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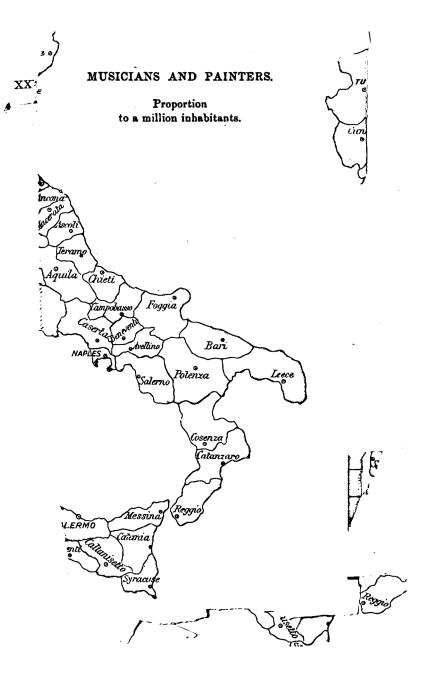
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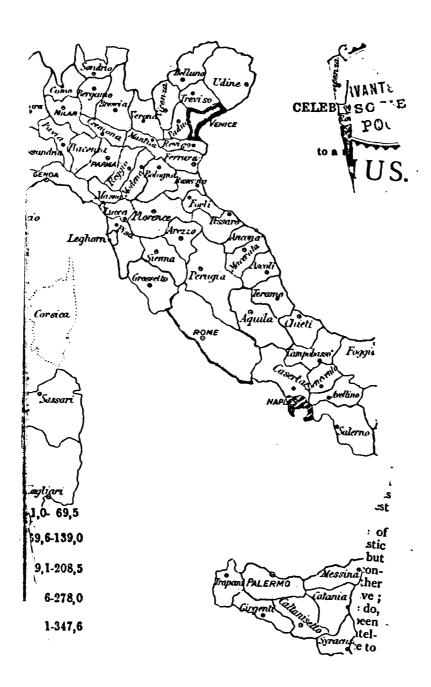
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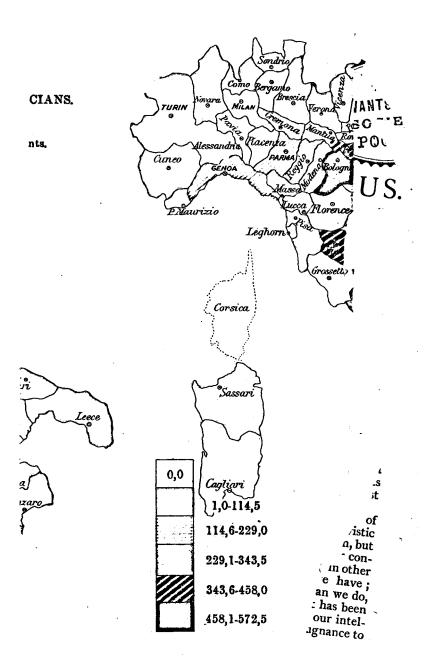
THE MAN OF GENIUS.



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THE

Man of Genius.

BY

CESARE LOMBROSO,

Professor of Legal Medicine at the University of Turin.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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PREFACE.

IT has never before happened that in the latest edition of a book I have had to disown so much in preceding editions; my first imperfect and spontaneous idea has never before been so modified and transformed, the final form being, perhaps, not even yet altogether attained.

The idea that genius was a special morbid condition had indeed often occurred to me, but I had always repelled it; and besides, without a sure experimental basis, ideas to-day do not count. Like still-born children, they appear but for a moment, to disappear at once. I had been enabled to discover in genius various characters of degeneration which are the foundation and the sign of nearly all forms of congenital mental abnormality, but the exaggerated extension which was at that time given to theories of degeneration, and still more the vague and inexact character of that conception, had repelled me; so that I accepted the facts, but not their ultimate consequences. How, in fact, can one suppress a feeling of horror at the thought of associating with idiots and criminals those individuals who represent the highest manifestations of the human spirit?

But recent teratologic researches, especially those of Gegenbauer, have shown that the phenomena of atavistic retrogression do not always indicate true degradation, but that very often they are simply a compensation for considerable development and progress accomplished in other directions. Reptiles have more ribs than we have; quadrupeds and apes possess more muscles than we do, and an entire organ, the tail, which we lack. It has been in losing these advantages that we have gained our intellectual superiority. When this is seen, the repugnance to

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the theory of genius as degeneration at once disappears. Just as giants pay a heavy ransom for their stature in sterility and relative muscular and mental weakness, so the giants of thought expiate their intellectual force in degeneration and psychoses. It is thus that the signs of degeneration are found more frequently in men of genius than even in the insane.

And again, this theory has entered to-day on so certain a path, and agrees so entirely with my studies on genius, that it is impossible for me not to accept it, and not to see in it an indirect confirmation of my own ideas. I find this confirmation in the characters of degeneration recently discovered; and still more in the uncertainty of the theories which were at first advanced to explain the problem of genius. Thus Joly affirms in a too convenient formula that "it is not even necessary to refute the theory of insanity in genius;" for, he says, "strength is not weakness, health is not disease, and for the rest the cases quoted in favour of these hypotheses are only particular cases." But the physician knows that very often, in the delirious and epileptic, strength is precisely an index of disease. As to the second objection, it falls to the ground as facts accumulate. It is certain that there have been men of genius presenting a complete equilibrium of the intellectual faculties; but they have presented defects of affectivity and feeling; though no one may have perceived it, or, rather, recorded it. Up to recent years, historians, being chroniclers rather than psychologists, very careful to transmit to us the adventures and pageantries of princes and peoples, and the wars which have so much importance in the eyes of the multitude, have neglected everything which concerns the psychology of thought. They have very seldom informed us concerning the disorders and degenerative characters which exist in men of genius and their families; while vanity, which is extreme in men of genius, has never allowed them, save in rare instances (such as Cardan, Rousseau, J. S. Mill, Renan), to yield spontaneous revelations of themselves.

Magnan, Annales Médico-Psychologiques, 1887; Lombroso, Tre Tribuni, pp. 3-9, 16-23, 148-150; Saury, Études Cliniques sur la Folie Héréditaire, 1886. Psychologie du Génie, 1883.

If Richelieu had not on one single occasion been caught in an epileptic fit, who could ever have guessed it? If it had not been for the recent works of Berti and Mayor, who would have believed that Cavour twice attempted to kill himself? If Taine had not been one of those rare writers who understand what help psychiatry can give in the study of history, he would never have been able to surprise those characteristics which make Napoleon's moral insanity manifest to all. Carlyle's wife wrote the narration of her tortures; few wives do as much, and, to tell the truth, few husbands are anxious to publish such narratives. Many persons still regard as an angelic being thecelebrated painter Aiwosowski, who succoured hundreds of poor persons and left his own wife and children to die of hunger.

It must be added that moral insanity and epilepsy which are so often found in association with genius are among the forms of mental alienation which are most difficult to verif, so that they are often denied, even during life, although quite evident to the alienist. There are still many estimable persons who doubt the insanity of King Ludwig of Bavaria, and even openly deny it.

There are, also, no individual cases in nature; all particular cases are the expression and effect of a law. And the fact, now unquestioned, that certain great men of genius have been insane, permits us to presume the existence of a lesser degree of psychosis in other men of genius.

But, adds Joly, genius is often precocious; as Raphael at fourteen years of age, Mozart at six, Michelangelo at sixteen; and sometimes it is tardy, with special characteristics, as in Alfieri. This is true; precocious originality is one of the characteristics of genius; but precisely because genius is a neurosis, an accidental circumstance may provoke it even at a comparatively late age, and like every neurosis which depends on irritation of the cerebral cortex it may take on different aspects, according to the spot attacked, while preserving the same nature.

Hailes, in a much praised essay on genius in art, maintains that genius is a continuation of the conditions of

¹ De Renzis, L'opera d'un Pazzo, 1887.

ordinary life; thus, as we all write prose we must all have a little genius. But how then does it happen, Brunetière rightly objects, that one individual alone becomes a great painter or a great poet? And how is it that so many philosophers affirm, and quite truly, that genius consists in an exaggerated development of one faculty at the expense of others?

The man of genius is a monster, say others. Very well, but even monsters follow well-defined teratologic

laws.

Brunetière remarks that there have been men of talent, like Addison and Pope, who were lacking in genius; and men of genius, like Sterne, who were lacking in talent. These two facts, however, are not contradictory; to be lacking in talent, or rather in good sense or common sense, is one of those characters of genius which witness to the presence of neurosis, and indicate that hypertrophy of certain psychic centres is compensated by the partial atrophy of other centres. As to the first assertion, it confirms rather than destroys my conclusions. Certainly talent is not genius, just as vice is not crime, but there is a transition from one to the other in virtue of that law of continuity which may be observed in all natural phenomena. Natura non facit saltus.

I must confess here that very often in this book I have had to confound genius with talent; not because they are not quite distinct, but because the line that separates them, like that which separates vice from crime, is very difficult to define. A man of scientific genius, lacking in education and opportunities—a Gorini, for example—will appear more sterile than a man of talent, who has been favoured

by circumstances from the first.

For the rest—and this is the point which concerns us most—the morbid effects and analogies are the same in both, since the man of talent, even without genius, presents various slight but real abnormalities. A man of even ordinary talent may be so exhausted as to exhibit the pathological central reactions of the most powerful regenius, and to leave traces of degeneration in his offspring; Foliad, although it is rare, it is not impossible for the man of

¹ Revue des Deux Mondes, 1886.

talent to descend from the neurotic and insane. This may easily be explained: talent, like genius, is accompanied by cortical excitation, only in a less degree and in a smaller brain. The true normal man is not the man of letters or of learning, but the man who works and eats—

fruges consumere natus.

But our nature, it is customary to say, revolts against a conception which tends to lower the most sublime manifestation of humanity to the level of the sorrowfully degenerate, to idiocy and insanity. It is sad, I do not deny, but has not nature caused to grow from similar germs, and on the same clod of earth, the nettle and the jasmine, the aconite and the rose? The botanist cannot be blamed for these coincidences; and since they exist it is not a crime that he should record them as he finds them. Repugnance also is a sentiment, not a reason; and a sentiment, moreover, which has not been shared by the race generally, who long ago reached conclusions—repugnant to the academic world, which sometimes closes its eyes in order not to see—entirely in harmony with the results here presented. We may see this in the most ancient etymologies; in Hebrew as well as in Sanscrit the lunatic is synonymous with the prophet. We may see it, too, in proverbs: "I matti ed i fancialli indovinano;" "Kinder und Narren sprechen die Wahrheit;" "Un fol advise bien un sage;" "Sæpe enim est morio valde opportune locutus." The lunatic, again, among barbarous people is feared and adored by the masses who often confide to him supreme authority.

In modern times the same conviction has been preserved, but in a form, it must be confessed, altogether disadvantageous to genius. Not only is fame (and until recent years even liberty), denied to men of genius during their lives, but even the means of subsistence. After death they receive monuments and rhetoric by way of compensation. And why is this? Neither the jealousy of rivals nor the envy of mediocre men is enough to explain it. The reason is that if we leave out certain great statesmen (though there are exceptions—Bismarck, for example) men of genius are lacking in tact, in moderation, in the sense of practical life, in the virtues which are alc

recognized as real by the masses, and which alone are useful in social affairs. "Le bon sens vaut micux que le génie," says an old French adage. And as Mirabeau said, "Good sense is the absence of every strong passion, and only men of strong passions can be great." Good sense travels on the well-worn paths; genius, never. And that is why the crowd, not altogether without reason, is so ready to treat great men as lunatics, while the lettered crowd cry out when—as I have attempted to do here—

this general opinion is attached to a theory.

By some of those persons who have too much good sense—and who do not know that that destroys every great truth, because we reach truth more by remote paths than by smooth and ordinary roads—it has been objected: "Many of these defects that you find in great men may be found also in those who are not men of genius." This is very true, but it is by the quality and quantity that the abnormal character is marked; and, above all, by the contradiction with the whole of the other characters of their personality, that the abnormality appears. Cooks are vain, but in those matters which refer to their occupation they are not so vain as to believe themselves gods. The nobleman will boast of descent from a mediæval hero, but not of being a sculptor. We are all forgetful sometimes, but not so far forgetful that we cannot recall our own names while at the same time we have an extraordinary memory for our own discoveries. Many have said what Michelangelo said of monks, but they have not afterwards spent large sums in fattening monasteries. In short, it is the doubling and contradiction of personality in genius which reveals the abnormality.

It has again been objected to me that these studies are deficient in utility. To this I might reply with Taine that it is not always necessary that the true should be useful. Yet numerous practical applications arise out of these researches; they furnish us with explanations of those strange religious insanities which become the nucleus of great historical events. The examination of the productions of the insane supply us with new sources fold analysis and criticism for the study of genius in art and erature; and, above all, these data bring an important

element to the solution of penal questions, for they overthrow for ever that prejudice by virtue of which only those are declared insane, and therefore irresponsible, whose reason has entirely departed, a prejudice which has handed thousands of irresponsible creatures to the executioner. They show us, lastly, that literary madness is not only a curious psychiatric singularity, but a special form of insanity, which hides impulses the more dangerous, because not easy to perceive, a form of insanity, which, like religious insanity, may be transformed into a historical event.

C. LOMBROSO.

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APPENDIX.

POETRY AND THE INSANE.

THE following letter was written by a druggist confined in the Asylum of Sainte-Anne:—

Sainte-Anne, le 26 février 1880.

MADAME,

Veuillez agréer l'hommage De ce modeste sonnet Et le tenir comme un gage De mon sincère respect.

SONNET.

Souvenez-vous, reine des dieux, Vierge des vierges, notre mère, Que vous êtes sur cette terre L'ange gardien mystérieux.

The same man addressed to M. Magnan a long poem on a dramatic representation accompanied by the following graceful envoi:—

VÉNÉRÉ DOCTEUR,

L'estime et la reconnaissance Sont la seule monnaie du cœur Dont votre pauvre serviteur Dispose pour la récompense Qu'il doit à vos soins pleins d'honneur.

¹ Quoted by Parant. Regnard, Sorcellerie, 1887.

Recevez donc cet humble hommage, Docteur admiré, révéré, Et j'ajouterai bien-aimé, Si vous vouliez tenir pour gage Qu'en cela du moins J'AI PAYE.

The following lines are from a long satirical poem by a writer who appears to have cherished much less respect for his physician. He believed that he had been changed into a beast, and recognised a colleague in every horse or donkey he met. He wished to browse in every field, and only refrained from doing so out of consideration for his friends:—

Les médicastres sans vergogne Qui changent en sale besogne Le plus sublime des mandats, Ces infâmes aliénistes, Qui, reconnus pour moralistes, Sont les pires des scélérats! Ils détruisent les écritures Pour maintenir les impostures Des ennemis du bien public. Ils prostituent leur justice Pour se gorger du bénéfice De leur satanique trafic.²

The author of the following lines on the same day made an attempt at suicide, and then a homicidal attack on his mother.

À MONSIEUR LE DOCTEUR C.

ÉPITRE (13 mai 1887).

Un docteur éminent sollicite ma muse.
Certes l'honneur est grand; mais le docteur s'amuse,
Car, dans ce noir séjour, le poète attristé
Par le souffle divin n'est guère visité. . . .
Faire des vers ici, quelle rude besogne!
On pourra m'objecter que jadis, en Gascogne,
Les rayons eclatants d'un soleil du Midi
Réveillaient quelquefois mon esprit engourdi;
Il est'vrai : dans Bordeaux, cité fière et polie,
J'ai fêté le bon vin, j'ai chanté la folie,
Celle bien entendu qui porte des grelots.

Regnard, Sorcellerie, 1887.

Mais depuis, un destin fatal à mon repos M'exile loin des bords de la belle Gironde, Qu'enrichissent les vins les plus fameux du monde! Aussi plus de chansons, de madrigaux coquets! Plus de sonnets savants, de bacchiques couplets! Ma muse tout en pleurs a replié ses ailes, Comme un ange banni des sphères éternelles!

Dans sa cage enfermé l'oiseau n'a plus de voix. . . .

Hélas! je ne suisse point le rossignol des bois, Pas même le pinson, pas même la fauvette; Vous me flattez, docteur, en m'appelant poète... Je ne suis qu'un méchant rimeur, et je ne sais Si ces alexandrins auront un grand succès. . . . Cependant mon désir est de vous satisfaire; Votre estime m'honore et je voudrais vous plaire, Mais Pégase est rétif quand il est enchaîné; D'un captif en naissant le vers meurt condamné. Si vous voulez, docteur, que ma muse renaisse, Je ne vous dirai pas : rendez-moi ma jeunesse. Non, mais puisque vos soins m'ont rendu la santé, Ne pourriez-vous me rendre aussi la liberté? Des vers! Pour que le ciel au poète en envoie Que faut-il? le grand air, le soleil et la joie! Accordez-moi ces biens: mon luth reconnaissant, Pour vous remercier comme un Dieu bienfaisant, . Peut-être trouvera, de mon cœur interprète, Des chants dignes de vous, et dignes d'un poète!

The following lines well express the solitary sadness of the melancholiac:—

A SE STESSO.

E con chi l'hai?
Con tutti e con nessuno,
L'ho con il cielo, che si tinge a bruno,
L'ho con il metro, che non rende i lai,
Che mi rodono il petto.
Nell'odio altrui, nel mal comun mi godo.

And these are of marvellous delicacy and truth :--

TIPO FISICO-MORALE DI P. L.

QUI RICOVERATO.

Al primo aspetto Chi ti vede, saria Costretto a dir che a te manca l'affetto; E male s'apporria; Che invece spesse fiate, Sotto ruvido vel, palpitan lene L'anime innamorate Che s'accendon, riscaldansi nel bene. Così rosa dal petalo Invisibile quasi Mette l'effluvio dai raccolti vasi, Come dal gelsomino, E i delicati odor dell'amorino; Nemico a tutti i giuochi, Di Venere, di Bacco indarno i fuochi Ti soffiano; la cute E di tal forza che sembrano mute Le vezzose lusinghe. . . Sei di pietra, E invano a darti il fiato spira l'etra. M. S.

The following little piece is a masterpiece of insane poetry:-

A UN UCCELLO DEL CORTILE.

Da un virgulto ad uno scoglio Da uno scoglio a una collina, L'ala tua va pellegrina Voli o posi a notte e dì.

Noi confitti al nostro orgoglio, Come ruote in ferrei perni, Ci stanchiamo in giri eterni, Sempre erranti e sempre qui! CAVALIERE Y.

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