour. From between the arcades, the eye glanced up to a bit of blue sky, or a passing cloud, and beheld the sun-gilt pinnacles of the Abbey towering into the azure heaven.'

Or this again, describing the general effect of Henry the Seventh's unrivalled chapel,—'The very walls are wrought into universal ornament; encrusted with tracery, and scooped into niches, crowded with the statues of saints and martyrs. Stone seems, by the cunning labour of the chisel, to have been robbed of its weight and density; suspended aloft as if by magic; and the fretted roof achieved with the wonderful minuteness and airy security of a cobweb.'

'Dusty splendour,' 'airy security,' epithets so unexpected, and yet so felicitous, as to be seemingly accidental. Such are the tokens of that highest art, which is—to conceal its own existence.

After such speech as that, what have I to tell you of the great old Abbey?

Yet there are one or two things, I dare to say, which Washington Irving would have written differently had he visited Westminster, not forty years ago, but now.

I think, in the first place, that if he visited the great Abbey now, he would not have noticed that look of dilapidation at which he hints—and perhaps had a right to hint—some forty years ago.

Dilapidation, dirt, and negligence are as hateful to us now, as to the builder of the newest house outside. We too, for more than a generation past, have felt, in common with the rest of England and with all the nations of Northern Europe, that awakened reverence for Mediæval Art and Mediæval History, which is—for good and for evil—the special social phenomenon of our times; the natural and, on the whole, useful countercheck to that extreme of revolutionary feeling which issues—as it did in Paris but three years ago—in utter hatred and renunciation of the past, and destruction of its monuments.

To preserve, to restore, and, if not, to copy, as a sort of filial duty, the buildings which our forefathers have left us, is now held to be the very mark of cultivation and good taste in Britain. It may be that we carry it too far; that by a servile and Chinese exactness of imitation we are crippling what originality of genius may exist among our draughtsmen, sculptors, architects. But we at least confess thereby that we cannot invent and create as could our ancestors five hundred years ago; and as long as that is the case it is more wise in us—as in any people—to exhaust the signification and power of the past, and to learn all we can from older schools of art and thought ere we attempt novelties of our own which, I confess freely, usually issue in the ugly and the ludicrous.

Be that as it may, we of Westminster Abbey have become, like other Englishmen, repairers and restorers. Had we not so become, the nation would have demanded an account of us, as guardians of its national mausoleum, the building of which our illustrious Dean has so well said—

'Of all the characteristics of Westminster Abbey, that which most endears it to the nation and gives most force to its name—which has, more than anything else, made it the home of the people of England and the most venerated fabric of the English Church—is not so much its glory as the seat of the coronations, or as the sepulchre of the kings; not so much its school, or its monastery, or its chapter, or its sanctuary, as the fact that it is the resting-place of famous Englishmen, from every rank and creed, and every form of genius. It is not only Reims Cathedral and St. Denys both in one; but

it is what the Pantheon was intended to be to France—what the Valhalla is to Germany—what Santa Croce is to Italy. . . It is this which inspired the saying of Nelson—Victory or Westminster Abbey. It is this which has intertwined it with so many eloquent passages of Macaulay. It is this which gives point to the allusions of recent Nonconformist statesmen, least inclined to draw illustrations from ecclesiastical buildings. It is this which gives most promise of vitality to the whole institution. Kings are no longer buried within its walls; even the splendour of pageants has ceased to attract. But the desire to be buried in Westminster Abbey is as strong as ever.

'This sprang, in the first instance, as a natural off-shoot from the coronations and interments of the kings. Had they, like those of France, of Spain, of Austria, of Russia—been buried far away in some secluded spot, or had the English nation stood aloof from the English monarchy, it might have been otherwise. The sepulchral chapels built by Henry the Third and Henry the Seventh might have stood alone in their glory. No meaner dust need ever have mingled with the dust of Plantagenets, Tudors, Stuarts, and Guelphs. . . . But it has been the peculiar privilege of the kings of England that neither in life nor in death have they been parted from their people. As the Council of the Nation and the Courts of Law have pressed into the Palace of Westminster, and engirdled the very throne itself, so the ashes of the great citizens of England have pressed into the sepulchre of the kings, and surrounded them as with a guard of honour after their death. We are sometimes inclined bitterly to contrast the placid dignity of our recumbent kings, with Chatham gesticulating from the northern transept, or Pitt from the western door, or Shakspeare leaning on his column in Poet's Corner, or Wolfe expiring by the chapel of St. John. But, in fact, they are, in their different ways, keeping guard over the shrine of our monarchs and our laws; and their very incongruity and variety become symbols of that harmonious diversity in unity which pervades our whole commonwealth.'

Honoured by such a trust, we who serve God daily in the great Abbey are not unmindful of the duty which lies on us to preserve and to restore, to the best of our power, the general fabric; and to call on government and on private persons to preserve and restore those monuments, for which they, not we, are responsible. A stranger will not often enter our Abbey without finding somewhere or other among its vast arcades, skilled workmen busy over mosaic, marble, bronze, or 'storied window richly dight;' and the very cloisters, which to Washington Irving's eye were 'discoloured with damp, crumbling with age, and crusted with a coat of hoary moss,' are being repaired till that 'rich tracery of the arches, and that leafy beauty of the roses which adorn the keystones'—of which he tells—shall be as sharp and bright as they were first, 500 years ago.

One sentiment, again, which was called up in the mind of your charming essayist, at the sight of Westminster Abbey, I have not felt myself: I mean its sadness. 'What,' says he, 'is this vast assembly of sepulchres but a treasury of humiliation? a huge pile of reiterated homilies on the emptiness of renown and the certainty of oblivion.'

So does that 'mournful magnificence' of which he speaks, seem to have weighed on him, that he takes for the motto of his whole essay, that grand Elizabethan epigram—

When I behold, with deep astonishment,
To famous Westminster how there resort
Living in brasse or stony monument,
The Princes and the worthies of all sort;
Do I not see re-formed nobilitie,
Without contempt, or pride, or ostentation,
And look upon offenseless majestie,
Naked of pomp or earthly domination?
And how a play-game of a painted stone
Contents the quiet, now, and silent sprites,
Whom all the world, which late they stood upon,

Could not content, nor quench their appetites.
Life is a frost of cold felicities;
And death the thaw of all our vanities.

True, true—who knows it not, who has lived fifty years in such a world as this?—and yet but half the truth.

Were there no after-life, no juster home beyond the grave, where each good deed—so spake the most august of lips—shall in no wise lose its reward—is it nought, *virûm volitare per ora*, to live upon the lips of men, and find an immortality, even for a few centuries, in their hearts? I know what answer healthy souls have made in every age to that question; and what they will make to the end, as long as the respect of their fellow-creatures is, as our Creator meant that it should be, precious to virtuous men. And let none talk of 'the play-game of a painted stone,' of 'the worthless honours of a bust.' The worth of honour lies in that same worthlessness. Fair money wage for fair work done, no wise man will despise. But that is pay, not honour; the very preciousness whereof—like the old victor's parsley crown in the Greek games—is that it had no value, gave no pleasure, save that which is imperishable, spiritual, and not to be represented by gold nor quintessential diamond.

Therefore, to me at least, the Abbey speaks, not of vanity and disappointment, but of content and peace.

The quiet now and silent sprites

of whom old Christolero sings, they are content; and well for them that they should be. They have received their nation's thanks, and ask no more, save to lie there in peace. They have had justice done them; and more than one is there, who had scant justice done him while alive. Even Castlereagh is there, in spite of Byron's and of Shelley's scorn. It may be that they too have found out ere now, that there he ought to be. The nation has been just to him who, in such wild times as the world had not seen for full three hundred years, did his duty according to his light, and died in doing it; and his sad noble face looks down on Englishmen as they go by, not with reproach, but rather with content.

Content, I say, and peace. Peace from their toil, and peace with their fellow-men. They are at least at rest. *Obdormierunt in pace*. They have fallen asleep in peace. The galled shoulder is freed from the collar at last. The brave old horse has done his stage and lain down in the inn. There are no more mistakes now, no more sores, no more falls; and no more whip, thank God, laid on too often when it was least needed and most felt.

And there are no more quarrels, too. Old personal feuds, old party bickerings, old differences of creed, and hatreds in the name of the God of love—all those are past, in that world of which the Abbey is to me a symbol and a sacrament. Pitt and Fox, Warren Hastings and Macaulay, they can afford to be near to each other in the Abbey; for they understand each other now elsewhere; and the Romish Abbot's bones do not stir in their grave beside the bones of the Protestant Divine whom he, it may be, would have burned alive on earth.

In the south aisle of Henry the VIIth's Chapel lies in royal pomp she who so long was Britain's bane—'the daughter of debate, who discord still did sow'—poor Mary Queen of Scots. But English and Scots alike have forgotten the streams of noble blood she cost their nations; and look sadly and pityingly upon her effigy—why not?

Nothing is left of her
Now but pure womanly.

And in the corresponding aisle upon the north, in a like tomb—which the voice of the English people demanded from the son of Mary Stuart—lies even a sadder figure still—poor Queen Elizabeth.

To her indeed, in her last days, Vanity of vanities—all was vanity. Tyrone's rebellion killed her. 'This fruit have I of all my labours which I have taken under the sun'—and with a whole book of Ecclesiastes written on her mighty heart, the old crowned lioness of England coiled herself up in her lair, refused food, and died, and took her place henceforth opposite to her 'dear cousin' whom she really tried to save from herself—who would have slain her if she could, and whom she had at last, in obedience to the voice of the people of England, to slay against her will. They have made up that quarrel now.

Ay, and that tomb is the sacred symbol of a reconciliation even more pathetic and more strange. Elizabeth lies—seemingly by her own desire—in the same vault as her own sister, Mary Tudor. 'Bloody Mary,' now, no more. James the First, who had no love for either of them, has placed at the head of the monument 'two lines,' as has been well said, 'full of a far deeper feeling than we should naturally have ascribed to him'—

'Fellows in the kingdom, and in the tomb, Here we sleep; Mary and Elizabeth the sisters; in hope of the resurrection.'

I make no comment on those words; or on that double sepulchre. But did I not say well, that the great Abbey was a place of peace—a place to remind hardworked, purblind, and often, alas! embittered souls—

> For Mother Earth she gathers all
> Into her bosom, great and small.
> Ah! could we look into her face,
> We should not shrink from her embrace.

Yes, all old misunderstandings are cleared up by now in that just world wherein all live to God. They live to God; and therefore the great Abbey is to me awful indeed, but never sad. Awful it ought to be, for it is a symbol of both worlds, the seen and the unseen; and of the veil, as thin as cobweb, yet opaque as night, which parts the two. Awful it is; and ought to be—like that with which it grew—the life of a great nation, growing slowly to manhood, as all great nations grow, through ignorance and waywardness, often through sin and sorrow; hewing onward a devious track through unknown wildernesses; and struggling, victorious, though with bleeding feet, athwart the tangled woods and thorny brakes of stern experience.

Awful it is; and should be. And, therefore, I at least do not regret that its very form, outside, should want those heaven-pointing spires, that delicate lightness, that airy joyousness, of many a foreign cathedral—even of our own Salisbury and Lichfield. You will see in its outer shape little, if any, of that type of architecture which was, as I believe, copied from scenery with which you, as Americans, must be even more familiar than were the mediæval architects who travelled through the German forests and across the Alps to Rome. True, we have our noble high-pitched snow-roof. Our architect, like the rest, had seen the mountain ranges jut black and bare above the snows of winter. He had seen those snows slip down in sheets, rush down in torrents from the sun, off the steep slabs of rock which coped the hill-side; and he, like the rest, has copied in that roof, for use as well as beauty, the mountain rocks.

But he has not, as many another mediæval architect has done, decked his roofs as Nature has decked hers, with the spruce and fir-tree spires, which cling to the hill-side of the crag, old above young, pinnacle above pinnacle, whorl above whorl; and clothed with them the sides and summit of the stone mountain which he had raised, till, like a group of firs upon an isolated rock, every point of the building should seem in act to grow toward heaven, and the grey leads of the Minster roof stand out amid peaks and turrets rich with carven foliage, as the grey rocks stand out of the primæval woods.

That part of the mediæval builder's task was left unfinished, and indeed hardly attempted, by our Westminster architects, either under Henry III., Edward I., or Henry V.

Their Minster is grand enough by grave height and severe proportion; and he who enters stooping under that low-browed arch of the north door, beneath the beetling crag of weatherworn and crumbling stone, may feel like one who, in some old northern fairy tale, enters a cave in some lone mountain side where trolls and dragons guard the hoards of buried kings.

And awful it is, and should be still, inside; under that vaulted roof a hundred feet above, all more mysterious and more huge, and yet more soft, beneath the murky London air.

But sad I cannot call it. Nor, I think, would you feel it sad, when you perceive how richly successive architects have squandered on it the treasures of their fancy; and made it, so they say, perhaps the most splendid specimen in the world of one of those stone forests, in which the men of old delighted to reproduce those leafy minsters which God, not man, has built; where they sent the columns aloft like the boles of giant trees, and wreathed their capitals, sometimes their very shafts, with vines and flowers; and decked with foliage and with fruit the bosses above and the corbels below; and sent up out of those corbels upright shafts along the walls, in likeness of the trees which sprang out of the rocks above their head; and raised those walls into great cliffs; and pierced those cliffs with the arches of the triforium, as with wild creatures' caves or hermits' cells; and represented in the horizontal string-courses and window-sills the strata of the rocks; and opened the windows into wide and lofty glades, broken, as in the forest, by the tracery of stems and boughs, through which were seen, not only the outer, but the upper world. For they craved—as all true artists crave—for light and colour; and had the sky above been one perpetual blue, they might have been content with it, and left their glass transparent. But in our dark dank northern clime, rain and snowstorm, black cloud and grey mist, were all that they were like to see outside for six months in the year. So they took such light and colour as nature gave in her few gayer moods, and set aloft in their stained glass windows the hues of the noonday and of the sunset, and the purple of the heather, and the gold of the gorse, and the azure of the bugloss, and the crimson of the poppy; and among them, in gorgeous robes, the angels and the saints of heaven, and the memories of heroic virtues and heroic sufferings, that they might lift up the eyes and hearts of men for ever out of the dark sad world of the cold north, with all its coarsenesses and its crimes, towards a realm of perpetual holiness, amid a perpetual summer of beauty and of light: as one who, from between the black jaws of a narrow glen, or from beneath the black shade of gigantic trees, catches a glimpse of far lands gay with gardens and cottages; and purple mountain ranges; and the far-off sea; and the hazy horizon melting into the hazy sky; and finds his soul led forth into an infinite, at once of freedom and repose.

Awful, and yet not sad; at least to one who is reminded by it, even in its darkest winter's gloom, of the primæval tropic forest at its two most exquisite moments—its too brief twilight, and its too swift dawn.

Awful, and yet not sad; at least to an Englishman, while right and left are ranged the statues, the busts, the names, the deeds, of men who have helped, each in his place, to make my country, and your country too, that which they are.

For am I not in goodly company? Am I not in very deed upon my best behaviour? among my betters? and at court? Among men before whom I should have been ashamed to say or do a base or foolish thing? Among men who have taught me, have ennobled me, though they lived centuries since? Men whom I should have loved had I met them on earth? Men whom I may meet yet, and tell them how I love them, in some other world? Men, too, whom I might have hated, and who might have hated me, had we met on this poor piecemeal earth; but whom I may learn to regard with justice and with charity in the world where all shall know, even as they are known? Men, too—alas! how fast their number grows—whom I have known, have loved, and lost too soon; and all gleaming out of the gloom, as every image of the dead should do, in pure white marble, as if purged from earthly taint? To them, too—

Nothing is left of them

Now but pure manly.

Yes, while their monuments remind me that they are not dead, but living—for all live to God—then awed I am, and humbled; better so: but sad I cannot be in such grand company.

I said, the men who helped to make my country, and yours too. It would be an impertinence in me to remind most of you of that. You know as well as I that you are represented just as much as the English people, by every monument in that Abbey earlier than the Civil Wars, and by most monuments of later date, especially by those of all our literary men. You know that, and you value the old Abbey accordingly. But a day may come—a generation may come, in a nation so rapidly increasing by foreign immigration, as well as by home-born citizenship—a generation may come who will forget that fact; and orators arise who will be glad that it should be forgotten—for awhile. But if you would not that that evil day should come then teach your children—That the history and the freedom of America began neither with the War of Independence, nor with the sailing of the Pilgrim Fathers, nor with the settlement of Virginia; but 1500 years and more before, in the days when our common Teutonic ancestors, as free then as this day, knew how

In den Deutschen Forsten
Wie der Aar zu horsten,

when Herman smote the Romans in the Teutoburger-Wald, and the great Cæsar wailed in vain to his slain general, 'Varus, give me back my legions!' Teach your children that the Congress which sits at Washington is as much the child of Magna Charta as the Parliament which sits at Westminster; and that when you resisted the unjust demands of an English king and council, you did but that which the free commons of England held the right to do, and did, not only after, but before, the temporary tyranny of the Norman kings.

Show them the tombs of English kings; not of those Norman kings—no Norman king lies buried in our Abbey—there is no royal interment between Edward the Confessor, the last English prince of Cerdic's house, and Henry the Third, the first of the new English line of kings. Tell them, in justice to our common forefathers, that those men were no tyrants, but *kings*, who swore to keep, and for the most part did keep, like loyal gentlemen, the ancient English laws, which they had sworn in Westminster Abbey to maintain; and that the few of them who persisted in outraging the rights or the conscience of the free people of England, paid for their perjury with their crowns, or with their lives. And tell them, too, in justice to our common ancestors, that there were never wanting to the kings, the nobles, or the commons of England, since the days when Simon de Montfort organised the House of Commons in Westminster Hall, on the 2nd of May, 1258—there were never wanting, I say, to the kings, the nobles, or the commons of England, counsellors who dared speak the truth and defend the right, even at the risk of their own goods and their own lives.

Remind them, too—or let our monuments remind them—that even in the worst times of the War of Independence, there were not wanting, here in England, statesmen who dared to speak out for justice and humanity; and that they were not only confessed to be the leading men of their own day, but the very men whom England delighted to honour by places in her Pantheon. Show them the monuments of Chatham, Pitt, and Fox—Burke sleeps in peace elsewhere—and remind them that the great earl, who literally died as much in your service as in ours, whose fiery invectives against the cruelties of that old war are, I am proud to say, still common-places for declamation among our English schoolboys, dared, even when all was at the worst, to tell the English House of Lords—'If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms—never, never, never!'

Yes—an American as well as an Englishman may find himself in the old Abbey in right good company.

Yes—and I do not hesitate to say, that if you will look through the monuments erected in that Abbey, since those of Pitt and Fox—you will find that the great majority commemorate the children, not of obstruction, but of progress; not of darkness, but of light.

Holland, Tierney, Mackintosh, Grattan, Peel, Canning, Palmerston, Isaac Watts, Bell, Wilberforce, Sharp, the Macaulays, Fowell Buxton, Francis Horner, Charles Buller, Cobden, Watt, Rennell, Telford, Locke, Brunel, Grote, Thackeray, Dickens, Maurice—men who, each in his own way, toiled for freedom of some kind; freedom of race, of laws, of commerce, of locomotion, of production, of speech, of thought, of education, of human charity, and of sympathy—these are the men whom England still delights to honour; whose busts around our walls show that the ancient spirit is not dead, and that we, as you, are still, as 1500 years ago, the sons of freedom and of light.

But, beside these statesmen who were just and true to you, and therefore to their native land, there lie men before whose monuments I would ask thoughtful Americans to pause—I mean those of our old fighters, by land and sea. I do not speak merely of those who lived before our Civil Wars, though they are indeed our common heritage. And when you look at the noble monuments of De Vere and Norris, the fathers of the English infantry, you should remember that your ancestors and mine, or that of any other Englishman, may have trailed pike and handled sword side by side under those very men, in those old wars of the Netherlands, which your own great historian, Mr. Motley, has so well described; or have sailed together to Cadiz fight, and to the Spanish Main, with Raleigh or with Drake.

There are those, again, who did their duty two and three generations later—though one of the noblest of them all, old Admiral Blake, alas! lies we know not where—cast out, with Cromwell and his heroes, by the fanatics and sycophants of the Restoration—whom not only we, but Royalty itself, would now restore, could we recover their noble ashes, to their rightful resting-place.

And these, if not always our common ancestors, were, often enough, our common cousins, as in the case of my own family, in which one brother was settling in New England, to found there a whole new family of Kingsleys while the other brother was fighting in the Parliamentary army, and helping to defeat Charles at Rowton Moor.

But there is another class of warriors' tombs, which I ask you, if ever you visit the Abbey, to look on with respect, and let me say, affection too. I mean the men who did their duty, by land and sea, in that long series of wars which, commencing in 1739, ended in 1783, with our recognition of your right and power to be a free and independent people. Of those who fought against you I say nought. But I must speak of those who fought for you—who brought to naught, by sheer hard blows, that family compact of the House of Bourbon, which would have been as dangerous to you upon this side of the ocean as to us upon the other; who smote with a continual stroke the trans-Atlantic power of Spain, till they placed her once vast and rich possessions at your mercy to this day; and who—even more important still—prevented the French from seizing at last the whole valley of the Mississippi, and girdling your nascent dominion with a hostile frontier, from Louisiana round to the mouth of the St. Lawrence.

When you see Wolfe's huge cenotaph, with its curious bronze bas-relief of the taking of the heights of Abraham, think, I pray you, that not only for England, but for you, the 'little red-haired corporal' conquered and died.

Remember, too, that while your ancestors were fighting well by land, and Washington and such as he were learning their lesson at Fort Duquesne and elsewhere better than we could teach them, we were fighting well where we knew how to fight—at sea. And when, near to Wolfe's monument, or in the Nave, you see such names as Cornwallis, Saumarez, Wager, Vernon—the conqueror of Portobello—Lord Aubrey Beauclerk, and so forth—bethink you that every French or Spanish ship which these men took, and every convoy they cut off, from Toulon to Carthagena, and from Carthagena to Halifax, made more and more possible the safe severance from England of the very Colonies which you were then helping us to defend. And then agree, like the generous-hearted people which you are, that if,

in after years, we sinned against you—and how heavy were our sins, I know too well—there was a time, before those evil days, when we fought for you, and by your side, as the old lion by the young; even though, like the old lion and the young, we began, only too soon, tearing each other to pieces over the division of the prey.

Nay, I will go further, and say this, paradoxical as it may seem:—When you enter the North Transept from St. Margaret's Churchyard you see on your right hand a huge but not ungraceful naval monument of white marble, inscribed with the names of Bayne, Blair, Lord Robert Manners—three commanders of Rodney's, in the crowning victory of April 12, 1782—fought upon Tropic waters, over which I have sailed, flushed with the thought that my own grandfather was that day on board of Rodney's ship.

Now do you all know what that day's great fight meant for you,—fought though it was, while you, alas! were still at war with us? It meant this. That that day—followed up, six months after, by Lord Howe's relief of Gibraltar—settled, I hold, the fate of the New World for many a year. True, in one sense, it was settled already. Cornwallis had already capitulated at York Town. But even then the old lion, disgraced, bleeding, fainting, ready to yield—but only to you, of his own kin and blood—struck, though with failing paw, two such tremendous blows at his old enemies, as deprived them thenceforth of any real power in the New World; precipitated that bankruptcy and ruin which issued in the French and Spanish revolutions; and made certain, as I believe, the coming day when the Anglo-Saxon race shall be the real masters of the whole New World.

Of poets and of men of letters I say nought. They are the heritage, neither of us, nor you, but of the human race. The mere man of letters may well sleep in the very centre of that busy civilisation from which he drew his inspiration: but not the poet—not, at least, the poet of these days. He goes not to the town, but nature, for his inspirations, and to nature when he dies he should return. Such men—artificial, and town-bred—however brilliant, or even grand at times—as Davenant, Dryden, Cowley, Congreve, Prior, Gay—sleep fitly in our care here. Yet even Pope—though one of such in style and heart—preferred the parish church of the then rural Twickenham, and Gray the lonely graveyard of Stoke Pogis. Ben Jonson has a right to lie with us. He was a townsman to the very heart, and a court-poet too. But Chaucer, Spenser, Drayton—such are, to my mind, out of place. Chaucer lies here, because he lived hard by. Spenser through bitter need and woe. But I should have rather buried Chaucer in some trim garden, Spenser beneath the forest aisles, and Drayton by some silver stream—each man's dust resting where his heart was set. Happier, it seems to me, are those who like Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Southey, Scott and Burns, lie far away, in scenes they knew and loved; fulfilling Burke's wise choice: 'After all I had sooner sleep in the southern corner of a country churchyard than in the tomb of all the Capulets.'

Yes—these worthies, one and all, are a token that the Great Abbey, and all its memories of 800 years, does not belong to us alone, nor even to the British Empire alone and all its Colonies, but to America likewise! That when an American enters beneath that mighty shade, he treads on common and ancestral ground, as sacred to him as it is to us; the symbol of common descent, common development, common speech, common creed, common laws, common literature, common national interests, and I trust, of a common respect and affection, such as the wise can only feel toward the wise, and the strong toward the strong.

Is all this sentiment? Remember what I said just now: by well-used sentiment, and well-used sorrow, great nations live.

LECTURE II
THE STAGE AS IT WAS ONCE

What the Stage is now, I presume, all know. I am not myself a playgoer, but I am informed that, in Europe at least, it is not in a state to arouse any deep interest or respect in any cultivated or virtuous person. Meanwhile, keeping fast to my intention of talking to you only about things worthy of your interest and respect, because they are good, true, and beautiful, I wish to tell you what the Stage was once, in a republic of the past—what it may be again, I sometimes dream, in some republic of the future.

Let me take you back in fancy some 2314 years—440 years before the Christian era, and try to sketch for you—alas! how clumsily—a great, though tiny people, in one of their greatest moments—in one of the greatest moments, it may be, of the human race. For surely it is a great and a rare moment for humanity, when all that is loftiest in it—when reverence for the Unseen powers, reverence for the heroic dead, reverence for the father-land; and that reverence, too, for self, which is expressed in stateliness and self-restraint, in grace and courtesy; when all these, I say, can lend themselves, even for a day, to the richest enjoyment of life—to the enjoyment of beauty in form and sound, and of relaxation, not brutalizing, but ennobling.

Rare, alas! have such seasons been in the history of poor humanity. But when they have come, they have lifted it up one stage higher thenceforth. Men, having been such once, may become such again; and the work which such times have left behind them becomes immortal.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

Let me take you to the then still unfinished theatre of Athens, hewn out of the limestone rock on the south-east slope of the Acropolis.

Above are the new marble buildings of the Parthenon, rich with the statues and bas-reliefs of Phidias and his scholars, gleaming white against the blue sky, with the huge bronze statue of Athené Promachos, fifty feet in height, towering up among the temples and colonnades. In front, and far below, gleams the blue sea, and Salamis beyond.

And there are gathered the people of Athens—50,000 of them, possibly, when the theatre was complete and full. If it be fine, they all wear garlands on their heads. If the sun be too hot, they wear wide-brimmed straw hats. And if a storm comes on, they will take refuge in the porticos beneath; not without wine and cakes, for what they have come to see will last for many an hour, and they intend to feast their eyes and ears from sunrise to sunset. On the highest seats are slaves and freedmen, below them the free citizens; and on the lowest seats of all are the dignitaries of the republic—the priests, the magistrates, and the other χαλοὶ χἀγαθοὶ—the fair and good men—as the citizens of the highest rank were called, and with them foreign ambassadors and distinguished strangers. What an audience—the rapidest, subtlest, wittiest, down to the very cobblers and tinkers, the world has ever seen. And what noble figures on those front seats; Pericles, with Aspasia beside him, and all his friends—Anaxagoras the sage, Phidias the sculptor, and many another immortal artist; and somewhere among the free citizens, perhaps beside his father Sophroniscus the sculptor, a short, square, pugnosed boy of ten years old, looking at it all with strange eyes—'who will be one day,' so said the Pythoness at Delphi, 'the wisest man in Greece'—sage, metaphysician, humourist, warrior, patriot, martyr—for his name is *Socrates*.

All are in their dresses of office; for this is not merely a day of amusement, but of religious ceremony; sacred to Dionysos—Bacchus, the inspiring god, who raises men above themselves, for good—or for evil.

The evil, or at least the mere animal aspect of that inspiration, was to be seen in forms grotesque and sensuous enough in those very festivals, when the gayer and coarser part of the population, in town and country, broke out into frantic masquerade, of which that silly carnival of Rome is perhaps the last paltry and unmeaning relic. 'When,' as the learned O. Müller says, 'the desire of escaping from self into something new and strange, of living in an imaginary world, broke forth in a thousand ways; not merely in revelry and solemn, though fantastic songs, but in a hundred disguises, imitating the subordinate beings—satyrs, pans, and nymphs, by whom the god was surrounded, and through whom life seemed to pass from him into vegetation, and branch off into a variety of beautiful or grotesque forms—beings who were ever present to the fancy of the Greeks, as a convenient step by which they could approach more nearly to the presence of the Divinity.' But even out of that seemingly bare chaos, Athenian genius was learning how to construct, under Eupolis, Cratinus and Aristophanes, that elder school of comedy, which remains not only unsurpassed, but unapproachable, save by Rabelais alone, as the ideal cloudland of masquerading wisdom, in which the whole universe goes mad—but with a subtle method in its madness.

Yes, so it has been, under some form or other, in every race and clime—ever since Eve ate of the magic fruit, that she might be as a god, knowing good and evil, and found, poor thing, as most have since, that it was far easier and more pleasant to know the evil than to know the good. But that theatre was built that men might know therein the good as well as the evil. To learn the evil, indeed, according to their light, and the sure vengeance of Até and the Furies which tracks up the evil-doer. But to learn also the good—lessons of piety, patriotism, heroism, justice, mercy, self-sacrifice, and all that comes out of the hearts of men and women not dragged *below*, but raised *above* themselves; and behind all—at least in the nobler and earlier tragedies of Æschylus and Sophocles, before Euripides had introduced the tragedy of mere human passion; that sensation tragedy, which is the only one the world knows now, and of which the world is growing rapidly tired—behind all, I say, lessons of the awful and unfathomable mystery of human existence, of unseen destiny; of that seemingly capricious distribution of weal and woe, to which we can find no solution on this side the grave, for which the old Greek could find no solution whatsoever.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.