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Life & Writings of Joseph Mazzini.

IN SIX VOLS.

VOL. II.—CRITICAL AND LITERARY

LIFE AND WRITINGS

OF

JOSEPH MAZZINI

VOL. II.

CRITICAL AND LITERARY

A NEW EDITION

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PREFACE, 1861.



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✓ I HAVE said in the first volume that when, from the year 1828 to 1832, we were fighting the battles of *Romanticism* against the antiquated rules of the *Classical* school, our real object was to combat that double tyranny—internal and external, political and religious—by which our country was dismembered and oppressed; and by attacking it upon the only ground then open to us, to further the cause of National Revolution.

✓ And such was indeed the case. Literature was for us the *means*, not the end. The alteration of a few words here and there would suffice to transform the writings of that period into an incessant appeal to the youth of Italy to create a country for themselves by force of arms.

And it is well to recall the fact that we were the

first to write in such wise. By our bold and fervid style—rather directed to the object of rousing the torpid faculties of Italian youth, than to the enunciation of a positive philosophy—we were the first to alarm our governments, and thus to prove the impossibility of intellectual emancipation and free progress, on any other condition than that of first freeing our enslaved and divided country.

The suppression of the *Indicatore Genovese*, the *Indicatore Livornese*, and the *Antologia* of Florence, was an important political fact, which drove the majority of our literary youth into the revolutionary ranks.

Until then, *Romanticism* had dragged itself through many an ignoble compromise, along the path of purely objective art, or lingered in the field of the past—choosing a past less remote than that of the *Classical* school, but none the less past for ever. The *Romanticists* of that day devoted themselves to prayer or description. The terror inspired by the Austrian condemnations which had struck the greatest among the contributors to the *Conciliatore*, yet hung over them; and Arici, Borghi, Mamiani, Biava, Mauri, and I know not how many others, inundated Italy with hymns to the virgin and saints, or versions of the

psalmists, amongst whom they were careful to avoid those revolutionists of Israel, the Prophets. Cesare Cantù hesitated between Guelphism and the Empire. The best among them busied themselves with imitations of the forms and externals of northern art.

✓ None declared that *Romanticism* in Italy was the struggle for liberty against oppression, the battle of independence fought in the name of our own individual inspiration and the collective Thought of our country, against all forms and rules not of our own choice.

✓ We did declare this. And this is the sole merit of these writings.

But in making this declaration, we intended to proclaim a truth not only political, but literary.

Truth is one, and governs every manifestation of life. Every stage of the education of humanity, or of a single nation, is presided over and directed by a social Thought, expressing and representing the degree of progress in course of achievement.

Religion, art, politics, and industry, all express and promote this thought, in methods varying according to their special mission, and the elements over which their influence extends.

Genius—the spirit gifted with exceptional power

—may either sum up the past, or prophesy the future; but the collective literature, the Art of one or of many nations, is inspired and informed solely by the immediate social *aim* of the epoch.

The special aim of art is to excite mankind to reduce *thought* to *action*. Some of the articles published in the present edition treat of this, the sole true definition of art, at greater length. Meanwhile, now that the rising of our nation appears to promise a revival of Italian art, it is well to state it here, and refer all who are doubtful on the subject to history.

Philosophy, since its earliest existence, has almost always been the repository of the ruling Thought of its epoch. But that Thought, while confined to the regions of philosophy, is unfruitful; the object of mere individual contemplation, it is incapable of modifying social life, unable to incarnate itself in, and direct the action of mankind.

Religion seizes upon that Thought, relinks it to heaven, gives it the consecration of a divine origin and of a future; then, setting it on high as the supreme law and aim of human action, transforms the world through it.

The ministry of art is similar. Art seizes upon the idea lying inactive in the mind, to instil it into the

heart, confides it to the affections, and converts it into a passion which transforms man from a thinker into an apostle.

I do not mean that art, as it is understood by unfaithful men at the present day, fulfils this mission. I mean that it ought to be such, that it was such in each great epoch of its existence, and that it has declined, and become degraded into the mere amusement of the idle, and the parody of its true self, whenever it has departed from that aim.

✓ The highest condition of art is when it interrogates the Thought of the epoch in the nation and in humanity, translates it in symbols and images, and clothes it in forms that stimulate the heart, the fancy, and the affections, to make it a part of their own life, and ensure its triumph.

The Thought of the epoch in our nation is the creation of an Italy, great and free, and destined to raise on high the banner of the oppressed and nameless peoples, to call them to unity and spontaneity of life, and aid them both by action and example.

And the Thought of the epoch in humanity—whatever appearances may say to the contrary—is a religious transformation. We have to fulfil the solemn obsequies of a faith which, for reasons it were long to

detail, no longer makes fruitful the life of man; and to summon hearts now hesitating, sceptical, disheartened, and divided, to rebaptism in faith, goodwill, and brotherhood, around the cradle of a new religion.

A new heaven and a new earth.—Is this a narrow field for the future art of Italy? Is it less poetical than the art of individual sensation and caprice, in the pursuit of which so many powerful minds have withered before they have reached half-way upon the path of life, like Alfred de Musset?

Will the fact that the manifestations of this new art are destined to be principally religious and political, that it will faithfully pursue a pre-ordained collective aim, cause it to falsify the very conditions of its own life or violate its own confines? Will art be less sublime when led by the column of fire that guided the Israelites across the desert, instead of the *ignis fatuus* that misleads the traveller by its dancing light?

✓ There are two errors that threaten art:—the theory that it is an imitation of nature, and the theory that would make self-worship its ruling law, and has created the formula of *art for art's sake*. The first would deprive it of all spontaneous individual life; the second breaks the link that binds it to the universe, and leaves it to wander like a sick man's dream, guided by no

law, destitute of all mission or aim, at the bidding of every new sensation. The first theory renders art useless, the second dangerous; both condemn it to sterility.

✓ Art does not imitate but interpret. It searches out the idea lying dormant in the symbol, in order to present the symbol to men in such form as to enable them to penetrate through it to the idea. Were it otherwise, what would be the use or value of art?

✓ Nature is for art the garb of the Eternal. The *real* is the finite expression and representation of the true; *forms* are the limits affixed by time and space to the power of life. Nature, reality, and form, should, all of them, be so rendered and expressed by art, as to reveal to mankind some ray of the truth—a vaster and profounder sentiment of life.

The opposite theory reduces the poet to a level with the photographer.

✓ Art is not the fancy or caprice of an individual. It is the mighty voice of God and the universe, as heard by the chosen spirit, and repeated in tones of harmony to mankind.

Should that omnipotent voice strike too directly upon the mortal ear, it would stun and suspend all

human action, even as Pantheism crushed the ancient Oriental world.

✓ Art is no isolated, unconnected, or inexplicable phenomenon. It draws its life from the life of the universe, and with the universe it ascends from epoch to epoch towards the Almighty. It owes its power over the souls of men to that collective life—even as the trees and plants draw their life from earth, the common mother; and its power would be destroyed should it attempt to forsake its source.

✓ The artistic formula, *art for art's sake*, is as atheistic as the political formula, *each for himself*, which may for a few years rule the actions of a people in decline, but can never guide a people arising to new life, and destined to fulfil a great mission.

The youthful student of art in Italy—when Italy exists, for until then all art amongst us should be a battle-hymn—will, I hope, avoid these two errors. They will not forget our great men who, from Dante to Foscolo, have taught us that art is a moral priesthood.

Whether ill or well, the writings that follow taught the same doctrine thirty years ago.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFATORY NOTE.

IN his Preface to the Italian Edition of his Literary Works, Mazzini says that had he been the compiler of that edition, he should have omitted the extremely juvenile articles of which one-third of the first volume is composed, and have begun the volume with the article "*Upon an European Literature.*"

This plan has therefore been adopted in the present edition. One exception has, however, been made, by the insertion of the extract from the review of Giannoni's poem "*The Exile,*" which is rendered peculiarly touching and interesting by the fact, that it was written at a time when it was impossible the young writer should foresee that he was describing the terrible destiny of his own future.