

**ALBERT DÜNER**

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Albert Dürer by Herman Friedrich Grimm

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**HERMAN FRIEDRICH GRIMM**

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BY

HERMANN GRIMM.

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WHEN one speaks of far-famed poets or artists, of Goethe, Schiller, Shakespeare, Raphael, or Rubens, the master pieces, by which their fame was gained, at once rise up before us. To speak of Goethe is to name Werther, Iphigenia, Faust, to mention Raphael is to recall the corridors of the Vatican, and the Sixtine Madonna. And so with great scholars and warriors, their names are like a brief pen and ink sketch of remarkable books and of brilliant battles.

The artist of whom I now wish to speak to you, Albert Dürer, is one of those, who can dispense with a towering monument. Every one knows, that he was a great and celebrated painter, that he has a place in the first rank, but where then are his master pieces? By what first rate work did he draw the world's attention to himself, as Goethe did with Werther, Corneille with *The Cid*, Michael Angelo with the *Pietà*? Or what was there remarkable in his life and career?

He lived at Nuremberg. His house there has been carefully restored and is entered with reverence. Dürer appears before us as a handsome tall man, with clear eyes, and fair curling hair, falling in waves on his shoulders; and this is pretty well all, that we are conscious of knowing about him. We re-

member, that here and there, this or that piece of work has been pointed out to us as Dürer's, but no one has ever stood before one of his pictures, lost in contemplation, as before one of Raphael's Madonnas. Dürer's works appear to us as mere trifles, engravings, wood-cuts, drawings, miniature paintings on parchment, wood and ivory carvings; choice and costly relics, rather than great pictures, asserting by their power and beauty their claim to an honourable position. And yet no one doubts, that Dürer was a great painter. Are then his works lost, destroyed, or carried away to foreign lands? on what rests his reputation, and by what is his greatness attested?

We may say at once, that Dürer's fame raising him to such a lofty height, and embracing the whole man, is of recent date. Dürer's name was always honoured, but the tone in which it is now uttered, resounds for the first time. And therefore, when we treat of him, we treat also of the characteristics of our age, which have made Dürer such a prominent personage.

Our age is that of enlightened enquiry. Every one who, in any way, is in a position to raise himself from the merely animal condition of uninterested ignorance, seeks to become a participator in the ruling tendency of our generation, devoted to the scientific investigation of everything, that exists around us. At the present time, the charm of such studies is all powerful. It is not for their material use, although enormous benefits have been derived from them, that these labours are undertaken, but to determine the laws of Nature. The man, who pursues them, on account of their mercantile interest, and thus produces results, is respected, but those only are truly noble, who work for the work's sake. In the present day, there is no loftier patent of nobility, than that of knowledge. Our recent cam-

paings are no proof to the contrary. Their issues are unquestionably the results of science applied to military subjects. Courage and enduring valour have characterised the German race at all times. But the historic sentiment of their position, that inspired the body of the army, the circumspection that regulated the plan of the campaign, the perfection of the weapons, by which the war was carried on, are all the fruit of scientific investigation and are recognised as such with pride.

Two facts of great significance have sprung from this tendency of the present generation to scientific enquiry: 1<sup>st</sup> a colossal increase in the number of those, who devote themselves to the investigation of things past and present, and 2<sup>nd</sup> the deduction, of the most extreme conclusions from the new views. A freedom and want of reticence have appeared, which we ourselves regard with a certain dubiousness. The seniors amongst us (this word is used in its mildest sense) have been brought up in the belief that the original progenitors of mankind were in immediate communication with the Deity; now-a-days, when man questions, not only the traditionary written records, but every thing, which can give an answer (and an answer is now given by every stone and every drop of water) we are linked with the Apes. A great number of men, more perhaps than we are aware of, console themselves in all seriousness with the thought, that they are descended from these animals, only because the connection between mankind and the Apes has been to a certain extent, presented in a plausibly scientific light. In place therefore, of lofty powerful ancestors, ideals, to which we cannot in this after-time attain, appear poor Indian-like dwellers in lake villages, whose mounds of bones we ransack. No one now dares to throw doubt



on these tangible records of the oldest history, or to oppose the conclusions drawn from them. The province of religion fares no better. What exceeds in purity the aspect of ancient Christendom and its records? Now men investigate these occurrences, treating them as if they were events, that happened recently, and over which there was no need to become enthusiastic. Anything may be said so long as it is in the form of a scientific enquiry. And in a wonderful way, all this makes us not more arrogant, but more modest. We assign to ourselves a lower place. The Earth with all its destinies we say, is only a small episode in the great Creation. We no longer imagine, that the world was solely created for man's benefit. The race of man likewise, with all its destinies, is only a limited episode in the Earth's history; the nationalities are only portions of the human race, whom we look upon and observe as individuals. Their national proclivities, capabilities and actions are enquired into, the impress they have left on the world's story, is dispassionately determined, and their history constructed by taking these qualities into account as the motive principles. We seek by all possible means, to come on the track of the former and present relations of different races. Formerly, when one spoke of history, wars and the fate of dynasties were all that was thought of, now endless classes of inter-dependent facts must be taken into consideration. There is a hunt for new points of view. Formerly it was much, to have found a foot path through the wood, now the leaves of every single tree must be counted. Every stone is turned over, to see if anything unknown lies beneath. Every change of weather is observed and registered. For countless years an arrow head, formed by the hands of men, remains sticking in the body of a buried animal. Layer upon layer of sand and mould collect above

it. To-day, we dig deep, find the arrow, measure the depth, and determine from the style of the work and the position of the strata, the existence of different nations, who lived a certain number of thousands of years ago. Splinters of bone, according to their form, become hieroglyphics, capable of interpretation. A dozen words inscribed ages ago, without being themselves intelligible, show us to-day, the existence of a language and give trustworthy indications, as to the location and migration of nations. We look round on all sides with a sense of perfect freedom, and nothing appears any longer unattainable.

Whilst these researches are directed towards the development of nationalities, and ages are brought near and made familiar, whose distance from us in time, we formerly dared not measure, there is a negative side to the positive results of this most recent aspect of thought. Certainly, former historical accounts were laboured at with often the poorest tools, facts were seldom known with exactitude, and out of shadowy elements indefinite forms were shaped. In return for that our passions, which are always excited by anything that concerns the intercourse of man with man, stepped more clearly into the foreground and history, which to-day is considered as the result of invincible laws that work together in endless variety, was simpler and easier of comprehension. To-day, no fact is credited, unless it can produce good evidence, that it occurred exactly as it *must* have occurred. Every event must be so luminous, that nothing indefinite remains behind. Buckle's celebrated work on the History of Civilisation is the most brilliant exposition of the deeds of nations according to this method, the comprehensive introduction to

it (the only part actually completed) forms a foundation for the history of all nations.

So long as Buckle limited himself to the comparison of the qualities of the inhabitants of different parts of our planet, he made many astonishing and curious observations. But he was powerless, when he trenched upon the province, where struggles of a spiritual origin take place. To render these clear and intelligible, requires not only an appreciation of the influences, that impel the masses to a common action, but a knowledge of the characteristics of the individuality of the leaders of the people. He seized and explained only, what relates to the effect of Nature on Man, but his mode of treatment failed, when it was applied to the active agent. For here we can no longer make use of the observations and comparisons, that have served us hitherto.

It is a striking thought that, whilst we have so vastly extended our observations, in the knowledge of all the outer conditions of life, we have rather fallen behind in our grasp of the inner life, not only in what depends on the keenness of observation, but also in the power of pourtrayal. In this department no progress has been made. Our earliest records of spiritual conditions go back some two or three thousand years, during which men have always remained the same. It appears, that the old Greeks felt hate, love, ambition and such like passions just as we do, and that they heeded them still more, that they spoke, wrote, made better poetry, sculptured, built, and even thought better, than we do. The riddle of man's nature has not been solved by all our increased knowledge. Many things have now been rendered clear in history, because such an enormous amount of aid has been brought to bear upon it.