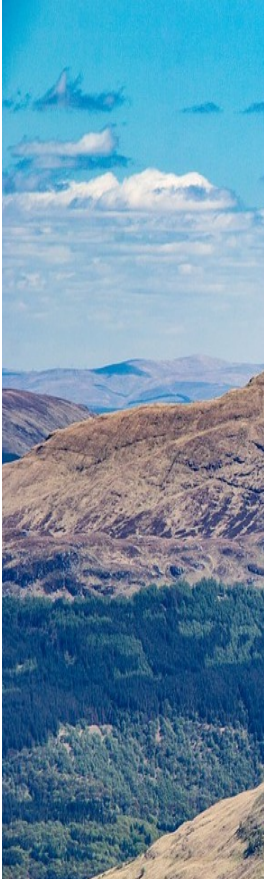


Ben Lomond

Thomas Campbell



Hadst thou a genius on thy peak,
What tales, white-headed Ben,
Could'st thou of ancient ages speak,
That mock th' historian's pen!

Thy long duration makes our lives
Seem but so many hours;
And likens, to the bees' frail hives,
Our most stupendous towers.

Temples and towers thou seest begun,
New creeds, new conquerors sway;
And, like their shadows in the sun,
Hast seen them swept away.

Thy steadfast summit, heaven-allied
(Unlike life's little span),
Looks down a mentor on the pride
Of perishable man.



Don't let the first words of this poem put you off. “Hadst thou” just means “if you had”. The poet is deliberately using a high or formal style of English; no one spoke like that in his life time but poets and other authors often used this style long after it was not used in everyday speech.

Sometimes in poetry words are used in a slightly unexpected sense. Use a good dictionary to help you answer these questions and you will understand the poem better. Some suggested answers are on the next page – but do not look until you have jotted down some possible answers of your own!

1. What does the poet mean by “genius”?
2. What does he mean by “white headed”?
3. What is a “mentor”?
4. Read Psalm 121 and James 4:14 How do these passages relate to the poem?
5. What would you say is the over all message of the poem and do you agree with it?

1. What does the poet mean by “genius”?

A spirit especially a guiding spirit. Note that the Holy Spirit himself is the only spirit to whom a Christian should look for guidance.

2. What does he mean by “white headed”?

Snow topped.

3. What is a “mentor”?

An experienced and trusted adviser.

4. Read Psalm 121 and James 4:14 How do these passages relate to the poem?

The psalmist considers how long the hills have stood and compares this with the eternal nature of God who is the source of all his help and protection. James reminds us of the passing nature of our lives (as does the poet) and draws from this the conclusion that we should be mindful of God's control of our lives and circumstances and give him the glory for all things.

5. What would you say is the over all message of the poem?

The poet warns against pride by reminding the reader of his mortality beside which the mountain seems so ancient. He extends this warning to cover all human empires and systems. As far as it goes, his message is a wise one. However, he has no real comfort to offer once he has reduced us, as it were, to our proper size. The message of the Bible completes the poet's accurate observation of the human condition by giving the reason for it and showing that man is not in reality “perishable” but has an eternal soul. Not only that but the bodies of believers will one day rise again. The purpose of everything will then be clear and believers will forever serve and praise the God who made and redeemed them.