

Charles Harpur (1813-1868) ‘Bard of our Country’

This is Part 2 of a serialised transcript of the presentation by the same title delivered to the June 23, 2012–CEC Candidates Workshop
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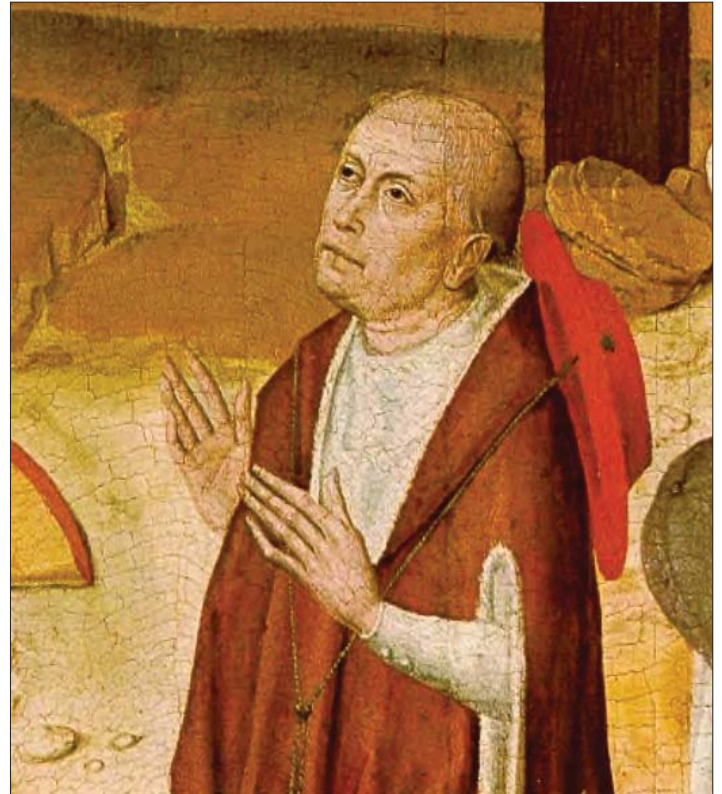
Harpur’s conception of Man’s relationship to God and the Universe

Charles claimed to follow no religious denomination and because he hated all religious pretentiousness, was often mistaken for an infidel. He wrote that whilst nothing could shake his own belief in God, he did think that many atheists were far better men than himself (including Percy Shelley whom he defended).

But he developed his own “Religion of Humanity”, based on the belief that by the power of his own free will, Man, acting together with the power of God upon the spring of beauty and goodness in his own heart and mind, can attain the highest degree of moral freedom and perfection. This stanza from his poem *Nobility* expresses Harpur’s view of *man imago Dei*.

We know that man is prone
To bow down to Power alone,
Or right or wrong, for Earth’s glooms will cloud an earthy wit;
But in his heart, though dark,
There yet glows a truthful spark—
His kin-spark with the Angel, for by heaven itself ‘twas lit;
And if still he keep the way
That is lightened by its ray,
On his high throne of Manhood a sun-born God might sit.

Such was Harpur’s appetite for discovering the truth about God and the Universe, that when Robert Chamber’s controversial 1844 book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* hit the streets, provoking enormous debate, Harpur welcomed the new ideas and saw in this new view of the universe “Universal Nature moved by Universal Mind”. Now we know, thanks to Ann Lawler’s presentation on Charles Darwin to the CEC’s July 23-24 National Conference [See *New Citizen* Vol 7 No 5 August/September 2011.] that Chambers was a Fellow of the Geological Society of London and a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and that this book was a real operation. It actually kicked off the rigged debate on “evolution” and was avidly read by both Alfred Wallace and Charles Darwin. It was an outright attack on Christianity, especially the concept of man as *imago Dei*. Nonetheless, it inspired one of



Philosopher and theologian Nicholas of Cusa lived 400 years before Harpur, but Harpur echoes many of his most profound ideas.

Harpur’s most incredible poems, *Geologia* [also titled, *The World and the Soul*] in which he expressed his wonder and elation at the evolutionary principle that governs the universe.

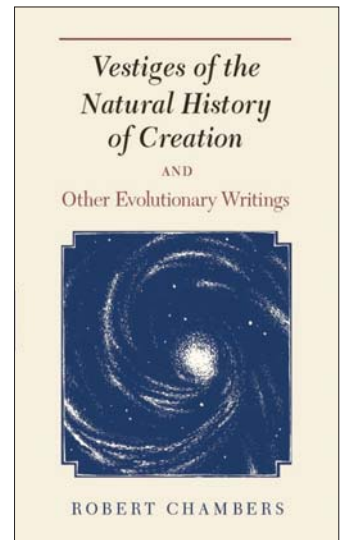
It’s a long poem, but I am going to read it to you. As you listen, think through what LaRouche’s Basement Team and we ourselves in the CEC have just published in the *New Citizen* (regarding Real Evolution and the Self-developing Biosphere).



Both sides of the Darwin-Wallace medal awarded to Alfred Wallace at the 1908 Linnæan society meeting celebrating the 50th anniversary of the reading of Darwin and Wallace’s papers on natural selection.



Left, front page of *New Citizen* Vol 7 No 5 August/September 2011. Right, book’s cover.



Charles Harpur (1813-1868)–‘Bard of our Country’

The World and the Soul

By Charles Harpur

Part I

From the crude records which mysterious Time
Hath graven on the crag-boned hills, and strewn
In crumbled fragments, and embedded deep,
On wild sea-shores, in dim dells, watery chasms,
And in the death-dark bowels of the Earth,
Where never sunshine, since Creation's dawn,
Hath fallen in its golden splendour down,
We learn that she, at dateless intervals,
Hath been the plastic and predestined mould
Of awfullest changes. And from these again,
Reading their crude significance, more and more
Into coherency, we wondering find
That her dark womb, through immemorial tracts
Of years so countless, that they ghostly seem,
Hath also teemed with still successive births
Of vegetable prophecies of spirit,
Ever ascending to their own fulfilment;
And thence with sentient natures, linking on
In strict organic sequency, from forms
Of lowest power and purpose,—on and on
To higher and highest.

Thus her quickening mass
Quickened yet more, till knotted reptile things
Stolid, yet frightful through mere multitude,
(Even as beheld *only in thought*), have swarmed
O'er all her clammy disc, as vile worms clothe,
In horrible mockery of both life and death,
An else-stark corpse; or beings unto which
The monstrous serpent of the Indian wastes
Were but a minim, in her miry lap
Have wallowed, snorting in their ponderous joy—
Beings enormous! But in function low
And gross in shape—yea, ugly as enorm!
And evermore pre-doomed to perish, when
Her altering surface grew the meet abode
For things of greater beauty. Whether wrought
Into such meetness by set laws of change,
For ever active, and thence through all time
Distributing their forces; or by some
Mystical energy at work within,
Of Demogorgon kind; or by the sweep
Of sudden cataclysms wild and vast;
Or by the upburst of internal fires,
Instant and universal.

First emerged
Mountains abrupt, like those upon the moon,
Scarred through with fissures out of which there seethed
A white volcanic heat; while spongy growths
Of cypress-dark and flowerless forests, filled
Vast valleys with a damp and noisome shade,
But luminous at intervals with drear
Avernian lakes, that blackened under storms
Drifting aloft, or imaged back the bulk
Of bat-like monsters, flying o'er; or glassed
(Along their low shores shadowing out) the huge
Unwieldy masses of some mammoth herd,
As into the dim spaces of the dense

And bordering woods it passed, and onward then
Crashed, munching as it went. And yet on this
So lonesome scene, the sun arose as now,
True to his season, and the moon unveiled
Her pale face over it night after night,
Bevied about with all her golden train
Of stellar glories raying influence down.
Yea thus, for countless centuries, beneath
The fulgent host of heaven, did all the bare
And slopeless hills show ghastly in their light,
And the dull waters gleam: although as yet,
Through all these patient periods immature,
No soul intelligent, save God himself,
Might know or visit them—

But lo, at last,
In jubilant ascension, Man, and all
The tribes of living creatures over which
He reigneth absolute, with comelier forms
Of higher cast, and inwardly endued
With spirits and faculties that flourished forth
To finer issues and to ends more nice,
Gave to their mother Earth's time-tempered orb
That worth and excellence which now are hers.

Then, on the hills, the hunter's voice went forth
And, in the valleys, the glad chaunt of birds
Chimed sweetly with the gurgling interflows,
And musical motions, manifold and mixt
Of rivers in their broad abundant flow
Through boundless depths of bloomy boughs, all tossed
And billowing in the breeze; and Echoes, housed
In rocky steeps, and caves, and twilight dells,
Made merry with the cheerful noise that came
Mellowed by distance, out of lowing glens
And multitudinously bleating vales,
In large scopes,—lying all within each broad
Allotted heritage that stretched around
The low-roofed homesteads of an early world;—
Low-roofed, but staunch,—and welcome fraught, as seen
Bosomed in trees from which ripe golden globes
Hung clustered, while about them rippled deep
Glad fields of rustling corn: till hence at length,
Through all meet channels working, Nature taught
Music to Art; and answering to a want
Hence too created, Poetry arose
Out of the dayspring like a morning star
Upon the awakened spirit of delight;
And thence descending in her influence, grew
More intimate and plastic,—till at last
Semblance idealised in hues, or wrought
From the rude rock into a life which spake
The language of immutable Loveliness,
Adorned the abodes of learning, and the shrines
Of Worship, and of Virtue;—Sister Arts,
Three Sister Arts in fellowship divine—
A triune glory of exalted *Soul*.

Part II

But dare we think the awful laws of Change
From good to better, still though over roads
So rough in seeming have even yet an end?

Charles Harpur (1813-1868)–‘Bard of our Country’

That Earth is Man's for ever? His and theirs,
The tribes o'er which pre-eminent he reigns
As king—his one true Kingship? No: the Hours
That shall behold her the prepared abode
For new successions in the Scheme of Life,
May even *now*—like a long flight of storks
Or ere it loom in view,—up, where the waves
Of ocean welter in the spectral haze
On heaven's apparent verge;—thus, even *now*,
May these upon their dim but destined way
Be winging world-ward, through the eternal clouds
That hide the Future in their pregnant folds.

But, granting this, from whence, it may be asked,
Might spring these novel Orders? Even from where
All that preceded them in time's long tract
Have hitherto sprang life-ward:—from the womb
Prolific of that Spirit of the World
Called nature, and wherein, even from the first,
In virtual preparation shall have slept
Their causes,—darkling; but awaiting so
The evoking word of God! And what besides
Were needed, for thrice greater things,—the births
Of mightiest Systems, than that potent Word
Which the mind heareth, as expressed through laws
Whose sure results are but the far-produced
Decisions of His will,—as fore-designed,
Will and design in an omniscient Spirit
Being co-incident.

Or rather, what
I would adumbrate in this serious song,
Were but progressive changes in the sum
And complement of that Divine Idea
Whereof the Earth's so solid-seeming mass
Is, with its fleshly populations whole,
The vesture,—yea, the tactual shape, and thence
The visual sign in manifold reflection,
As ever forth fulfilling, more and more,
Its part in that great Sequence which ensures
The prospering intercourse of all the worlds:
Even as a human thought—so far as what
Is finite, and imperfect therefore, may
With Infinite compare,—as knowledge grows
Before it, and combines all congruent things,
A necessary progress undergoes
In its accruing unity with Truth.

But come what changes may, yet is the Soul,
As individualised in all mankind,
Beyond the swoop of chance, and lifted high
Out of the wasting whirl of brute Appearance,
When thence eliminated. She, complete
In her self-being, evermore aspires
An ultimate of all that went before—
A Spirit of Thought, and thence of that prime Cause
Whereby the world itself began and is.
And thus derived,—a Virtue purer far
Than that invisible ethereal fire—
That vital spirit of the world which breathes
Through Being's boundless lungs, she cannot know
Or darkness or corruption; but must be
A missioned Liberty, and thence endued

With powers of self-development that break
All bondage! Yea, ancestrally a spark
From God's own brightness, goes she world-ward forth
To die not, but to clothe for evermore
Her mighty life and wondrous faculties
In robes of beauty and of use, and all
The comforting integuments which sense
Weaves for her wearing, in the loom of Time,
Out of the hoards and harvest of the earth;
And thence by transmigration made through that
New birth called Death, in the adapted worth
And garniture of many *or all* of those
Innumerable orbs, that spangle thick
The neighbouring heaven with seats of being,—such
As host on host yet farther forth, enrich
Infinite spaces, populous alike
With kindred glories bosomed all in Him!
As being indeed the million-featured modes
Of His omniscient Power;—each several mode
A shining link in one eternal chain
Of progress—to Perfection.

Here we rest
Secure in soul. In secular safety too,
Here rest we,—satisfied; that come what may
Of change to Earth herself, or unto those
Her kindred glories that compose so bright
A Sisterhood in heaven,—though such as yet
Shall beat them into ruin and involve
Their death *in seeming*; still, in sure reserve,
For each some restoration must abide
In the unfailing consciousness of God,
And that divine necessity which makes
Creation and Advancement evermore
Link onward through all being: wherefore She
And They, though after some dread shock of change
Long lying shrouded, shall again awake,
And yet again,—wake jubilant, to hear
His far-off trumpet through the dark of doom
Calling them up into a state yet more
Exalted, as yet nearer to his own
Internal excellence and central peace.



Charles Harpur (1813-1868)–‘Bard of our Country’

You get a sense of how Harpur viewed the universe—the past, the present and the future, as all relatively timeless—but all governed by a constant process of change, ever upward, always onward to greater and greater perfection. But all brought into being by “The evoking word of God! That potent Word Which the mind heareth, as expressed through laws Whose sure results are but the far-produced Decisions of His will.” [The same idea Saint John expressed in his Gospel when he said “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” John 1:1-3.]



Left. John Keats. Right. Percy Bysshe Shelley.

There is much more we could discuss in this poem, but I want to zero in on the end of the third last stanza. Where he says: “Even as a human thought—so far as what is finite, and imperfect therefore, may With Infinite compare,—as knowledge grows Before it, and combines all congruent things, A necessary progress undergoes In its accruing unity with Truth.”

This invisible spiritual or intellectual realm in which the Mind of Man communes with the Mind of God, free from all physical and temporal restraints, is the world of *metaphor*—the world of poetry. In his *Lecture on Poetry* which I referenced earlier, Harpur said:

“But the social bearing of poetry, as an art, is only well and worthily inclined to, when it is carried into the service of the truthful as well as of the beautiful: Truth and Beauty being essentially one; nay, being one too, even in appearance, when beheld and contemplated from a sufficient height of thought. And when thus far produced, not only is poetry religious in spirit, but moral in influence.” [Echoes of John Keats’ *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: “Beauty is Truth, Truth beauty, that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”]

“That we do not live by bread alone is a saying of supreme moment, for it is divinely suggestive of the fact, that the spiritual part of our nature can only be adequately sustained by a meet ethereal nourishment which is alone attainable through the ministry of the Muse; and that the full godward growth of our minds can only be derived from habitual converse with the sublime and beautiful in the laws and harmonies, and in all the seasonable changes and aspects and influences of that great constitution of things which surrounds us to infinity, and which we call the universe. And of these the true seer is the Poet, the highest interpretation, Poetry.” [Here, echoes of Percy Shelley’s *In Defence of Poetry*: “Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; ... Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”]

Now, consider the concept of *creativity* itself, as Mr. La-Rouche began discussing it in a fresh way back on December

27, 2011. He said: “Creativity is the intimation of the future, which drives you to find the idea, which corresponds to that future. And it comes for you as a mood, not as a definite instruction, it’s a mood! An idea is there, it stimulates you. And the stimulation of that, induces in you a mood! It’s from that mood, which is an anticipation of what you’re going to discover, which is what creativity is...”

And then later in an April 17, 2012 discussion: “The fire of creativity, the principle of life, the principle of artistic composition, of scientific discovery, is always an experience of the future, perceived as if in the present. It’s like a microsecond in the future: You’ve penetrated the anticipation of a microsecond in the future, and that participation in terms of Classical musical performance, grips you, and implicitly contains, in itself, the whole music! The entirety of the music is expressed, entirely in that instant, of realisation, of what the meaning of the composition is. And you’re edging into the edge of the future, and suddenly the future becomes apparent to you, and in the next moments, you can now express that principle: that’s creativity.”

With this in mind, listen to Harpur again from his *Lecture on Poetry*:

“The moderns have too little—or rather, no faith in the ideal. Yet it is the beautiful love-birth of the mind in fruition with its empyreal affinities; a spiritual insight, however imperfect, of the yet-to-be, or of the unfulfilled. And how full of promissory evidence too, are ‘these thoughts that wander through eternity’ of the Godward ascension and immortality of the soul. Yet the moderns, speaking widely, have no faith in the Ideal. With the ancients, on the contrary, Poesy and Prophecy were the same...”

Ideality is the very organ of spiritual progress, and great poets, possessing this pre-eminently, and speaking at large through its Sybilic instinct, but fore-characterise the divine tones of their beatitudes, and forecast in the exalted beauty of their impersonations and of the conditions surrounding them, that reunion with Paradise—with the perfect—which it promises to the future.”

To be continued...