

WISE · MEN · AND
A · FOOL

COULSON KERNAHAN

Cornell University Library

BOUGHT WITH THE INCOME
FROM THE
SAGE ENDOWMENT FUND
THE GIFT OF
Henry W. Sage
1891

A.15-9112

2/6/1902

Wise men and a fool,



3 1924 013 261 288

The date shows when this volume was taken.

MAY 4 1903
JUN 13 1903
1 0'07

All books not in use for instruction or research are limited to four weeks to all borrowers.

Periodicals of a general character should be returned as soon as possible ; when needed beyond two weeks a special request should be made.

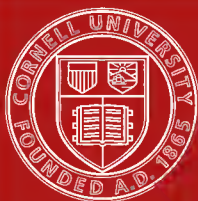
All *student* borrowers are limited to two weeks, with renewal privileges, when the book is not needed by others.

Books not needed during recess periods should be returned to the library, or arrangements made for their return during borrower's absence, if wanted.

Books needed by more than one person belong on the reserve list.

PR
463
K39

WISE MEN AND A FOOL



Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.



Photo by]

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

[Walker & Cockerell

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

BY

COULSON KERNAHAN

with
illustrations

“Wise men think out new thoughts and fools proclaim them”

HEINE

LONDON

WARD, LOCK & CO LIMITED

NEW YORK AND MELBOURNE

1901

k

l

✓

To
LOUISE CHANDLER MOULTON
A TRUE POET
AND
A FRIEND OF FRIENDS

* * * The paper upon Mr. Frederick Locker-Lampson appeared originally in the *Nineteenth Century*; that upon Dr. George MacDonald, in the *Quiver*; the article upon Emerson, in the *National Review*; and the study of Stevenson, in the *London Quarterly Review*. The others have also appeared in English and American periodicals, but as they have been entirely re-cast and re-written the author hesitates to associate them with the publications in question.

AN EXPLANATION AND AN APOLOGY

FOR the title of this volume an explanation, if not an apology, must be offered. Some readers will think it merely silly ; others will hold that by straining after what is bizarre, the author is impudently seeking to advertize a worthless book.

The justice of both assumptions must be admitted, but before a verdict be returned and sentence passed, the author claims to be heard in his own defence. That he has a weakness for a distinctive title, it were best frankly to confess. Even though he plead that four years

AN EXPLANATION

have passed since the publication of his last volume, the list of previous convictions is long, and may be produced in court against him.

But it seems to him that in these days of the multiplication of books, and consequently of titles, it is to the convenience of every one concerned—be he publisher, bookseller, or reader—that a new work be called by a name which is easily remembered, and is not likely to be confounded with any work already in existence.

Apart, however, from this side of the question, he can assure the reader that, easy as it may be to christen a work of fiction, it is by no means easy to find a distinctive and unused title for a book which discusses books and authors. Such words as “Studies,” “Essays,” and the like, have been used so often in connection with

AND AN APOLOGY

“Literature” and “Criticism,” that every possible combination seems already to have been exhausted. Moreover, “Criticism” or “Literature,” in the serious sense of either word, this book is not. There is some attempt at criticism in the articles upon Emerson, Mr. Watts - Dunton, and the late Mr. Locker-Lampson, but the papers upon Tennyson and the Brownings are mere “snapshots” of one aspect of personality. They appeared originally in the pages of a popular periodical circulating chiefly among a public which has little time for the serious study of poetry. That — to the author’s knowledge — they induced more than one young reader to turn aside from the crude snapshot, in order to make the acquaintance of the great original, is his only excuse for republication. Unless it can be proved that the “snapshotting” of the wise by the

AN EXPLANATION

foolish have served some such purpose, the republication of papers of this sort seems to the present writer little better than an impertinence.

May he add that his title has been chosen in no spirit of mock modesty? He believes (otherwise the book had never seen light) that what he has to say is sometimes to the point. But that much which he has to say is altogether irrelevant, and by those, whose judgment he respects, will be accounted "foolishness," he is well aware. Hence the title, which is meant to warn off as much as to attract.

THRUMS

WESTCLIFF-ON-SEA

ESSEX

January 1st, 1901

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST	15
A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM	47
A SOCIETY POET	87
ONE ASPECT OF BROWNING	115
TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS.	129
A NATURE-POET	151

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A HAUNTED HOUSE	177
MRS. BROWNING AND THE "EVER- WOMANLY"	203
A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET.	225

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST



Robert Louis Stevenson
March 17th 1893

Photo by]

[Walker & Cockerell

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

From a pencil sketch by Spence

The Soul of an Artist :

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON AS
REVEALED IN HIS LETTERS

I

“**T**HERE is but one art—to omit !
Oh! if I knew how to omit, I
would ask no other knowledge.
A man who knew how to omit would make
an *Iliad* of a daily paper.”

So wrote Stevenson to his cousin, Mr. R. A. M. Stevenson, in 1883. The passage is characteristic of him of whom it might be said that, although he loved his wife devotedly, and was devotedly loved by her in return, the very soul of him was celibate—

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

celibate in the sense that his life was, from the outset, consecrated to his art.

“I sleep upon my art for a pillow,’ he wrote to Mr. Henley ; “ I waken in my art ; I am unready for death because I hate to leave it. I love my wife, I do not know how much, nor can, nor shall, unless I lost her ; but while I can conceive my being widowed, I refuse the offering of life without my art. *I am* not but in my art ; it is me ; I am the body of it merely.”

That those who label him egoist are right in so doing I am by no means sure. It is true that he assumed each of his correspondents would be as interested in his art as he was himself, and that news of work done, work on hand, and work projected, fills no small space in his letters. But this does not argue egotism, else were it egotism for a lover to sing of his mistress, a devotee to speak of things sacred. The egotism would have

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

been more apparent had Stevenson not spoken thus freely of his work, for your egotist is generally a *poseur*. And the very frankness of Stevenson's letters, the very *abandon* of them, should give pause to all who carry slings wherewith to cast stones at egotism, lest, in their haste, they make a target of an innocent man.

Considering the self-consciousness with which he wrote—though 'tis but fair to say that this self-consciousness was afterwards in a measure outgrown—the only cause for wonder is that he is never caught in a “pose.”

To Stevenson — if only by virtue of his rare sense of humour and his even rarer capacity for self-criticism—the gentle art of attitudinising was an impossible accomplishment. Had one of the many Stevensons who were the tenants of his frail body, been caught by a brother-sprite and

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

co-tenant in the act of tricking himself out and attitudinising before a mirror, we may be sure that the mannikin had been made to dance to the tune of a whip's lash.

That one of these many Stevensons—whether the angel or the animal (and he had not been the man he was, but for a healthy dash of the brute), the moralist or the jest-maker, who shall say?—had a touch of vanity in him, there is no denying. But vanity is a spice that, provided it be used sparingly, brings out the flavour of the whole dish; and the man, to whose making there went never a grain of vanity, would as a personality be as insipid as soup without salt. The writer who, like Stevenson, can make jest of his own folly, who can tell, with relish, a story against himself, will not easily become the prey of over-weening vanity.

Unlike the proverbial "little knowledge," a little vanity is not always "a dangerous

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

thing." To the children of Humour it is seldom more dangerous than some childish complaint; for Humour—careful old physicker that she is—knows what is best for her offspring; and lest in later years they fall victim to a more fell disease, she forgets not to inoculate them with as much of the virus as may be rubbed into a lancet-scratch. After that, they are not like to be troubled by the more serious malady.

II

Not many lovers of art or of literature will have the heart to urge any fault against the most lovable personality of our time, but if any fault can be urged against Stevenson, it is that he is too subjective, too self-conscious. He has himself told us that as a lad he endeavoured to form a "style" by laboriously imitating the work of this or that

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Master. It was an unfortunate confession, and is responsible for much affected and stilted writing on the part of some of Stevenson's imitators and disciples, who were foolishly counselled to go and do likewise.

The result of such imitation would in most cases be disastrous to originality. It is all very well for a writer in search of a style to study—even to saturate himself with—the work of the masters of his craft ; but when it comes to self-conscious imitation, to what Stevenson himself called “playing the sedulous ape,” the case is entirely different. To be natural, is in literature, as in life, the secret of good manners. Self-consciousness is as detestable in a prince as in a peasant. Watch a farm-labourer trudging home with his basket slung across his shoulder, and though, by reason of heavy boots and thick corduroy, he walk with a certain lumpiness, you shall

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

find nothing displeasing in his stride. But array that same labourer in Sunday broad-cloth, and set him to walk across a church before a dozen people, and the sweaty grin upon the face of him, and the shambling self-consciousness of his gait, transform him into the clumsiest of clowns.

The most villainous advice that was ever given to a would-be author is that he should ape the work of others. If the man who has the great writers by heart cannot express himself to good purpose by saying what he has to say in the manner peculiar to himself, and by the right choice of simple Saxon—that picture-making, ear-arresting speech—he can never hope to become master of a “style.” Still less can he acquire the coveted distinction by self-conscious imitation.

Stevenson himself had been greater, but for his occasional self-consciousness. His was

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

not, however, the self-consciousness of which I have been speaking. It was the self-consciousness of ill-health, the self-consciousness that comes of the realization of one's neighbourhood to death. His writing is robust and manly, but it suggests husbanded energy rather than the careless squandering of strength ; and his very eagerness to make it appear robust indicates the quality which his physical health lacked. There is the colour of warm blood in his work, but that colour is sometimes of too hectic a hue. What Emma Lazarus once said of her countryman, Heine—that his very enjoyment of Nature was more like the feverish excitement of the invalid who is allowed a brief breathing space in the sunshine, than the steady, sober intensity of one of her lifelong worshippers—is equally true of Louis Stevenson.

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

III

One specially interesting point about these letters is that they bring out emphatically the religious nature of the man. He admits to Mr. Crockett that he is, "for many reasons," "no great kirk-goer." "The sermon's one of them," he says, "and the first prayer another, but the chief and effectual reason is the stuffiness."

Yet he calls himself "a son of the manse," and confesses to Mr. Barrie that his "style is from the Covenanting writers." Elsewhere we find him declaring his inability to express to the full his admiration of Frederick Robertson's Sermons. The supreme passion of Robertson's life was his religion. The supreme passion of Stevenson's life was his art. But had Robertson been an artist and Stevenson a preacher, the two great Scotchmen might have done very similar work. In

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

the fact that, like Sir Walter Raleigh, they could "toil terribly"; in their almost fanatical conscientiousness and devotion to their ideals—the one to his art, the other to his religion; in the alternate light-heartedness and melancholia of their moods; in their fiery and intolerant outbursts against smug self-righteousness, cant, effeminacy, and shams of every sort; in playfulness and whimsicality of humour; in love of action and longing for a soldier's life; in chivalry of spirit; in heroic endurance of ill-health and physical suffering; and in the depth and sincerity of their religious feeling—the two men, leading as they did such widely differing lives, were in many ways singularly alike.

Especially alike were they in intensity of sympathy. Theirs was the divine sympathy which so suffers for, and with its object, that it passes from sympathy into absolute anguish. It was the sympathy—I say it in

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

all reverence—of the Christ, and most Christlike of all was it when its object was a little child.

“My landlord and landlady’s little four-year-old child is dying,” writes Stevenson to Mr. Colvin, “and, oh! what he has suffered! It has really affected my health. Oh, never, never any family for me. I am cured of that.

“I have taken a long holiday—have not worked for three days, and will not for a week; for I was really weary. Excuse this scratch; for the child weighs on me, dear Colvin. I did all I could to help; but all seems little to the point of crime when one of these poor innocents lies in such misery.”

Perhaps of all the interesting letters in these two volumes, the most interesting and characteristic is that on the death of James Walter Ferrier. It is addressed to Mr. Henley, and is printed, we are told, in accordance

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

with the expressed wish of Ferrier's surviving sister.

“ DEAR BOY,—

“ Our letters vigorously cross. You will ere this have received a note to Coggie. God knows what was in it. It is strange, a little before the first word you sent me—so late—kindly late, I know and feel—I was thinking in my bed, when I knew you I had six friends—Bob I had by nature ; then came the good James Walter, with all his failings, the *gentleman* of the lot, alas to sink so low, alas to do so little, but now, thank God, in his quiet rest. Next I found Baxter. Well do I remember telling Walter I had unearthed ‘a W.S. that I thought would do.’ It was in the Academy Lane, and he questioned me as to the Signet's qualifications. Fourth came Simpson. Somewhere about the same time I began to get intimate with Jenkin.

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

Last came Colvin. Then, one black winter afternoon, long Leslie Stephen, in his velvet jacket, met me in the *Spec.* by appointment, took me over to the infirmary, and in the crackling, blighting gaslight showed me that old head whose excellent representation I see before me in the photograph. Now when a man has six friends, to introduce a seventh is usually hopeless. Yet when you were presented you took to them and they to you upon the nail. You must have been a fine fellow ; but what a singular fortune I must have had in my six friends that you should take to all. I don't know if it is good Latin, most probably not, but this is enscrolled before my eyes for Walter : *Tandem e nubibus in apricum properat*. Rest, I suppose, I know, was all that remained ; but, oh, to look back, to remember all the mirth, all the kindness, all the humorous limitations and loved defects of that character ; to think that

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

he was young with me, sharing that weather-beaten, Fergussonian youth, looking forward through the clouds to the sun-burst ; and now clean gone from my path, silent—well, well. This has been a strange awakening. Last night, when I was alone in the house, with the window open on the lovely, still night, I could have sworn he was in the room with me ; I could show you the spot ; and, what was very curious, I heard his rich laughter, a thing I had not called to mind for I know not how long.

“ I see his coral waistcoat studs that he wore the first time he dined in my house ; I see his attitude, leaning back a little, already with something of a portly air, and laughed internally. How I admired him ! And now in the West Kirk.

“ I am trying to write out this haunting, bodily sense of absence ; besides, what else should I write of ?

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

“Yes, looking back, I think of him as one who was good, though sometimes clouded. He was the only gentle one of all my friends, save, perhaps, the other Walter. And he was certainly the only modest man among the lot. He never gave himself away; he kept back his secret; there was always a gentle problem behind all. Dear, dear, what a wreck! and yet how pleasant is the retrospect! God doeth all things well, though by what strange, solemn, and murderous contrivances!

“It is strange, he was the only man I ever loved who did not habitually interrupt. The fact draws my own portrait. And it is one of the many reasons why I count myself honoured by his friendship. A man like you *had* to like me; you could not help yourself; but Ferrier was above me, we were not equals; his true self humoured and smiled paternally upon my

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

failings, even as I humoured and sorrowed over his.

“Well, first his mother, then himself, they are gone : ‘in their resting graves.’

“When I come to think of it, I do not know what I said to his sister, and I fear to try again. Could you send her this? There is too much both about yourself and me in it ; but that, if you do not mind, is but a mark of sincerity. It would let her know how entirely, in the mind of (I suppose) his oldest friend, the good, true Ferrier obliterates the memory of the other, who was only his ‘lunatic brother.’

“Judge of this for me, and do as you please ; anyway, I will try to write to her again : my last was some kind of scrawl that I could not see for crying. This came upon me, remember, with terrible suddenness ; I was surprised by this death ; and it is fifteen or sixteen years since first I saw the hand-

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

some face in the *Spec.* I made sure, besides, to have died first. Love to you, your wife, and her sisters.

“ Ever yours, dear boy,

“ R. L. S.”

“ I never knew a man so superior to himself as poor James Walter. The best of him only came as a vision, like Corsica from the Corniche. He never gave his measure, either morally or intellectually. The curse was on him. Even his friends did not know him but by fits. I have passed hours with him when he was so wise, good and sweet that I never knew the like of it in any other. And for a beautiful good humour he had no match. I remember breaking in upon him once with a whole red-hot story (in my worst manner), pouring words upon him by the hour about some truck not worth an egg, that had befallen me, and suddenly, some half-hour

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

after, finding that the sweet fellow had some concern of his own, of infinitely greater import, that he was patiently and smilingly waiting to consult me on. It sounds nothing, but the courtesy and the unselfishness were perfect. It makes me rage to think how few knew him, and how many had the chance to sneer at their better.

“ Well, he was not wasted, that we know ; though if anything looked liker irony than this fitting of a man out with those rich qualities and faculties to be wrecked and aborted from the very stocks, I do not know the name of it. Yet we see that he has left an influence. The memory of his patient courtesy has often checked me in rudeness ; has it not you ?

“ You can form no idea of how handsome Walter was. At twenty he was splendid to see ; then, too, he had the sense of power in him, and great hopes ; he looked forward

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

ever jesting, of course, but he looked to see himself where he had the right to expect. He believed in himself profoundly ; but *he never disbelieved in others*. To the roughest Highland student he always had his fine, kind, open dignity of manner ; and a good word behind his back. . . .

“ My dear friend Walter Ferrier : oh, if I had only written to him more ! if only one of us in these last days had been well ! But I ever cherished the honour of his friendship, and now when he is gone I know what I have lost still better. We live on, meaning to meet, but when the hope is gone the pang comes.

“ R. L. S.”

Not many so-called “ human documents ” are of such twofold and vital human interest as this letter. Just as, from the Röntgen rays, there is not hidden the inner

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

frame of a man beneath its outer casing of flesh—so from the eye of Louis Stevenson there was not to be concealed the great heart that lay beneath the soiled exterior that most men and women took to be Ferrier. Stevenson has stencilled this picture of the real Ferrier upon his own soul, and in showing us the picture of his friend, he has laid bare the soul of the artist. By smug respectability and self-righteousness, by the class which Stevenson had in his mind when he wrote: "It makes me rage to think how few knew him, and how many had the chance to sneer at their better," such men as Ferrier are sentenced out of hand. To them all weakness of the flesh is of the devil, but, as Stevenson well says of them: "For all displays of the truly diabolic—envy, malice, the mean lie, the mean silence, the calumnious truth, the back-biter, the petty tyrant, the peevish

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

poisoner of family life—their standard is quite different. These are wrong, they will admit, yet somehow not so wrong ; there is no zeal in their assault upon them, no secret element of gusto warms up the sermon.”

V.

In Professor Colvin's introduction to these Letters we have the most faithful picture of Stevenson the man which has yet been drawn. Where affection for a friend might pardonably have betrayed the biographer into excess, Professor Colvin writes with judgment, restraint, and unerring taste. In no department of literature have so many unfortunate lapses of tact, such want of consideration for the living, been evident as in the work of those to whom has been

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

intrusted the editorial revision of Letters or Reminiscences of the dead. Professor Colvin's own contributions to literature have already won for him a distinguished place among contemporary writers. His share in the present volumes might henceforth stand as the very model and monument of what such work should be. The letters begin at the time when Stevenson was eighteen, but even the earliest are interesting. There is a passage from one of these which bears a curious similarity of mental impression to the following lines by William Allingham :—

Four ducks on a pond,
A grass bank beyond,
A blue sky of spring,
White clouds on the wing.
What a little thing
To remember for years,
To remember with tears.

It would not be easy to instance another

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

poem which presents so perfect a picture in so few lines. Allingham paints with the broad brush and bold strokes of the impressionist, yet contrives to cram his picture into cameo space. Young Stevenson's record of the same mental experience, though dashed off hurriedly in prose, is deserving of record.

"When I am a very old and respectable citizen, with white hair and bland manners, and a gold watch," he wrote, "I shall hear three crows cawing in my heart as I heard them this morning."

The letter in which this passage occurs is interesting for other reasons. "I vote," he says in the very next sentence, "for old age and eighty years of retrospect. Yet, after all, I dare say, a short shrift and a new green grave are about as desirable."

Here thus early is sounded the note which rings through all his letters. This was penned when he was twenty-two. When he

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

was nearing his forty-fourth and last year he wrote to Mr. Charles Baxter: "My dear old man, I perceive by a thousand signs that we grow old and are soon to pass away; I hope with dignity; if not, with courage at least. I am myself very ready, or would be—will be—when I have made a little money for my folks."

Open these volumes of letters where you will, you shall chance upon some reference to death. Throughout his life Stevenson kept royal company. King Death stalked day by day at his side, lay with him at night, sat with him at table. And Stevenson never shrank from his grim companion. "I keep returning, and now hand over fist from the realms of Hades," he writes. "I saw that gentleman between the eyes and fear him less after each visit. Only Charon and his rough boatmanship I somewhat fear."

To the staling influences by which, as

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

Mr. Lowell phrases it, "we become accustomed to Orion and the Pleiades" Stevenson was never subject. *Ennui* was unknown to him. Each new face he saw, each new place he visited, set interest and curiosity agog. He walked the world on tiptoe, straining that he might miss by the way no single sight that might interest his eager brain. He preached, and, better still, practised, the gospel of cheerfulness as one of the first of human duties :

The world is so full of such wonderful things,
I think we should all be as happy as kings.

Yet in spite of the superb lust of life that surged in his veins, he recognised from the outset that death, the so-called despoiler, is in reality the beneficent donor—that human life, human love, human friendship, would be infinitely less beautiful but for him, at whose touch, beauty is supposed to wither.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Not all the physical and mental ills that beset him in the very valley of the shadow of death, not all the onslaughts of the Apollyon of poverty, could subdue his splendid optimism, or bring him to his knees. Half dead with ague in San Francisco, he tells Mr. Colvin with grim humour that, though he would gladly have walked half a mile for the sake of a glass of brandy by means of which to shake off the chill of ague, "it seemed strange not to be able to afford a drink." Of his *Emigrant Papers* he writes from the same place, "The second part was written in a circle of hell unknown to Dante—that of the penniless and dying author." Yet soon after he sums up his philosophy of life by declaring: "I believe for myself, at least, that what is, is best. I believed it through all my worst days, and I am not ashamed to confess it now."

Even more characteristic of the man's

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

attitude towards life—of his attitude towards death—is a letter which he wrote within a few weeks of his own passing. He is speaking of the death of his correspondent's father.

“He is another of the landmarks gone. When it comes to my own turn to lay my weapons down, I shall do so with thankfulness and fatigue ; and whatever be my destiny afterward, I shall be glad to lie down with my fathers in honour. It is human at least, if not divine. And these deaths make me think of it with an ever greater readiness. Strange that you should be beginning a new life, when I, who am a little your junior, am thinking of the end of mine. But I have had hard lines ; I have been so long waiting for death ; I have unwrapped my thoughts from about life so long that I have not a filament left to hold by ; I have done my fiddling so long under Vesuvius that I have almost forgotten to play, and can only wait for the

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

eruption, and think it long of coming. Literally, no man has more wholly outlived life than I. And still it's good fun."

Who else but Louis Stevenson would have written thus? A dying man, as he practically was, and as he clearly knew himself to be, his incorrigible cheerfulness burns steadfast to the last.

"And still it's good fun"!

Strange ending to so solemn a *Nunc Dimittis*! The jauntiness of the words sounds incongruously upon the lips of the man whose eyes are already set upon the approaching figure of Death. One is reminded of the French nobleman who, as he made ready his neck for the guillotine, turned to the executioner with a courtly gesture of apology. "I crave your pardon for one moment, monsieur," he said, "that I may delight myself with a pinch of snuff." Then, as he replaced the box and carefully brushed

THE SOUL OF AN ARTIST

a speck of dust from his coat, he turned again to the grim figure, "Come, sir, I await your pleasure. Let us show this *canaille* how a soldier and a gentleman can die."

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM



Photo by]

GEORGE MACDONALD.

[Elliott & Fry

A Child of the Kingdom

I

God gives His child upon his slate a sum—
To find eternity in hours and years ;
With both sides covered, back the child doth come,
His dim eyes swollen with shed and unshed tears ;
God smiles, wipes clean the upper side and nether,
And says, "Now, dear, we'll do the sum together."

GEORGE MAC DONALD.

GENERATION by generation God
puts his pupil Humanity to school—
the reader will observe that I make
bold to filch a shaft from Dr. Mac Donald's
richly stocked quiver of metaphors — and
bids the learner work out for himself so many

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

sums upon the slate of life. Upon that slate many figures are set down which are afterwards effaced. They played an indispensable part in the working out of the sum, and in the education of the learner, although that part may be forgotten when the answer is obtained, and God cleans the slate for a new generation to begin the sum for itself.

It is so with most of those who serve the public with the pen. They are but figures upon a slate. Many can claim to have counted for no more than a cipher; the majority are the forgotten units by which the sum was worked; a few, a very few, find their names in the line which gives the answer.

There is a fashion in figures as in everything else. The value of the different numerals is unvarying, but each generation likes to turn the tail of its "sevens," or to

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

cross its "fours" in its own way. And God, the wise old Schoolmaster, though He smile at the silly fashions of to-day and to-morrow, does not greatly concern Himself about trifles, so long as He can keep His unwilling pupils to their task. He knows that the answer to the sum will be the same, whether we change, or do not change, the fashion of our figures. Twenty years ago the ring of this or that voice moved us strangely. It seemed to open up new worlds to us, so fresh, so clear, was its note. To-day we turn aside impatiently at sound of it. Was ever anything so trite, so hackneyed, as its message? Yet that voice has not spoken to idle purpose. It has helped us to learn the lesson; it was one of the figures by means of which we worked the sum. Robertson of Brighton in commenting upon the power of the spoken or written word, said once that no worthy book we have

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

read, no impressive sermon to which we have listened, has altogether failed of its object. Its influence upon us is none the less abiding because unconscious. It may be that the face of the preacher has passed from our memory, that we have forgotten even the very name of the writer of the book. "But," adds Robertson sternly, "the Day of Judgment will not forget it."

George Mac Donald—it were idle to pretend otherwise—is not a great literary classic. A great religious influence, or, better still, a great spiritual influence, he has been and still is. In the sum which, a generation ago, God set His pupils to work, the author of *Robert Falconer* was a high factor. His influence upon the young, and upon thoughtful men and women generally, has been enormous. I question whether any writer of his day has set a higher spiritual ideal or has maintained that ideal more faithfully.

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

Others may be content to make preaching and teaching their business, but of him one feels as one reads that here at least is a man who is constrained to speak of righteousness because righteousness is the life of him.

Of George Mac Donald we may say, in a scriptural phrase of quaint simplicity, that he is a "man who walks with God." He is the Saint John of modern literature. His loyalty to his Lord is just such a love as that which the disciple whom Jesus loved bore to his Master. Something there is in it of a woman's protecting tenderness as well as of a man's stern strength. Had he been of the company of those who watched with Jesus in the garden, one can readily believe that, at the approach of his Master's enemy, there would have kindled in his eyes such fire of menace as kindle in the eyes of even a gentle woman when danger to her child draws nigh.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

With one exception, I know no other living¹ poet whose work breathes so passionately personal a love for the Redeemer as George Mac Donald's. That exception is the Rev. S. J. Stone, whose noble hymn, "The Church's One Foundation," set as it is to battle-march music, has become the very Marseillaise of the Church militant and victorious.

II

I have a fancy that, for every baby-soul which is born into the garden of this world, there upsprings, in the heavenly garden above, a white flower which is watched over by the angels of God. It is the emblem of purity, the white flower of childhood; and so long as the soul on earth remains unsullied, so long as that soul retains the child-heart

¹ The writer must, with inexpressible grief, record the death of his dear friend, Mr. Stone, in November last.

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

of purity, so long and no longer shall the heavenly flower bloom white and fair in the garden of God.

The roses of seventy-six summers have flowered and faded since there came to earth —“out of the everywhere into here”—a little child who has made childhood more sacred and more wonderful for each of us, but whose childhood was not more beautiful than is the honoured and hallowed old age of the man who was once that child. * The white flower of George Mac Donald's childhood blooms as bravely and as purely to-day as when he first came into the world, bearing in his hand—did the wee soul snatch at it as he floated by?—the fairy gift of a scrap of God's blue heaven. And because he is of the pure in heart who see the Father, to him has been vouchsafed the celestial vision. To that which he has witnessed he has borne faithful testimony, and the world is a better

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

place to-day—it will be a better place a hundred years hence—because of his presence in it. To him we may not unreverently apply the lines which in his Organ Songs he addresses to a Greater than he :—

I know what beauty is, for Thou
Hast set the world within my heart ;
Of me Thou madest it a part ;
I never loved it more than now.

I know the Sabbath afternoons ;
The light asleep upon the graves ;
Against the sky the poplar waves ;
The river murmurs organ tunes.

I know the spring with bud and bell ;
The hush of summer woods at night ;
Autumn, when leaves let in more light ;
Fantastic winter's lovely spell.

I know the rapture music gives,
Its mystery of ordered tones ;
Dream-muffled soul, it loves and moans,
And half-alive, comes in and lives.

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

And verse I know, whose concord high
Of thought and music lifts the soul
Where many a glimmering starry shoal
Glides through the Godhead's living sky.

Yea, Beauty's regnant All I know—
The imperial head, the thoughtful eyes,
The God-imprisoned harmonies
That out in gracious motions go.

* * * * *

Admitting gladly and gratefully all that George Mac Donald has been and is to his readers, the fact remains, however, that, as I have already said, he is not a great literary classic. Some perfect and beautiful lyrics, an occasional quaint conceit after the manner of George Herbert and the Elizabethans, and it may be an odd snatch or two of Blake-like song, are sure of immortality. The rest—with the exception, perhaps, of some three or four fugitive lines that are less poems than the half-chanted meditations of a mind that

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

thinks metrically—is like to pass. His prose is even less sure of preservation. He is at his best in work which is purely imaginative and in his exquisite flights of fancy ; but fifty years hence I doubt if any one will read his novels. If they are read at all, it will be as studies in a singularly interesting temperament, or as vignettes of Scottish life—vignettes which I venture to think do not suffer by comparison with those of his successors in what has been dubbed “The Kailyard School.” When I say that the work of Mr. Barrie, “Ian Maclaren,” and Mr. Crockett is more artistic than that of Dr. Mac Donald, I am not thinking so much of technique as of the fact that it is more creative, that it has more of objectivity, whereas his is nearly always subjective. In the words of Goethe, he “cannot jump off his own shadow.”

It is rather curious that two contemporary

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

novelists of like initials, who have little else in common—Dr. George Mac Donald and Mr. George Meredith—should occasionally introduce into their books characters who are the mouthpieces of the authors. Mr. Meredith's mind is so unceasingly at work, minting the fine gold of epigram, that he finds it necessary to look about him for some one who can help to put the coin into circulation. Hence we sometimes discover in his novels a cleverly disguised character who has apparently been introduced for that purpose, but whose voice is the voice of Mr. Meredith himself. Dr. Mac Donald is the possessor, not of a mint, but of a gold-mine of beautiful thoughts about the Fatherhood of God, the childlikeness of the Christian, poetry, music, German mysticism, and Elizabethan literature. Some one must be found to stand sponsor for these thoughts, so the same

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

lay-figure is introduced again and again. To-day it is a Scotch stonemason, to-morrow a college-bred man from Glasgow. Then Dr. Mac Donald claps a grey wig upon the figure's head, twists a shawl about its shoulders, and introduces us to a fish wife from the Orkneys. When next it comes upon the scene it is a shepherd boy of scholarly taste, or a budding Burns; and then it makes its bow to us as a shy young governess to a tomboy of a girl. Remembering how genuine is Dr. Mac Donald's gift of humour, one wonders that he should use the same device so frequently, for the moment the character that he has so introduced opens its mouth, its voice is so unmistakably the voice of Dr. Mac Donald that no one can have an instant's doubt about its identity.

I should be sorry for the reader to think that I am speaking flippantly. The thoughts which Dr. Mac Donald expresses in this

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

way by the mouth of his lay-figures are so beautiful and so true that I, for one, count them among the most precious gifts that my books have brought to me, and am more grateful to Dr. Mac Donald than if he had sent me a purse of gold. All the same, I think that he would have done better to have printed them as a separate book. Dare I venture the opinion that Mr. Meredith would have been wise to have done the same with his epigrams?

III

In an unsigned notice of Dr. Mac Donald's work which I read recently, the writer referred to "the nebulousness of the Doctor's mental atmosphere." Might not the same expression be applied to the greatest of all the books of the New Testament—the Gospel of St. John? A mystic, as St. John

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

was, Dr. Mac Donald undoubtedly is, and, to a certain order of mind, mysticism and nebulousness seem interchangeable terms.

“But I’m talking what the people who do not understand such things lump all together as mysticism,” says Dr. Mac Donald, in *The Seaboard Parish*, “which is their name for a kind of spiritual ashpit, whither they consign dust and stones, never asking whether they may not be gold-dust and rubies all in a heap.”

In *Unspoken Sermons* there is a longer passage upon the same subject:—

“I use the word *mysticism*,” he says, “as representing a certain mode of embodying truth, common, in various degrees, to almost all, if not all, the writers of the New Testament. The attempt to define it thoroughly would require an essay. I will hazard but one suggestion towards it: A mystical mind is one which, having perceived that the

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

highest expression, of which the truth admits, lies in the symbolism of nature, and the human customs which result from human necessities, prosecutes thought about truth so embodied by dealing with the symbols themselves after logical forms. This is the highest mode of conveying the deepest truth, and the Lord Himself often employed it, as, for instance, in the whole passage ending with the words, 'If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!'"

This passage sufficiently explains Dr. Mac Donald's position in regard to mysticism. Yet, in justice to the writer of the article to which I have referred, one must admit that the word "nebulous" is not altogether misapplied. Nebulous upon vital points of religious belief Dr. Mac Donald certainly is not. His faith in the loving Fatherhood of God is almost childlike in its

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

unquestioning directness. Even more unquestioning—if that be possible—is his absolute acceptance of Christ as Human and Divine, the Saviour of the world, and the Very Son of God. One who so believes is surely of the company of the faithful, even though his theological views may not accord exactly with the definitions laid down by any one Church. In his sympathies he is catholic to a remarkable degree. A pilgrim of the Cross, he has, in spirit, travelled farther east than Palestine ; a student of religion, he pays reverent homage to a faith which was old when Christianity was new. By few living writers has what I may call the Philosophy of the Cross of Christ been so profoundly expounded as by Dr. Mac Donald, but he is not blind to the grandeur and the sublimity of the ancient faith that has its origin in that birthplace of religion and home of wonders—India. He has dreamed with Buddha of

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

a state in which Nirvâna is to be found, not by the development of the *ego* along the line of personal identity, but by the going back of the human soul in search of the Divine Soul and Source of its being, until at last the finite and the Infinite are at one.

His sympathies in regard to the different branches of the Christian Church are equally broad. Though no one could be farther from Rome than Dr. Mac Donald, he does not hesitate to admit that there is in certain Roman tenets, wherein Protestantism sees only error, an abiding truth which it were well not to overlook.

The avowed enemy of sacerdotalism, he is, upon certain subjects (prayers for the dead, for instance) curiously in sympathy with the High Church party; and member of the Church of England as he is generally understood to be, his preaching and his teaching strike me, at least, as more in accor-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

dance with the spirit of the older Nonconformity than with that of the Established Church. He has, I believe, described himself as a "layman." Without expressing an opinion one way or the other upon the doctrine of apostolical succession, I can only say that of all men to whom I have ever listened—with the exception, perhaps, of the late revered Canon Liddon—none has seemed to me so "ordained of God," so directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, as George Mac Donald. To my life's end I shall think of him as a High Priest and Prophet of the Most High.

"Nebulous" in his manner of expressing himself, he occasionally is, and from a passage in *Wilfred Cumbermede* one suspects that Dr. Mac Donald is not unaware of this :—

"Words always give either too much or too little shape : when you want to be definite, you find your words clumsy and blunt : when you want them for a vague, shadowy

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

image, you find them give a sharp and impertinent outline to your undefined but vivid thoughts. Forms themselves are hard enough to manage, but words are unmanageable."

It were an outrage to hold an author responsible for the words that he puts into the mouths of his characters, but—I am open to correction if I do Dr. Mac Donald an injustice—I incline to the opinion that this passage voices some uneasiness on his own part, in regard to the accuracy and the completeness with which his words express his thoughts. The fact that Dr. Mac Donald is an excellent and unerring critic of literature does not necessarily imply a capacity for self-criticism on his part, but it is likely that one whose writings convey such an impression of simplicity, manliness, and modesty, would suspect weakness rather than strength in his own work. Whatever be

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Dr. Mac Donald's estimate of himself, the fact remains that he lives so constantly in the clouds, and in a world of his own creating, that he lets himself drift sometimes beyond the ken of common folk. Allegory which is not easy of comprehension is bad art. The aim of allegory is to assist thought, not to confuse it. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* clears itself to the comprehension of a child, but one cannot say the same of the following lines from *Wilfred Cumbermede* :—

I dreamed that I woke from a dream,
And the house was full of light ;
At the window two angel Sorrows
Held back the curtain of night.

The door was wide, and the house
Was full of the morning wind ;
At the door two armed warders
Stood silent with faces blind.

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

I ran to the open door,
For the wind of the world was sweet,
The warders with crossing weapons
Turned back my issuing feet.

I ran to the shining windows,
There the wingèd Sorrows stood,
Silent they held the curtains,
And the light fell through in a flood.

I clomb to the highest window,
Ah! there with shadowed brow
Stood one lonely radiant Sorrow,
And that, my love, was thou.

I bowed my head before her,
And stood trembling in the light,
She dropped the heavy curtain,
And the house was full of night.

Or take the opening passage of the noble discourse, "The Eloi," from *Unspoken Sermons* :—

"I do not know that I should dare to approach this, of all utterances into which

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

human breath has ever been moulded, most awful in import, did I not feel that containing both germ and blossom of the final devotion, it contains, therefore, the deepest practical lesson the human heart has to learn. The Lord, the Revealer, hides nothing that can be revealed, and will not warn away the foot that treads in naked humility even upon the ground of that terrible conflict between him and Evil, when the smoke of the battle that was fought, not only with garments rolled in blood, but with burning and fuel of fire, rose up between him and his Father, and for the one terrible moment, ere He broke the bonds of life, and walked weary and triumphant into his arms, hid God from the eyes of his Son."

This is not well expressed. Reading it, we understand better why Dr. Mac Donald has not received adequate recognition at the hands of men of letters. Mr. Gosse and

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

Mr. Saintsbury do not, so far as I remember, even mention him in their comprehensive surveys of modern literature. In the literary journals and in the reviews, where men who are his juniors in years and his inferiors in intellect and in imagination, have been the subject of "appreciations" and critical notices by the score, he is rarely mentioned. And this in spite of the fact that he has been one of the most widely-read writers of the latter half of the nineteenth century. The reason for this undeserved neglect possibly is that in the matter of "style" he suffers by comparison with writers of far less repute. His thought is generally profound, and is often beautiful, but it does not crystallize into speech.

Let me make my meaning plainer by borrowing an illustration from chemistry. I have before me two tumblers of water, into each of which the same substance has been

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

dissolved. So long as this substance is held in solution, the water remains cloudy. But into one of my tumblers I drop a grain or two of a certain chemical, and a change at once takes place. The water clears, and at the sides and bottom of the tumbler I see forming certain crystals. Into the other tumbler no chemical has been dropped, and the substance being held in solution, the water remains clouded.

It is so with much of George Mac Donald's prose. *It lacks the precipitate of "style."* Instead of being crystalline, concise, and restrained, it is often diffuse and cloudy. We have been told that in order to write clearly one must first think clearly, and when a man's written or spoken utterances are ill-defined and misty, when his sentences are involved and straggling, we not unnaturally suspect him of some incapacity for thinking otherwise than confusedly.

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

Upon his own subjects Dr. Mac Donald is, we know, a profound and an accurate thinker, and whatever of "nebulousness" there is in his work must be attributed to some other cause than to incompleteness of thought. It is possible—I speak ignorantly, and do but hazard a conjecture—that ill-health and the constant calls which every professional man of letters has upon his time have spared him no leisure to sit, pen in hand, balancing, cutting, and recasting his sentences, until he has expressed his meaning in the simplest possible form and in the fewest possible words.

Or it may be that Dr. Mac Donald, like many another man of letters, is impatient, not to say incapable, of revision, and has found by long experience that it is wise to let his work stand as it came to him, lest, by pulling it about, he mar it altogether. I am by no means sure that this is not the

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

true explanation of the matter, for the originality of his thought is not more remarkable than his admirable critical judgment. He is too sincere, too self-respecting an artist to let travail of soul or labour of body prevent him from giving us anything but his best. Not Keats himself was more haunted of beauty than he, and in temperament, if not in achievement, he is akin to the great craftsmen of letters.

To what cause the nebulousness of Dr. Mac Donald's written words is attributable can only be conjectured. Even were that cause conclusively proved to be haste and over-production, we should not be justified in assuming that the accuracy of his thinking has suffered thereby. That it would be so in most cases one admits. The work of the born novelist depends pre-eminently upon the success of his plot-construction; and if the constructive work be scamped,

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

the novel cannot be considered a satisfactory work of art. But Dr. Mac Donald is not a born novelist. Strictly speaking, he is not a novelist at all. That he has written such successful novels as, for instance, that noble book *Robert Falconer*, proves only his versatility as a man of letters. He can do anything with the point of a pen except keep to the point of a story. Take the plot out of this or that novel of the day, and what is left is scarce worth remembering. Do the same with one of Dr. Mac Donald's novels, and, by most of us, the plot will not be greatly missed. He is primarily a poet, a seer, and a preacher; and if he have elected to be a fiction-maker for that House of Entertainment over which Mr. Mudie presides, be sure that he will somehow contrive to smuggle in a sermon between the leaves.

Had he been merely a fiction-maker, the necessity for producing so much work

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

in so much time, which may be responsible for whatever there is of nebulosity in his style, would have resulted also in some incompleteness of thought. But like the man who, when wrecked upon a treasure island, built his hut of nuggets of gold, because gold was "the nighest thing he had by him," so Dr. Mac Donald has given us pearls for all time, when we asked only for some plaything with which to while away an idle hour. He does so for the same reason and out of the fulness of his riches. Bargain to tie him down to a novel (and the impression one gathers of him from his books is that he would be the poorest of poor hands at a bargain); ask for one of those working hours of which sickness and other causes have, alas! spared him too few, and it is easy to imagine that he would look askance at you. But tell him that you come in search of thoughts, and you shall have good measure,

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

heaped up and running over; you shall, in fact, be made free of an inexhaustible store. Of working hours—hours in which his writing may and can be done—the man of letters has too few. Of thinking hours he has, if possible, too many. It is not when he sits, pen in hand, and says “Go to, let us write a book,” that he thinks the thoughts with which he fills his pages. Those thoughts are of his every-day life. They came to him at all times and in the most incongruous places—under the stars at midnight, or over his afternoon coffee in the club smoking-room, at a funeral, or at a ventriloquial entertainment, while he knelt in prayer or while he took a twopenny ride on a tramcar. The brain of a writer like Dr. Mac Donald is a photographic camera which is constantly and automatically at work, taking and storing up infinitely more thought-negatives than he has time to develop.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

IV

One does not wonder that the wise of this world smile when they are told—even on what we hold to be Divine authority—that the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven is he who has most nearly put on the likeness of a little child. “It would scarcely be worth the pains of growing old,” said that infinitely wise man, Goethe, “if all the wisdom of this world be foolishness with God.” If by “wisdom” we mean merely the adding of knowledge to knowledge, then he who has lived longest, and learned the most, is assuredly the wisest of the wise. But wisdom comes not merely by taking thought, and as a matter of experience. It is to a great extent an attitude of the mind; and Rossetti was right when he said that there are men and women whom no amount of brains could keep from being fools.

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

Heinrich Heine went further than this, and asked whether genius, like the pearl in the oyster, is anything more than a splendid disease. That the intellectual power which fits a man for grappling with abstract principles, unfits him, not unfrequently, for dealing successfully with the practical affairs of life, is true; and one sighs to think how often men of high intellectual attainments afford the mean minds of this world an opportunity, as Stevenson says, of "sneering at their better." And that there is a splendid insanity, which manifests itself sometimes in the direction of a sort of abnormal genius, is also true; but what Charles Lamb calls "true genius," the genius of such men as Shakespeare and Milton, comes only of splendid sanity.

To suppose that when Christ spoke of a child as being the representative of what is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, He

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

meant us to understand that He accounted the fruits of knowledge, experience, and intellectual power, as of no value, would be to suppose what is in direct contradiction to the whole tenour of His life and teaching. None was more willing than He to sit at the feet of those who taught with real authority ; none was more ready to yield whole-hearted reverence to the knowledge which comes with honoured old age. But He knew that knowledge is, after all, only comparative ; that, comparing one man with another, the knowledge of either may be said to be great and of the other to be small, just as one grain of sand on the seashore may be said to outbulk the other.

He knew, too, that to compare the knowledge which has been acquired by the wisest man that ever trod earth, with the knowledge which is an attribute of God, would be like setting the larger of our sand-grains against

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

the great globe itself; and that in such a sense the wisdom of this world *is*, indeed, "foolishness with God." He knew also that there is a difference between worldly knowledge, as typified by a wise man, and heavenly wisdom, as typified by a child. Knowledge must consider and weigh in the balance before delivering judgment, and even then it is possible that knowledge may not decide aright. Wisdom acts intuitively and unerringly, for it is a compass, the needle of which—magnetised by the mind of God—points invariably to the pole star of purity. The whole difference between worldly knowledge and heavenly wisdom may be summed up in that one word—purity; and it is because purity is best typified on earth by the unsullied mind of a child, that childhood stands for all time as representative of what is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Against the judgment of purity there is no

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

appeal. In the presence of purity, impurity stands forth self-accused and self-condemned. To convince the uncleanly of their uncleanness, it needed not for the Christ to speak. The trump of Doom could not more loudly proclaim their shame than the silence of those terrible eyes. God requires no recording angel to strike the balance of man's good or ill. As it was two thousand years ago, so shall it be two thousand or twenty thousand years hence. When man looks upon the face of Jesus, then is Judgment Day already come. The calm scrutiny of those eyes, none who is guilty of unrepented sin may encounter. God has one test, one ordeal, by which He tries the soul of man as by fire. The eyes of His Christ shall sift the tares from the wheat, shall separate the sheep from the goats by a glance. So long as life lasts, there is hope for the sinner who, sin he never so deeply, yet in his heart hates the

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

evil, and struggles—struggle he never so feebly—towards the unattained good. But when a man has come to love evil for its own sake, and for its own sake to hate the good ; when he is guilty of the crime of God-murder—for such a man *would* murder God if he could—then is he indeed in terrible straits.

When, two thousand years ago, the sinner, whose soul was not wholly dead, looked upon the face of Christ, then did he see his sin for the loathsome leprosy that it was. If in the heart of him there yet flickered one last spark of purity, one single aspiration towards good—the challenging purity of those eyes would compel him to the feet of the Saviour, even as at touch of that Divine hand the spell of Satan was broken, and the soul of the sinner was re-created in the image of God.

But if the calm purity that looked out

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

from the eyes of the Christ could call up all that yet lingered of good in harlot, and outcast, and thief—the sight of that same dread purity lashed into madness all the hatred of Hell. God forewilled that His Son should die upon the cross for the salvation of humanity, but even had it not been so ordained, the awful purity of the Christ would have brought Him, sooner or later, to the same cross. And as it was two thousand years ago, so would it be to-day, were the sinless One to come on earth again. The sin which slew Him then would slay Him now. The scene of the tragedy would not be the same, the excuse for hustling that awful and accusing Presence from our midst might be different, but the cry of “Away with Him! Away with Him!” would be heard here in England to-day as it was long ago heard in ancient Palestine.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that George Mac Donald's work on earth is well-

A CHILD OF THE KINGDOM

nigh done. Not far short of fourscore years ago, a little child lay nestling against the bosom of his mother, and that child's faith in her dear love and care was not more sure or more beautiful than is the faith of the child, who is nearing eighty, in the love of the Eternal Father upon whose bosom he rests. By him the scrutiny of those awful and accusing eyes may not unconfidently be encountered. They are the eyes of his Elder Brother, his Saviour and his God.

Two thousand years ago wise men were led by the shining of a star to a cot where lay a little Child. That Child is seen on earth no more, but, to the pure in heart, Bethlehem's white star of purity has never set. And to-day, as it goes before, an old, old man follows feebly after, knowing that ere long it will lead him, as it led the holy men of yore, into the presence of his Master.

A SOCIETY POET



Photo by]

[Dickinson & Foster

THE LATE FREDERICK LOCKER-LAMPSON.

A Society Poet

I

MR. FREDERICK LOCKER—
to call him by the name by which
he was known among his friends—
shows us many phases of society through
the lorgnettes of his *London Lyrics*, but the
glasses are always so held as to exclude what-
ever might disturb the easy level of manners.
He takes his time over each, but he does not
dwell long enough upon any particular pic-
ture to allow interest to exceed the limits
of well-bred reserve. His sad scenes may
touch us to tender melancholy, but never
to tears; his gay scenes to smiles, but sel-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

dom to laughter. Of hurry, heroics, and hysteria he scarcely recognises the existence. In his company we breathe again the ample morning air of leisure—for to the man of leisure the day is always at the morn. In an age when every poet has his "message," every novelist his "mission," Mr. Locker would make no serious business either of literature or of life. A favoured pupil of the Muse, he played truant from her class, as he played truant from the school of the taskmistress Life. He elected to don the cap and bells, when he might have worn the singing robes of the poet, just as he preferred the irresponsible *rôle* of the collector and the country gentleman to that of the courtier or the statesman. As a diplomat, his knowledge of men and of society, his judgment, his *finesse*, his unerring tact and taste, and his fine presence and charm of personality, would have made him a success.

A SOCIETY POET

But his dislike to everything which tended to disturb the social level, his habitual "backwardness," and, one is bound to confess, his constitutional indolence and love of ease, made him shrink from the distractions of public life, just as he shrank from challenging that serious recognition as a poet to which—apart from his reputation as a writer of light verse—he had it in his power to make good his claim.

And here I venture to dissent from the verdict of the *Athenæum*,¹ that Mr. Locker's "obvious defect was lack of singing power." It is hardly to be expected that work which is intentionally pitched in a conversational key, should rival in melody some passionate song of love or sorrow. But the fact that he has set the small-talk and graceful nothings of the drawing-room to music—and so adroitly that the small talk has passed into

¹ Obituary notice, June 8, 1895.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

song while remaining conversation—seems sufficient proof of his lyrical gift. Whenever he essays to sing, he seems to me to have the true lyrical note. Three stanzas may, by way of example, be quoted from the poem “The Cuckoo”:

It came, and with a strange, sweet cry,
A friend, but from a far-off land ;
We stood and listened, hand in hand,
And heart to heart, my Love and I.

In dreamland then we found our joy,
And so it seem'd as 'twere the Bird
That Helen in old times had heard
At noon beneath the oaks of Troy.

O time far off, and yet so near !
It came to her in that hush'd grove,
It warbled while the wooing throve,
It sang the song she liked to hear.

If these stanzas, in the metre of *In Memoriam*, had been printed as part of

A SOCIETY POET

that noble poem, not many would have suspected them to be by another hand. Very Tennysonian, too, is the touch in the lyric "It Might Have Been,"—especially in the concluding verse :

Dear bird! Blithe bird that sing'st in frost,
 Forgive my friend if he is sad ;
He mourns what he has only lost,—
 I weep what I have never had.

And here is a lyric which, with all respect to the critic of the *Athenæum*, I make bold to say is pure song, and song, too, with its own individual note :

AT HER WINDOW

*Ah, Minstrel, how strange is
 The carol you sing!
Let Psyche, who ranges
 The garden of Spring,
Remember the changes
 December will bring.*

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Beating Heart! we come again
Where my Love reposes :
This is Mabel's window-pane ;
These are Mabel's roses.

Is she nested? Does she kneel
In the twilight stilly,
Lily clad from throat to heel,
She, my virgin Lily?

Soon the wan, the wistful stars,
Fading will forsake her ;
Elves of light on beamy bars,
Whisper then, and wake her.

Let this friendly pebble plead
At her flowery grating ;
If she hear me will she heed?
Mabel, I am waiting.

Mabel will be deck'd anon,
Zoned in bride's apparel ;
Happy zone! O hark to yon
Passion-shaken carol!

Sing thy song, thou trancèd thrush,
Pipe thy best, thy clearest ;—
Hush, her lattice moves ; O hush—
Dearest Mabel!—dearest . . .

A SOCIETY POET

Mr. Austin Dobson speaks of this as "one of the most beautiful love-songs of the century," and though it may strike too passionate a note to come well within the definition of *vers de société*, many of Mr. Locker's admirers will count it more worthy of preservation than much of the "Society Verse" by which he is thought to be best represented. Take, for instance, "Rotten Row," which commences as follows:—

I hope I'm fond of much that's good,
As well as much that's gay;
I'd like the country if I could;
I love the Park in May:
And when I ride in Rotten Row,
I wonder why they call'd it so.

A lively scene on turf and road;
The crowd is bravely drest:
The *Ladies' Mile* has overflow'd,
The chairs are in request:
The nimble air, so soft and clear,
Can hardly stir a ringlet here.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

I'll halt beneath these pleasant trees,—
And drop my bridle-rein,
And, quite alone, indulge at ease
The philosophic vein :
I'll moralise on all I see—
Yes, it was all arranged for me !

Now here is a poem (there are eight verses, but the first three are fairly representative) which is included in the privately printed and tiny volume, containing the pick of Mr. Locker's work, for which Mr. Austin Dobson wrote, by way of preface, the well-known stanza :—

Apollo made, one April day,
A new thing in the rhyming way ;
Its turn was neat, its wit was clear,
It wavered 'twixt a smile and tear ;
Then Momus gave a touch satiric,
And it became a "London Lyric."

This same poem, "Rotten Row," is given the place of honour in the selection from *London Lyrics* which appears in Mr. A.

A SOCIETY POET

H. Miles's *Poets and Poetry of the Century*; it has been singled out for special mention by Mr. Austin Dobson; and it stands as representative of Mr. Locker's work in several anthologies. One cannot but feel some diffidence in expressing an opinion contrary to such a verdict, but if this poem represents the Muse of Society, it shows her as she appears at the fag-end of the season, when a long course of late hours and hot rooms has taken the bloom from her cheeks, the freshness from her fancy. It is a jaded, faded Muse to whom we listen—a Muse who springs upon us no pleasing surprise in the way of whimsical rhyme or graceful conceit. On the contrary, the rhymes and the metre are as hackneyed and as commonplace as the idea, and the whole poem is lacking in distinction. Why it should everywhere be selected as a typical lyric, is hard to say, but as a matter of fact

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Mr. Locker is indifferently represented in the anthologies. He seems to me to be at his best when he is most himself: at his worst when he affects puns and Hoodisms, and is too consciously trying to be funny. The anthologists, however, think otherwise; for, while, among the half-dozen anthologies which I have examined, I find included such work as "Rotten Row," "To Parents and Guardians," and "My Son Johnny," not one of the six contains the original and altogether delightful lines, "A Human Skull," of which I will venture to copy, by way of contrast, a few verses:—

A human skull! I bought it passing cheap,
No doubt 'twas dearer to its first employer!
I thought mortality did well to keep
Some mute memento of the Old Destroyer.

Time was, some may have prized its blooming skin;
Here lips were woo'd, perhaps, in transport tender;
Some may have chuck'd what was a dimpled chin,
And never had my doubt about its gender.

A SOCIETY POET

Did She live yesterday or ages back?

What colour were her eyes when bright and waking?
And were your ringlets fair, or brown, or black,
Poor little Head! that long has done with aching?

It may have held (to shoot some random shots)

Thy brains, Eliza Fry! or Baron Byron's;
The wits of Nelly Gwynne, or Doctor Watts,—
Two quoted bards—Two philanthropic sirens.

But this, I trust, is clearly understood;

If man or woman—if adored or hated—
Whoever owned this skull was not so good,
Nor quite so bad, as many may have stated.

* * * * *

II

Mr. Locker had a curious habit of giving prominence to the stanzas or lines, which most pleased him, by detaching them from the context, and making them do duty elsewhere as headings. There is a quatrain of his in which the World—grown tired of

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

being preached at for so many centuries by Religion—turns, like the proverbial worm, and preaches a scathing sermon at the worldliness and the worthlessness of much that passes for piety :—

They eat, and drink, and scheme and plod,
They go to church on Sunday ;
And many are afraid of God—
And more of Mrs. Grundy.

Every one knows the lines, and that they appear in the later editions of *London Lyrics* as a prefix to "Beggars." But every one may not know that the quatrain was originally part of a poem called "The Jester's Plea," published in 1862 in a volume of poems by several hands, entitled *An Offering to Lancashire*. "The Jester's Plea," though it was included in the now rare *Selections from the Work of Frederick Locker*, which was illustrated by Richard Doyle and pub-

A SOCIETY POET

lished in 1865 in Moxon's *Miniature Poets*, is represented in *London Lyrics* only by the quatrain I have quoted.

Mr. Locker was constantly pulling about his work in this way, sometimes grafting a whole passage from one poem upon another, sometimes inverting, altering, and, not seldom, entirely discarding verses which many of his admirers might well wish retained. I may instance a quatrain which is not included in the single volume of original verse by which, and which only, Mr. Locker desired to be remembered. So far from being unworthy of preservation, it seems to me to recall George Herbert ; and, lest any reader should think the comparison between a writer of occasional verse, and a writer of sacred poems, incongruous, let me add that, though Mr. Locker never paraded his religion, it was none the less sincere ; and let me add also that the depth of the

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

serious side of his nature was often unsuspected because seldom shown.

And, like yon clock, when twelve shall sound,
To call our souls away,
Together may our hands be found,
An earnest that we pray.

That so quaint and antique a conceit should be discarded, will make more than one reader doubt whether Mr. Locker's habit of re-writing and rejecting was altogether a course for which to be thankful. How incurable was the itch to re-write may be instanced from an interesting volume in my possession. He was singularly happy in his lines about children, and in the last (the twelfth) edition of *London Lyrics*, the fourth and fifth stanzas of the charming poem "Little Dinky," which have already been considerably changed from their first rendering, stand as follows:—

A SOCIETY POET

As time runs on, she'll still be rich
In much that's left, the joys with which
Our love can aye supply us ;
For hand in hand we'll sit us down
Right cheerfully, and let the town—
This foolish town—go by us.

*Dinky, we must resign our toys
To younger girls, to finer boys,
But we'll not care a feather ;
For then (reflection's not regret),
Though you'll be rather old ! we'll yet
Be Boy and Girl together.*

Not long after the issue of the last edition of *London Lyrics*, Mr. Locker sent me a copy of his book *Patchwork*, in which he had made several annotations, and some changes. In this volume the verses quoted above are altered as follows. Remembering how recently the alterations were made, that in the fifth stanza, has now a mournful interest :—

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

So be it, may they still be rich
In all that's best, the joys with which
 Their love can aye supply them ;
Then hand in hand they'll sit them down
Right cheerfully, and let the town—
 This foolish town—go by them.

*Dinky, I must resign the toys
I've loved so well to finer boys,
 For I have had due warning.
Farewell to all this dear delight,
Content am I to say good-night,
 And hope for better morning.*

III

If self-consciousness denote under-breeding, and if the essence of all good writing, as of good manners, be, as Mr. George Saintsbury has told us, ease—then most assuredly was Mr. Locker of the aristocracy of letters. Just as in the man who comes of gentle blood, and who is also a citizen

A SOCIETY POET

of the world in the best sense, we see perfect self-possession combined with unaffected grace of manners, so in the work of the writer, who holds a corresponding place in the world of letters, we find unstudied ease and distinction of style which are recognisable at a glance.

Though Mr. Locker had his literary limitations — though his work was not marked by dramatic or creative power, any more than by originality of thought—the grace of “style” dignifies everything to which he put his hand. It is apparent even in the books which he edited, as well as in the books which he wrote. The charm of his anthology of social verse, *Lyra Elegantiarum*, is entirely of the editor’s individuality. Its very want of method, as a rule a most serious defect in an anthology, reminds one of Herrick’s “sweet disorder” that does

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

“More bewitch me than when art
Is too precise in every part.”

What is true of *Lyra Elegantiarum*—the latest edition of which would have been more satisfactory had the circumstances permitted the distribution of the old type, and the setting up of the book anew—is true of his book of promiscuous selections, *Patchwork*. Absolutely without method as it is, and dealing with such widely differing subjects as “Tight Boots” and “Patriotism,” “Public Worship” and “Excuses for Drinking,” the volume is the most delightful of desultory reading. The editor’s “Notes,” like the editor’s preface to *Lyra Elegantiarum*, are especially attractive. Few writers of his day could give point to an epigram or turn a sentence more prettily than Mr. Locker. So pellucid are some of the happiest passages in his prose, so crisply conversational, and yet so courtly in the

A SOCIETY POET

phrasing, that one might well fancy they had been recorded, not by means of commonplace pen, paper, and ink, but had been found diamonded upon the window-pane of some old Elizabethan mansion. Of Mr. Locker, Fénelon's hackneyed saying that a man's style is nearly as much a part of himself as his physiognomy or his figure, was exceptionally true. With him many might be intimate, but none familiar. Once when he and I were chatting together at a literary "At Home," a guest, to whom he was only slightly known, broke into our talk by slapping him roughly on the back, exclaiming, "Well, Locker-Lampson, how are you? You never seem to get any older." Mr. Locker replied with perfect courtesy to the effect that he was quite well, but I, who heard the emphasis with which he prefixed "Mr." to the offender's name, and saw the look of haughty surprise which

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

flashed from his eyes, felt that I would rather have faced a pistol at seven paces than that look. Yet his gift of adaptability was so great that he could, by his kingly courtesy and singular sweetness of disposition, as easily charm a churlish old print-seller into civility as he could, by some graceful compliment, make bright the eyes of a society beauty. He has been called the Du Maurier of Song ; but, singer of society and man of fashion as he was, his sympathies and his choice of subject were not narrowed by social distinctions. In his graceful poem, "The Housemaid," he shows how sincerely he can enter into humble joys and sorrows. Everybody knows the lyric, but, by way of reminder, I will quote the last three verses :—

*Oft on a cloudless afternoon
Of budding May and leafy June,
Fit Sunday weather,*

A SOCIETY POET

*I pass thy window by design,
And wish thy Sunday out and mine
Might fall together.*

*For sweet it were thy lot to dower
With one brief joy: a white-robed flower
That prude or preacher
Hardly could deem it were unmeet
To lay on thy poor path, thou sweet,
Forlorn young Creature.*

* * * * *

But if her thought on wooing run,
And if her Sunday Swain is one
Who's fond of strolling,
She'd like my nonsense less than his,
And so it's better as it is—
And that's consoling.

Mr. Locker's accomplished relative, Mr. Augustine Birrell, is, I believe, responsible for the phrase "sentiment, that odious onion," but Mr. Birrell is not more keen to distinguish between the simple sincerity of pathos and the parade and assumption of

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

sentiment, than was the author of *London Lyrics*. The way in which, at the close of the poem just quoted, he turns aside from what might seem like a lapse into sentiment, by playfully satirising himself in his self-assumed *rôle* of consoler, is delightful. But the man who takes his soundings by the fathom-line of humour is not likely to drift upon the quicksands of sentiment; and to say that humour was one of Mr. Locker's most marked characteristics, would be to state the case inaccurately. Humour—keen, kindly, and playful—was of the very framework of his being. It was humour which made his sight so clear, his judgments so generous. Humour was the secret alike of his light-heartedness and of his occasional tender melancholy, for though the lips of Humour may smile at human folly, when we look into her eyes, we see them sad at the thought of human sorrow.

A SOCIETY POET

IV

The excellence of technique and of taste, and the ease, grace, and restraint which are never absent from Mr. Locker's work, entitle him to rank among the best writers of occasional verse. As compared with his contemporaries, it will generally be conceded that he shares with Mr. Austin Dobson the highest place. Mr. Lang, Mr. Gosse, and Mr. Henley have penned occasional verse which may challenge comparison with the best ; but it will be by another standard than that which is applied to writers of *vers de société* that their work will ultimately be judged. Between Mr. Dobson and Mr. Locker then the honours may be equally divided, and between these brothers in friendship, as in song, no comparison of merits need be instituted. Each has his individual note ; each his individual charm.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

The elder poet is more English and more modern in his choice of subjects than the younger. He sings the nineteenth century in preference to the eighteenth, London in preference to the Luxembourg or the Louvre. But though, like Mr. Dobson, he does not affect the Puritan, and would not deny

A winning wave, deserving note
In the tempestuous petticoat,

his poems of gallantry, like those of Mr. Dobson, are the happiest examples of work which touches upon the sweet allurements of sex with absolute delicacy and supreme good taste. Like Mr. Dobson, he is always simple, urbane, and spontaneous. He is innocent of the poetic frenzy, and, except for the grimly sarcastic note which he struck in the heading to "Beggars," he manifests no desire—to use a phrase of Mr. George Meredith's—"to lash the ages."

A SOCIETY POET

That his poetic equipment is slender—consisting, as it does, of one small volume which, since it was first published, has been so ruthlessly winnowed and edited that it can be carried in a side-pocket—is not to be gainsaid. But if our gratitude for the exquisite songs he has sung to us be tempered by regretful thought of the songs which remain unsung, as well as of the daintily - worded, diamond - pointed essays which are written only upon the chamber walls of a brain which will throb with thought no more, we owe it to him to remember that, in these days of diffuseness and over-production, he has given us only his best. That he elected to don the cap and bells when he might have worn the singing robes of the poet ; that he preferred to be a perfect lyrist rather than an indifferent organist, must be admitted ; but that we have any just cause for quarrel

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

with him on that score, one fails to see. If a "minor" poet, he was at least a master of the instrument he touched, which cannot be said of all who would be accounted "major." And if he trained the winged steed Pegasus to amble like any lady's palfrey in the "Row," rather than enter him for the Laureate stakes, Mr. Locker has at least spared us the Competitive Elegy and the Jubilee Ode.

ONE ASPECT OF BROWNING



ROBERT BROWNING
(From the portrait by G. F. WATTS, R.A.)

One Aspect of Browning

I

BEFORE speaking of Robert Browning, I should like to buttonhole the reader for a preliminary word. I hold in my hand a bundle of grey strings, technically called "gut." It is made, one is given to understand, from the intestines of an animal, and is scarcely the sort of thing over which rests any glamour of poetry or romance.

Now I take a curious wooden box, incurved at the waist, and shaped not unlike a stag-beetle, except for the fact that, instead

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

of the stag-beetle's horns, it has a long tapering neck-like snout. Lengthwise, across the hollow body of the box, I stretch four of the grey gut strings. Then I fashion a bow, strung with strands of horsehair. Does either box or bow suggest music, colour, poetry, light? I think not. But wait. I put bow and box into the hands of a musician, and straightway he shall compel from the bowels of that queer instrument such music as shall float you out upon the dreaming sunset—shall bring to your ears the rain-rustled whisper of leaves in a forest glade—shall show you the dewy beauty of the daughters of men as they were when the old gods came a-wooing them in the morning of the world.

To the poet, to the artist, all life is what that grey-stringed box is to the musician. He takes up brush or pen, just as the musician takes up his bow; and all things,

ONE ASPECT OF BROWNING

even the grey, unsightly things—the very fungus growths of our existence — body themselves forth in beauty of shape and colour and line. It is Art and Poetry which make harmony of the discords of life. The artist but waves his magic wand, be it pen, chisel, or brush, and straight-way out of chaos comes order, the tangled, ravelled ends of life's tapestry sort themselves into related designs that together form one great picture—the scheme that pre-existed in the mind of the great artist, God.

Robert Browning has taken the stuff of our ordinary every-day life, our ordinary every-day conversation, and has made great poetry out of it.

For, don't you mark ? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times, nor cared to see ;
And so they are better painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that ;
God uses us to help each other so,

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And, trust me, but you should though! How much
more
If I drew higher things with the same truth!

Here we have the keynote of Browning. What he has done is so difficult, so well-nigh impossible, that he only in all the century has done it greatly. There is no poet who touches our modern life more nearly or more widely than he. This or that contemporary of his was content to make music. Robert Browning made living women and men, and then took the hearts of them to pieces before us. He showed us the love that consecrates to noble manhood and pure womanhood; and he showed us the red passions that make hell and havoc of life. We looked with him into the brain, and saw the secretion of thought in its grey chambers; saw at work the mean motive

ONE ASPECT OF BROWNING

for what had seemed a noble deed; the meritorious impulse that led to what otherwise had seemed inexplicably wrong. And all this he did as naturally, as unaffectedly as though it were a matter of every-day occurrence.

II

Intrusions upon the private life of public men are generally impertinent and in bad taste. Else one would be tempted to comment upon the completeness with which one's impressions of Browning as a poet were carried out by one's impressions of Browning the man. An event within the knowledge of the present writer may, however, be recorded. A certain author, who at the time was young, and quite unknown, was once so fortunate as to be introduced

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

to Browning by a friend. Stammering with nervousness, the lad attempted to express his admiration of the poet's work. To Robert Browning—he was then at the height of his fame—the appreciation of an awkward hobbledohoy could have mattered nothing. Yet so absolutely natural and unaffected was he, so entirely free from self-consciousness and from everything that we mean by the word “pose,” that he did not attempt to conceal the pleasure which the sincerity of the tribute gave him. Some time after, the same young writer was so fortunate as to obtain an invitation to an important literary function. Browning, who was present, surrounded by a circle of distinguished friends, chanced to catch sight of the youngster standing sheepishly by the door. Turning his back upon the great folk, the poet made his way to his humble admirer, calling the lad by name and express-

ONE ASPECT OF BROWNING

ing pleasure at an opportunity of renewing the acquaintance. "Was that really Browning, with the white hair and beard, and red tie?" said a lady who had been standing by. "Why, by his dress and the way he spoke, one would think he'd be better pleased to be taken just for an ordinary gentleman than for a great poet!"

And I like to think that she was right.

III

Between Robert Browning and some of his readers there is a relationship similar to that which exists between a class of students and a lecturer who is at once a venerated teacher and an intimately loved friend. "You all know what this is, don't you?" Browning seems to say, outlining roughly some simple figure on a blackboard.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

“Very well! Watch now;” and, snatching up a piece of chalk, he adds a stroke on this side, smears out with one rub of his thumb what is now superfluous on that; dashes in a curve there, softens with a finger-tip what was hard here, and lo! under his hand, as he works, has grown something which is the same and yet quite different, something which makes easy of comprehension what otherwise had been difficult, something which seems to bring us near to the pivot-points of life.

Tennyson holds the magic glass which makes the near things of this world beautiful, and so, too, does Browning. But Browning does more than this: he offers us the telescope which brings the great things of far-off worlds near. “Fundamental brainwork” — to use a phrase of Rossetti’s—is to be seen in all he attempts, though, at the setting-out, one expects no-

ONE ASPECT OF BROWNING

thing more serious than some gossip of studio or club. Like a poetic Socrates in a frock-coat and silk hat, he takes you, as it were, by the button-hole, and starting off with a colloquial "Between you and me" that puts one off one's guard, he suddenly springs upon the unwary auditor some question that probes life to the quick.

It is not a matter for wonder that Browning should not be popular. The reasons are many. One is that he is a poet for men and women rather than for lads and maidens. But the number of those who, after thirty, sit down deliberately to study a poet whom they have hitherto neglected is by no means legion. Browning has floated songs to us which have the lyric qualities of bird-music—songs so crystal-clear and lucid that they would sing themselves into the comprehension of a child. But in the bulk of his work the *motif*

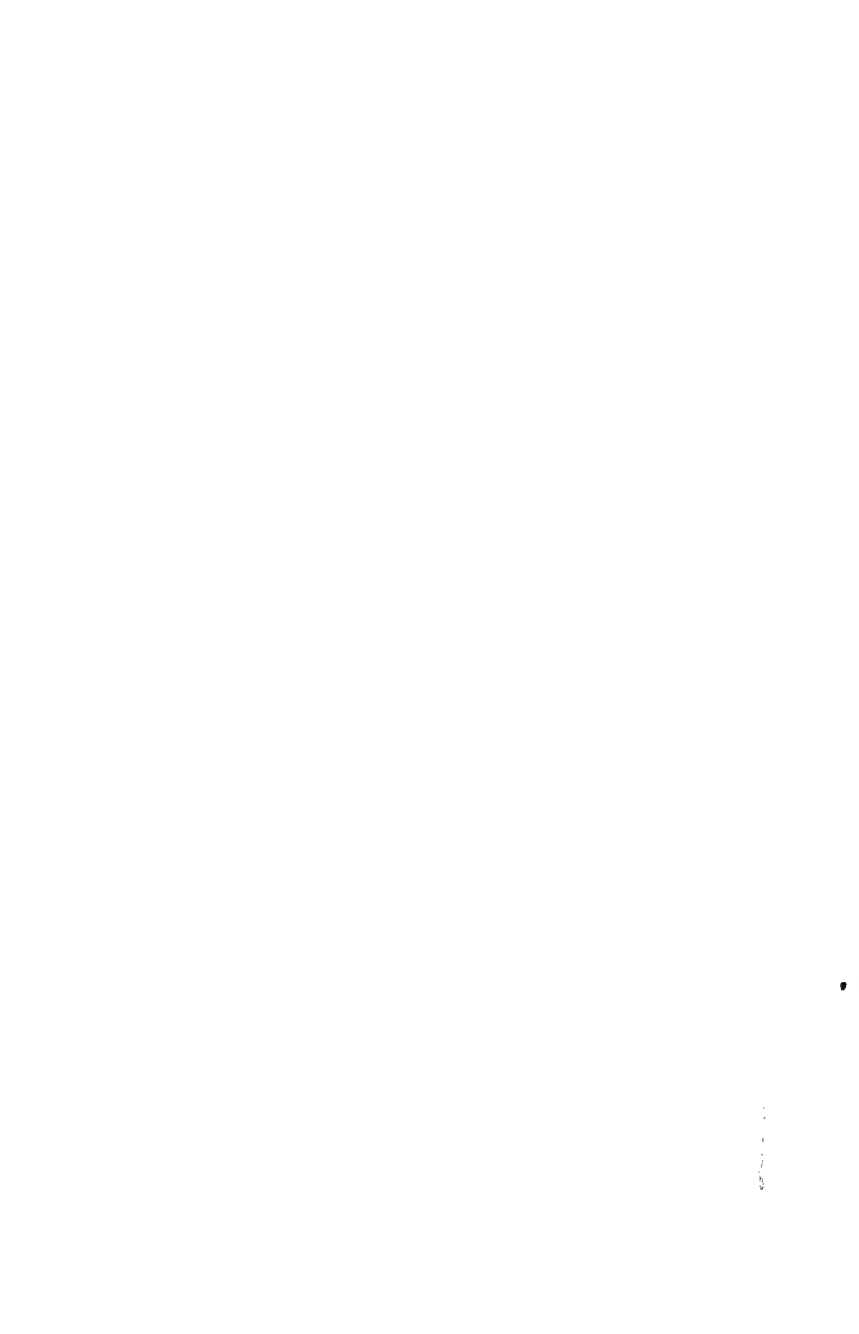
WISE MEN AND A FOOL

does not lie on the surface. It must be sought for ; and this implies intellectual effort, concentration of thought on the part of the reader, which are not precisely what readers of to-day desire.

Another reason why so few care to go abroad in the company of Browning is that he is a difficult companion with whom to keep step. He plays tricks—trips you up with a forced rhyme, against which you stub your foot, as you might against the stump of a stake that has been driven into the ground, for the undoing of the incautious. You suspect, as you lie sprawling, that your companion is laughing at you, but when you are again on your feet and take his arm, he seems never in his life to have been more serious. For a score of yards you and he trudge soberly in harness, and you are aware of making headway. Then—heigh presto!—you are floundering neck deep in a ditch,

ONE ASPECT OF BROWNING

and he is a mile ahead of you on a mountain-top, whereon, if you will but persevere, he shall set you beside himself in due course.



TENNYSON AND SOME
OTHERS



Photo by]

[Frederick Hollyer

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON.

(From the portrait by G. F. WATTS, R.A.)

Tennyson and Some Others :

A SIDE-NOTE WITH
DISCURSIVE COMPARISONS

I

IF Tennyson be the representative poet of his time, Carlyle is its representative prose-writer. Others may be spoken of as the Moses of the Nineteenth Century, the leader of the people into the Promised Land ; but its Aaron, its mouth-piece, is surely that son of a Scotch stonemason. Or, in pursuance of the kindergarten method of criticism which we are adopting, we

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

might sponge out from our blackboard the name of his Old Testament antitype and—turning to the New Testament for a figure to which to liken Carlyle—we might term him the John the Baptist of his generation, the voice of one crying aloud in the wilderness of shams and conventionalities, urging his brethren to lay hold of the gospel of courage, manhood, and the dignity of all true work. Or we might say of him, in his own semi-German jargon, that a Man-in-Earnest had at last arisen among us in an Age of Humbug, Black-coated-Respectability and Make - Believes. In *Sermons, Addresses and Reviews*, Professor Huxley says (it is possible that he had Carlyle in mind), that whenever he saw “hypostatized adjectives” and abstract nouns printed with the initial letter in capital, he was reminded of the bearskin which is worn by Grenadiers. By Huxley, the bearskin and the capital initial



Photo by

[H. H. H. Cameron

THOMAS CARLYLE.

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

letter were regarded with some contempt as tricks of the trade, for he went on to say that both were used for one purpose—to look “formidable.”

Huxley was, as usual, severe, but it is quite possible that future generations may become impatient of Carlyle's blunt, bluff speech, and may regard his talk of “the Eternities,” “the Infinities,” and “the Verities” as bad, if not barbaric, literary art.

Compared with certain of his contemporaries, he was what a blacksmith is to a silversmith. Others might ply the engraver's file or chase upon cold metal, but he swung his sledge-hammer, shaping the red-hot iron into ploughshare or sword-blade.

Or, once more, to change the metaphor, we might say that while others carved cedar-wood into cabinets, he builded with rough-hewn oak, knotted and gnarled, and fashioned as it was when it came from the forest.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

II

Tennyson lived to see a great change come over the religious life of England. Until his time the critical spirit had stopped short at religion. Individual critics had laid hands on the sanctuary, and had analysed and tested religion in precisely the same spirit of scientific inquiry as that in which a chemist tests and analyses a metal. The individual critic has done so in all ages, and will continue to do so. But until Tennyson's time the critical spirit—so far as it concerns the bulk of the public—had by common consent stopped short at religion. Whether this reticence were the result of faith or of faithlessness, is not easy to determine. It may have been born of the reverent piety which has no doubts, and is disinclined to see sacred things touched by the secular hand; or it may have been due to the uneasiness

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

which deems it unwise to inquire too closely into matters, in the stability of which, one is fain to believe. This, however, is a question which need not here be discussed. The point before us is that it was not until the middle half of the Nineteenth Century, that the critical spirit was applied generally to religion. That was a time of transition and unrest. To hear a son or a daughter openly express religious doubt would have been to the older generation of sabbath-keeping, church-going folk, as great a shock as if in some ancient Tory family, the son and heir had suddenly identified himself with the most violent form of Socialism. Such an event, when it occurred, would have been looked upon as a calamity, a stigma upon the family name, a taint in the blood which, for the credit of every one concerned, were best forgotten. Tennyson lived to see all that changed. He lived to see the uneasy soul-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

questionings — which previous generations had admitted only upon their knees to God—discussed openly and as subjects upon which it was quite possible for the most staid and respectable members of society to differ. He lived, in fact, to see the smug cant, with which it was customary to talk of belief, give place to equally smug and sickening cant about “honest doubt.” And it was in great part due to the fact that he went to neither extreme—to the fact that he voiced the mild doubt tempered by belief, the mild belief tempered by doubt, of the middle classes of his day—that he had such an immense following.

Tennyson and Longfellow are read and revered by a public at whose hands Rossetti and Browning suffer comparative neglect. The reason is not far to seek. Browning drew bow at a target which was set an arrow's flight beyond the standpoint of

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

his contemporaries, and Rossetti harked back to mediævalism; whereas in "In Memoriam," the most popular and the most representative great poem of the latter half of the century, Tennyson held the mirror to the mind of his contemporaries. One fears, however, that it was less because his contemporaries admired the greatness of the poem, than because they agreed with its sentiment, that "In Memoriam" has been thus canonised. Give the public the sentiment it likes, and so long as this sentiment is expressed poetically, pleasingly, and intelligibly, the public will not concern itself to inquire in what degree its favourite approximates to, or falls short of, the highest standard. From the standpoint of art, the fact that the handkerchief of temporary popularity has fallen upon this or that shoulder does not count. The public choice may go infallibly right, as in the case of Tennyson, or it may

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

go preposterously wrong, as instanced by Martin Tupper. Like the quality of mercy, or the gentle rain from heaven, it is not strained, but droppeth equally upon the maker of poems and upon the maker of platitudes. Of poetic degree, as I have already said, the public knows absolutely nothing. Longfellow is to-day more popular than Tennyson, yet comparison between the two is impossible. One might as well compare Sir Henry Bishop's "Home, Sweet Home" with Beethoven's "Sonatas," and in saying this I mean disrespect to neither Bishop nor Longfellow.

To have composed a melody which, like "Home, Sweet Home," has won its way to the hearts of the people, is no small achievement; and Longfellow, the Henry Bishop of Song, has, by the simplicity, the sincerity, and often by the beauty of his verse, made for himself a household name among two

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

great nations. Despised of the "precious" though he may be, one need not be ashamed to confess an honest liking for that true and unaffected singer. He has been the "first-love" of many a lad and maiden, who, though they may soon have come to recognise his poetic limitations, will be slow to forget his pure and generous influence.

III

In his Essay on Language, Emerson says that "a man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes, will find that a material image, more or less luminous, arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought."

It is so whenever I think of Keats. His name is, in my mind, inseparably connected

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

with flowers. Sometimes it is the lily of the valley, the flower that—even to the draping of its lower stem in the diaphanous emerald of its sheath—stands in the flower world for the cold chastity, the classic beauty of the marble Venus of Milo. More often it is the rose-flushed, fragrant-lipped honeysuckle. Sometimes it is the waxen, cloying sweetness of the hothouse hyacinth.

It is not often, however, that we can compare a poem by Keats to the lily of the valley or to the cold marble of the statue. The classic beauty of Milo's Venus is there, but under the touch of Keats the marble warms to rosy, sensuous life.

Mr. Le Gallienne, an adept at epigrams, once said that much of the pre-Raphaelite poetry was a rib taken out of the side of Keats, but the influence of Keats has by no means been confined to the pre-Raphaelite group. Tennyson is too great a



JOHN KEATS.

(From a Steel Engraving.)

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

man to be described as the disciple of any single poet. He is of those of whom it has been said, that though for a season this or that master may seem to suffice, yet, after a time, the undue influence is withdrawn, and there is one more star in their intellectual heaven. Yet the influence of Keats upon Tennyson, especially at one stage of his development, is very marked. And small wonder. His odes are like chased goblets of gold, into which he has distilled all the sweet odours of Hymettus—goblets wrought into shapes of ravishing loveliness and panelled with pictures that riot and bewilder with beauty. He is divinely voluptuous, voluptuously divine. He leads us to magic casements opening, not always upon perilous seas in faery lands forlorn, but sometimes upon enchanted cloud-isles, of ecstasy that—like mist which seems neither to suspire from the ground nor to descend from the sky

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

—hang midway 'twixt earth and heaven. We are constrained to ask ourselves whether the sheer joy he brings us is born of sublimation of the senses, or of sensuous subjugation of the intellect.

And in reading Tennyson are we not sometimes conscious of a like effect? Just as a mere flicker in the eyelid of a child startles us by bringing vividly to mind the face of one who has passed away, so sometimes between the lines of Tennyson we see looking out, as behind bars, the beauty-haunted eyes of Keats. The two men are akin in weakness as in strength. Tennyson could lapse into such commonplace as

Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood;

and Keats could mar the most beautiful of his odes by so false and feeble ending as

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty”—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

What an inglorious climax (even from the point of view of art) to a glorious poem! And this inartistic tacking on of a moral in the work of one who is the spiritual high priest of all who preach the doctrine of “Art for Art’s sake” is more than surprising.

That it is a most immoral “moral,” that truth is not always beauty, nor beauty truth, only makes the matter worse. Keats is striving to deceive himself and others by calling things by false, fine names. Nor can we evade the issue by contending that it is the beauty of righteousness which he would have us to admire. The artist-love of all fair form does *not* imply—far from it—a corresponding love of spiritual perfection, any more than a high moral sense implies a corresponding artistic development. Some of us have known men and women who were

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

quick to respond to every artistic appeal, who were enamoured of pictures, poems, and beautiful faces, but who were absolutely without the moral sense. And, on the other hand, most of us have known men and women the sincerity of whose aspirations towards the beauty of holiness was beyond dispute, but whose sense of colour, whose ideas as to what constitutes beauty in poetry or in art, were absolutely primitive.

The "pure religion breathing household laws," which makes for righteousness, makes sometimes, in the matter of art, for a household hideousness which is appalling.

But why labour the point? No book of biographies on our shelves but emphasizes the fact that the rapturous love of beauty, which we associate with the artistic temperament, is, unless restrained by high ideals and a practised will, an element of positive danger. It is at all times perilously near

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

to love of physical pleasure, and has, in too many instances, degenerated into effeminacy, voluptuousness, and gross sensuality.

IV

Tennyson's ultimate place it is, as yet, difficult to fix. What Mrs. Browning says of the age in which we live is equally true of the great men who lived in that age. Till they can be seen from a distance, till we can stand away from the shadow of their bulk, their true proportions may not be estimated :—

“ Every age
Through being held too close, is ill-discerned
By those who've not lived past it. We'll suppose
Mount Athos carved, as Alexander schemed,
To some colossal statue of a man.
The peasants, gathering brushwood in his ear,
Had guessed as little as the browsing goats
Of form or feature of humanity

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Up there,—in fact, had travelled five miles off
Or ere the giant image broke on them,
Full human profile, nose and chin distinct,
Mouth, uttering rhythms of silence up the sky
And fed at evening with the blood of suns ;
Grand torso,—hand that flung perpetually
The largesse of a silver river down
To all the country pastures. 'Tis even thus
With times we live in—evermore too great
To be apprehended near.”

If I may put forward a personal opinion, I should say that Tennyson just misses being included among the first eight great names of English poetry. When the first two places have been accorded to Shakespeare and Milton, there yet remain six names concerning which it is not easy to say whom to exclude—Chaucer, Spenser, Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, and Shelley.

That in the anthologies of the future, Tennyson's work will, however, be more largely represented than some of those who

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

have been mentioned, is very likely. The reason is not far to seek. His work, at its best, falls short of such sheer height of sublimity as is attained in the best work of Wordsworth, of whom, as regards the quality of "inspiration," we may say that, at rare moments, he comes within measurable distance of the divinest of all English poets, John Milton.

But Wordsworth, like the child in the fairy tale, had two godmothers. The first, the good godmother, laid her magic wand upon his mouth, commanding that when, at certain times, he opened his lips, pearls and precious stones should fall from them. The evil godmother arrived too late to prevent the bestowal of this gift, seeing which, she maliciously decreed that when at other times he opened his mouth, not diamonds or pearls, but common clay, should fall therefrom; adding, with a wicked swish of her wand

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

before his eyes, that to the end of his life he should be unable to distinguish the diamond from the clay.

To Wordsworth it was sometimes given to be caught up in a chariot of fire to heaven, where he walked and talked with the gods. Yet, with the very pen with which he had made manifest the celestial vision, would he, next day, sit down, as lengthily, as laboriously, and as solemnly, to describe an afternoon's jaunt in a donkey-cart, in the company of a potato-salesman.

In the matter of average artistic excellence, apart from inspiration, Tennyson leaves Wordsworth far behind. Could our great poets be put to school, and each separate poem be awarded so many marks for so much excellence, Tennyson would come near to topping the class.

As an artist, a word-jeweller, a lyricist, and a musician, he stands almost unrivalled. No

TENNYSON AND SOME OTHERS

poet of the second half of the century has bequeathed a more magnificent legacy to posterity than he. He has builded for our delight a many-chambered, music-haunted Palace of Song, where richly-wrought tapestries (a picture-gallery of Beauty) look down upon cabinet and case, wherein is displayed a wonderland of gem, jewel, and pearl. And in all that gorgeous Palace of Song and Imagery you shall hear no false note, you shall see no picture that does not stand for the ideal of knightly manhood and pure womanhood. He was indeed the rightful successor "of him who uttered nothing base."

A NATURE-POET



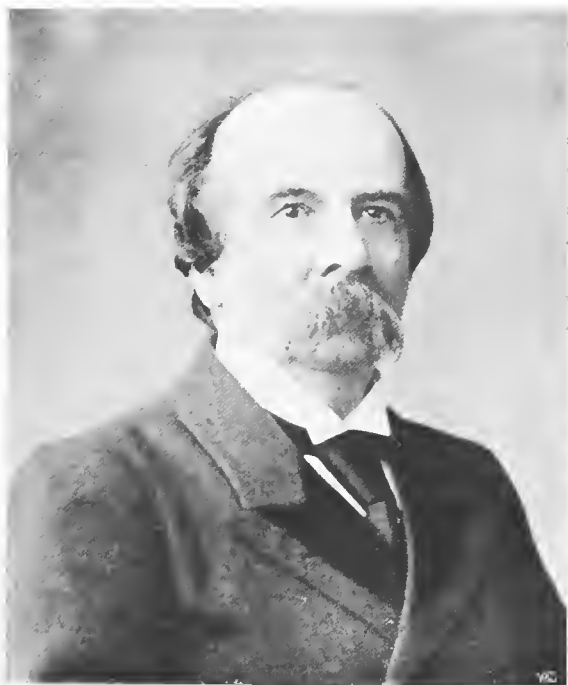


Photo by]

MR. THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON.

[Poole

A Nature-Poet

I

TO Mr. Watts-Dunton Nature is not only the Great Mother, but the Great Mesmerist. No sorrow is too keen for a pass of her hand to soothe. In bereavement or in calamity he turns as unconsciously to her for consolation as his Stormy Petrel turns, when liberated, to the sea :—

Away to sea! no matter where the coast :
The road that turns for home turns never wrong.

This is perhaps partly due to the romantic experiences which, in early life, brought him

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

into close association with the wandering people to whom Emerson has given voice in rude and characteristic chant:—

“The wild air bloweth in our lungs,
The keen stars twinkle in our eyes,
The birds gave us our wily tongues,
The panther in our dances flies.”

Mr. Watts-Dunton's volume of poems, *The Coming of Love*, is a work to the weaving of which he has brought, not only, as might have been expected, the nature-worshipper's eye and the poet's art, but also, to no inconsiderable extent, the musician's ear and the painter's colour-sense. He has no sympathy with the shallowness of certain modern poets who gibe at the scientific spirit as antagonistic to the spirit of song. It is not often that poems which display the knowledge of science that one expects from a naturalist, should be found side by side with

A NATURE-POET

sonnets in which the very manner and movement of three great musical composers' work are caught and conveyed in the medium of verse.

"The Coming of Love," which gives his volume its title, is a psychological study as singular as it is successful. In a succession of tableaux—sometimes so vivid and realistic that we seem to be looking at a canvas rather than at a printed page ; at other times as cloudy and uncanny as the shadow-scenes depicted in a beryl stone or magic crystal—Mr. Watts-Dunton presents before us the evolution of a soul. His book is a piece of poetic Darwinism. The drama opens with a picture of the poet, whose one supreme passion is his love of Nature. At last the time comes when love teaches him to read Nature's heart as in his loveless days he had never read it. But it is a Romany girl whom the poet loves and ultimately marries ; and she, in defend-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

ing herself against the murderous attack of a rejected gypsy lover, becomes the unwitting agent of her assailant's death, thereby incurring the terrible tribal vengeance of the gypsies. She disappears mysteriously after her marriage, and then it is that the half-frenzied husband, driven forth by his anguish into the whited wilderness of the Snow Mountains, finds, in place of *Natura Benigna*, serene of brow and starry of eye, a harpy "red in tooth and claw."—

The Lady of the Hills with crimes untold
Followed my feet with azure eyes of prey;
By glacier brink she stood—by cataract spray—
When mists were dire, or avalanche-echoes rolled.
At night she glimmered in the death-wind cold,
And if a footprint shone at break of day,
My flesh would quail, but straight my soul would say:
"Tis hers whose hand God's mightier hand doth hold."
I trod her snow-bridge, for the moon was bright,
Her icicle-arch across the sheer crevasse,
When lo, she stood! . . . God made her let me
pass,

A NATURE-POET

Then felled the bridge! . . . Oh, there, in fallow
light,
There down the chasm, I saw her, cruel, white,
And all my wondrous days as in a glass!

Thence, through a succession of Blake-like pictures, the poem passes on to a fitting sunrise-close with its superb *Natura Benigna* morning anthem, which is quoted at the end of this article.

One critic of "The Coming of Love" has told us that though Mr. Watts-Dunton's poetical affinities are many, he has no master. It may be so, but the sonnet which has been quoted shows how markedly he has been influenced by the author of "The Ancient Mariner." Of Coleridge we may say that he is the Merlin of English Song. The waving of his enchanted wand is the Open Sesame to Ghostland. His spells are woven of wizard music and moonlight. The gates that guard the realms of dreams roll

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

back at his bidding. We tread his moon-beam stair, and mount where spectral ships sail over spectral seas to the haunting music of elfin-spirits of the air.

II

“The Coming of Love” may be described as a number of exquisite lyrics and sonnets, which, by the aid of “stage-directions” and some interpolated narrative passages, Mr. Watts-Dunton has woven together into an unconventional tragic drama. The difficulties — both in regard to sequence and to sustaining the narrative interest— which such a form presents, must, in less skilful hands, have resulted in failure, and to say that Mr. Watts-Dunton has achieved an unqualified success is to pay a high tribute to his ability as a dramatic poet. Only in

A NATURE-POET

one instance is the stage-machinery obtrusive—that in which the poet watches, across a river, the death-struggle between the girl he loves and his rival :—

'Tis he, my gypsy rival, by her side !
He lifts a knife. She springs, the dauntless girl,
Lithe as a leopardess ! Ah ! can she hurl
The giant down the bank ?

Is not this, with the subsequent stage-directions, " He prepares to plunge into the river in order to swim to her," dramatically weak ? Surely, too, so passionate a lover would, at the first hint of danger to his loved one, have plunged into the river to her rescue ? One finds it difficult to picture him standing tamely on the bank that he may act the part of chorus for the benefit of the audience.

Another point calls for mention in connection with the poetic construction of the work. Mr. Watts - Dunton's friends

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

are aware that the conception and scheme of "The Coming of Love" have been in his mind for years, and that each poem has been written as part of a component whole. But the fact that several of these lyrics have already been allowed to appear in print as separate poems, the fact that the public has been allowed to inspect, as single gems, some of the precious stones which are here found in their true setting—will cause the uninformed to ask whether the gems suggested the setting or the setting the gems. In future editions a note explaining the circumstances under which portions have already been published might profitably be added.

In expressing one's admiration of "The Coming of Love" as a conception, one must not forget to call attention to the many fine lyrics that round it into a single and sustained poem. Nor must one forget to con-

A NATURE-POET

gratulate the author on the success which has attended his curious experiment with Romany as a poetic medium. Many gypsy words—"chirikel" for "bird," "kollo" for "black," "gypsy-magpie" for "water-wag-tail," for instance—are so picturesque that they lend themselves readily to such an attempt; but to have written a love-letter in Romany which, while remaining Romany, passes into pure poetry, is a task which perhaps only such accomplished Romany students as Mr. Charles Godfrey Leland or Mr. Francis Hinde Groome can adequately appreciate. Rhona's piteous letter for forgiveness is heart-breaking in its pleading, and wherever Romany is introduced the result is as picturesque in effect as is the touch of red afforded by the handkerchief which a gypsy girl's love of warm colouring prompts her to twine around her head or to thrust into her bosom.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Nor does Mr. Watts-Dunton omit to make impressive, even lurid, use of the gypsies' strangely superstitious belief in the "Dukkeripen," or omen. To them man's doom is pronounced by the stars, his destiny determined by the shape of a cloud in the sky, the ripples on a river :—

The mirrored stars lit all the bulrush spears,
And all the flags and broad-leaved lily-isles ;
The ripples shook the stars to golden smiles,
Then smoothed them back to happy golden spheres.
We rowed—we sang ; her voice seemed in mine ears
An angel's, yet with woman's dearer wiles,
But shadows fell from gathering cloudy piles
And ripples shook the stars to fiery tears.

What shaped those shadows like another boat
Where Rhona sat and he Love made a liar ?
There, where the Scollard sank, I saw it float,
While ripples shook the stars to symbols dire ;
We wept—we kissed—while starry fingers wrote,
And ripples shook the stars to a snake of fire.

A NATURE-POET

III

Another signal achievement is the "Ode to a Caged Petrel." Nearly every bird has now its poet. Shakespeare, Shelley, Hogg, and Mr. Meredith have rivalled the lark with lyrics no less lovely than the carol which Richard Jefferies likens to "a waterfall in the sky." Keats has swooned into song more musical than the nightingale's plaining; Wordsworth has stayed the seasons at perpetual spring with his cuckoo's cry; and Mr. Swinburne has sent floating sunwards and southwards, after the swallow, the very silver pollen of song.

Mr. Watts-Dunton is not the first English poet to write of the Stormy Petrel; but his is a noble poem, a poem rich

"In purple of billows, silver of ocean foam,"

and salt with the briny lash and sting of

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

flying spray. As one reads one's sight—
like the sight of the poet's caged petrel—

Is mocked with Ocean's horses—manes of white,
The long and shadowy flanks, the shoulders bright.

* * * * *

They rise, each foamy-crested combatant—
*They rise and fall and leap and foam and gallop and
pant,*
Till albatross, sea-swallow, and cormorant
Must flee like doves away!

The line I have italicised is masterly in its
“representative art,” and the whole poem is
so fine that one may respectfully submit to
the future editor of *The Golden Treasury*
that here surely is work well worthy of in-
clusion in that standard anthology.

“The Coming of Love” is no less a love
poem than a nature poem. It is in fact a
love epic, opening with the coming of love,
passing on from the confession to the con-
summation of love, on that sacred night,

A NATURE-POET

Whose darkness seemed more dear than Eden-light,
Fragrant of Love's warm wings and Love's warm
breath,

and thence to the tragedy of Rhona's murder, after which all that is left to her lover-husband is a memory :—

Beneath the loveliest dream there coils a fear :
Last night came she whose eyes are memories now ;
Her far-off gaze seemed all forgetful how
Love dimmed them once, so calm they shone and
clear.

“Sorrow,” I said, “has made me old, my dear ;
’Tis I, indeed, but grief can change the brow :
Beneath my load a seraph's neck might bow,
Vigils like mine would blanch an angel's hair.”
Oh, then I saw, I saw the sweet lips move !
I saw the love-mists thickening in her eyes—
I heard a sound as if a murmuring dove
Felt lonely in the dells of Paradise ;
But when upon my neck she fell, my love,
Her hair smelt sweet of whin and woodland spice.

Another exquisite love poem is that entitled, “A Sleepless Night at Venice,” which

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

occurs in the sonnet-sequence of *Prophetic Pictures*.

When hope lies dead—ah, when 'tis death to live,
And wrongs remembered make the heart still bleed,
Better are Sleep's kind lies for Life's blind need
Than truth, if lies a little peace can give.

A little peace! 'tis thy prerogative,
O Sleep! to lend it, thine to quell or feed
This love that starves—this starving soul's long
greed,

And bid Regret, the queen of hell, forgive.
Yon moon that mocks me through the uncurtained
glass

Recalls that other night, that other moon—
Two English lovers on a grey lagoon—
The voices from the lanternd gondolas,
The kiss, the breath, the flashing eyes, and soon
The throbbing stillness: all the heaven that was.

There are in the volume other love poems no less beautiful, in which we see twin-flames—the red flambeau of passion and the white taper of purity—burning on one altar.

And here let me call attention to a char-

A NATURE-POET

acteristic of Mr. Watts-Dunton's work, both as poet and critic, upon which, so far as I am aware, no comment has been made. I refer to his innate love of purity, his uncompromising attitude towards everything like uncleanness. It is well for English literature that one who stands in her high places—one of whom so competent a judge as Dr. Robertson Nicoll said recently in *The Academy*, "Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton is undoubtedly the first of living critics, and, perhaps, the first of all English critics"—should thus jealously guard the honour of the mistress whom he serves. He is of the company of poets who, in his own words,

Have for muse a maiden free from scar,
Who know how beauty dies at touch of sin.

He has kept unsullied the white shield of literature, and his influence for good is none the less real and lasting because it can never be estimated.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

IV

Pitfalls beset the feet of every poet of originality, and though none walks more warily than Mr. Watts-Dunton, he is apt to wander perilously near to the steep and treacherous places of Mount Parnassus. When the lines of a sonnet have too great a similarity in rhythm and in fall of accent, the effect is often droning and humdrum to a sensitive ear. To avoid monotony, Mr. Watts-Dunton sometimes makes use of what has been called a "feminine rhyme." His tendency to introduce the extra syllable is, however, so marked as to threaten to become a mannerism. Of this he is possibly aware, for I observe that the sonnet on James Russell Lowell has been altered, from the original reading in the *Athenæum*, so that the second and third lines now end with "years" and "pioneers," instead of

A NATURE-POET

with "story" and "hoary." As an example, a marked example, of a sonnet with "feminine rhymes," I will quote the fourth of his second series addressed to Rossetti:—

Last night Death whispered: "Life's purblind procession
 Flickering with blazon of the human story—
 Time's fen-flame over Death's dark territory—
Will leave no trail, no sign of Life's aggression.
Yon moon that strikes the pane, the stars in session,
 Are weak as Man they mock with fleeting glory.
 Since Life is only Death's frail feudatory,
How shall love hold of Fate in true possession?"

I answered thus: "If Friendship's isle of palm
 Is but a vision, every loveliest leaf,
Can knowledge of its mockery soothe and calm
 This soul of mine in this most fiery grief?
 If Love but holds of Life through Death in fief,
What balm in knowing that Love is Death's—what
 balm?"

Where done sparingly, the addition of an extra syllable gives what some sonnet students may consider a pleasing variety to the lines, though personally I am of opinion

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

that Mr. Watts-Dunton's finest sonnets are those which are written in the more familiar form. Another sonnet to Rossetti, the first in the first series, may be instanced as a case in point. It is interesting to note, though the fact is not mentioned by Mr. Watts-Dunton in his volume, that the sonnet was originally addressed to Heine, though intended from the first for Rossetti.

Thou knewst that island, far away and lone,
Whose shores are as a harp where billows break
In spray of music, and the breezes shake
O'er spicy seas a woof of colour and tone,
While that sweet music echoes like a moan
In the island's heart, and sighs around the lake,
Where, watching fearfully a watchful snake,
A damsel weeps upon her emerald throne.

Life's ocean, breaking round thy senses' shore,
Struck golden song, as from the strand of Day:
For us the joy, for thee the fell foe lay—
Pain's blinking snake around the fair isle's core,
Turning to sighs the enchanted sounds that play
Around thy lovely island evermore.

A NATURE-POET

This is one of Mr. Watts-Dunton's most characteristic sonnets. He can concentrate into fourteen lines what many poets could not cram into forty. The sonnet is noteworthy also as an illustration of his skilful treatment of elision, by the aid of which he gives some of his lines the confluent volume of sound and sonority of organ music. But much as one admires the fine effects he can attain in this way, the fact that his use of elision is fast merging into a mannerism must be patent to every one. It is true that elision, like alliteration, is a plant which blooms on Parnassus. Elision and alliteration are, however, growths of strange quality. An odd blossom, added here and there, enriches a nosegay immeasurably, but pluck these treacherous flowers with too reckless a hand, and the chances are that your carefully-culled posy turns to a handful of weeds.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

V

Of Mr. Watts-Dunton's patriotic poems, one cannot speak always with enthusiasm. "Christmas at the Mermaid" contains many virile and memorable passages ; but his love of elision and his partiality for the redundant syllable are allowed—as, indeed, is the case throughout the book—to run riot. Taken as a whole, the poem lacks spontaneity and is unequal. The ballad of "God's Revenge" is a masterly bit of *diablerie* ; but such a verse as the following, which he puts into the mouth of Raleigh—and there are several of the same kind—leaves me, I confess, quite unstirred :

Wherever billows foam,
The Briton fights at home ;
His hearth is built of water—water
Blue and green ;

A NATURE-POET

There's not a wave of ocean
The wind can set in motion
That shall not own our England,
Own our England Queen.

This seems to me too much in the style of "Rule Britannia," on a copy of which, according to tradition, Carlyle once wrote "Cock-a-doodle-do!"—to be worthy of Mr. Watts-Dunton.

It is not when the British Lion is, to use an Americanism, "doing a prance round," and inviting creation generally to "come on"; not when those who are the real "Little Englanders"—since they would belittle England—scream, "*My* country : right or wrong!" not when Englishmen change the old battle-cry of "For God and England!" to "For England, and—unless otherwise inconvenient — God!" that the sturdy and splendid spirit of British patriotism leaps in our blood again. Rather is

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

it when we see England as Mr. Watts-Dunton pictures her in the following noble sonnet, which shows how finely he can, on occasion, catch the true and ancient spirit of British patriotism :

ENGLAND STANDS ALONE.

“England stands alone : without an ally.”—*A German newspaper.*

“She stands alone ! ally nor friend has she,”
Saith Europe of our England—her who bore
Drake, Blake, and Nelson—Warrior Queen who wore
Light’s conquering glaive that strikes the conquered
free.

Alone ! From Canada comes o’er the sea,
And from that English coast with coral shore,
The old-world cry Europe hath heard of yore
From Dover cliffs : “Ready, aye ready we !”

“Europe,” saith England, “hath forgot my boys !—
Forgot how tall in yonder golden zone
'Neath Austral skies my youngest boys have grown
(Bearers of bayonets now and swords for toys)—
Forgot 'mid boltless thunder—harmless noise—
The sons with whom old England ‘stands alone’ !”

A NATURE-POET

There are many equally noble and moving lines in the "Jubilee Greeting," but it seems to me that it is as a son and seer of nature, not as a writer of patriotic verse, stirring and virile though it be, that Mr. Watts-Dunton will live in English song. His patriotic poems are the handiwork of a master-craftsman whom long and patient study has taught every secret by which to "build the lofty rhyme." But his nature-poems are of an entirely different order. "Natura Benigna," for instance, is less a sonnet than an incantation, like that by which Saul summoned to his presence the Witch of Endor. It is a spell, a wizard-word, whispered in the poet's ear by the unseen lips, whence Coleridge and Wordsworth learned their lore—a spell that can at any time conjure the very Spirit of Nature before us:—

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

What power is this? what witchery wins my feet
To peaks so sheer they scorn the cloaking snow,
All silent as the emerald gulfs below,
Down whose ice-walls the wings of twilight beat?
What thrill of earth and heaven, most wild, most
sweet—

What answering pulse that all the senses know,
Comes leaping from the ruddy Eastern glow,
Where, far away, the skies and mountains meet?

Mother, 'tis I reborn: I know thee well:

That throb I know, and all its prophesies,
O Mother and Queen, beneath the olden spell
Of silence, gazing from thy hills and skies!
Dumb Mother, struggling with the years to tell
The secret at thy heart through helpless eyes.

A HAUNTED HOUSE



Messersch

CHARLOTTE BRONTË.
(From a Photograph.)

A Haunted House :

CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S HOME AT HA-
WORTH AS SHOWN TO US BY MR.
SHORTER

I.

READING Mr. Clement Shorter's *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, we might almost fancy that there had hung somewhere, in that shabby Yorkshire vicarage, one of those now old-fashioned, circular mirrors, which show their little world in miniature, and that some secret had been discovered by which the mirror, like the sea, could be made to give up its dead, and to show again on its surface the scenes it had once recorded.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

We are conscious of some such impression as is conveyed by looking at a scene through the wrong end of a telescope. The "Circle" at the other end is far away, but the figures that flit across the disc, down the vista, are human and alive; and when we recollect that this magic tube, which has been directed back into the past, is showing us the daily life of fifty years ago, we find it difficult to shake off the feeling that there is something uncanny about the whole business.

Charlotte Brontë's uneventful life is so inseparably connected with Haworth parsonage that one is glad to have an idea of the place as it was when the various members of the family of geniuses were children.

Mr. Shorter pictures it all for us—the mean and, save for an occasional currant bush, barren bit of garden, where, on a fine summer afternoon, the Brontë girls might have been seen picking the scanty fruit;

A HAUNTED HOUSE

the dining-room where, when the dusk was gathering, they would pace backward and forward telling one another their dreams; the kitchen, whither they would wander to harry the feelings of the public as there represented by the solitary serving woman, whose astonished "Lor! Miss Charlotte!" anticipated the horrified outcry with which the publication of *Jane Eyre* was received; and the staircase on which Mr. Brontë would pause on his way to bed to call out "Don't be up late, children," and to wind up the loud-ticking grandfather's clock.

Since the time when Emily and Anne Brontë, and sometimes Charlotte, would carry their stools on summer afternoons to sit by the ragged bushes and to pick the scanty fruit, thousands of men and women, to whom the names of those shy and shrinking girls are now household words, have journeyed to see the Brontë home. What would those

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

girls have thought had they known that in a single year (1895) ten thousand persons would visit the Brontë Museum at Haworth! But they had then as little premonition of their fame, as they had (as Mr. Shorter reminds us) of the "time, not so far distant, when the rough doorway separating the churchyard from the garden, which was opened for their mother when they were little children, should be opened again, time after time, in rapid succession for their own biers to be carried through. This gateway is now effectually bricked up. In the days of the Brontës it was reserved for the passage of the dead—a grim arrangement which, strange to say, finds no place in any one of the sisters' stories."

Leaving the garden, we enter the house with Mr. Shorter, who takes us as it were by the hand, and leads us through rooms that oppress us with memories and with the sense

A HAUNTED HOUSE

of haunting presences. We are reminded of the sonnet in which Philip Marston, the blind poet, speaks of the coming time when he and those he loved should

“Lie at the last beneath, where the grass grows,
Made one, in one interminable repose.”

Writing of the room in which he had lived so long and suffered so much, he goes on to ask himself a strange question :

“Must this not be, that one then dwelling here,
Where one man and his sorrows dwelt so long,
Shall feel the pressure of a ghostly throng,
And shall upon some desolate midnight hear
A sound more sad than is the pine-tree’s song,
And thrill with great, inexplicable fear?”

The door on the right of the hall opens into Mr. Brontë’s study, called always the parlour ; that on the left into the dining-room, where the children spent so great a portion of their lives. Here they would eat their

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

midday dinner—Miss Branwell, their aunt, at one end of the table, and Charlotte at the other—and here they passed their evenings. They all wrote stories, even at that early period ; and, curiously enough, the same heroes, the Duke of Wellington or his children, appeared in almost everything which Charlotte then penned. This tendency to introduce the same characters into all their dreamings, is by no means uncommon in imaginative children who afterwards become writers. Mrs. Chandler Moulton, the American poet, has put upon record the fact that, as a girl, she used to relate stories to herself in all of which a certain roysterer named “Buccaneer” sustained the leading parts ; and a well-known novelist once told me that he dreamed himself to sleep every night in his boyhood by imagining romantic situations in which the actors were himself, Cora, of the *Last of the Mohicans*, the late Duke

A HAUNTED HOUSE

of Albany (Prince Leopold he was at that time), and his sister Princess Beatrice, now Princess Henry of Battenberg.

II

In 1846 the now famous *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* saw the light. The three sisters published it at their own expense, and paid for it out of some money which had been left to them by their aunt. In 1847 *Jane Eyre* was issued, to be followed by *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. The result every one knows. The Brontë girls' season of compulsory obscurity was over, and in its place they were threatened with a scarcely less compulsory notoriety. But once again in the history of literature was the truth of Goethe's maxim, that "the wished-for comes too late," made apparent. In less than a year after the pub-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

lication of *Jane Eyre*, Branwell Brontë was in his grave ; and within twelve months after the issue of *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë whom Mr. Shorter speaks of as “the sphinx of our modern literature,” had passed away.

The picture which has been drawn for us of Charlotte Brontë, waiting with clasped hands for the death of Emily, is pitiful. Well might she say at the time to her friend Miss Nussey, “We should not knit human ties too close, or clasp human affections too fondly.” “When Emily is ill,” she wrote, a day or two later, “there is no sunshine in the world for me.” And again : “I hope still, for I must hope—she is as dear to me as life.” To the last she tried to cheat herself into the belief that Emily would recover. She dare not, as she said in a letter, “Let the faintness of despair reach my heart.” But Emily died before Branwell had been in his grave three months, and, as if this were not enough, the

A HAUNTED HOUSE

only remaining sister, Anne, "the wraith" of Charlotte and Emily, as Dr. Garnett has called her, followed Emily into the Great Dark. Even now, when Charlotte Brontë has been at rest for nearly half a century, it is difficult to read, without painful emotion, the letters which she wrote at that time, so terrible is the anguish of loneliness which rings through them. Three times, in eight short months, was the doorway that separated the churchyard from the garden opened for the passage of her dead. The success which, had her loved ones been there to share it, would have been so sweet, was Dead Sea fruit to that sisterless, brotherless, motherless woman, the flower of whose youth had withered unplucked upon its stalk.

At last, after five years of that uncommunicable soul-loneliness, which is too often the lot of genius, the gloom of advancing and unaccompanied middle age gave place to the

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

clear-shining gladness of a husband's love. But after a few months of married happiness, and when the holy light of expectant motherhood was dawning in her eyes, the tiny taper of Charlotte Brontë's life suddenly flickered and went out. "I am not going to die : we have been so happy." These words, spoken to her husband on her death-bed, are, as Mr. Shorter truly says, "not the least piteously sad in her tragic story."

III

The history of that gentle-faced, fragile woman, with beautiful hair and big, soft, eyes, living her lonely life—lonely at all events as far as the outside world was concerned—in that out-of-the-way old Yorkshire parsonage, has scarcely a parallel in literature. One finds it difficult to think of her as ever having been a child. The little

A HAUNTED HOUSE

creature with old-fashioned ways was in heart a woman when she was but a girl in years. Few children age so soon as those of proud parents who are in straitened circumstances. The everlasting "pinching," which frets a generous spirit like the touch of a rude hand upon a wound; the necessity which compels one to appear "mean," when one's inclination is to be open-handed; the contrivances by which a threadbare coat or a dowdy frock is made to do duty over again; the consciousness of shabby clothes; the shared anxiety about tradesmen's bills; the pitiful attempts to keep up appearances, and to hide the too-apparent secret from the outside world—these, and a thousand other similar cares, combine to make men and women of those who are but children in years.

Upon Charlotte Brontë, the eldest of a motherless family, the burden lay so heavily,

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

that one can only wonder at the playfulness and the buoyancy of her letters. To so proud and sensitive a nature as hers, the knowledge that a dearly-loved father—and that father a clergyman—could so forget his self-respect and his sacred calling, as occasionally to give way to drink, must have meant something like martyrdom. We know that on one occasion, when she returned from Brussels, she found that the father, whose welcome she had been eagerly anticipating, had given himself up to a drinking bout, to rescue him from which was the first business of her home-coming.

The misery, which, when she was at home, Charlotte must have suffered on account of her father's drinking habits, and the nervous suspense to which his indulgence must have given rise when she was away, and could not know to what excesses the withdrawal of her restraining influence might lead—

A HAUNTED HOUSE

may be imagined by the reader, but may not be known by any word of hers, for she never speaks of him except with reverence and love.

She realised how heavily such men as he are handicapped by "temperament." Impulse could lead him blindfold where Reason could not persuade him open-eyed. He had a big brain, which even a small quantity of alcohol would unduly affect, and to which the blood would rush when he was excited. At such times he would undoubtedly say and do things upon which outsiders put wrong interpretations. But so far from being morose and severe to his children, as has been represented, he was an affectionate and indulgent parent. Martha Brown, the servant who lived with him till her death, insisted that her old master had been grievously wronged, and that a more worthy man she had never known. Nancy Garr, another servant, al-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

ways spoke of Mr. Brontë as “the kindest man who ever drew breath, and as a good and affectionate father.”

Though we may and must admit all this, the fact remains that Patrick Brontë was not an easy man with whom to live. A lady who knew something of the state of affairs at Haworth Parsonage, once spoke of Charlotte's father as “a handful”; and lovable in themselves as such men often are, their peculiarities are a constant source of anxiety to the unfortunate relative—be it a wife, a son, or a daughter—upon whose shoulders they have a trick of shifting the burden of responsibility. With no one are they quite so high-handed as with the very person—a rich relative, the patron of a living, a landlord, or an employer—with whom there is every reason for wishing to keep upon good terms. The consciousness of being under an obligation, or the know-

A HAUNTED HOUSE

ledge that this or that man has it in his power to further their interests, or the interests of their family, will set them itching for cause to affront. And head of the household though they may be, they have often a fine scorn for such merely mundane matters as the payment of rates, taxes, and tradesmen's bills. They have a happy knack of dismissing unpleasant subjects from consideration, and will sit down in high spirits to enjoy an excellent meal, while a wife or a daughter is eating out her heart at thought of the clamorous butcher, who remains, and is likely to remain unpaid. Yet their pride is a pistol with a hair-trigger, and is carried always at full cock. Let but this same butcher come betwixt the wind and their nobility, to hint that his account is of long standing, and the odds are that he is denounced as a "rascally tradesman" who shall be paid off on the instant, and dis-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

missed. 'Tis nothing to those who so talk that a wife, or a daughter, must put pride in her pocket and go shamefaced to make her peace with the angry tradesman, or to beg or borrow money to meet the bill. The high-spirited head of the household has vindicated the family honour, and is as righteously content as if he had discharged the account in full.

That all this is true of Patrick Brontë by no means follows. It is of the type, not of any particular man, that I am writing; but we know enough of the Vicar of Haworth to believe that when he was spoken of as "a handful" the term was not misapplied. The perusal of Mr. Shorter's book makes us feel that it was upon Charlotte, even before the death of her aunt Miss Branwell in 1842, that the burden of his eccentricities lay heaviest. Of the strange home-life of that unchildlike child with brooding eyes,

A HAUNTED HOUSE

Mr. Shorter gives us an intimate picture. We know how she and her brother and two sisters grew up together, dreaming dreams and weaving romances. We know, too, how desperately, when she came to womanhood, she fought with Death for the lives of Emily and Anne, only to see both sisters fade away before her eyes. And, sadder still, we know how desperately she strove to save her idolised brother from a worse fate than death, and with what agony she saw his constitution being shattered, his mental and moral faculties being perverted, by opium and strong drink. Well might she say in a letter to her friend Miss Nussey, that her home was "haunted by the phantoms of Sin and Suffering." Yet how unwavering was her faith in the goodness of God, is sufficiently shown in the following letter which was penned when the shadow of Branwell's death lay heaviest upon her: "When I

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

look on the noble face and forehead of my dead brother (Nature had favoured him with a fairer outside as well as a finer constitution than his sisters), and ask myself what had made him go ever wrong, tend ever downwards, when he had so many gifts to induce to, and aid in, an upward course, I seem to receive an oppressive revelation of the feebleness of humanity—of the inadequacy of even genius to lead to true greatness, if unaided by religion and principle. In the value, or even the reality of these two things, he would never believe till within a few days of his end ; and then, all at once, he seemed to open his heart to a conviction of their existence and worth. The remembrance of this strange change now comforts my poor father greatly. I myself, with painful, mournful joy, heard him praying softly in his dying moments, and to the last prayer, which my father offered up at his bedside, he

A HAUNTED HOUSE

added Amen. How unusual that word appeared from his lips, of course, you, who did not know him, cannot conceive. When the last struggle was over, and a marble calm began to succeed the last dread agony, I felt, as I had never felt before, that there was peace and forgiveness for him in Heaven. All his errors—to speak plainly, all his vices—seemed nothing to me at that moment; every wrong he had done, every pain he had caused vanished; his sufferings only were remembered; the wretch to the natural affections only was left. . . . He is at rest, and that comforts us all. . . . In God's hands we leave him, He sees not as man sees."

I think these hastily written lines strike the keynote which Charlotte Brontë sought to sound in her books. I am sure that one passage in them contains the source of her strength and the secret of her brother's

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

sinnings. She is conscious, she says, of "the feebleness of humanity—of the inadequacy of even genius to lead to true greatness, if unaided by religion and principle." A platitude you will perhaps say, and I agree with you. It was old, and a platitude, when Branwell Brontë sinned and Charlotte suffered. Yet, had that unhappy boy but taken it, old as it was, to heart—how different might have been his story and hers! It is a platitude which will be new and needed a hundred years hence when I who write, and you who read, will have gone to answer the question of the Great Teacher; "What profit had ye, from the lessons I bade ye learn from other lives?"

IV

More often than not, men and women of high genius are, when compared with ordinary mortals, like wild birds caged. There

A HAUNTED HOUSE

is a pitiful resemblance in their life-stories. Until the heart of them be broken, they never cease to beat against the cruel wires. Your everyday mortal, your cage-born songster, takes not unkindly to his prison. Now and then, when a breath of the meadows is wafted through an open window, or when, looking up, he sees the tree-tops at play with the breeze, the consciousness that he was born for ampler air, that his wings were given to him to beat upward to the blue, or to bear him away to the green heart of a forest, stirs like a vague uneasiness within him. But a cage can cramp the heart even more than it cramps the wings, and with a little fluttering sigh the prisoner turns to the sweet morsel that has been thrust between the bars, and is not for long rebellious in his sugared seclusion.

It is not so with your caged wild bird. To him the green fields and the branches

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

a-swing in the forest call continuously. The winds invite him with whisper of unwinged skies and shining sun-filled space until, grown sick with tumultuous longing, he beats despairingly against the bars, and falls back with bleeding and unfeathered breast, gasping out his little life with piteous cries.

Rarely has the tragedy of genius been brought home so intimately to the reader as in Mr. Shorter's book. For myself, I must confess that I have read few novels which were half so fascinating. Not all the hundred-voiced hubbub of a mimic battle-scene—be the stage never so crowded, the details never so realistic—can make the blood riot and the pulse leap like the shrill "Hi! Hi!" from the throats of a dozen firemen, as the steaming, straining, half-maddened horses, urged on by whip and rein and the shouts of excited men, hurtle by us and are gone. For the same reason Mr. Shorter's book

A HAUNTED HOUSE

holds us wide-eyed and watchful, when a novel would scarcely keep us awake!

Life is infinitely more interesting than either literature or the stage. This picture of Charlotte Brontë wrestling with death for the life of her two loved sisters, and with a worse fate than death for the soul of her unhappy and dissolute brother, is so real that we seem to hear the voice of Charlotte herself speaking to us out of the past, just as that company of rapt listeners, of whom Mr. Haweis has told us, heard the voice of the dead Browning speaking from the phonograph. The battle is so fierce, the agony and the despair of it are so terrible, that we find it difficult to persuade ourselves it is all ended ; and can readily understand why the spirits of the unhappy dead are believed to return to the scenes of their sorrows, there to re-enact the tragedies in which they bore a part. No imaginative

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

reader of Mr. Shorter's book could visit the Parsonage at Haworth, and turn the handle of a door, opening into an empty room, without some sense of intrusion upon an unseen company—without fancying that his entrance had been the signal for the sudden dispersion of startled ghosts.

MRS. BROWNING AND THE
“EVER-WOMANLY”



Photo by]

[H. H. H. Cameron

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

(From a Drawing.)

Mrs. Browning and the “Ever-Womanly”

I

CONSIDERING that we personify poetry as of the gentler sex, it is strange how seldom the sceptre of song has passed into a woman's hand. Is it because the poet comes of a race of exiled kings—because, though a prince and born in the purple, he must *fight* for his principality, that the Muse has elected to be the mother of brave sons rather than of fair daughters? Some good folk will perhaps smile at the association of “poetry”

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

with "bravery," for the comic journals and the variety stage have for a long time accustomed one section of the public to think of the poet as a puny creature to the making of whom went neither a man's courage nor a woman's wit. 'Tis true that we have to thank some self-dubbed poets for this, and that the name of poet, like the name of "gentleman," is "soiled by all ignoble use." But your true poet is "ever a fighter," and necessarily so; for is he not at the best of times the leader of a forlorn hope, the bearer of the banner of a lost cause?

Whatever be the reason, one must admit that poetry is a garden in which the rose of womanhood rarely comes to perfect flower. Of the women poets who lived and died in the Nineteenth Century, only three great names occur to me — Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, and Emily Brontë. In an imagined Parliament of

MRS. BROWNING

Poets, would not the first of these sit as the representative of her sex? In an imagined (and unimaginable) Parliament of Women, she would have equal right to be chosen as the representative of poetry.

What Goethe calls "The Ever-Womanly" has, in Mrs. Browning, voiced itself in song for all time. Alas, that from so many women-writers of to-day we hear not the Ever-Womanly, but the Eternal-Feminine! Alas, that instead of the voice that "leadeth us upward and on," we too often hear the shriek of a scold, who bids us look down into the muddy pools that she has made it her business to stir up! And she does it, she tells us, for the better protection of her sister-women! As if a woman's natural purity were not a surer safeguard than the dissemination of dirt! As if the sight of a woman, instructing her sisters, and with zest, in the vices of men, would not—by sap-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

ping man's faith in the purity of womanhood, and by destroying the knightly reverence which is the basis of all true love—do harm, rather than good! As if the ennobling influence, which every true woman can bring to bear upon men, were not an infinitely greater force for good than all the sex-novels that ever were written!

II

To return to Mrs. Browning. I have more to say of her as the poet-representative of the "Ever-Womanly," but, first, I must crave permission to make use of an illustration. The Rev. John Watson ("Ian Mac-laren")—he told me the story himself—was once in a Roman Catholic Church in Italy. Before the altar to the Virgin, knelt a woman, her lips moving devoutly in prayer, her eyes alight with wondering worship and love. As she was making her way to the

MRS. BROWNING

door, after ending her devotions, Dr. Watson asked her in Italian some question about the points of interest in the building. The woman seemed pleased to find a visitor who could converse in her own language, and the two fell to chatting about the scenery and show places of the neighbourhood. By-and-by the conversation turned upon the differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant religions, especially in regard to the fact that Protestants do not address prayers to the Virgin.

“Don't you ever pray to the Mother of God?” she asked.

“No,” said Dr. Watson, very gently, “for it seems to me that all you find, which is holy and helpful and adorable in the character of that most revered and beautiful of women—all that, and infinitely more, I find in her Divine Son.”

“Yes, sir,” she said wistfully. “I

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

understand that for you, but you see you are a man, and you don't know how a woman needs a woman to pray to."

"And although I should be the last man in the world ever to become a Roman Catholic," said Dr. Watson, when telling the story, "you'll believe me when I assure you that I hadn't the heart to add another word."

My own views upon Roman Catholicism are similar to those of Dr. Watson, but in the same circumstances I fear that I should have been equally silenced.

Well, just as it is possible to realize the human craving, which, from that good woman's standpoint, made her long for a woman to pray to, so it is possible to realize how many women there must be in the world, who, voiceless themselves, long for a woman's voice to express in poetry—the divinest of all forms of expression—

MRS. BROWNING

their own unuttered, almost unrealized thoughts.

“To me, alone, there came a thought of grief;
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong.”

These lines were written by a man. To that creature of emotion, a woman, such “timely utterance” must do even more to “cleanse the stuff’d bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart.” Some of us wondered to hear of the childless woman who asked that a little volume of Roumanian poems, collected, most of them, from the peasantry, might lie with her at last in her coffin. But open the book—reverently, for you are looking into the holy place of a woman’s soul—and you shall know why, here in England, the heart that beat under the white bosom whose sweet springs had never flowed to the pressure of baby-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

lips, cried out across the sea and across a continent to the dusky-bosomed sister in far Roumania, who had unsealed for her the founts of speech :—

“I am she that hath borne no children,
Yet there is no one hath cursed me : I look the
same as the others,
But the nests pity me even.
The sun, the mother of stars, hath compassion upon
me, and saith :
‘O childless woman ! what doth thou with all the
days I make bright ?’
Mine ear is full of the murmur of rocking cradles.”

In the beautiful Litany of our ancient Church, we beseech the mercy of God for “all women labouring of child, all sick persons and young children,” but the ears of that humble Roumanian peasant have listened to a litany which is heard, it may be only of God—the wail of the woman who hears crying out to her, from eternal dark,

MRS. BROWNING

the voice of her unborn child. If the cry of a woman in travail of body be terrible to listen to, more terrible is the cry of the woman whose soul is in travail of a child, but whose body is barren and unblessed.

Who knows, to how many of her sisters in Roumania, the words of that peasant woman may not have been like warm breath that bade flow again the frozen fountain of relief-giving tears? And here, in England, the words of Elizabeth Barrett Browning have been to thousands of white-souled mothers and white-souled maidens the "timely utterance" which gave their thoughts "relief." She is the David—the sweet singer in Israel—of her sex. Childhood, maidenhood, wifehood, motherhood, who among women poets has interpreted these, or sung of these more purely, or more truly than she?

To me, indeed, it has sometimes seemed

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

as if—recognising that the time was ripe for the advent of one who should voice for her sister-woman the thoughts that come and go in every woman's heart—God had sent Mrs. Browning into the world that she might stand at the altar as the woman High-Priest of Song ; but that, remembering how, once before, His creatures had erred by building for Pure Womanhood an altar at which to bend the knee, God had at the last withheld the final gift. A great poet, perhaps the greatest of woman poets, we must acknowledge the writer of the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" to be, but so amazing are her artistic aberrations that one is half-persuaded to regard her as a poet whom God has, of set purpose, spoilt in the making.

In one of the reviews there appeared recently an article in which poets were classified under the two headings of Poets

MRS. BROWNING

of Thought and Poets of Form. The first depend, we were told, upon what they have to say ; the second upon the way they say it.

Rubbish! A poem—how many more times must one insist upon it!—is poetic thought *plus* poetic expression. No matter how beautiful the form, there must be a thought of poetry behind it (a thought which is to the form what the soul is to the body) before the result can be a poem. And contrariwise, until the thought have bodied itself forth in beautiful form, it is not poetry. Hence those who declare that so long as the thought of a poem be true, the form does not greatly matter, are as wide of the mark as those who clamour that “Art for Art’s sake” should suffice. The thought, and the art by which that thought finds adequate expression, the vision and the faculty divine, are as necessary for the

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

making of a poem, as a man and a woman are necessary for the solemnisation of a marriage. If either bride or bridegroom be absent, there can be no marriage ; and, in the same way, the art, minus the thought of poetry, or the thought, minus the art, may be poetic, but cannot be poetry. To say that this or that person is a poet, implies of necessity, not only that he has the vision, but that he has also the faculty of artistic expression. Either may vary in degree, and the greatest poet is he who most nearly approximates, both in conception and in execution, to the highest standard.

All this is, of course, the veriest platitude, and I have laboured the point to repetition ; but ancient errors are hard to kill, and so long as the reading public persists in speaking of rhymed sentiment as poetry, so long must the student of letters protest

MRS. BROWNING

that much of this rhymed sentiment is, for all its prettiness, nothing of the sort.

Nor can beauty of thought atone for slovenly execution ; and Mrs. Browning's artistic sins are so many that more than one critic of repute has questioned whether she should be counted among the great poets of England. If Wordsworth has lapsed into what is trivial, Mrs. Browning has perpetrated what is atrocious. No other poet of like eminence has done so much to debase the gold currency of the Muse's realm. The execrable cockney rhymes she has put into circulation have encouraged innumerable minters of poetic small coin to go and do likewise, and with lamentable result. She has, if I may vary the metaphor, made what is known as "poetic license" synonymous with the removal of the landmarks of art. To some admirers of Mrs. Browning this may seem a harsh

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

saying, but if it had been their lot, as it once was mine, to act as editor to a magazine, they might perhaps see cause to reconsider their opinion. Scarcely a day passed that I did not receive "poems," generally from girls and women, but sometimes from men, of which one could only say, in the words of the first chapter of Genesis, that they were "without form, and void." I was by way of being an editorial enthusiast in those days, and was, moreover, young at the work, so instead merely of declining the proffered contributions, without comment, I was so indiscreet as to point out that such rhymes, as, for instance, "mountain" and "daunting," were not exactly perfect rhymes. In return, I received indignant, sometimes abusive, letters, informing me that it was evident I knew nothing about the matter, for the rhymes to which I objected, or similar rhymes, were to be found

MRS. BROWNING

in the work of Mrs. Browning. The name of the great woman-poet was sometimes heavily under-scored, sometimes printed in capitals, and presumably was expected to cause rather more consternation in the editorial camp than the bursting of a lyddite bomb. I was informed that what was good enough for Mrs. Browning was good enough for my correspondents, and ought to be good enough for me. In reply, I ventured to hint that the poems in question had been declined, not so much because I found in them faults which were identical with those of Mrs. Browning, as because I failed to find any of the great qualities which—her faults notwithstanding—marked her out as the supreme singer of her sex. But I was given to understand that an editor who could speak disparagingly of Mrs. Browning was so unlikely to know what was, or was not, good poetry, or to re-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

cognise a work of genius when he saw it, that it was not to be expected I should appreciate the poems which had been submitted to me. And so the matter ended—not, I fear, without ill-feeling towards myself on the part of my correspondents, and, perhaps, with something in the nature of a grudge, on my own part, against Mrs. Browning. My only consolation is that though all this happened a good many years ago, none of my correspondents has yet attained to fame, so it is clear that I am not the only editor who does not recognise budding genius and great poetry at sight.

III

In the preface to this series of papers, the reader was warned that criticism, unless by the kindergarten method, these gossiping comments may not pretend to be. My aim

MRS. BROWNING

has been, not to present a comprehensive estimate of the writers under discussion, but to turn the searchlight of the imagination upon some representative aspect of their writings, or of their personality, and so to indicate briefly the spirit in which they lived and worked. It would, however, be paying one's readers a poor compliment to suppose that what they look for is indiscriminate eulogy, and, of Mrs. Browning, one must admit that her womanhood was at once the secret of her weakness and of her strength.

Some of her poems are perfect, alike in conception and execution. Others do more honour to her heart than to her art, and if it is true that she speaks often with the voice of an angel ("an inarticulate angel," she might be called at other times), it is equally true that she tends sometimes to shrillness and "wordiness."

Though all this may, and must be ad-

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

mitted, the fact remains that among the great poets of England, none is more assured of a permanent place in the hearts of her readers than Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The world must grow old as a garment, and we must grow old with it, but love is ever fair, and young and immortal. So long as there remains on earth one garden to which the Spring, and the white flowers of the Spring shall, year by year, return, and where, at eventide, a lad and a maiden may wander together to whisper to each other of God's wonder-gift of love—*there* shall the name of Elizabeth Barrett Browning be softly spoken. So long as the love of husband and wife shall be consecrated by the coming into the world of the yet more wonderful wonder-gift of a strange new life, springing from their own; so long as there remains on earth one of Christ's little ones to love and to tend—or, O God! the shame!

MRS. BROWNING

the pity of it! to need to be snatched from child-slavery, or, more horrible still, from child shame—so long will that Ever-Womanly Servant of Christ who, with pen dipped in her own heart's blood, has written for us "The Cry of the Children," be honoured and loved of all true women and true men :—

"All things transitory
As symbols are sent ;
Earth's insufficiency
Here leads to event ;
The Indescribable
Here it is done,
The Ever Womanly leadeth us
Upward and on."

A POET WHO WAS NOT A
POET

A Poet who was not a Poet

I

THOSE who assert that Emerson was not a poet are not wrong. Those on the other hand who assert that he was a poet, are right. This may sound paradoxical, but there is more in Frederick Robertson's axiom that "Truth is made up of two opposite propositions and is not found in a *viâ media* between the two," than is apparent at first sight.

The Emerson who wrote

Still on the seeds of all He made
The rose of beauty burns;
Through times that wear, and forms that fade,
Immortal youth returns,

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

was a poet, but only half a poet, inasmuch as his mind, like flint without tinder, could kindle the celestial fire only in sparks.

The Emerson who penned and—incredible to believe—in cold blood published such a verse as this

Hear you, then, celestial fellows !
Fits not to be over-zealous,
Steads not to work on the clean jump,
Nor wine nor brains perpetual pump,

was not only no poet, but would have suffered rejection at the hands of a self-respecting greengrocer, who, for advertising purposes, required the assistance of a “poet” to sing the superiority of his spinach. Could any comment upon such lines be more ironic than Emerson’s own words in his essay upon “Poetry and Imagination”? “Let the poet of all men stop with his inspiration,” he says, “The inexorable rule in the Muses’

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

court, *either inspiration or silence*, compels the bard to report only his supreme moments." With Portia, Emerson might well have exclaimed, "I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching." Every day ugliness goes despised of all, but to be superlatively ugly, to establish a record in ugliness, is a distinction. A lady once said that the ugliness of her bull-dog amounted to "high art," that he was "beautifully hideous" as well as "hideously beautiful"; and it is possible that these lines of Emerson's may be recalled—if only by virtue of their immemorial ugliness—when his really memorable work is forgotten.

An exponent and critic of his to whom I once quoted the same lines in conversation, refused—and small wonder—to believe that Emerson ever wrote them. When he had been convinced by documentary evidence

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

(they are from "Alphonso of Castile," which is to be found in any volume of the "Poems") he endeavoured to defend them on the ground that Emerson "had no ear for music." The excuse was as ludicrous as the lines which it sought to excuse. That Emerson was not indifferent to music we know from a fine passage in his Address at Concord. "What omniscience has music," he says, "so absolutely impersonal, yet every sufferer feels his personal sorrow reached!"

But for the publication of such unutterable doggerel as the lines from "Alphonso of Castile"—and by a writer who held that "a man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best, but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace"—we must look for some other explanation than is afforded by Emerson's want of a musical "ear." The explanation is to be found in

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

his theory that "it is not metre, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem. Here again we are reminded of Frederick Robertson's axiom that "Truth is made up of two opposite propositions, and is not found in a *viâ media* between the two." The proposition that "It is not metre but a metre-making argument which makes a poem," is well enough, so far as it goes. But Emerson should not have stopped there. Had he gone on to the opposite proposition, that "It is not argument, but a poem-making metre which makes a poem," he would not have been led astray by the most specious and dangerous of all delusions—a half-truth. It was this theory which betrayed him into that carelessness in the matter of technique that indifference in regard to detail, which he could ill afford to assume. He held that if the inward thought with which the poet's brain is pregnant, be a thought of pure and

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

perfect poetry—equally pure and perfect will be the outward form in which it bodies itself forth, when the time comes for this thought to be brought to birth. The poet, he says,

Shall not his brain encumber
With the coil of rhythm and number ;
But, leaving rule and pale forethought,
He shall aye climb
For his rhyme,

and

Mount to paradise
By the stairway of surprise.

Moreover, Emerson never had in him, as he well knew, the makings of an artist. "Expect nothing more of my power of construction," he writes, "no ship-building, smack, nor skiff even ; only boards and logs tied together." "Here I sit and read and write with very little system, and as far as regards composition with the most fragmentary result ; paragraphs incompressible,

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

each sentence an infinitely repellent particle." In reply to Carlyle, who had been urging him to give to the world something which should be distinctly Emersonian, he says: "Alas, my friend, I can do no such gay thing as you say. I do not belong to the poets, but only to a low department of literature—the reporters, suburban men."

He has written beautifully and brilliantly on the subject of Art, but the very essay which bears that title is a witness to his deficiencies as an artist. It scintillates—like a loose handful of shaken diamonds—with innumerable starry points of truth. It is felicitous in imagery and profound in insight, but it has no logical sequence, no continuity or completeness. He brought thoughts home with him from hillside or field, as the naturalist brings home pinned butterflies or pressed flowers. These thoughts he had, like the naturalist, "caught flying," or found

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

flowering, and had scratched down in his notebook, or upon an envelope-back, for future use. The fact that his noblest thought should so often come to him as a song, or shape itself into a stanza, caused him no wonder. That the man of intellect and imagination should turn poet, and find in poetry the fittest form of expression, seemed to Emerson as inevitable as that Isaiah should have used the same medium for his prophecies, David for his psalms—as natural as that birds should sing or waters ripple. It were as easy to picture David and Isaiah racking their brains for an alliterative phrase or for a neat turn to a line, as it were to picture Emerson in like occupation. To him poetry is the most natural thing in the world. It is, as he puts it, “the only verity, the expression of a sound mind speaking after the ideal, and not after the apparent.” “A rhyme in one of our

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET
sonnets," he says, "should not be less
pleasing than the iterated nodes of a sea-
shell, or the resembling difference of a group
of flowers. The pairing of the birds is an
idyll, not tedious as our idylls are ; a tempest
is a rough ode without falsehood or rant ; a
summer with its harvest sown, ripened, and
stored, is an epic song, subordinating how
many admirably executed parts !"

II

Rightly to understand Emerson's poems,
it is necessary to know something of his
theory of the derivation of poetry.

He holds that craftsmanship is nothing,
vision everything. Let the Divine vision be
withheld, and, to the very master-craftsman
of poetic art, he would deny the high title
of poet. Would we write a poem, we must,
Emerson would tell us, prepare ourselves

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

to report rather than to create. He holds that the poem already *is*, that it exists pure and simple in the mind of God, and that all we can do (I borrow a word from the schools) is to "intend" our mind toward the Eternal Mind, that the Divine thought may think in us. Sooner or later, unless we be utterly unworthy of the vision, we shall be conscious of our approach to a higher region of thought. Within us, our own diffused thought — suddenly become luminous—is gathering and culminating to a focal point of flame. There is light within us and without. The light within us is but a spark in darkness ; the light without, whether far off or near we know not, is supernal and supreme. Yet slowly, surely, as our inner light spires upwards toward it, the splendour from above—a ladder of light let down from heaven—draws nearer and yet more near, until at last the two meet,

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

and, to the creature, the revelation from the Creator has come.

Our ability to remember and to record the vision, is in proportion to our gifts as poets. To some of us it may be that not more than a verse or a line remains after the vision is passed, but that which we have seen, Emerson believes is of God and from God, and should be accounted of more worth than all the stored wisdom of the ages.

“A man should learn,” he says, “to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought because it is his. In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.”

That this *non-willing* but *willed-upon* doctrine of the intuitional perception of

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

truth, with its rapt, Buddha-like absorption of the individual soul into the Infinite Soul, has its dangers, Emerson is not slow to realize. Hence he contends that the poet must of all men be the purest in life. Intellectual greatness can never, in the gospel according to Emerson, overshadow moral greatness, for, in his opinion, a decline in morality is inevitably a decline in intellect. "The foundation of culture, as of character," he says, "is at last the moral sentiment." "If we live truly, we shall see truly." And again, "So to *be* is the sole inlet of so to *know*." For this reason he seeks to counteract what is dreamy and inconclusive in his mental conceptions, by insisting, uncompromisingly and unsparingly, upon the faithful discharge of every duty of daily life. None is more sternly practical than he. Though we search the wide world over for truth or beauty, we shall find it not, he tells

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET
us, till we seek it in our own hearts and in
our own homes—until we come to realize
that

The life of heaven above
Springs from the life below.

Most of all is he insistent upon the supreme
importance of the Present :—

Shines the last age ; the next with hope is seen,
To-day slinks poorly off unmarked between ;
Future or Past no richer secret folds,
O friendless Present ! than thy bosom holds.

Elsewhere he says in plain prose : “ Write it
on your heart that every day is the best day
in the year. No man has learned anything
rightly until he knows that every day is
Doomsday.”

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

III

Emerson was an optimist; and his optimism is evident, not only in every word he spoke or penned, but in the glad, benignant, starlike life of the man himself. "His life has been above reproach," writes one who knew him intimately, "and he has been constantly devoted to human good, steadily loyal to his own ideal. . . . He has been called a sage, but he has more than wisdom, he has that loftiness and holiness of character, that loyalty and self-forgetfulness, that simplicity and wideness of sympathy, and especially that high sense of human faithfulness to the Divine, which characterize the saintly life."

He can hope infinitely, believe infinitely for his fellows :—

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, *Thou must,*
The youth replies, *I can.*

He is, indeed, so incorrigible an optimist that he will scarce recognise the existence of what is unlovely, either in nature or in human nature.

Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,
Or dip thy paddle in the lake,
But it carves the bow of beauty there,
And the ripples in rhyme the oar forsake.

Of what is morally uncomely—of the unclean—he says, with St. Paul: “Let it not be once named among you.” Verse that touches upon what is vicious, he holds to be not poetry, but the prostitution of poetry. To him all art, all poetry, are but thoughts in the brain of God; and God’s thoughts can never be anything but beautiful:—

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

The hand that rounded Peter's dome,
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,
Wrought in a sad sincerity ;
Himself from God he could not free ;
He builded better than he knew ;
The conscious stone to beauty grew.

These lines are from "The Problem," a poem in connection with which a very graceful compliment has been paid in this country to Emerson, and, through Emerson, to the literature of America, inasmuch as a passage from it has been printed upon boards which are displayed in various parts of Westminster Abbey. "The Problem," like all Emerson's work, whether in prose or poetry, is intensely suggestive ; but I quote it here, not so much because of its suggestiveness, as because it demonstrates that Emerson's theory of Art is identical with his theory of Poetry.

He builded better than he knew.

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

Here, in a single line, is what Emerson held to be the secret of all that is beautiful in his work. Let but the thought which possesses the poet be sublime, and for the moment he shall rise, Emerson believes, into the region of pure inspiration, and become, not an irresponsible thinker, but the mouthpiece of God's thought.

IV

Writing of Emerson's faultier work, his friend, Mr. E. C. Stedman, says: "Not seldom a lyrical phrase is more taking for its halt, helped out, like the poet's own speech, by the half-stammer and pause that was wont to precede the rarest or weightiest word of all." This is to an extent true, but one cannot help suspecting that many of Emerson's crudities are the result of a certain wilfulness. He had something of

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Wordsworth's lordly contempt for the mere rhyme-maker, and more than Wordsworth's scorn for the man who cannot forget the business of bookmaking even in his secret communings with Nature :—

Canst thou copy in verse one chime
Of the wood-bell's peal and cry,
Write in a book the morning's prime,
Or match with words that tender sky?

Remembering how keen was Emerson's love of Nature, one wonders, sometimes, that he does not quote Wordsworth more. He quotes "bravely"—to use one of his favourite words—and does not altogether neglect his contemporaries for the classics; but for every instance where Wordsworth's testimony is briefly cited, there are at least three where Napoleon, Plato, and Plutarch are quoted at length. Yet he knew Wordsworth personally, and in the first chapter of *English Traits*, he describes his visit to

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET
that poet at Rydal Mount. With Wordsworth, too, he is keenly in sympathy, for, apart from the worship of the great Mother, which is common to both, the poems of the one are as passionless as those of the other. Like Wordsworth, it is Nature to whom Emerson turns for consolation in all his woes :—

I am a willow of the wilderness,
Loving the wind that bent me. All my hurts
My garden spade can heal. A woodland walk
A quest of river-grapes, a mocking thrush,
A wild rose, a rock-loving columbine,
Salve my worst wounds.

In “Each and All” we have something that reminds us of the Wordsworthian form, as well as of the Wordsworthian spirit.

Over me soared the Eternal Sky
Full of light and of deity,

might be a couplet from “The Excursion.” Very Wordsworthian, too, is the following

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

passage, which is also from "Each and All":—

I thought the sparrow's note from heaven,
Singing at dawn on the alder bough ;
I brought him home, in his nest, at even ;
He sings the song, but it cheers not now,
For I did not bring home the river and sky ;—
He sang to my ear—they sang to my eye.
The delicate shells lay on the shore ;
The bubbles of the latest wave
Fresh pearls to their enamel gave ;
And the bellowing of the savage sea
Greeted their safe escape to me.
I wiped away the weeds and foam,
I fetched my sea-born treasures home ;
But the poor, unsightly, noisome things
Had left their beauty on the shore,
With the sun and the sand and the wild uproar.

The last line is fine. An ordinary versifier might cast about in his mind for an hour, and then not hit upon a combination of words so simple and yet so successful. The ordinary versifier would, in fact, debate with himself whether the stringing together

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

of three everyday nouns—only one of which is weighted with an adjective—would not result in a line which is bald rather than beautiful.

In nothing is the touch of the master-craftsman more manifest than in what I may call economy of effort. The richer a writer's command of language, the more likely is it that when he wishes to produce a great result, his words will be simple and few. The symbol of his thought may be humble or homely—and Emerson, like Plato his spiritual master, could put homely objects to high imaginative use—but the words once spoken shall seem true for all time. "Aristotle, or Bacon, or Kant," he says, "propound some maxim which is the keynote of philosophy thenceforward. But I am more interested to know that when at last they have hurled out their grand word, it is only some familiar experience of every man in the

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

street. If it be not, it will never be heard of again."

V

In "The Snow Storm," Emerson shows us not only how keen is his observation, but how fine is his gift of imagery. Here is his picture of "the frolic architecture of the snow" :

Come, see the north-wind's masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Curves his white bastions with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths!

"Woodnotes" has many beautiful passages, but is chiefly interesting for the picture it gives us of Emerson himself. The poem is

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET
generally supposed to refer to Emerson's
friend Thoreau, but there is authority for
stating that it is not so.

Knowledge this man prizes best
Seems fantastic to the rest :
Pondering shadows, colours, clouds,
Grass buds and caterpillar-shrouds,
Boughs on which the wild bees settle,
Tints that spot the violet's petal,
Why Nature loves the number five,
And why the star form she repeats ;
Lover of all things alive,
Wonderer at all he meets,
Wonderer chiefly at himself,
Who can tell him what he is ?
Or how meet in human elf
Coming and past eternities.

* * * * *

It seemed as if the breezes brought him,
It seemed as if the sparrows taught him ;
As if by secret sight he knew
Where in far fields the orchis grew.

There are many equally interesting pas-
sages, but what Matthew Arnold once said

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

of Emerson's poems generally—that they have no “evolution”—is particularly true of “Woodnotes.”

À propos of Arnold's criticism, it is a little curious that he should have used the word in question, for though there may be no “evolution” in Emerson's poems, there is in one of them, as Dr. Holmes has pointed out, a reference to evolution which—remembering that the passage in question was printed ten years before the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, twenty years before *The Descent of Man*—is not without interest :—

And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form.

In the poem “Bacchus” there is also a curious passage :—

I, drinking this,
Shall hear far Chaos talk with me ;
Kings unborn shall walk with me ;

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

And the poor grass shall plot and plan
What it will do when it is man.

The poem of "The Humble-Bee" is a sylvan idyll, full of the joyousness of June sunshine and the perfume of flowering clover :—

Burly, dozing humble-bee,
Where thou art is clime for me.
Let them sail for Porto Rique,
Far-off heats through seas to seek ;
I will follow thee alone,
Thou animated torrid zone !
Zigzag steerer, desert cheerer,
Let me chase thy waving lines ;
Keep me nearer, me thy hearer,
Singing over shrubs and vines.

Insect lover of the sun,
Joy of thy dominion !
Sailor of the atmosphere ;
Swimmer through the waves of air ;
Voyager of light and noon ;
Epicurean of June ;
Wait, I prithee, till I come
Within earshot of thy hum—
All without is martyrdom.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

As one reads does not one seem to hear,
blundering across the printed page, the buzz
of this "rover of the underwoods," who

The green silence dost displace
With thy mellow, breezy bass ?

Here is the poet's description of the
haunts of his "yellow-breeched philoso-
pher" :—

Aught unsavoury or unclean
Hath my insect never seen ;
But violets and bilberry bells,
Maple-sap and daffodils,
Grass with green flag half-mast high,
Succory to match the sky.

Of love poems Emerson wrote few, and
of these few, not one is memorable. It is
the cold light of the intellect which shines
throughout his work, never the consuming
flame of passion. He is a star in our
heaven, not a pulsing presence in our home.
Only once does he throw off his mantle of

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET
aloofness, and step down among us as if to
crave human companionship, human help.
His "Threnody" on the death of his eldest
son—the child who

Wandered backward, as in scorn,
To wait an æon to be born,

is the one intimate note in all his work.
Through it we seem to hear ringing the
lament of David of old, "O my son
Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would
God I had died for thee, O Absalom my
son, my son!"

And whither now, my truant wise and sweet,
O whither tend thy feet?
I had the right, few days ago,
Thy steps to watch, thy place to know;
How have I forfeited the right?
Hast thou forgot me in a new delight?

* * * * *

The eager fate which carried thee
Took the largest part of me:

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

For this losing is true dying ;
This is lordly man's down-lying,
This his slow but sure reclining,
Star by star his world resigning.

Yet, even in this, the greatest sorrow of Emerson's life, his calm faith in the deathlessness of what is divine never wavers :

What is excellent,
As God lives, is permanent ;
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain,
Heart's love will meet thee again.

VI

Emerson's theological views did not run readily into moulds. He has been claimed as of their faith by the representatives of half a dozen different beliefs, and has been repudiated by as many. There are those who maintain that his ultimate position was in accordance with orthodox Christianity ;

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

there are those who denounce him as a dangerous heretic and underminer of faith—the particular heresy most often laid to his charge being pantheism. To pantheism—that sublimest of conceptions outside revealed religion—such self-reliant intellects as Emerson's are apt to tend; and by pantheism his writings are undoubtedly tinged. But his was not the pantheism of which Heine spoke when he said that its "last word is atheism." Emerson does not lose God in Nature. To him, as to Goethe, Nature is the living and visible garment of God. "He has an absolute confidence in God," says Theodore Parker. "He has been foolishly accused of pantheism, which sinks God in Nature; but no man is farther from it. He never sinks God in man; he does not stop with the law, in matter or morals, but goes to the Law-giver, yet probably it would not be so easy for him

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

to give his definition of God, as it would for most graduates at Andover or Cambridge. . . . In God his trust is complete ; with the severest scrutiny he joins the highest reverence."

"Unlovely, nay, frightful," says Emerson himself, "is the solitude of the soul which is without God in the world. To wander all day in the sunlight among the tribes of animals, unrelated to anything better ; to behold the horse, cow, and bird, and to foresee an equal and speedy end to him and them—no ; the bird, as it hurried by with its bold and perfect flight, would disclaim his sympathy and declare him an outcast. To see men pursuing in faith their varied actions, warm-hearted, providing for their children, loving their friends, performing their promises—what are they to this chill, houseless, fatherless Cain, the man who hears only the sound of his own foot-

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

steps in God's resplendent creation? To him it is no creation; to him these fair creatures are hapless spectres; he knows not what to make of it; to him heaven and earth have lost their beauty. How gloomy is the day, and upon yonder shining pond, what melancholy light! I cannot keep the sun in heaven, if you take away the purpose that animates him. The ball, indeed, is there; but his power to cheer, to illuminate the heart, as well as the atmosphere, is gone for ever. It is a lamp-wick for meanest uses. The words *great, venerable*, have lost their meaning; every thought loses all its depth, and has become mere surface. . . . Nature is too thin a screen; the glory of the One breaks in everywhere."

This passage is in itself sufficient to show how unwavering was Emerson's belief in a personal God. But I cannot agree, much as one may wish to do so, with those who

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

assert that he went so much further than this, as ultimately to accept Christianity. In a conversation with Mr. Alcott he is reported to have said, "My ancestry is made up of ministers. In my family the Bible is seen oftener than any other book in the hands of my wife and daughter. I think those facts tell my story. If you wish to call me a Christian theist, you have my authority to do so, and you must not leave out the word Christian, for to leave out that, is to leave out everything."

Even if these words were actually spoken by Emerson (they are taken from the "Monday Lectures" of Dr. Joseph Cook, of Boston), I fail to see that they justify the contention which has been founded upon them. He was a theist who accepted Christianity in a spiritual, not in a historical sense. The words he used to Mr. Alcott, so far from proving that he had changed his mind

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

upon religious questions, seem to me less definitely Christian than those he used earlier in life :—

“Christianity is rightly dear,” he wrote, “to the best of mankind ; yet was there never a young philosopher whose breeding had fallen into the Christian Church, by whom that brave text of Paul’s was not specially prized : ‘ *Then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* ’ ”

I venture to think that Dr. Holmes has left us a better testimony to Emerson’s Christianity than that of Dr. Cook : “If he did not worship ‘the man Christ Jesus’ as the Churches of Christendom have done, he followed His footsteps so nearly, that our good Methodist, Father Taylor, spoke of him as more like Christ than any man he had known.”

Just as there are many who call Christ “Lord, Lord,” in whose heart Christ has no

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

place, so there are some whose Lord He is, though they know it not.

VII

Comparing Emerson with Holmes, in *Literature*, September 29th, 1900, Mr. J. Y. W. Macalister says that "Emerson never wrote a line of poetry in his life." If Mr. Macalister had said that Emerson has left no perfect poem behind him, the statement might pass unchallenged, though Matthew Arnold was of a different opinion in regard to "Concord Fight," in which are to be found the two famous lines :

Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.

Nor should I have differed from Mr. Macalister had he quoted that letter of Milton's to Master Samuel Hartlib (the letter by which Matthew Arnold set such store),

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET
and had pointed out that Milton's first requirements in regard to poetry—that it should be “simple, sensuous, and passionate”—are fulfilled by none of Emerson's work. Simple he certainly is not. It would be difficult to instance a more subtle and less simple poem than the following four verses entitled “Brahma,” which Mr. Andrew Lang has parodied so inimitably that it is difficult to dissociate poem from parody :—

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near ;
Shadow and sunlight are the same ;
The vanished gods to me appear ;
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out ;
When me they fly, I am the wings ;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven ;
But thou, meek lover of the good !
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

This one poem would suffice, in the judgment of most readers, to disqualify Emerson upon the score of "simplicity."

To make out a case against him on the grounds that he is neither "sensuous" nor "passionate" were easier still. He sings, like Wordsworth, of the joy of elevated thoughts ; he hymns the serene splendours of the intellect and of the spirit ; but of the rapturous, Hellenic adoration of beauty for its own sake, he has scarcely a word to say. The ravishing, sense-enthraling music which the quivering fingers of Keats compelled from the soul of his violin, was like a strain from fairyland when compared with the half savage accompaniment that Emerson beat from his rudely-fashioned harp of iron. He

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

is, indeed, less a poet than a skald, an inspired rune-maker. Here, for instance, are some lines which one could well believe had first been chanted in some shield-hung hall where the firelight flashed fitful and red upon mail-clad Vikings :—

Behold the Sea,
The opaline, the plentiful and strong,
Yet beautiful as is the rose in June,
Fresh as the trickling rainbow of July ;
Sea full of food, the nourisher of kinds,
Purger of earth, and medicine of men,
Creating a sweet climate by my breath,
Washing out harms and griefs from memory,
And, in my mathematic ebb and flow,
Giving a hint of that which changes not.

* * * * *

I with my hammer pounding evermore
The rocky coast, smite Andes into dust,
Strewing my bed, and, in another age,
Rebuild a continent of better men.

* * * * *

I make your sculptured architecture vain,
Vain beside mine. I drive my wedges home,
And carve the coastwise mountain into caves.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

Whatever this may be, it is at least not minor verse. As evidence that Emerson could, on occasion, strike a minor key, and strike it gracefully, I may quote the conclusion of his "Dirge" in memory of his brothers :—

Hearken to yon pine-warbler
Singing aloft in the tree !
Hearest thou, O traveller,
What he singeth to me ?

Not unless God made sharp thine ear
With sorrow such as mine,
Out of that delicate lay could'st thou
Its heavy tale divine.

"Go, lonely man," it saith ;
"They loved thee from their birth ;
Their hands were pure, and pure their faith,—
There are no such hearts on earth.

"You cannot unlock your heart,
The key is gone with them ;
The silent organ loudest chants
The master's requiem."

A POET WHO WAS NOT A POET

The last two lines are fine. Reading them, one wonders, more than ever, at the opinion expressed by Mr. Macalister when he declared that "Emerson never wrote a line of poetry in his life." To me it seems singularly unfelicitous. Had Mr. Macalister said that it was only single lines of poetry which Emerson ever wrote, one would not have protested, for, as I have already pointed out, Emerson's thinking was like the striking together of tinderless flints—it could call forth the fire of poetry only in sparks.

Emerson has written and published verse which can in no sense of the word be called poetry. He has written and published verse which it were well for his own sake to forget. But, on the other hand, he has done work which the lover of poetry will be reluctant to see perish—work which will be remembered when that which is faulty and unworthy is forgotten.

WISE MEN AND A FOOL

“I hung my verses in the wind ;
Time and tide their faults may find ;
All were winnowed through and through,
Five lines lasted sound and true.”

He was never more than a note-book draughtsman. His etchings and jottings are admirable beyond all words of praise, but the painting of a finished picture was beyond him. Poetry, that daughter of the gods, sat with him, walked with him, worked with him. It was only when he sought to transfer her living image to canvas that she eluded him and was gone. Yet even as she fled, she not seldom mocked him by touching brush and easel with her sacred fire.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

SORROW AND SONG.

A Companion Volume to "Wise Men and a Fool."

FIFTH EDITION. *Crown 8vo, buckram, 3s. 6d.*

Athenæum (four column review, commencing on first page):—
"These essays are eloquently and often poetically written, and the criticism is, we think, mainly just."

"A tribute (the paper on Marston) of singular beauty and tenderness, but at the same time full of critical insight."

Times:—"By a writer of much insight and originality."

Morning Post:—"Remarkable papers. Both as a psychologist and critic he is thoroughly conscientious and discriminative. Gracefully written, his study of Heine charms by its keen yet sympathetic appreciation of a complex genius, while the article on Robertson of Brighton and others in the volume are no less characterised by originality and serious thought."

Mr. S. R. Crockett in "Bookman":—"The reader fares sumptuously during the hour or two he may spend with Mr. Kernahan. The essays are both truly thought and well written. . . . Mr. Kernahan shows himself a genuine thinker, a sympathetic critic, a patient analyst, and above all a man of wholesome clean soul, so far as he has enshrined it in the pages of this modestly dignified little book."

Mr. Norman Gale in "Literary World":—"The phrasing is often finely managed, the language employed is illuminative without being intricate, the estimate is that of a man knowing nothing of the tricks of bias. . . . Then comes a beautiful sentence . . ."

Review of Reviews:—"The most important volume of literary criticism the month has brought us."

St. James's Gazette:—"It would seem as if the author of 'A Dead Man's Diary' and 'A Book of Strange Sins' had found for the weird moods and impulses, the sighs and sobs from a hidden world, which he has before controlled in the realm of fiction, a local habitation and a name in the personalities of the actual mortals he delineates in these luminous sketches."

Daily Chronicle:—" . . . Where he has to make a critical point, it is characterised by perfect and winning simplicity. His utterance has dignity and vigour. . . . The fine seriousness which distinguishes the substance of these papers from that of the work of many of our younger critics. . . . Mr. Kernahan has passed a test which has proved too severe for several distinguished literary scribes. The papers will be read with interest and pleasure by those who are drawn to the study either of literature or life."

Mr. Eden Phillpotts in "Black and White":—"These scholarly papers. His essay on Heine shows a wonderfully accurate estimate of that fantastic genius, while his 'Note on Rossetti' shows critical insight of a high order."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

A Book of Strange Sins.

THIRTIETH THOUSAND.

Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d.

The Academy :—"Such books are among the healthiest symptoms not only of modern literature, but of modern thought. They are on the crest of the wave, whether we regard them from the artistic or the ethical standpoint. . . . His book is a fine one, and we think it will live."

The Daily Chronicle :—"A writer possessing not only a fine literary gift, and a marvellous power of intense emotional realisation, but a fresh, strange, and fascinating imaginative outlook. We know of nothing published in recent years which, in lurid impressiveness and relentless veracity of rendering, is to be compared with the realisation of the fatally dominant alcoholic craving in the study entitled 'A Literary Gent.'"

The Sketch :—"The daring freshness of his thought, his great ability in expressing it, his contempt for common tradition, the sincerity which exudes from every page of his work, captivate the reader. I do not know any piece of prose which opens up so many great questions in so few lines as the story, 'A Lost Soul,' nor one which is more forcibly realistic and impressive than 'The Apples of Sin.'"

Punch :—"Rises are freely predicted in Egertons and Kernahans" (Mr. Punch on "The Literary Stock Exchange").

Mr. I. Zangwill, writing on the books of the year in the *Pall Mall Magazine* :—"Mr. Kernahan shares with Olive Schreiner a capacity for sustained silence and a genius for poetical and spiritual allegory. . . . The last half-dozen pages of 'A Literary Gent' are of unsurpassable strength and originality."

Pall Mall Gazette :—"If one of the wholesome offices of tragic literature be to purify the soul by terror, Mr. Kernahan has done something towards the purification of the world."

World (New York) :—"The strongest stories that have been written in many a long day. No one who is guilty of sin can read these stories without realising their truth. They are like Conscience sitting alone with him staring him steadily, sternly in the face. . . . This spiritual rhapsody ('The Lonely God') shows you one facet of this brilliant young Irishman's genius. Turn to the 'Literary Gent,' and you will see another utterly different—fearful, almost cruel."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH THOUSAND.

GOD AND THE ANT.

Bound in cloth, 2s. ; or in paper, 1s.

Vanity Fair :—“ He has risen to imaginative heights whither few living authors can follow him. Nor can I recall any finer picture in religious fiction than that which he has painted of the end of the world, and the coming of unnumbered souls to cry for vengeance before the throne of God.”

The Literary World :—“ It may be said to speak as closely to the religious consciousness of the nineteenth century as Bunyan’s immortal work did to that of the seventeenth.”

Illustrated London News :—“ Could only have come to a man possessed of an intensely imaginative brain, and it could only have been written down by one who has, as Mr. Zangwill once said of him, ‘ a genius for poetical and spiritual allegory.’ ”

Ian Maclaren in “The Bookman” :—“ He creates a daring situation—the arraignment of God by the victims on the other side of the grave—and uses it with strength and reverence. With earnestness also, and conviction. His answer is that which commends itself to many as the only light on the darkness. . . . This is a book to read.”

Mrs. Katherine Tynan-Hinkson in “Irish Daily Independent” :—“ Mr. Coulson Kernahan is a young Irish writer whose pen is concerned with great themes. . . . ‘ God and the Ant ’ is a very noble and striking allegory of the arraignment of God by man, and the Divine answer. . . . He has undertaken his Apologia, tremendous though it be, in a most reverent spirit that will commend it even to the faithful.”

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH THOUSAND.

The Child, the Wise Man, and the Devil.

Bound in cloth, 2s. ; or in paper, 1s.

The Saturday Review :—“There is a touch of genius, perhaps even more than a touch, about this brilliant and original booklet.”

The Illustrated London News :—“All must recognise the boundless charity, the literary power, and the intense sincerity of one of the most interesting works of the year.”

The Bookman :—“In this little book he has given us work which deserves to live. . . . No one can read these pages without emotion.”

The Daily Mail :—“Resembling in many respects his ‘God and the Ant,’ this new book of Mr. Kernahan’s is an even finer example of imaginative brilliancy, poetic eloquence, and fervent spiritual appeal. . . . There can be no doubt that his little book must make a very deep and abiding impression upon the hearts and minds of all who read it.”

The Echo :—“Let us acknowledge with gratitude the fine moral enthusiasm, the lofty spiritual fervour, and the chivalrous charity of this most poetic of prosemen. The writer is manly, vigorous, and sincere. . . . There will be few readers of this work, however thoroughly they may dissent from the author’s contentions, who will not allow with enthusiasm the moral earnestness, the poetic imagination, and the literary charm of Mr. Kernahan’s stern muse.”

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

A Dead Man's Diary.

FORTIETH THOUSAND.

Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d.

Mr. J. M. Barrie in "The British Weekly" :—"The vigour of this book is great, and the anonymous author has an uncommon gift of intensity. On many readers, it may be guessed, the book will have a mesmeric effect."

Mr. Barry Pain in "The Speaker" :—"We find beautiful and appreciative writing in these pages."

Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton in Syndicate Article on "Four Modern Men" :—"A book which must certainly be accounted one of the pronounced literary successes of the time. It has gone through various editions in America, as well as in England, and I think no one who has read it could ever quite escape from its haunting spell. It contains passages of poetic prose which no lover of the beautiful will overlook, and its appeal to the consciences of men is even more strenuous. I am not surprised to hear that the first English edition of 2,000 copies was exhausted a few days after publication."

Globe :—"Has achieved a brilliant success."

Daily Telegraph :—"Great reverence and much literary power."

Mr. I. Zangwill in "Ariel" :—"There can be no doubt of the force and freshness of most of the book, of the fine literary quality of some of the chapters, and of the interest of the whole. . . . There is, too, many a burst of beautiful English."

Daily Chronicle :—"Very remarkable and beautiful."

Review of Reviews :—"One of the most successful volumes of the last two years. Intensely interesting and exceedingly well written."

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Captain Shannon,

Fourth Edition.

DAILY CHRONICLE:

“No man, possibly, but Dr. Conan Doyle could have treated such an admirable first idea as well as Mr. Kernahan has treated it. We had thought it almost impossible to add anything novel or noteworthy at this day to detective fiction. Mr. Kernahan undecives us, and undecives us very quickly. To discern a story which is waiting to be written, to construct it cleverly, to add a large measure of imaginative garnish, to tell it in vigorous and individual English—to do these things is to write a popular success. ‘Captain Shannon’ has enjoyed such a success in the pages of *The Windsor Magazine*. We believe that a larger public which never reads serial stories will hasten to make the acquaintance of the terrible Captain. As an effort in the fiction of pure sensation it is a veritable *tour de force*. . . . The notion of concealing the prince of monsters upon one of the dynamite hulks off Canvey Island was a positive inspiration. The loneliness, the weird and watery surroundings, of this grim haven are described by Mr. Kernahan with an art rarely seen in detective fiction. There is real power here, and with power the ability to fascinate by suggestion, a form of fascination in which Poe excelled. Nothing more holding or engrossing than the scene in which the Captain and his enemy are face to face upon a hulk containing enough dynamite to blow up a city, has been read by us for a long time. It is a worthy ‘third act’ to a book abounding from the first in the dramatic and the unexpected.”

THE TIMES:

“He is perhaps the hundredth individual who in recent fiction has devoted himself to amateur detection, and he is certainly ‘one in a hundred’ as regards his exceptional success. . . . This simple sample must suffice for extract, but we may assure the reader that there are plenty more where it came from. ‘Captain Shannon’ is full of dramatic interest.”

DAILY NEWS:

“If we are to have detective stories, we cannot have a better one than ‘Captain Shannon.’”

TRUTH:

“This extremely thrilling detective story.”

ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS:

“‘Captain Shannon’ is an enthralling story which it is not possible to lay down until you have finished it.”

ACADEMY:

“ He writes admirably, and has a swinging, narrative style.”

MR. R. Le GALLIENNE in “The Idler”:

“ This capital detective story, which I have just eagerly devoured, is certainly one of the most ingenious and exciting which the fashion for such stories has created.”

NATIONAL OBSERVER:

“ Very thrilling reading. . . . Of a high order of literary merit.”

THE CRITIC (New York):

“ The story is excellent from the first page to the last, not the least of its merits being that it reminds us neither of Dr. Doyle nor of Gaboriau.”

THE ECHO (Front-page Article on “The Book of the Week”:

“ The reader will revel in the exciting incidents and original *motif* of the story ; he will delight in some finely observed character studies, and he will be charmed by a pervading feeling for style in the writing, that gives this newest detective romance an easy pre-eminence over all recent tales of its kind. ‘ Captain Shannon ’ should enjoy the heartiest of welcomes. It can be devoured as sensational fiction ; it can be enjoyed as good literature.”

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Scoundrels & Co.

A Companion Volume to “Captain Shannon.”

Crown 8vo, cloth, Illustrated by Stanley Wood, 3s. 6d.

Some idea of the character of Mr. Kernahan's new Novel “ Scoundrels & Co.” can be gathered by the following chapter headings :—

I see a Strange Sight in the Cabin of the *Sea Swallow*—I Fight for My Life—I Squirm under the Cold Kiss that a Revolver's Ugly Lips press to my Forehead—How I caused a Horse to Run Away, and then Ran Away myself—I become a Pavement Artist—A Bit of “ Bounce ” that sent Six Policemen off on a False Scent—The Burglar, Mr. Paul, and some “ Bobbies ”—Hell, with the Fire Out—A “ Scrimmage ” in which I Play the Part of Football—Fists and Finger-nails and Hob-nail Boots—The Prince of Wales at the Ishmael Club—The Man who was “ Blackballed ”—How the Police Discovered a Harem in the Heart of London—“ Fire ! ”—Scoundrels and Company.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

A Dead Man's Diary.

FORTIETH THOUSAND.

Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d.

Mr. J. M. Barrie in "The British Weekly" :—"The vigour of this book is great, and the anonymous author has an uncommon gift of intensity. On many readers, it may be guessed, the book will have a mesmeric effect."

Mr. Barry Pain in "The Speaker" :—"We find beautiful and appreciative writing in these pages."

Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton in Syndicate Article on "Four Modern Men" :—"A book which must certainly be accounted one of the pronounced literary successes of the time. It has gone through various editions in America, as well as in England, and I think no one who has read it could ever quite escape from its haunting spell. It contains passages of poetic prose which no lover of the beautiful will overlook, and its appeal to the consciences of men is even more strenuous. I am not surprised to hear that the first English edition of 2,000 copies was exhausted a few days after publication."

Lyra Elegantarium.

EDITED BY

FREDERICK LOCKER-LAMPSON,

ASSISTED BY

COULSON KERNAHAN.

Mr. A. C. Swinburne in his last volume, "Studies in Prose and Poetry" :—"There is no better or completer anthology in the language. I doubt, indeed, if there be any so good or so complete. No objection or suggestion which can reasonably be offered can in any way diminish our obligation, either to the original editor, or to his evidently able assistant. Mr. Kernahan."

Mr. Edmund Gosse in "The Illustrated London News" :—"Where so many skilful hands have tried to produce rival anthologies, these two, each in its own class, preserve their unquestionable superiority. Mr. Locker-Lampson has been helped in this republication by Mr. Coulson Kernahan, who has entered into the elegant spirit of the editor, and has continued his labours with taste and judgment."

