

Great genius and counterfeits



Abstract¹

No Ego differs from another Ego in its primordial or original essence and nature. That which makes one mortal a great man, and another a vulgar, is the quality and makeup of the physical shell or casing, and the adequacy or inadequacy of brain and body to transmit and give expression to the light of the Inner Man. And this aptness or inaptness is the result of Karma.

What we call “the manifestations of genius” in a person, are only the more or less successful efforts of that Ego to assert itself on the outward plane of its objective form, the man of clay, in the matter-of-fact, daily life of the latter.

The flame of genius is lit by no anthropomorphic hand, save that of one’s own Spirit. Therefore great genius, if true and innate, and not merely an abnormal expansion of our human intellect, can never copy or condescend to imitate but will ever be original, *sui generis*, in its creative impulses and realizations.

On the other hand, artificial genius (so often confused with its higher counterpart and master, and which is but the outcome of long studies and training) will never be more than the flame of a lamp burning outside the portal of the fane; it may throw a long trail of light across the road, but it leaves the inside of the building in darkness.



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Genius! thou gift of Heaven! thou light divine!
Amid what dangers art thou doom'd to shine!
Oft will the body's weakness check thy force,
Oft damp thy vigour, and impede thy course;
And trembling nerves compel thee to restrain
Thy nobler efforts, to contend with pain;
Or Want (sad guest!) . . .

— CRABBE, *Tales xi*, lines 1-7

AMONG MANY PROBLEMS HITHERTO UNSOLVED in the Mystery of Mind, stands prominent the question of Genius. Whence, and what is genius, its *raison d'être*, the causes of its excessive rarity? Is it indeed “a gift of Heaven”? And if so, why such gifts to one, and dullness of intellect, or even idiocy, the doom of another? To regard the appearance of men and women of genius as a mere accident, a prize of blind chance, or, as dependent on physical causes alone, is only thinkable to a materialist. As an author truly says, there remains then only this alternative; to agree with the believer in a *personal* god, “to refer the appearance of every single individual to a *special act of divine will and creative energy*,” or “to recognize, in the whole succession of such individuals, one great act of some will, expressed in an eternal inviolable law.”

Genius, as Coleridge defined it, is certainly — to every outward appearance, at least — “the faculty of growth”; yet to the inward intuition of man, it is a question whether it is genius — an abnormal aptitude of mind — that develops and grows, or the physical brain, *its vehicle*, which becomes through some mysterious process fitter to receive and manifest *from within outwardly* the innate and divine nature of man's oversoul. Perchance, in their unsophisticated wisdom, the philosophers of old were nearer truth than are our modern wiseacres, when they endowed man with a tutelary deity, a Spirit whom they called *genius*. The substance of this entity, to say nothing of its *essence* — observe the distinction, reader, — and the presence of both manifests itself according to the organism of the person it informs. As Shakespeare says of the genius of great men — what we perceive of his substance “is not here” —

For what you see is but the smallest part
And least proportion of humanity:
I tell you, madam, were the whole frame here,
It is of such a spacious lofty pitch,
Your roof were not sufficient to contain it.¹

¹ [*Henry VI*, Part I, Act ii, scene 3, lines 52-56]

This is precisely what the Esoteric philosophy teaches. The flame of genius is lit by no anthropomorphic hand, save that of one's own Spirit. It is the very nature of the Spiritual Entity itself, of our *Ego*, which keeps on weaving new life-woofs into the web of reincarnation on the loom of time, from the beginnings to the ends of the great Life-Cycle.¹ This it is that asserts itself stronger than in the average man, through its personality; so that what we call "the manifestations of genius" in a person, are only the more or less successful efforts of that EGO to assert itself on the outward plane of its objective form — the man of clay — in the matter-of-fact, daily life of the latter. The EGOS of a Newton, an Aeschylus, or a Shakespeare are, of the same essence and substance as the Egos of a yokel, an ignoramus, a fool, or even an idiot; and the self-assertion of their informing *genii* depends on the physiological and material construction of the physical man. No Ego differs from another Ego, in its primordial or original essence and nature. That which makes one mortal a great man and another a vulgar, silly person is, as said, the quality and makeup of the physical shell or casing, and the adequacy or inadequacy of brain and body to transmit and give expression to the light of the real, *Inner* man; and this aptness or inaptness is, in its turn, the result of Karma. Or, to use another simile, physical man is the musical instrument, and the Ego, the performing artist. The potentiality of perfect melody of sound, is in the former — the instrument — and no skill of the latter can awaken a faultless harmony out of a broken or badly made instrument. This harmony depends on the fidelity of transmission, by word or act, to the objective plane, of the unspoken divine thought in the very depths of man's subjective or inner nature. Physical man may — to follow our simile — be a priceless Stradivarius, or a cheap and cracked fiddle, or again a mediocrity between the two, in the hands of the Paganini who ensouls him.

All ancient nations knew this. But though all had their Mysteries and their Hierophants, not all could be equally taught the great metaphysical doctrine; and while a few elect received such truths at their initiation, the masses were allowed to approach them with the greatest caution and only within the farthest limits of fact. "From the DIVINE ALL proceeded Amun, the Divine Wisdom . . . give it not to the unworthy," says a Book of Hermes. Paul, the "wise Master-Builder,"² but echoes Thoth-Hermes when telling the Corinthians

We speak wisdom among them that are perfect [the initiated] . . . the wisdom of God in a MYSTERY, even the *hidden* Wisdom.³

Yet, to this day the Ancients are accused of blasphemy and fetishism for their "hero worship." But have the modern historians ever fathomed the cause of such "worship"! We believe not. Otherwise they would be the first to become aware that that which was "worshipped," or rather that to which honours were rendered was neither the man of clay, nor the *personality* — the Hero or Saint So-and-So, which still prevails in the Roman Church, a church which beatifies the body rather than the soul — but the divine imprisoned Spirit, the *exiled* "god" *within* that personality. Who, in the profane world, is aware that even the majority of the magistrates (the *Archons* of

¹ The period of one full Manvantara composed of Seven Rounds.

² (1 *Corinthians* iii, 10) A term absolutely theurgic, masonic and occult. Paul, by using it, declares himself an Initiate having the right to initiate others.

³ Cf. *ibid.* ii, 6, 7

Athens, mistranslated in the Bible as “Princes”) — whose official duty it was to prepare the city for such processions — were ignorant of the true significance of the alleged “worship”? Verily was Paul right in declaring that

. . . we speak wisdom . . . not the wisdom of this world . . . which none of the *Archons* of this [profane] world knew,

but the *hidden wisdom* of the MYSTERIES. For, as again the Epistle of the apostle implies, the language of the Initiates and their secrets, no *profane*, not even an “Archon” or ruler *outside the fane* of the sacred Mysteries, knoweth; none “save the spirit of man [the Ego] which is *in him*.”¹

Were Chapters ii and iii of *1 Corinthians* ever translated in the Spirit in which they were written — even their dead letter is now disfigured — the world might receive strange revelations. Among other things it would have a key to many, hitherto unexplained rites of ancient Paganism, one of which is the mystery of this same Hero worship. And it would learn that if the streets of the city that honoured one such man, were strewn with roses for the passage of the Hero of the day; if every citizen was called to bow in reverence to him who was so feasted; and if both priest and poet vied in their zeal to immortalize the hero’s name after his death — occult philosophy tells us the reason why this was done. It saith,

Behold, in every manifestation of genius — *when combined with virtue* — in the warrior or the Bard the great painter, artist, statesman or man of Science, who soars high above the heads of the vulgar herd, the undeniable presence of the celestial exile, the divine *Ego* whose jailer thou art, Oh man of matter!

Thus, that which we call *deification* applied to the immortal God within, not to the dead walls or the human tabernacle that contained him. And this was done in tacit and silent recognition of the efforts made by the divine captive who, under the most adverse circumstances of incarnation, still succeeded in manifesting himself.

Occultism, therefore, teaches nothing new in asserting the above philosophical axiom. Enlarging upon the broad metaphysical truism, it only gives it a finishing touch by explaining certain details. It teaches, for instance, that the presence in man of various creative powers — called genius in their collectivity — is due to no blind chance, to no innate qualities through hereditary tendencies — though that which is known as atavism may often intensify these faculties — but to an accumulation of individual antecedent experiences of the *Ego* in its preceding life, and lives. For, though omniscient in its essence and nature, it still requires experience through its *personalities* of the things of earth, earthy on the objective plane, in order to apply the fruition of that abstract omniscience to them. And, adds our philosophy — the cultivation of certain aptitudes throughout a long series of past incarnations must finally culminate in some one life, in a blooming forth as *genius*, in one or another direction.

Great Genius, therefore, if true and innate, and not merely an abnormal expansion of our human intellect — can never copy or condescend to imitate, but will ever be original, *sui generis* in its creative impulses and realizations. Like those gigantic Indian

¹ *1 Corinthians* ii, 11

lilies that shoot out from the clefts and fissures of the cloud-nursing and bare rocks of the highest plateaux of the Nilgiri Hills,¹ true Genius needs but an opportunity to spring forth into existence and blossom in the sight of all on the most arid soil, for its stamp is always unmistakable. To use a popular saying, innate genius, like murder, will out sooner or later, and the more it will have been suppressed and hidden, the greater will be the flood of light thrown by the sudden irruption. On the other hand, artificial genius, so often confused with the former, and which in truth is but the outcome of long studies and training, will never be more than, so to say, the flame of a lamp burning outside the portal of the fane; it may throw a long trail of light across the road, but it leaves the inside of the building in darkness. And, as every faculty and property in Nature is dual — *i.e.*, each may be made to serve two ends, evil as well as good — so will artificial genius betray itself. Born out of the chaos of terrestrial sensations of perceptive and retentive faculties, yet of finite memory, it will ever remain the slave of its body; and that body, owing to its unreliability and the natural tendency of matter to confusion, will not fail to lead even the greatest *genius*, so called, back into its own primordial element, which is chaos again, or *evil*, or earth.

Thus between the true and the artificial genius, one born from the light of the immortal Ego, the other from the evanescent will-o'-the-wisp of the terrestrial or purely human intellect and the animal soul, there is a chasm, to be spanned only by him who aspires ever onward; who never loses sight, even when in the depths of matter, of that guiding star, the Divine Soul and mind, or what we call *Buddhi-Manas*. The latter does not require, as does the former, cultivation. The words of the poet who asserts that the lamp of genius —

If not protected, pruned, and fed with care,
Soon dies, or runs to waste with fitful glare . . .

— can apply only to artificial genius, the outcome of culture and of purely intellectual acuteness. It is not the direct light of the *Mānasaputras*, the Sons of Wisdom, for true genius lit at the flame of our higher nature, or the EGO, cannot die. This is why it is so very rare. Lavater² calculated that

. . . the proportion of genius [in general] to the vulgar, is like one to a million; but genius without tyranny, without pretension, that judges the weak with equity, the superior with humanity, and equals with justice, is like one in ten millions.

This is indeed interesting, though not too complimentary to *human* nature, if, by “genius,” Lavater had in mind only the higher sort of human intellect, unfolded by cultivation, “protected, pruned, and fed,” and not the genius we speak of. Moreover, such genius is always apt to lead to the extremes of weal or woe, him through whom this artificial light of the terrestrial mind manifests. Like the good and bad genii of old with whom genius is made so appropriately to share the name, it takes its helpless possessor by the hand and leads him, one day to the pinnacles of fame, fortune, and

¹ [Cf. “The Nilgiri Sannyāsis” in our Living the Live Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² [Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801), Swiss poet and physiognomist.]

glory, but to plunge him on the following day into an abyss of shame, despair, often of crime.

But as, according to the great Physiognomist, there is more of the former than of the latter kind of genius in this our world, because, as Occultism teaches us, it is easier for the personality with its acute physical senses and *tattvas* to gravitate toward the lower quaternary than to soar to its triad — modern philosophy, though quite proficient in treating this lower place of genius, knows nothing of its higher spiritual form — the “one in ten millions.” Thus it is only natural that confusing one with the other, the best modern writers should have failed to define *true* genius. As a consequence, we continually hear and read a good deal of that which to the Occultist seems quite paradoxical. “Genius requires cultivation,” says one; “Genius is vain and self-sufficient,” declares another; while a third will go on defining the *divine light* but to dwarf it on the Procrustean bed of his own intellectual narrow-mindedness. He will talk of the great eccentricity of genius, and allying it as a general rule with an “inflammable constitution,” will even show it “a prey to every passion but seldom delicacy of taste!”¹ It is useless to argue with such, or tell them that original and great genius puts out the most dazzling rays of human intellectuality, as the sun quenches the flame-light of a fire in an open field; that it is never eccentric; though always *sui generis*; and that no man endowed with true genius can ever give way to his physical animal passions. In the view of an humble Occultist, only such a grand altruistic character as that of Buddha or Jesus, and of their few close imitators, can be regarded, in our historical cycle, as fully developed GENIUS.

Hence, true genius has small chance indeed of receiving its clue in our age of conventionalities, hypocrisy and time-serving. As the world grows in civilization, it expands in fierce selfishness, and stones its true prophets and geniuses for the benefit of its apeing shadows. Alone the surging masses of the ignorant millions, the great people's heart, are capable of sensing intuitively a true “great soul” full of divine love for mankind, of god-like compassion for suffering man. Hence the populace alone is still capable of recognizing a genius, as without such qualities no man has a right to the name. No genius can be now found in Church or State, and this is proven on their own admission. It seems a long time since in the XIIIth century the “Angelic Doctor” snubbed Pope Innocent IV who, boasting of the millions got by him from the sale of absolutions and indulgences, remarked to Aquinas that “the age of the Church is past in which she said ‘Silver and gold have I none!’” “True,” was the ready reply, “but the age is also past when she could say to a paralytic, ‘Rise up and walk.’” And yet from that time, and far earlier, to our own day the hourly crucifixion of their ideal Master both by Church and State has never ceased. While every Christian State breaks with its laws and customs, with every commandment given in the Sermon on the Mount, the Christian Church justifies and approves of this through her own Bishops who despairingly proclaim “A Christian State *impossible* on Chris-

¹ Lord Kames [Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696–1782) Scottish advocate, judge, philosopher, writer and agricultural improver. A central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, founder member of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, and active in the Select Society, his protégés included James Boswell, David Hume and Adam Smith.]

tian Principles.”¹ Hence no Christ-like (or “Buddha-like”) way of life is possible in civilized States.

The occultist then, to whom “true genius is a synonym of self-existent and infinite mind,” mirrored more or less faithfully by man, fails to find in the modern definitions of the term anything approaching correctness. In its turn the esoteric interpretation of Theosophy is sure to be received with derision. The very idea that every man with a “soul” in him, is the vehicle of [a] genius, will appear supremely absurd, even to believers, while the materialist will fall foul of it as a “crass superstition.” As to the popular feeling — the only approximately correct one because purely intuitional — it will not be even taken into account. The same elastic and convenient epithet “superstition” will, once more, be made to explain why there never was yet a universally recognized genius — whether of one or the other kind — without a certain amount of weird, fantastic and often uncanny tales and legends attaching themselves to so unique a character, dogging and even surviving him. Yet it is the unsophisticated alone, and therefore only the so-called *uneducated* masses, just because of that lack of sophisticated reasoning in them, who feel, whenever coming in contact with an abnormal, out-of-the-way character, that there is in him something more than the mere mortal man of flesh and intellectual attributes. And feeling themselves in the presence of that which in the enormous majority is ever hidden, of something incomprehensible to their matter-of-fact minds, they experience the same awe that popular masses felt in days of old when their fancy, often more unerring than cultured reason, created of their heroes gods, teaching:

. . . the Weak to bend, the Proud to pray
To Pow'r unseen, and mightier far than they.²

This is now called SUPERSTITION . . .

If superstition makes a man a fool, scepticism makes him mad.

But what is Superstition? True, we dread that which we cannot clearly explain to ourselves. Like children in the dark, we are all of us apt, the educated equally with the ignorant, to people that darkness with phantoms of our own creation; but these “phantoms” prove in no wise that that “darkness” — which is only another term for the *invisible* and the *unseen* — is really empty of any *Presence* save our own. So that if in its exaggerated form, “superstition” is a weird incubus, as a belief in things *above* and *beyond* our physical senses, yet it is also a modest acknowledgement that there are things in the universe, and around us, of which we knew nothing. In this sense “superstition” becomes not an unreasonable feeling of half wonder and half dread, mixed with admiration and reverence, or with fear, according to the dictates of our intuition. And this is far more reasonable than to repeat with the too-learned wiseacres that there is nothing, “nothing whatever, in that darkness”; nor can there be anything since they, the wiseacres, have failed to discern it.

¹ See “Going to and Fro in the Earth” 1st article [p. 27 of present Volume].

² [Quoting Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man*, Epistle III, “Of the Nature and State of Man with respect to Society,” p. 35]

*Eppur si muove!*¹ Where there is smoke there must be fire; where there is a steamy vapour there must be water. Our claim rests but upon one eternal axiomatic truth: *nihil sine cause*. Genius and undeserved suffering prove an immortal Ego and Reincarnation in our world. As for the rest, *i.e.*, the obloquy and derision with which such theosophical doctrines are met, Fielding² — a sort of Genius in his way, too — has covered our answer over a century ago. Never did he utter a greater truth than on the day he wrote that “*If superstition makes a man a fool, SCEPTICISM MAKES HIM MAD.*”



¹ [And yet it moves!]

² [Henry Fielding (1707–54), English novelist and dramatist known for his rich earthy humour and satirical prowess, and as the author of the *Tom Jones*.]