

The life & letters of James Gates Percival. by Julius H. Ward. (1)
Boston Ticknor & Fields. 1866. 12mo. pp. XIV 583.

This is an interesting & in many respects instructive book. Mr Ward has done his work, as is fitting, in a loving spirit, & if he overestimates both what Percival was & what he did, he enables us to form our own judgment by letting him do far as possible speak for himself. The book gives a rather curious picture of what the life of a man of letters is likely to be in a country not yet ripe for literary production, especially if ~~he~~ he be not endowed with ^{the} those higher qualities which command respect, & can wait for that ^{best} of all rewards which comes slowly, in a generation where everybody can write verses & other certain modes of thought & ^{effluvia} have become so tyrannous that it is as hard to distinguish between the productions of one minor poet & another as beds among those of so many Minnesingers or Troubadours, there is a demand for only two things, - for what chimes with the moment's whim of popular sentiment & is forgotten when that has changed, or for ^{what} that which is resented as an anachronism because it gladdens the eternal thirst of our nature for ^{the} ideal waters that gimmer before us & still before us, in ever-renewing mirage. Percival met neither of these conditions. With a nature singularly unpliant, & unsympathetic, & self-absorbed, he was incapable of receiving into his own mind the ordinary emotions of men & giving them back in music, & with a lofty conception of the object & purpose of poetry, he had neither the resolution nor the power which might have enabled him to realize it. He offers as striking an example as we know of the poetic temperament unbelabored with those less obvious qualities which make the poetic faculty. His verse carries every inch of language that diction & sentiment can command, but the craft is barely & we miss that deep-grasping keel of reason which alone can steady & give direction. His mind drifts, it does not answer the helm, & in his longer poems, like "Prometheus", half the voyage is spent in ^{trying to} maddening up for a leeway which becomes at last irretrievable. If he had a port in view when he set out, he seems soon to give up all hope of ever reaching it, & whenever we open the book we find him running for nowhere in particular, as the breeze happens to ^{lead} blow, or the moment calls of windy working. The truth is that Percival was led to the writing of verse by ^{a sentimental} ~~an~~ desire of the mind, & not by that unerring instinct of all the faculties which is a self-forgetting passion of the entire man. Too ⁱⁿ suitable to possess his subject fully as a man of more talent may often do, he is not possessed by it as the man of genius is, & seems helplessly ^{devoting} ~~wasting~~ the greater part of the time to make out what, in the name of Common or un-common sense, ^{he is often} ~~with~~ all the stork properties of verse whirling & dancing about his ears puffed out with an empty show of life, the reader of much of his blank verse feels as if a mob of well-dressed

Christians were noting about him in all the unmillling ecstasy of a Thundersquall.

Perceval, living from 1795 to 1866, ^{arrived at} came to manhood just as the last

was with England had come to an end. Poor, shy, & proud, there is nothing in his earlier ^{years} that might not be paralleled in the lives of hundreds of sensitive boys who gradually get the reins shaken out of them in the rough school of ^{life} the world. The length of the schooling needful in his case is what makes it peculiar. Not till after he was fifty, if even then, did he learn that the world never takes a man at his own valuation & never pays money for what it does not want, or thinks it wants. It did not want his poetry simply because it was not, & is not, & by no conceivable power of argument can be made, interesting, - the first duty of every artistic product. Perceval who would have thought his neighbors mad if they had insisted on his buying twenty thousand ^{refrigerators} ~~refrigerators~~ merely because they had been at the trouble of making them & found it convenient to turn them into cash, could never forgive the world for this business view of the matter. He went on doggedly making refrigerators of every possible pattern, & comforted himself with the thought of an ^{infinite} posterity which should have learned that the purpose of poetry is to cool & ^{not} ~~inspire~~ ^{inspire} of kindle. His "Mind", which is on the whole perhaps the best of his writings, rises in coldness with his brother doctor, Alameda, whose "Pleasures of Imagination" are something quite other than that in reality. If there be here & there an emblance of pale fire, it is but the reflection of moonshine upon ice. Alameda is respectable because he really had something new to say in spite of his pompous, monitory, way of saying it, but when Perceval says it over again it is a little too much. In his more ambitious pieces, - & it is curious how literally the word "pieces" applies to all he did, - he devotes himself mainly to telling us what poetry ought to be, as if mankind were not always more than satisfied with any one who fulfills the true office of poet by showing them what it is, with the least possible fuss. Perceval was a professor of poetry rather than a poet, & we are not surprised at the number of lectures he reads us when we learn that in early life he was an excellent demonstrator of anatomy whose subject must be had before his interest in it begins. His interest in poetry was always more or less scientific. He was forever trying experiments in metres & form, especially the latter. And these were especially unhappy, because it is plain that he had no musical ear, or at best a very imperfect one. His attempts at classical metres are simply unrecusable. He continues to make even the Sapphic so, which when we read it in Latin moon-faith to our modern accentuation. Let any one who wishes to feel the difference between Sat & no Sat compare Perceval's specimens with those in the same kind of Coleridge who had the finest metrical sense since Milton. We take this very experimenting to be a sufficient proof that Perceval's faculty, such as it was, & we do not rate it highly, was artificial & not innate. The true poet is much rather experimented upon by life & nature, by joy & sorrow, by beauty & defect, till it be found out whether he has any hidden music in the him that can sing them into an accord with the eternal harmony which we call God.

wrote a memorable verse. We should not have thought this of any consequence
now, for we need not try to read him, ^{but} not Mr Ward with amusing gaiety all
along affirms that he was a great poet. There was scarce timber enough in him for
the making of a Tidge or a Stage-door, both of whom he somewhat resembles.

Perival came to maturity at an unfortunate time for a
man so liable to self-delusion. Leaving College with so imperfect a classical training
(in spite of the numerous "testimonials" added by Mr Ward) that he was capable of playing
the accent on the second syllable of Pericles, he seems never to have systematically trained
even such faculty as was in him, but to have gone on to the end mistaking the stability
of brain for ^{wisdom} ~~accuracy~~ of thought. The consequence, a prolonged immaturity which makes
his latest volume published in 1843 as crude & as plainly wanting in enduring quality
as the first number of his "Clio". The same old complaints of neglected genius - as if
Genius could ever be neglected so long as it has the pecuniary consolation of its own ^{own} ~~own~~
society, - the same wild sentiment, the same feeling about for topics of verse in which
he may possibly find that ^{anxious} ~~anxious~~ ^{or} ~~or~~ ^{with} ~~with~~ ^{the} ~~the true poet cannot flee from in himself.
Then tedious wailings about heavenly powers suffocating in the heavy atmosphere of an uncogniz-
ing world, & Perival is proper of them, are simply an advertisement to show how ears
of some innate disability in the man who utters them. Heavenly powers hear very well
how to take care of themselves. The "poor World", meaning thereby that small fraction of society
which has any personal knowledge of an author or his affairs, has had great wrong done it
in such matters. It is not, & never was, the power of a man that it neglects, it looks not of
it would, but his wailings, of which & especially the publication of them, of which it
grows weary. It can never supply any man with what is wanting in himself, & the attempt
to do it only makes bad worse. If a man can only find the proof of his own genius in
public appreciation, still worse, if his vanity console itself with seeking that taking it as
an evidence of rare qualities in himself that his fellow-mortals are unable to see them,
it is all up with him. The "World" resolutely refused to find Wordsworth interesting, & I
refuse still on good grounds, but the genius that was in him bore up unflinchingly,
would take no denial, got its claim admitted on all hands, & impregnated at last the
literature of an entire generation, though habitans in sicco, if ever genius did. But
Perival seems to have satisfied himself with a syllogism something like this; men
of genius are neglected: the more neglected, the more genius: I am altogether neglected, & ^{therefore}
wholly made up of that priceless material. The truth was that he suffered ^{rather} from over-
appreciation, & "when", says a nameless old Frenchman, "I see a man go up like
a rocket, I expect before long to see the stick come down." The times were singularly
propitious to mediocrity. It had been resolved unanimously that we must & would
have a national literature. England, France, Spain, Italy, ^{each} already had their one, Ger-
many was getting one made as fast as possible, & Ireland ^{she} ~~was~~ ^{one} had one far
surpassing them all. To be respectable, we must have one also, & that quickly. That we~~

which is the breath of life to all artistic production, that our scholarship, such as it was, was mostly of that theological sort which acts like a prolonged smother upon the brain, that our poetic fathers were John Barlow & Timothy Dwight, was nothing to the purpose, - a literature adapted to the size of the country, was what we must & would hear. Given the number of square miles, the length of the rivers, & the size of the lakes, & you hear the grating of the literature as we are bound to produce instead of the easy, literary-geography for the first time took her rightful place as the truth & most inspiring guide. It glances at the map & would satisfy the most invidious that she led us but for us, & that she be content to the glorious opportunity? Not we indeed! So early as Franklin invented the art of printing & Fulton the steam engine, we would invent ^{no} a great part in time to send the news by the right packet to England & teach her that we were by no means inferior in arts as well as arms. Percival was only too ready to be mounted, & he forthwith produced ^{his work} a vessel from a loom capable of turning off a billiard umbrella of number of yards ^{in length} & perfectly adapted to the amplitude of our territory, inasmuch as it was manufactured on the theory of covering the largest surface with the least possible amount of meaning that would hold words together. He was as ready to accept the ^{previous} surprise & as low in affecting his claim thereto as Sir Kay always was to be, & with much the same result. Our critical journals (and America certainly has led the world in a department of letters which of course requires no outfit but the power to read & write gratuitously furnished by our public schools) received him with a shout of welcome. Here came the true deliverer at last, mounted on a steed to which he himself had given the new name of "Pegasus" (for we were to be original in everything), & certainly blessing his own triumph with remarkable vigor of lungs. Solitary enthusiasts, who had long awaited this sublime advent, addressed him in Sonnets which he accepted with a grant, beyond all praise. (To be sure, even Mr. Ward seems to ^{allow} that his sense of humor was hardly equal to his other transcendent endowments.) His path was strewn with laurel, & of the native variety, although superior to that of old world & certainly not precisely like it, versus signed "P.", & as life each other as two peas & as much like poetry as that vegetable is like a peach, were watched for in the corners of the newspapers as an astronomer watches for a new planet. There was, near anything so comically ^{the} since the crowning in the Capitol of Major Francisco Petrona, Grand Sentimentalist in Ordinary at the Court of King Robert of Naples. Unhappily Percival took it all quite seriously. There was no praise too ample for the easy slenderness of his shallows. He believed himself as gigantic as the shadow he cast on these rolling mists of insubstantial adulation, & how long he could never make out why his fine words refused to butter his parsnips for him, to furnish both parsnips & sauce. While the critics were debating precisely how many of the prime qualities of the great poets of his own & preceding generations he combined in his single genius & in what particular respects he surpassed them all, a point about which he himself seems never to have had any doubts, the public, which could read Scott & Byron with avidity & which was beginning even to taste Woodworth, found his verses inexplicably wearisome. They would not think it advisable to subscribe for a collected edition of those works which surely had been too much for them. With whatever delight I sense they may be changed, they have a remarkably keen ^{scent} for tediousness, & will have none of it unless in a tract or sermon where, of course, it is to be expected. Percival never forgave the public, but it was the critics that he never should have forgiven, for of all the snatches that can make their way into the brains through the ears, there is none

(Insult). If that little Dubliner had succeeded in murdering Shakespeare, what a grant might we not look for from the mighty womb of this *fufufu*!

1. Write out the following sentences correctly in Italian, and then translate them into English:—

Si le Fiorentini chi con tanto costanza è per tanto tempi defesero il loro liberta contro gli usurpazioni de' Medici, riuscissero in fine a sottrarvisi l' abiam vedduto. Meritarono il loro sorte? Avremo lo coraggio di dirla? Sì, in parte almeno la meritarano.

Coloro chi in modo piu o meno colpevole è diretto furano autore del rovina del loro patria, ottemero essi, à prezzo almeno di tanti lacrimi è di tanta sangue quell' fine chi s'eran prefissa? Vediamola.

2. Give all the forms of the verb *giudicare*, marking the syllables on which the accent falls.

3. Give all the forms of the verb *porre*.

4. Give the imperative mood of *fiare*.

5. Give the future tense of *ottenere*.

6. Give the forms of the perfect indicative in *are, ere, and ire*.

7. What change takes place to form the Italian perfect where the Latin has *x, nx, and v*? *Piuxi, vixi, crevi.*

8. What does the Latin *pl* become in Italian? Give some examples.

9. Decline the masculine and feminine definite articles.

so disastrous as the permission that you are a great poet. There is surely something
powerful in the construction of the two I make authors which lays them specially open
to the moods of this pest. It tickles pleasantly while it eats away the fibre of will &
incompetence; a man for all honest dealing with himself. Unhappily its insidious
tortillation seems to have been Perival's one great pleasure during life.

He began by saying that the book before us was interesting
& instructive, but we meant that it was so not so much from any positive merits
of its own as by the light which almost every page of it suggests. To those who
have some knowledge of the history of literature or some experience in life, it is,
from beginning to end a history of perhaps mistaking great hours for great powers.
If poetry, in Bacon's noble definition of it, "adapt the shows of things to the desires
of the mind", sentimentalism is equally ^{skillful} in making realities shape themselves
to the cravings of vanity. The theory that the poet is a being above the world & apart
from it is true of him as an observer only who applies to the phenomena about
him the test of a finer & more spiritual sense. That he is a creature himself set
apart from his fellowmen by a mental organization that makes them mutually
unintelligible to each other, is in flat contradiction with the lives of those ^{poets} universally
acknowledged as greatest. Dante, Shakespeare, ^{the} Cervantes, Calderon, Milton, ^{the} ~~other~~
Moliere, ^{what} conceivable sense is it true of them that they wanted the merely
qualities which made them equal to the demands of the world they lived in which
they lived? That a poet should aspire, as Victor Hugo used to be, that he is a reorganizer
of the moral world, & that works cunningly adapted to the popular whim of the times,
form parts of some suspicious system which is to give us a new heaven & a new earth
& a new law of art which are as unchangeable as those of astronomy, can do so
very great harm to any one but the author himself, who will thereby be led astray
from his proper function & from the only path of legitimate & lasting success. But
when the theory is carried a step farther & we are asked to believe, that because
as in Perival's case, that, because a man can write verses, he is exempt from
that measurable logic of life & circumstance to which all other men are subjected
& to which it is ^{well known} good for them that they should be, then it becomes mischievous
& calls for a protest from all those who have at heart the interests of good morals
& healthy literature. It is the theory of idlers & dilettanti, of fiddlers in morals &
dilettantes in prose, which a young man of real power may jolly with ^{some fit}
of mental indigestion, but which when accepted by a mature man & carried along with
him through life is a sure mark of fuddling & of insincere dealing with himself.
Perival is a good example of a class of authors unhappily too numerous in these
latter days. In Europe the natural growth of a world ill at ease with itself & still nervous
with the frightful palpitation of the French revolution, they are but feeble echoes in our
healthier air. Without faith or hope, & deprived of that outward support in the ~~world's~~ ^{world's} ~~substantial~~
possession of wants & authoritative limitations of thought which in ordinary times gives steadiness

to feel & timid intellects, they are turned inward, & forced, like Austere's sword

"To eat into themselves for lack of other things to chew & hack."

Compelled to find ^{within their own} ~~in their own~~ ^{nothing} that stay which had hitherto been supplied by creeds & institutions, they leaned to attribute to their own consciousness the grandeur which belongs of right only to the mind of the human race slowly endeavoring after ~~that~~ equilibrium between its desires & the eternal conditions of them. Hence that exaggeration of the individual & depreciation of the social man which has become the cant of modern literature. Abundance of such phenomena accompanied the rise of what was called Romanticism in Germany & France, reaching to some extent even upon England & consequently America. The smaller poets crested themselves into a kind of giddy into which all were admitted who gave proof of a certain feebleness of character which rendered them inferior to their greater fellowmen. It was a society of ruffles undertaking to teach the new generation how to walk. Meanwhile the object of their generous solicitude, what with clinging to the Past's skirts, & helping itself by very piece of household furniture it could lay hands on, leaved, after many a tumble, to get on its legs & to use them as other generations had done before it. Critical belongs to this new order of birds, weak in ^{the hopes} ^{of} ^{thinking} ^{of} ^{health} ^{species} ^{to} ^{climb} ^{the} ^{peaks} ^{of} ^{Dreamland}. To the vague & misty views, from these ^{into his own vast interior} ^{sublime hummings}, their reports in blank verse & otherwise did ample justice, but failed to excite the appetite of mankind. He spent his life, like those of his class, in proclaiming himself a neglected Columbus, was ready to start on his voyage when the public should supply the means of building his ships. It never seems to have entered his head that the gulf between genius & its new world is never too wide for a stout swimmer: with all sentimentalists he overrode the proof of nature which makes it a part of greatness that it is a simple thing to itself, however ^{much} ^{great} a marvel it may be to other men. He discovered his own genius, as he supposed, - a thing impossible had the genius been real. Donne never wrote a profounder verse than

"Who knows his virtue's name & place, hath none".

Perceval's life was by no means a remarkable one except, perhaps, in the number of chances that seem to have been offered him to have made something of himself if anything were possible to be made. He was never without ^{new} ^{opportunities} ^{presenting} ^{without} friends, or opportunities if he could have availed himself of them. It is pleasant to see Mr. Dickson treating him with that considerate kindness which many a young scholar can remember as shown to Quincey of himself. But nothing could help Perceval - whose nature had been worked into its very composition. He was not a real, but an imaginary man. His early attempt at suicide (as Mr. Ward seems to think it) is typical of him. He is not the first young man who, when crossed in love, has spoken of "loving o'er a lion" - nor will he be the last. But that any one, ^{who} ^{really} ^{meant} ^{to} ^{kill} ^{himself} ^{should} ^{put} ^{himself} ^{irrevocably} ⁱⁿ ^{the} ^{way} ^{of} ^{being} ^{presented}, as Perceval did, is hard to believe. One remarkable gift he seems to have had, which may be called memory of the eye. What he saw, he never forgot & this fitted him for a good geological observer. How great his powers of combination was, which alone could have made him as great a geologist, we cannot determine. But he seems to have shown ^{but little} ⁱⁿ ^{other} ^{directions}. At least it is noticeable that he was happy for the first time when taken away his vague pursuit of the ideal & set to practical work.