

**GILBERT MARLOWE
AND OTHER POEMS**

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Gilbert Marlowe and Other Poems by William Whitmore

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WILLIAM WHITMORE

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BY

WILLIAM WHITMORE.

WITH PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR OF

"TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL DAYS."

Cambridge:

MACMILLAN AND CO.

AND 23, HENRIETTA-STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON.

1859.

PREFACE.

THE author of this little volume of poems is a young man, a house painter by trade, who has earned his bread by daily labour since he was ten years old. He has since that age had no education (in the common sense of the word) except what he could get at a Sunday School. The poems will speak for themselves as to how he has used such opportunities for study as fall within the reach of men in his position. He has already earned an honourable name for himself in his own neighbourhood. His friends think that this name has been honestly earned; that the author ought to have a larger audience; that he is one of those to whose speech it will be well for his countrymen of all classes to listen; and so, at last, after the usual difficulties which have to be overcome in all such cases, his book is published.

No one is likely to be surprised now-a-days at finding that a painter can write English fluently, gracefully, and forcibly, and that he has been exercised by the same problems which are puzzling the wisest of our learned doctors. The novelty of the thing is past. Not to speak of the giants of their order, such as Hugh Miller and Livingstone, we have had books in verse and prose by tailors, postmen, weavers, and a score of other mechanics and artizans, all showing great command of language, some of which would have placed their authors in a high rank as writers had they lived a few years earlier in the century. But there is no longer any excitement on the subject, and people will not buy and read the work of a mechanic simply because he is a mechanic. He has to come down into the lists, and win his spurs side by side with those who have had every advantage of training and social position. If he cannot hold his own he will be shouldered back at once; for the audience are used to his garb and weapons, and will no longer shout for him to stay on simply as a strange sight.

This social equality is a healthy sign of our day, and a most honourable fact for those who have won it for their class. I should be the last man to say anything against it. I may think that the public has been a little over hasty, that there ought in fairness to be still *some* handicapping. But I am too glad to welcome any sign that the great mass of my countrymen are beginning to triumph over all hindrances, and are rising in intelligence and all noble and gentle culture, to have much sympathy to spare for a few of them, who may not have had quite fair play from Mrs. Grundy. Nevertheless, I believe, that, for the sake of getting to understand our own times, and our own land—that we may be able, each in his own small way, to help England, instead of hindering her—it may be sometimes well worth our while to buy, and read carefully, and think about, a book by a working man, while we might only hire from Mudie's, and glance at, a more perfect book on the same subject by a Master of Arts.

And this brings me to my reasons for writing a preface to these poems. I want people to read them. I may be

mistaken as to their merits as poems. I don't pretend to be a judge of the artistic worth of such matters. But I do know something of the published works of men of the author's rank—I know what the tone and spirit of the most popular and ablest of such works have been. The great—the almost irresistible temptation of such men, when they begin to write, is to appeal to class differences and class hatreds; to work up and over-colour the sufferings and the virtues of the poor; to preach a sort of vague worship of glorious humanity, to which phrase they will let you attach any meaning you please, so long as you allow it to remain an abstraction; to rail at old creeds, and sneer at the believers in them. All this has been mixed with very much that was noble, and no one can wonder who knows anything of the case, that such temptations have been too strong for many. I believe, myself, that a sounder and better time is near for our country. At any rate, the present volume will prove that though such temptations may have been felt strongly, yet, that a man of Whitmore's class, may, by patient and

honest dealing with himself, and all that he sees around him, master them, and learn, that in order to love and serve his own class it is not necessary to hate or rave against all others; that what every true poet and true man ought to be seeking for, is, a common ground for himself and every other human soul; upon which the poor and rich, the weak and strong, may rest side by side. If he cannot shew us glimpses of such a ground, the most musical words that man ever uttered will reach no depth and meet no yearning in our hearts, however they may please our ears; if he can, the rudest utterance will not hinder us from drinking in his words, for in them will be drops from the fountain of life.

The price of this volume will keep it, for the present at least, out of the hands of poor men. We, who have money to spare for luxuries, who have had all the education which money could buy for us, who know not what it is to depend for food, and house, and clothes, on the labour of the day, shall form the first audience of the working painter. That we may profit by what he has to say let us

try to realize his life as well as we can while we read. Few of us can do it as we ought. The grim reality of such a life cannot be really known to us. But, making such effort as we can, let us read: and, as we read, I think we shall thank God for training amongst our poorer brethren men who can think, and feel, and write, as this man has done. Shall we be wrong in taking it as a sign that He has noble work yet in store for us Englishmen, when such voices as William Whitmore's are rising more and more frequently and earnestly out of the most sorely tried portion of our great family, to teach their brethren what the work is which they are sent into the world to do, in such words as these,

Oh be it thine

To gladden and exalt their sad poor life !
Be their true brother, on thy forehead bearing
The morning of their hope. Oh do thou seek
To win this world for them ; but seek still more
To win back Heaven, now faded from their sight.
Nourish thy soul in reverence and truth.
Be thou God's workman, zealous to build up
In poor men's hearts a temple unto Him.