Gleanings from a literary life, 1838-1880

Bowen Francis
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GLEANINGS

FROM

A LITERARY LIFE.
BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

MODERN PHILOSOPHY,
FROM DESCARTES TO SCHOPENHAUER AND HARTMANN.

AMERICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY:
INCLUDING STRICTURES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF THE
CURRENCY AND THE FINANCES SINCE 1861.

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS,
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GLEANINGS
FROM
A LITERARY LIFE
1838-1880
BY
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"La littérature n'a jamais été son but, mais son moyen"

NEW YORK
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PREFACE.

The contents of this volume have been gleaned from a wide field. They have been selected from a much larger number of miscellaneous papers, and are here brought together as having some unity of purpose, devoted as they are to the exposition and defence of doctrines which seem to me of priceless interest and importance. They were not meant to set forth novel opinions, or any mode of thought or system of belief here first propounded, but to guard and inculcate some of the old and familiar truths which are the best portion of the heritage which we have received from former generations. They express the earnest and persistent convictions of the writer upon topics of great moment, which still so far occupy the minds of all thoughtful persons as to appear foremost among what may be called the burning questions of the day. Literature is not in its highest vocation when it is cultivated merely for its own sake, but only when used as a means of promoting other and nobler ends than those of a purely literary character.

A few of these papers are here printed for the first
time. Others had been in print, but can hardly be said to have been published. The larger number of them are taken from the different periodicals in which they have appeared during the last forty years.

The Essay upon Classical and Utilitarian Studies is an attempt to prove that the proper end and aim of the higher education, which is sought within the walls of a University or a College, is not to impart useful information, which is best obtained from Scientific, Technical, and Professional Schools, but to develop the intellect and form the character by those "liberal studies" and scholastic exercises for the promotion of which Universities were first instituted. The papers upon Political Economy are almost exclusively devoted to pointing out the serious evils which menace the peace of society and the safety of property and trade, through tampering with the standard of value and the public credit by reckless experiments with the currency, and by permitting the enormous increase of national and municipal debt which has marked the financial history of the civilized world during the present century.

But most of the Essays in this volume are upon philosophical subjects, and may be regarded as a supplement to the volume published three years ago upon "Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Schopenhauer and Hartmann." They were intended to expose and refute those doctrines of materialism and fatalism, of agnosticism and pessimism, which have been imported into America from England and Germany, where they have usurped the name and garb of biological and
physical science. But for the undue prestige which is attached in this country to opinions and reputations of European origin, these theories would not have acquired here the popularity and influence which they actually possess. The hypothesis, for it is nothing more, of the evolution of all things out of chaotic dirt, through powers and agencies necessarily inherent and immanent in that dirt, unhelped and unguided anywhere by an organizing Mind, is too monstrous a doctrine ever to be entertained by competent thinkers. It teaches "the essential bestiality" of man, and if generally accepted, it would destroy all the finer qualities of his nature and condition, and reduce him again to what it claims to have been his primitive state,—at first, a brother to the insensate clod, and then a beast. I have argued strenuously against these infidel speculations, because I believe them to be as baseless as they are injurious. The upholders of them are not only at war with all morality and religion, but they are also, though for the most part unconsciously, attacking those institutions of property, the family, and the state, on which the whole fabric of modern civilization is based. I have controverted them because not only the consequences of their doctrines are pernicious, but their method is misleading and unsound; because their inferences conflict with all sound reasoning and faithfully observed facts; because their science is unscientific and their philosophy is unphilosophical. In these respects, what I have fully believed, and earnestly though imperfectly attempted to teach, during the last forty years, is set forth in these Essays. If the arguments
contained in them fail to impart to others the entire and trustful conviction which they have created in my own mind, the fault is not in the cause, but in the advocate.

Harvard College, September 10, 1880.