

ESSAYS from The Critic

CORNELL
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY



THIS BOOK IS ONE OF
A COLLECTION MADE BY
BENNO LOEWY
1854-1919
AND BEQUEATHED TO
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Cornell University Library
PN 501.C93

Essays from "The Critic"



3 1924 026 926 737

01in



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.

ESSAYS

FROM

“The Critic”

BY

JOHN BURROUGHS

EDMUND C. STEDMAN

WALT WHITMAN

R. H. STODDARD

F. B. SANBORN

E. W. GOSSE

AND OTHERS



BOSTON

JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY

1882

L₇

em

COPYRIGHT, 1881 AND 1882,
BY J. L. & J. B. GILDER.

Franklin Press:
RAND, AVERY, AND COMPANY,
BOSTON.

THE essays and sketches of which this volume is composed are taken, as the name implies, from "The Critic." In the conviction that some, if not all of them, are, despite their brevity, of permanent literary value, it has been deemed well to reproduce them in a form more durable than that of a fortnightly review. This step is rendered doubly advisable by the fact that some of the earlier numbers of "The Critic" are already out of print.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THOREAU'S WILDNESS. <i>John Burroughs</i> . . .	9
II. WILLIAM BLAKE, POET AND PAINTER. <i>Edmund C. Stedman</i>	21
III. DEATH OF CARLYLE. <i>Walt Whitman</i>	31
IV. DEATH OF LONGFELLOW. <i>Walt Whitman</i> . .	41
V. GEORGE ELIOT AND THE NOVEL. <i>Edward Eggleston</i>	49
VI. FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT. <i>R. H. Stoddard</i> ,	57
VII. THOREAU'S UNPUBLISHED POETRY. <i>F. B. Sanborn</i>	71
VIII. EMERSON AND THE SUPERLATIVE. <i>John Bur- roughs</i>	81
IX. A COMPANY OF SPRING POETS. <i>Edith M. Thomas</i>	91
X. NATURE IN LITERATURE. <i>John Burroughs</i> .	103
XI. AUSTIN DOBSON. <i>E. W. Gosse</i>	109
XII. ALPHONSE DAUDET. <i>P. M. Potter</i>	121
XIII. THE BOSTON CULTURE. <i>J. H. Morse</i>	133
XIV. THE LATE SIDNEY LANIER. <i>E. C. Stedman</i> .	141
XV. ENGLISH SOCIETY AND ENDYMION. <i>Julia Ward Howe</i>	153
XVI. HISTORICAL CRITICISM OF CHRIST. <i>H. W. Bellows</i>	165
XVII. WHITMAN'S LEAVES OF GRASS	175

I.

THOREAU'S WILDNESS.

Essays from "The Critic."

I.

THOREAU'S WILDNESS.

DOUBTLESS the wildest man New England has turned out since the red aborigines vacated her territory was Henry Thoreau, — a man in whom the Indian re-appeared on the plane of taste and morals. One is tempted to apply to him his own lines on "Elisha Dugan," as it is very certain they fit himself much more closely than they ever did his neighbor: —

"O man of wild habits,
Partridges and rabbits,
Who hast no cares
Only to set snares,

Who liv'st all alone
Close to the bone,
And where life is sweetest
Constantly eatest."

His whole life was a search for the wild, not only in nature, but in literature, in life, in morals. The shyest and most elusive thoughts and impressions were the ones that fascinated him most, not only in his own mind, but in the minds of others. His startling paradoxes are only one form his wildness took. He cared little for science, except as it escaped the rules and technicalities, and put him on the trail of the ideal, the transcendental. Thoreau was of French extraction; and every drop of his blood seems to have turned toward the aboriginal, as the French blood has so often done in other ways in this country. He, for the most part, despised the white man; but his enthusiasm kindled at the mention of the Indian. He envied the Indian; he coveted his knowl-

edge, his arts, his wood-craft. He accredited him with a more "practical and vital science" than was contained in the books. "The Indian stood nearer to wild Nature than we." "It was a new light when my guide gave me Indian names for things for which I had only scientific ones before. In proportion as I understood the language, I saw them from a new point of view." And again: "The Indian's earthly life was as far off from us as heaven is." In his "Week," he complains that our poetry is only white man's poetry. "If we could listen but for an instant to the chant of the Indian muse, we should understand why he will not exchange his savageness for civilization." Speaking of himself, he says, "I am convinced that my genius dates from an older era than the agricultural. I would at least strike my spade into the earth with such careless freedom, but accuracy, as the woodpecker his bill into a tree. There is in my

nature, methinks, a singular yearning toward all wildness." Again and again he returns to the Indian: "We talk of civilizing the Indian, but that is not the name for his improvement. By the wary independence and aloofness of his dim forest life he preserves his intercourse with his native gods, and is admitted from time to time to a rare and peculiar society with Nature. He has glances of starry recognition, to which our saloons are strangers. The steady illumination of his genius, dim only because distant, is like the faint but satisfying light of the stars compared with the dazzling but ineffectual and short-lived blaze of candles." "We would not always be soothing and taming nature, breaking the horse and the ox, but sometimes ride the horse wild, and chase the buffalo." The only relics that interest him are Indian relics. One of his regular spring recreations or occupations is the hunting of arrow-heads. He goes looking for arrow-

heads as other people go berrying or botanizing. In his journal, parts of which have recently been published, under the title of "Early Spring in Massachusetts," he makes a long entry under date of March 28, 1859, about his pursuit of arrow-heads. "I spend many hours every spring," he says, "gathering the crop which the melting snow and rain have washed bare. When, at length, some island in the meadow or some sandy field elsewhere has been ploughed, perhaps for rye, in the fall, I take note of it, and do not fail to repair thither as soon as the earth begins to be dry in the spring. If the spot chances never to have been cultivated before, I am the first to gather a crop from it. The farmer little thinks that another reaps a harvest which is the fruit of his toil." "As the dragon's teeth bore a crop of soldiers, so these [arrow-heads] bear crops of philosophers and poets, and the same seed is just as good to plant again. It is a stone fruit.

Each one yields me a thought. I come nearer to the maker of it than if I found his bones." He probably picked up thousands of arrow-heads. He had an eye for them. The Indian in him recognized its own.

His genius itself is arrow-like, and typical of the wild weapon he so loved, — hard, flinty, fine-grained, penetrating, winged, — a flying shaft, bringing down its game with marvellous sureness. His literary art was to let fly with a kind of quick inspiration; and though his arrows sometimes go wide, yet it is always a pleasure to watch their aërial course. Indeed, Thoreau was a kind of Emersonian or transcendental red man, going about with a pocket-glass and an herbarium, instead of with a bow and tomahawk. He appears to have been as stoical and indifferent and unsympathetic as a veritable Indian; and how he hunted without trap or gun, and fished without hook or

snare! Everywhere the wild drew him. He liked the telegraph, because it was a kind of æolian harp; the wind blowing upon it made wild, sweet music. He liked the railroad through his native town, because it was the wildest road he knew of: it only made deep cuts into and through the hills. "On it are no houses nor foot-travellers. The travel on it does not disturb me. The woods are left to hang over it. Though straight, it is wild in its accompaniments, keeping all its raw edges. Even the laborers on it are not like other laborers." One day he passed a little boy in the street who had on a home-made cap of a woodchuck's skin, and it completely filled his eye. He makes a delightful note about it in his journal. That was the kind of cap to have,— "a perfect little Idyl, as they say." Any wild trait unexpectedly cropping out in any of the domestic animals pleased him immensely. The crab-apple was his favorite apple, because of its beauty and

perfume. He perhaps never tried to ride a wild horse, but such an exploit was in keeping with his genius.

Thoreau hesitated to call himself a naturalist. That was too tame: he would perhaps have been content to have been an Indian naturalist. He says in this journal, and with much truth and force, "Man cannot afford to be a naturalist, to look at Nature directly, but only with the side of his eye. He must look through and beyond her. To look at her is as fatal as to look at the head of Medusa. It turns the man of science to stone." When he was applied to by the secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Science, at Washington, for information as to the particular branch of science he was most interested in, he confesses he was ashamed to answer for fear of exciting ridicule. But he says, "If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was the president, I should not

have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly." "The fact is, I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot." Indeed, what Thoreau was finally after in nature was something ulterior to science, something ulterior to poetry, something ulterior to philosophy; it was that vague something which he calls "the higher law," and which eludes all direct statement. He went to Nature as to an oracle; and though he sometimes, indeed very often, questioned her as a naturalist and a poet, yet there was always another question in his mind. He ransacked the country about Concord in all seasons and weathers, and at all times of the day and night; he delved into the ground, he probed the swamps, he searched the waters, he dug into woodchuck holes, into muskrats' dens, into the retreats of the mice and squirrels; he saw every bird, heard every sound, found every wild-flower, and brought home many a

fresh bit of natural history ; but he was always searching for something he did not find. This search of his for the transcendental, the unfindable, the wild that will not be caught, he has set forth in a beautiful parable in "Walden : " —

"I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken concerning them, describing their tracks, and what calls they answered to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind a cloud ; and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves."

JOHN BURROUGHS.

II.

WILLIAM BLAKE, POET AND PAINTER.

II.

WILLIAM BLAKE, POET AND PAINTER.

IF Blake was not a great master, he had in him certain elements that go to the making of one. Often these were beyond his own control. One does not need to be a painter or a poet to see, in his extraordinary work, that he frequently was the servant rather than the master; that he was swept away, like his own Elijah, by the horses and chariot of fire, and that when, like Paul, he reached the third heaven, whether he was in the body or out of it he could not tell. This was not so at all times. The conception and execution of his "Job" are massive, powerful, sublime, maintained throughout the series. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"

is a wonderful, a fearlessly imaginative, production. But much of his labor with pen or pencil does not show that union of genius with method which declares the master. He does not always sit above the thunder: he is enrapt, whirled, trembling in the electric vortex of a cloud.

What is this, you say, but to be the more inspired? True, no man ever lived who had, at intervals, a more absolute revelation. He was obedient to the heavenly vision; but great masters, obeying it, find it in harmony with their own will and occasion. They have, moreover, the power to discern between false and foolish prophecies,—between the monitions from a deity, and those from the limbo of dreams, delusions, and bewildered souls.

Did Blake see the apparitions he claimed to see? Did the heads of Edward and Wallace, and the Man that built the Pyramids, rise at his bidding, like the phantoms

summoned for Macbeth? I have no doubt of it. Neither, I think, will painters doubt it; for I suspect that they also have such visions,—they who are born with the sense that makes visible to the inward eye the aspect of forms and faces which they have imagined or composed, and with the faculty that retains them until the art of reproduction has done its service. We, who are not painters, at times see visions with our clouded eyes,—one face swiftly blotting out another, as if in mockery at our powerlessness to capture and depict them.

Men like Swedenborg and Blake, sensitive in every fibre and exalted by mysticism, accept as direct revelation the visions which other leaders understand to be the conceptions of their own faculty, and utilize in the practice of their art.

One of Blake's masterly elements was individuality. His drawings are so original as to startle us: they seem like pictures

from some new-discovered world, and require time for our just appreciation of their unique beauty, weirdness, and power.

Another element was faith, — unbounded faith in his religion, his mission, and the way revealed to him. To say that he had faith is to say also that he believed in himself; for his ecstatic piety and reverence and his most glorious visions were the unconscious effluence of his own nature. And that a poet or an artist should have faith is most vital and essential. He cannot be a mere agnostic. The leaders have had various beliefs, but each has held fast to his own. Take the lowest grade of Shakespeare's convictions: he believed in royalty and the divine right of kings. His kings, then, are chiefs indeed, hedged with divinity, and speaking in the kingliest diction of any language or time. If I were asked to name the most grievous thing in modern art, I should say it is the lack of some kind of

faith. Doubt, distrust, the question "What is the use?" make dim the canvas, and burden many a lyre. The new faith looks to science and the reign of law. Very well: these must breed its inspiration, as in time they will. But the processes of reason are slower than the childish instincts of an early and poetic age.

Blake had the true gift of expression: he was not merely learned, but inventive, in his methods of drawing, etching, and color. Here, and in his talks concerning art, he showed power and wisdom enough to equip a host of ordinary draughtsmen. He was mad, only in the sense that gave the clown warrant for saying all Englishmen are mad; only when he left the field in which he was thoroughly grounded, for speculations in which he was self-trained and half-trained. It is useless, however, to wonder what such an one might have been: he was what he was, and as great as he could be. There is

no gainsaying his marvellous and instant imagination. He saw not the sunrise, but an innumerable company of the angelic host, crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty!" Heaven and Hell are spirits, alike naked and alike clothed with beauty, rushing together in eternal love. Job and his friends are almost pre-Adamite in mould and visage. His daughters are indeed they of whom we are told that there were not found others so fair in all the land. Jehovah himself came within Blake's vision: the dreamer walked not only with sages and archangels and Titans, but with the very God.

Among his other qualities were a surprisingly delicate fancy, human tenderness and pity, industry and fertility in the extreme. He had ideas of right and government, and was grandly impatient of dulness and of hypocrisy in life or method. Finally, even his faults, and the grotesqueness which re-

peatedly brings his mark below the highest, add to the fascination that attends the revival and study of this artist. All that I say of his drawings applies in many respects to his rhymed and unrhymed verse. But his special gift was the draughtsman's. It would not be correct to say that he often hesitated with the pen but never with the pencil; since, whether as an artist or as a maker of songs and "prophetic books," his product was bold and unstinted: but his grotesque errors are found more frequently in his poetry than in his designs, while his most original and exquisite range of verse is far below that attained by him in his works of outline and color.

These are the merest, the most fragmentary impressions of a man whom some have dismissed with a phrase, terming him a sublime madman, and concerning whom others — poets and critics of a subtle and poetic type — have written essay upon essay, or

deemed whole volumes too brief for their glowing studies of his genius. If he did not found a school, it may almost be said that a modern school has founded itself upon the new understanding of his modes and purpose. But in copying the external qualities of Blake, it does not follow that his self-elected pupils are animated by his genius, rapture, and undaunted faith.

EDMUND C. STEDMAN.

III.

DEATH OF CARLYLE.

III.

DEATH OF CARLYLE.

AND so the flame of the lamp, after long wasting and flickering, has gone out entirely.

As a representative author, a literary figure, no man else will bequeath to the future more significant hints of our stormy era, its fierce paradoxes, its din, and its struggling parturition periods, than Carlyle. He belongs to our own branch of the stock too, — neither Latin nor Greek, but altogether Gothic. Rugged, mountainous, volcanic, he was himself more a French Revolution than any of his volumes.

In some respects, so far in the nineteenth century, the best-equipped, keenest mind, even from the college point of view, of all Brit-

ain; only he had an ailing body. Dyspepsia is to be traced in every page, and now and then fills the page. One may include among the lessons of his life, — even though that life stretched to amazing length, — how behind the tally of genius and morals stands the stomach, and gives a sort of casting vote.

Two conflicting agonistic elements seem to have contended in the man, sometimes pulling him different ways, like wild horses. He was a cautious, conservative Scotchman, fully aware what a fœtid gas-bag much of modern radicalism is; but then his great heart demanded reform, demanded change, — an always sympathetic, always human heart, often terribly at odds with his scornful brain.

No author ever put so much wailing and despair into his books, sometimes palpable, oftener latent. He reminds me of that passage in Young's poems, where, as Death

presses closer and closer for his prey, the Soul rushes hither and thither, appealing, shrieking, berating, to escape the general doom.

Of shortcomings, even positive blur-spots, from an American point of view, he had serious share; but this is no time for specifying them. When we think how great changes never go by jumps in any department of our universe, but that long preparations, processes, awakenings, are indispensable, Carlyle was the most serviceable democrat of the age.

How he splashes like leviathan in the seas of modern literature and politics! Doubtless, respecting the latter, one needs first to realize, from actual observation, the squalor, vice, and doggedness ingrained in the bulk-population of the British Islands, with the red-tape, the fatuity, the flunkyism everywhere, to understand the last meaning in his pages.

Accordingly, though he was no chartist or radical, I consider Carlyle's by far the most indignant comment or protest against the fruits of feudalism to-day in Great Britain, — the increasing poverty and degradation of the homeless, landless twenty millions, while a few thousands, or rather a few hundreds, possess the entire soil, the money, and the fat berths. Trade and shipping, and clubs and culture, and prestige, and guns, and a fine select class of gentry and aristocracy, with every modern improvement, cannot begin to salve or defend such stupendous hoggishness.

For the last three years we in America have had transmitted glimpses of Carlyle's prostration and bodily decay, — pictures of a thin-bodied, lonesome, wifeless, childless, very old man, lying on a sofa, kept out of bed by indomitable will, but of late never well enough to take the open air. News of this sort was brought us last fall by the sick

man's neighbor, Moncure Conway; and I have noted it from time to time in brief descriptions in the papers. A week ago I read such an item just before I started out for my customary evening stroll between eight and nine.

In the fine, cold night, unusually clear (Feb. 5, '81), as I walked some open grounds adjacent, the condition of Carlyle, and his approaching—perhaps even then actual—death, filled me with thoughts, eluding statement, and curiously blending with the scene. The planet Venus, an hour high in the west, with all her volume and lustre recovered (she has been shorn and languid for nearly a year), including an additional sentiment I never noticed before—not merely voluptuous, Paphian, steeping, fascinating—now with calm, commanding, dazzling seriousness and hauteur—the Milo Venus now. Upward to the zenith, Jupiter, Saturn, and the moon past her quarter, trail-

ing in procession, with the Pleiades following, and the constellation Taurus, and red Aldebaran. Not a cloud in heaven. Orion strode through the south-east, with his glittering belt; and a trifle below hung the sun of the night, Sirius. Every star dilated, more vitreous, nearer than usual. Not as in some clear nights when the larger stars entirely outshine the rest. Every little star or cluster just as distinctly visible, and just as nigh. Berenice's Hair showing every gem, and new ones. To the north-east and north the Sickle, the Goat and Kids, Cassiopeia, Castor and Pollux, and the two Dippers.

While through the whole of this silent indescribable show, enclosing and bathing my whole receptivity, ran the thought of Carlyle dying. (To soothe and spiritualize and, as far as may be, solve the mysteries of death and genius, consider them under the stars at midnight.)

And now that he has gone hence, can it be that Thomas Carlyle, soon to chemically dissolve in ashes and by winds, remains an identity still? In ways perhaps eluding all the statements, lore, and speculations of ten thousand years, — eluding all possible statements to mortal sense, — does he yet exist, a definite, vital being, a spirit, an individual, — perhaps now wafted in space among those stellar systems, which, suggestive and limitless as they are, merely edge more limitless, far more suggestive systems?

I have no doubt of it. In silence, of a fine night, such questions are answered to the soul, the best answers that can be given. With me too, when depressed by some specially sad event, or tearing problem, I wait till I go out under the stars for the last voiceless satisfaction.

WALT WHITMAN.

IV.

DEATH OF LONGFELLOW.

IV.

DEATH OF LONGFELLOW.

I HAVE just returned from a couple of weeks down in some primitive woods where I love to go occasionally away from parlors, pavements, and the newspapers and magazines; and where, of a clear forenoon, deep in the shade of pines and cedars, and a tangle of old laurel-trees and vines, the news of Longfellow's death first reached me. For want of any thing better, let me lightly twine a sprig of the sweet ground-ivy, trailing so plentifully through the dead leaves at my feet, with reflections of that half-hour alone, there in the silence, the mottled light, 'mid those earth-smells of the Jersey woods in spring, and lay it as my contribution on the dead bard's grave.

Longfellow in his voluminous works seems to me not only to be eminent in the style and forms of poetical expression that mark the present age (an idiocracy, almost a sickness, of verbal melody), but to bring what is always dearest as poetry to the general human heart and taste, and probably must be so in the nature of things. He is certainly the sort of bard and counteractant most needed for our materialistic, self-assertive, money-worshipping, Anglo-Saxon races, and especially for the present age in America, — an age tyrannically regulated with reference to the manufacturer, the merchant, the financier, the politician, and the day workman; for whom and among whom he comes as the poet of melody, courtesy, deference, — poet of the mellow twilight of the past in Italy, Germany, Spain, and in Northern Europe, poet of all sympathetic gentleness, and universal poet of women and young people. I should have to think long if I

were asked to name the man who has done more, and in more valuable directions, for America.

I doubt if there ever was before such a fine intuitive judge and selector of poems. His translations of many German and Scandinavian pieces are said to be better than the vernaculars. He does not urge or lash. His influence is like good drink or air. He is not tepid either, but always vital, with flavor, motion, grace. He strikes a splendid average, and does not sing exceptional passions, or humanity's jagged escapades. He is not revolutionary, brings nothing offensive or new, does not deal hard blows. On the contrary, his songs soothe and heal, or, if they excite, it is a healthy and agreeable excitement. His very anger is gentle, is at second hand (as in "The Quadroon Girl," and "The Witnesses").

There is no undue element of pensiveness in Longfellow's strains. Even in the early

translations, the "Manrique," the movement is as of strong and steady wind or tide holding up and buoying. Death is not avoided through his many themes; but there is something almost winning in his original verses and renderings on that dread subject—as, closing "The Happiest Land" dispute,—

"And then the landlord's daughter
Up to heaven raised her hand,
And said, 'Ye may no more contend,—
There lies the happiest land!'"

To the ungracious complaint-charge (as by Margaret Fuller many years ago, and several times since), of his want of racy nativity and special originality, I shall only say that America and the world may well be reverently thankful—can never be thankful enough—for any such singing-bird vouchsafed out of the centuries, without asking that the notes be different from those of other songsters; adding what I have heard

Longfellow himself say, that ere the New World can be worthily original, and announce herself and her own heroes, she must be well saturated with the originality of others, and respectfully consider the heroes that lived before Agamemnon.

Without jealousies, without mean passions, never did the personality, character, daily and yearly life of a poet, more steadily and truly assimilate his own loving, cultured, guileless, courteous ideal, and exemplify it. In the world's arena he had some special sorrows; but he had prizes, triumphs, recognitions, the grandest.

Extensive and heartfelt as is to-day, and has been for a long while, the fame of Longfellow, it is probable, nay certain, that years hence it will be wider and deeper.

WALT WHITMAN.

CAMDEN, N. J., April 3, '82.

V.

GEORGE ELIOT AND THE NOVEL.

V.

GEORGE ELIOT AND THE NOVEL.

EVERY writer of the first rank makes some modification in his *genre*. The modern French comedy was created by Molière; the English drama changed its form and aims in the hands of Shakespeare; the French stage was turned upside down by the appearance of "Hernani." A like change, I take it, far-reaching in its effect, has begun to take place in the modern novel since the "Scenes of Clerical Life" and "Adam Bede" appeared to a public still enamoured of the historical romances of Walter Scott. I know that some of our ablest critics have thought that George Eliot, though a great writer, was not great as a novelist, according

to the common standard. Neither is Shakespeare a great dramatist according to the old classical standard. The novel is the most flexible form of literature. There is hardly such a thing as a legitimate and an illegitimate novel. I suppose that even "Wilhelm Meister," that most structureless work of genius, is a novel. A species of writing that can contain Mr. Roe's homiletic tales, Judge Tourgee's picturesque political brochures, Lord Beaconsfield's autobiographies and malice, Spielhagen's weird nightmares, and Erckmann-Chatrion's photographs, is certainly the most catholic of literary genera. But it needs no latitudinarianism to include George Eliot's works. To my mind, it is as a novelist that she is greatest. Ah, but her stories are not dramatic, it is objected! But who limited the novel to a dramatic form? Is Charles Reade the normal novelist? Must there always be tableaux with red lights? Fielding, the

creator of the novel, was not "dramatic." But open "Daniel Deronda" at the incomparable river scene, where Deronda rescues Mira, and tell me by what scene in any novel it is surpassed in artistic interest? Read on to the meeting of the sweet lost little Jewess with the Meyricks; or take Gwendolen's confession to Deronda; or go to Middlemarch, and see Dorothea whispering confidences in the ear of Lydgate's wife. These scenes live ineffaceably in the memory, and are worth a thousand dramatic *denouements* of the artificial sort.

But what has this novelist of the first rank taught those who come after her about her art? What peculiarities of George Eliot's are likely to leave a strong impress after her? I answer, She, of all novelists, has attacked the profound problems of our existence. She has taught that the mystery worthy of a great artist is not the shallow mystery of device, but the infinite perspec-

tive of the great, dark enigmas of human nature; that there is a deeper interest in human life seen in the modern, scientific daylight, than in life viewed through a mist of ancient and dying superstitions; that the interest of human character transcends the interest of invented circumstances; that the epic story of a hero and a heroine is not so grand as the natural history of a community. She, first of all, has made cross sections of modern life, and shown us the busy human hive in the light of a great artistic and philosophic intellect. She has not sought to see men in the dim haze of a romantic past, but to bring men into close vision who by difference of race, condition, or the lapse of time, were far away. George Eliot has made the typical novel of this age of scientific thought and growing unbelief in the supernatural. Knights, corsairs, buccaneers, highwaymen, witches, charms, ghosts, miracles, second-sight, — these are the worn-

out stage property of the past. But George Eliot, more than any other, has shown that romance, so far from dying under the influence of the stern scepticism of our time, has had opened to it a new and more vigorous life. She has made the great ruthless forces of nature into *dramatis personæ*, — not writing books of fortune, but books of fate. Now, the book of fate is the book of failure, partial or entire. The man seeks to climb to the sun, but at most he attains to the mountain-top, or, perchance, the church-steeple; or he falls, and breaks his neck. The book of fate has few “dramatic” *denouements*: nevertheless it is the sublimest book of all, and the most interesting, if we learn to read it rightly. A literary primate has come and gone. We must revise our notion of the novel. It has taken on new possibilities, and received a new impress.

EDWARD EGGLESTON.

VI.

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

VI.

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

I AM frequently struck with the difference between an impression as it exists in my mind, and the same impression as it struggles through the best expression that I can give it on paper. I have never been able to satisfy myself with any thing I wrote about a book or a person; for there is that about books and persons which one feels, and very deeply perhaps, but which one cannot define, even shallowly. Poe wrote an ingenious little essay, in which he maintained the power of words; but the time came when he disclaimed his mad pride of intellectuality, and confessed his impotence to utter the unthought-like thoughts which two words, —

two foreign, soft dissyllables, — stirred from out the abysses of his heart. I desire to state, in what is to follow, the estimation in which I hold the genius of Mrs. Burnett: but I am not at all certain that I shall succeed in doing so; for much that I wish to say will either escape me before I can grasp it, or will refuse to be put in words. Criticism may be an art, but it is not an exact science. It perceives intellectual qualities which it cannot classify; for, the more it exercises itself upon them, the more they defy analysis. They are elusive, shadowy, — emotions, not thoughts; emanations of the original soul whence they proceed, that obey no will but their own in revealing themselves to the souls of others, and they choose their own time for that.

There is a quality in the work of Mrs. Burnett which reminds me of Dickens, but nothing which reminds me of Dickens's manner. Roughly speaking, I should say it was

a profound sympathy with, and an intimate knowledge of, what English statisticians call the lower classes, and American statisticians, the democratic masses — in other words, the people, the poor. I should also say that she was drawn to them in her early years, without knowing how, or caring why. They had, I think, the same attractions for her that they had for the young Shakespeare, who mastered the humors of clowns and constables long before he mastered the emotions of kings, queens, and lovers; and that they had for the young Dickens, who tried his “ ‘prentice han’ ” on every-day characters. The bent of her genius directed her girlish observation toward the miners of Lancashire, as it directed her maiden observation, at a later period, toward the mean whites of North Carolina. There have been great writers to whom the people were of much less account than they were to Shakespeare, or Scott, or Dickens. Balzac was one of

these, Thackeray another, and Hawthorne a third. Not that they did not introduce them in their stories, when they were needed for artistic purposes, but that they did not handle them as if they loved them — as Walton said of the angler's worm. There may be a wider scope and a deeper philosophy in the writings of this latter class; they may be more metropolitan, more national, more cosmical even, if the phrase may be allowed; but they are apt to lack a charm which is characteristic of provincial writing, of which the songs of Burns and Miss Blamire are good examples in verse, and the stories of Mr. Cable and Mrs. Burnett in prose.

Mrs. Burnett discovers gracious secrets in rough and forbidding natures, — the sweetness that often underlies their bitterness, — the soul of goodness in things evil. She impresses me as understanding her suffering and sinning characters as fully as Dickens ever understood his, — as having a more

genuine affection for them, and as never at any time caricaturing them. I find no impossibilities among them, no monsters of light and darkness, and no attempt to capture my sensibilities by trickery. Her pathos, when she is pathetic, is so natural that I am not ashamed of the tears in my eyes; and her humor, when she is humorous, is so unforced that I do not despise myself for laughing at it. I never question her domination over me when I am reading her books; and when I close them it is not to criticise, but to admire. I do not mean to say that she has not faults, and that I do not feel them: far from it. There are chapters in "That Lass o' Lowrie's" which are tantalizing with unfulfilment; they stop when they should go on, bringing up suddenly like balky horses. What is the matter here? I ask myself. Did Mrs. Burnett write when she ought not to have written,—when the soul was in a ferment, as Keats says, the character undecided,

the ambition thick-sighted, — or did she lop away her work to bring it within editorial requirements? There are branches which the pruning-knife would seem to have trimmed, and gaps which only a broadaxe could have made. I feel these faults, I say, and feel, besides, a certain indecision of invention here and there: but I never feel that the story is not true to the nature it depicts; that it is not true to the imagination of the writer; and that, with all its faults, it is not admirable.

Mrs. Burnett seems to have an intuitive perception of character, and what belongs to it. If we apprehend her personages, and I think we do clearly, it is not because she describes them to us, but because they reveal themselves in their actions. She is not responsible for what they say or do, or not more so than Thackeray would allow himself to be for the love between Henry Esmond and Lady Castlewood. “Why did you

marry them?" asked Mrs. Jameson (I think it was), whose sense of propriety was somehow shocked by that incident. "I did not," he answered: "they married themselves." Mrs. Burnett's characters are as veritable as Thackeray's; though her range, of course, is much narrower than his, as her sympathies are more nearly allied to sentiment. The word "sentimental," however, which so justly describes the work of many lady novelists, does not apply to her work; though the word "romantic," in its highest sense, does. She has an impassioned mind, that conceives with tenderness as well as strength. Only such a mind could have conceived Jean Lowrie, who, whether she follows Derrick in the darkness, night after night, to protect him from the wrath of her brutal father, or walks her room crooning to the child of poor foolish Liz, is alike womanly and alike noble. She is a glorious creature, — elemental, primitive, cast in the mould of the mothers

of the race, — the daughters of Job, as they live in the vigorous drawings of Blake, or the daughters of men, whom the sons of God saw were fair. She belongs to a sisterhood of heroic heroines whom the novelists of the period are fond of delineating (notably Mr. Charles Reade), but she overtops them all in massive simplicity of character and thorough womanhood. Very different, but very lovely and touching, is that shy, sensitive, rustic little lady, Louisiana Rogers; and very charming and lovable is Miss Octavia Bassett, who seemed to have a divine right to embody the American girl abroad. The three women of whom I have spoken represent their sex, in a certain sense, in Mrs. Burnett's three novels, "That Lass o' Lowrie's," "Louisiana," and "A Fair Barbarian;" and represent, also, the growth and change of her intellect during the three years in which she was writing them. Other women of hers recur to my remembrance, though not with

the same vividness (I may mention, in passing, *Esmeralda* and *Lodusky*); and others, I am sure, would recur to it if I had read her early stories as they appeared in the magazines, or if I could bring myself to make their acquaintance now in certain unauthorized books. As I do not remember her men with the same distinctness as her women, I conclude that her strength hitherto has lain in drawing the latter. I state this conclusion for what it is worth, as tentative, and not final; for I do not accept the finality of genius until it has gone down into the dark and narrow house, nor even then when I bethink me of "*Denis Duval*" and "*Hyperion*."

As I like to know something about the lives of the writers whom I admire, I take it for granted that the readers of Mrs. Burnett will like to know something about her life. I therefore proceed to tell them what I know about it. It is not much. She was born on Nov. 24, 1849, in Manchester, Eng., where

she passed the first fifteen years of her life. No particulars of her childhood have reached me, except that, like Charlotte Brontë, she developed a talent for improvising stories at an early age, and that while at school she wrote poems, and began to write novels. At the close of our civil war her parents emigrated to the United States, and settled at Newmarket, a small village in Eastern Tennessee, some twenty-five miles from Knoxville. About a year later they removed to Knoxville, where, at the age of sixteen, she completed a story which she had planned, and partly written, in her thirteenth year, and sent it to a Boston periodical. It was accepted, and an early insertion promised; but, as the editor stated that no remuneration could be given for it, she reclaimed it, and sent it to "Godey's Lady's Book," where it was published, paid for, and followed by other stories. From Godey's she passed to "Peterson's Magazine," for which she wrote

largely. The turning-point in her literary fortunes was "Surly Tim's Trouble," an English dialect story, which she sent to the editor of "Scribner's Monthly." It was published there; and the writer, Miss Frances Hodgson, was invited to furnish more stories, which she hastened to do. About this time (1873) Miss Hodgson married a young Tennessee physician, and became Mrs. Burnett. Her next work of importance was "That Lass o' Lowrie's," which was published in "Scribner's," and which made a great sensation, especially when it was issued in book form. It was reprinted in England, where of one edition alone about thirty thousand copies were sold. It was burlesqued in "Punch," and was dramatized and played with success. Mrs. Burnett's subsequent works are "Surly Tim and Other Stories" (1877), "Haworth's" (1879), "Louisiana" (1880), and "A Fair Barbarian" (1881). The latest work to which she has put her

hand is a novel of Washington life, entitled "Through One Administration," the materials for which have been gathered during a residence of several years in the capital. This story is now running as a serial in "The Century." Just before the publication of the first instalment (in the November number), Mrs. Burnett's dramatization of her story of "Esmeralda" was produced at the Madison-square Theatre. Its success is unquestioned; and it is important as indicating the line in which her best work may be done.

R. H. STODDARD.

VII.

THOREAU'S UNPUBLISHED POETRY.

VII.

THOREAU'S UNPUBLISHED POETRY.

SOON after the death of Miss Sophia Thoreau, in October, 1876, I received from her executor in Maine, where she died, her brother Henry's copy of "The Dial," in four volumes, which she had asked me to keep in memory of her and of him. Opening the volumes, I found in one of them a sheet of verses in Henry Thoreau's handwriting, and evidently copied out of his commonplace-book many years ago. Some of them have never been printed, and all are arranged in a manner that may suggest how this man of a great and peculiar genius regarded his own poems. He seldom published any except as parts of his prose essays, where they occur

either as choruses, or hymns, or as word-pictures to illustrate more clearly the movement of his thought. It is true he allowed several of his poems to appear in "The Dial," beginning with "Sympathy" in the first number, which Mr. Emerson has reprinted with a few more at the end of his selection from Thoreau's letters. But these were probably obtained from him by friends who desired to see them printed, after reading them in his manuscripts. I have heard it said that the earliest poem he showed to any friend was "Sic Vita," which was printed years afterward in "The Dial," and then in the "Week." This was written on a sheet of paper that was wrapped round a bunch of violets, tied loosely with a straw, and thrown into a lady's window. It was not deemed worthy of a place among those selected for printing in 1865 (though it had been read at his funeral by Mr. Alcott in 1862), and is indeed far less striking than

his "Inspiration," which is perhaps his longest poem; but only a few extracts from this appeared during the author's lifetime. Thoreau had much skill in selecting from his own verses; and no doubt these fragments were the best lines in the poem, which consists of twenty-one stanzas. Mr. Emerson printed seven of these stanzas, omitting the less significant parts, but also omitting much which the author would have deemed essential to the full statement of his thought. Having received the manuscript from Miss Thoreau in 1863, I thought it right to print it entire in the Boston "Commonwealth," just as it was left by the poet. Any differences noticed between the lines as there given, and as published by Mr. Emerson, are caused by changes made by another hand. Miss Thoreau did not object to these slight changes; and in regard to one short essay, entitled "Prayers," which she published in the last collection of her brother's

papers that was made by her, she fell into a singular error. This essay is not Henry Thoreau's at all, but Mr. Emerson's. It contains some verses of Thoreau's, — which in his manuscripts are entitled "Prayer," — but nothing else from his hand. The essay was originally published in "The Dial" for July, 1842; and, as the verses there appear in a fuller form than that given below, I assume that the sheet of verses found in my "Dial" was written out, in the form which came to me, some time before 1842, or at least twenty years previous to Thoreau's death (May 6, 1862). In this form it is simply a collection of rhymed sentences, each with its title, like epigrams; and this, I conclude, was the way that Thoreau's verses were made. They might be, and often were, afterward joined together in a connected poem; and sometimes the framework of this poem was arranged beforehand, as in the piece called "The Fisher's Boy," contain-

ing the line so well known and so often quoted,—

“ My life is like a stroll upon the beach.”

After this long preface, let us come to the sheet of verses :—

OMNIPRESENCE.

Who equalleth the coward's haste,
And still inspires the faintest heart;
Whose lofty fame is not disgraced,
Though it assume the lowest part.

INSPIRATION.

If thou wilt but stand by my ear,
When through the field thy anthem's rung,
When that is done I will not fear
But the same power will abet my tongue.

PRAYER.

Great God! I ask thee for no meaner pelf,
Than that I may not disappoint myself;
That in my conduct I may soar as high
As I can now discern with this clear eye;
That my weak hand may equal my firm faith,
And my life practise more than my tongue saith;

That my low conduct may not show,
Nor my relenting lines,
That I thy purpose did not know,
Or overrated thy designs.

MISSION.

I've searched my faculties around,
To learn why life to me was lent :
I will attend the faintest sound,
And then declare to man what God hath meant.

DELAY.

No generous action can delay
Or thwart our higher, steadier aims ;
But if sincere and true are they,
It will arouse our sight, and nerve our frames.

THE VIREO.

Upon the lofty elm-tree sprays
The Vireo rings the changes meet,
During these trivial summer days,
Striving to lift our thoughts above the street.

MORNING.

Here the sheet abruptly ends, and what was to be said about "Morning" we may never know. The quatrain describing the vireo singing in the elms above a Concord street was printed in "The Dial" for July, 1842; another indication that these verses are of earlier date than that. Perhaps they may be found among the "verses in the long book," to which Thoreau refers by pencil-notes in his copy of "The Dial," if indeed the "long book" may not have been long ago destroyed. For during his last illness, in the winter of 1861-62, Henry Thoreau told me, in one of the conversations we had in his sick-room, that he had once destroyed many of his verses, because they did not please the friend (Mr. Emerson) to whose eye he had submitted them; but he added, "I am sorry now that I burned them, for perhaps they were better than he thought." I doubt not they were, and am anxious now that every line he left behind him should be

printed; for he had examined his own work with great care, and certainly left

“No line which, dying, he could wish to blot.”

Why, then, should his friends erase one, or withhold it from publication? Even those which do not rise into his loftiest mood cast a tender light on his own life and character, which were far more sweet and amiable than some have supposed.

F. B. SANBORN.

VIII.

EMERSON AND THE SUPERLATIVE.

VIII.

EMERSON AND THE SUPERLATIVE.

EMERSON on the Superlative (in "The Century") is the same Emerson we have known of old. This is perhaps one of the essays of his prime, as it is certainly on a par with any of the chapters of his later volumes. How he hates the superlative in speech, the gas and insincerity of the popular orator! When he went West a few years ago, he said the only thing he saw that equalled the brag was the Yosemite. This was the kind of superlative he liked, — the superlative of fact, — grandeur that beggared comparison.

Yet Emerson is himself a master exaggerator, the lord of extremes, holding the

zenith and the nadir in his two hands. But at his best his superlative runs the other way,—runs to excess of truth, rather than to excess of form. Without adjective or adverb, he reaches the superlative degree by the sheer projectile force of his verbs and nouns. It is the exaggeration of quality, not of quantity; of essence, not of bulk. His sentences are a steam-chest: the force of expansion is there without the expansion; the gas is held by an iron grip, and made to work. He praises a low style, moderate statement; but there must be a good many pounds pressure to the square inch in the low style that suits him. The rivet-heads must be ready to fly, only they must not fly on any account. Perfect control and moderation though you are handling thunderbolts.

If there is a difference between an extreme statement and an exaggerated statement, then we should say Emerson makes the

extreme statement, the compact, iron-bound, high-pressure statement. There is never any admixture of a lie, not the least taint of insincerity, but always the plus, the pressure of a purpose that would make the extreme more available and submissive. The last degree, the last limit of power, he wants; but he wants it without striving or contortion. He cuts no fantastic tricks before high heaven, but he deals in plain speech before the Olympian dignitaries. "There is no god dare wrong a worm," he says somewhere. Speaking for Brahma, he says to the "meek lover of the good," "Find me, and turn thy back on heaven." His rhetoric is a search for an extreme, but for a safe and well-clinched statement, — for the arousing superlative, the superlative that freezes the mercury, or — boils it. He likes an understatement when it is bold or stimulates by what it omits; as when the village father of whom he speaks in this article gave as a

toast at an agricultural fair, after the speaker had finished his discourse, this sentiment, "The orator of the day: his subject deserves the attention of every farmer;" or the boy who on the top of the Catskill Mountains said to his companion, "Come up here, Tony, it looks pretty out-of-doors;" and he likes an over-statement when it is equally bold, when it is a blow and not a word, a double shot and not a blank cartridge. In short, the statement must be forcible, whether under or over. He says the low expression is strong and agreeable. He means it is agreeable when it is strong, — when it is full of powder and bullet. This article on the Superlative is a good example of Emerson's Spartan exaggeration, his heroic hyperbole. Speaking of a person with the superlative temperament, he says, "If the talker lose a tooth, he thinks the universal thaw and dissolution of things has come. Controvert his opinion, and he cries, 'Persecution!'

and reckons himself with St. Barnabas, who was sawed in two." He says "every favorite is not a cherub, nor every cat a griffin, nor each unpleasing person a dark diabolical intriguer; nor agonies executions, nor ecstasies our daily bread." "The secrets of death, judgment, or eternity are tedious when recurring as minute-guns. Thousands of people live and die who were never, on a single occasion, hungry or thirsty, or furious or terrified." But this tameness and monotony is just what our philosopher would avoid in speech. "The books say, 'It made my hair stand on end!' Who, in our municipal life, ever had such an experience?" Yet the phrase, when first used, was a sample of the true Emersonian exaggeration. "It froze my blood," too, he dislikes; yet he has used the phrase "the shudder of joy," and in his poem on the "Titmouse," he says of the severe cold that it "curdles the blood to the marble bones." In one of his earlier

essays he speaks of that hunger of the soul that could eat the solar system like ginger-cake. "Religion and poetry," he says, speaking of the superlative character and manners of the Eastern races, "are all the civilization of the Arab." The exaggeration of a striking and telling antithesis is always agreeable to Emerson. "Dante," he says, in "Letters and Social Aims," "was free imagination, — all wings, — yet he wrote like Euclid." "Turnpike is one thing," he says, speaking of Dryden, "blue sky another."

Emerson's exaggeration, either way, up or down, unlike that, say, of such a writer as Victor Hugo, great as the latter is, always strikes fire, always kindles the mind; and we get a glimpse of noble manners, or feel the religious or else the poetic thrill. The heroic quality lurks in every line he writes. There is always the stimulus of great example, — of that high and undaunted attitude and the cheerful confronting of great odds,

which is like the reply of the Athenian soldier to his Persian enemy, "Our arrows will darken the sun," said the latter. "Then we will fight in the shade," said the Greek.

JOHN BURROUGHS.

IX.

A COMPANY OF SPRING POETS.

IX.

A COMPANY OF SPRING POETS.

IF there be a Tenth Muse, let her be known henceforth as the Muse of Spring Poetry! This is the season when the editor's waste-basket is filled to overflowing with odes, sonnets, and nameless other species of metrical composition in praise of the god Vertumnus. The season which puts a "spirit of youth in every thing" affects as well the laity as the recognized priesthood of poesy, and makes the usually discreet dumb spirit break forth in unadvised dithyrambs. There may possibly be a singing contagion in the atmosphere,—a dancing of the air we breathe, which rhythmically affects our pulse, and urges us to seek a

vocal embodiment for our "organic numbers." It is certain that the most spontaneous couplet, inside or outside the rhyming dictionary, is "spring" and "sing;" and the commonest bit of song, if its keynote be spring, never falls into contempt or out of good usage. Witness:—

April showers
Bring forth May flowers.

This is undoubtedly the briefest lyric ever composed on the subject of spring; but, for any thing known to the contrary by philologists, it may have come down to us from the remotest "Aryan antiquity."

Anacreon, whose three-stringed lyre sounded only love, wine, and himself, makes an agreeable exception when, for once, he takes up the praise of spring. Very charming is the picture which the old pleasure-lover gives us of the youthful season, as he beheld it: a world of flowers; the Graces

dancing on the fresh green turf; the return of the cranes; the sunshiny water with its sailing ducks; the thrifty shoots of the olive; flowers, leaves, fruit, crowding the same branches; and, last of all, Bacchus and himself rejoicing at the prospect of a great grape-yield next autumn! Anacreon was, without question, the chief "spring poet" of Teos: but he encountered no editorial malison, for he seems to have had little ambition for "rushing into print;" on the contrary, being quite content with private recitals and the applause of his fellow *bons vivants*. But poets of the South and Orient could not, from the nature of the climate, have known all the rich surprises and delicate coquetries of the spring as they were known to the bards of more northern latitudes, where the changes of the year are more emphatically marked. Early English poetry, we may say, began with a melodious somnambulism on a May morning of the

fourteenth century. Chaucer was the first "spring poet" of our tongue. There is but one induction to nearly all his performances, greeting to the springtime, and particularly "observance to May." There were light sleepers in those days, folk longing to go on pilgrimages, and impatient for the coming of daylight, like the birds themselves, as Chaucer describes them in the Canterbury Prologue:—

" And smale fowles maken melodie
That slepen al the night with open yhe."

It was on a "morne of May" that Palamon first saw Emelie, who had risen early to do honor to the day, and was walking in the garden gathering flowers to make a "certeyn gerland" for her head. Again, in the story of the "Cuckow and the Nightingale," a sleepless wight wanders through a grove in the morning twilight, early in the month of May. Unluckily for the success of his love-

suit, he hears the cuckoo sing before the nightingale; but, in partial compensation, he finds a mysterious land "all white and green," — grass-green, "ypoudred with daisie." There he sits down among the flowers, and listens to the singing of the birds.

The old dramatists are never happier than when they draw their comparisons from vernal nature. Shakespeare makes Prince Florizel pay a pretty compliment to Perdita, who is attired as the queen of the sheep-shearing frolic. He tells her that she seems

"no shepherdess, but Flora
Peering in April's front."

In the course of the festivities, Perdita wishes for some "flowers o' the spring," suitable for her young companions, and names the following:—

"Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath."

Other delicacies in this bouquet of spring beauties are pale primroses, bold oxslips, the crown imperial, lilies of all kinds, including the flower-de-luce. Yet another clerk calls the flower-roll of spring. It was inevitable that the memory of Lycidas should be fragrant, embalmed as it was in such sweets as those he names. (No wonder if New England poets cast jealous and covetous regards upon the floral treasures of Old England. The flowers of our continent are only half-souled, if fragrance constitutes the soul of a flower.)

We cannot go by Robin Herrick's garden, with its fantastic parterres, without begging a holiday souvenir. We will ask for violets. In what trim and tripping measures does he celebrate their beauty!

“Welcome, maids of honor!
Ye do bring
In the Spring,
And wait upon her.”

Bright and early we hear him calling Corinna to go a-maying. This Corinna, we infer, was a very phlegmatic young person to require so much reminding that May Day had come, and that her friends were impatiently waiting for her to join them in their quest for white-thorn and greens for decoration. The playful despatch and impatience of the verse are altogether irresistible. We, at least, have no two minds about the matter:—

. . . “Wash, dress, be briefe in praying:
Few prayers are best, when once we goe a-maying.”

Collins, who stands a long remove from the poets best read in Nature's traditions, has nevertheless one drop of pure quintessence distilled from the very atmosphere of spring. There is something more than mere elegant personification in the following couplet:—

“When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mould;”

The poet, indeed, must have seen those dewy fingers (as we have often seen them) fitfully stirring among the slim, weak blades of the young grass, at the close of a chilly April day, or smoothing out the creases of earliest-opened leaves in the midst of a "sweet, uncalendared spring rain."

Never has the divinity of May been more divinely hymned than in Keats's ode for May Day, opening with an invocation to "Mother of Hermes, and still youthful Maia!" Did we not know its authorship, we could readily believe it a fragment descended from some sublime-hearted Grecian bard, one of those who

"died content on pleasant sward,
Leaving great verse unto a little clan."

This ode contains but fourteen lines, long and short; but they are, as their poet wished them to be, "rich in the simple worship of a day."

Everywhere the poetic scriptures bear record of the dangerous reciprocity existing between love and springtime, — no other season so fatally propitious for love-making. When Launcelot brings Guinevere home to Camelot, it is the “boyhood of the year.” The spring has come in a “sunlit flood of rain;” the tallest forest elms have already gathered a green mist about their tops; the yellow river runs full to its grassy brim; the linnet pipes, and the throstle whistles strong. As for Guinevere, she might pass for the Faerie Queen herself, having on the suit in fashion at the elfin court, — a grass-green robe with golden clasps, and light-green plumes held by a ring of gold, floating from her cap as she rides swiftly along. “She seemed a part of joyous spring,” we are told; and to one who had beheld her then it would have been none too great a sacrifice

“To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.”

Alas for Launcelot and Guinevere, and for good King Arthur, that this journey was not made in the dull unelectric days of later summer, or under the November sky, — at any time save when the spirits of April were weaving their enchantments for idle pilgrims with empty hearts!

The spring poets! May their race never die out! They cannot be too many, too early, or too long-delaying. Let them not be put down by Philistine depreciation anywhere. Let nothing less than a fillip on the ear from Apollo himself put them to shame. What though their notes be small and tame, abounding in melodious iterations that were not new last year, or the year before last?

“Remember, never to the hill or plain,
Valley or wood, without her cuckoo strain,
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.”

EDITH M. THOMAS.

X.

NATURE IN LITERATURE.

X.

NATURE IN LITERATURE.

SEVERAL different kinds or phases of this thing we call Nature have at different times appeared in literature. For instance, there is the personified or deified Nature of the towering Greek bards, an expression of Nature born of wonder, fear, childish ignorance, and the tyranny of personality: the Greek was so alive himself that he made every thing else alive, and so manly and human that he could see only these qualities in Nature. Or the Greek idyllic poets, whose nature is simple and fresh, like spring-water, or the open air, or the taste of milk or fruit or bread. The same thing is perhaps true in a measure of Virgil's Nature.

In a later class of writers and artists that arose in Italy, Nature is steeped in the faith and dogmas of the Christian Church: it is a kind of theological Nature.

In English literature there is the artificial Nature of Pope and his class,—a kind of classic liturgy repeated from the books, and as dead and hollow as fossil shells. Earlier than that, the quaint and affected Nature of the Elizabethan poets; later, the melodramatic and wild-eyed Nature of the Byronic muse; and lastly, the transmuted and spiritualized Nature of Wordsworth, which has given the prevailing tone and cast to most modern poetry. Thus, from a goddess Nature has changed to a rustic nymph, a cloistered nun, a heroine of romance, besides other characters not so definite, till she has at last become a priestess of the soul. What will be the next phase is perhaps already indicated in the poems of Walt Whitman, in which Nature is regarded

mainly in the light of science — through the immense vistas opened up by astronomy and geology. This poet sees the earth as one of the orbs, and has sought to adjust his imagination to the modern problems and conditions, always taking care, however, to preserve an outlook into the highest regions.

I was much struck with a passage in Whitman's last volume, "Two Rivulets," in which he says that he has not been afraid of the charge of obscurity in his poems, "because human thought, poetry or melody, must have dim escapes and outlets, — must possess a certain fluid, aërial character, akin to space itself, obscure to those of little or no imagination, but indispensable to the highest purposes. Poetic style, when addressed to the soul, is less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista, music, half-tints, and even less than half-tints." I know no ampler justification of a certain

elusive quality there is in the highest poetry — something that refuses to be tabulated or explained, and that is a stumbling-block to many readers — than is contained in these sentences.

JOHN BURROUGHS.

XI.

AUSTIN DOBSON.

XI.

AUSTIN DOBSON.

THERE is something kindred to humorous poetry in the warm and humid climate of Devonshire. All our best writers of *vers-de-société* have been Devon men, except Prior, who had the misfortune to be born just over the border in Dorset. A year ago I made a pilgrimage to the neat little house in Dodbrooke, where Peter Pindar saw the light, and looked across the muddy creeks of Kingsbridge harbor to the home of Praed. Mr. Austin Dobson, however, though born at Plymouth, on the 18th of January, 1840, is really of French extraction. His father, Mr. George Clarisse Dobson, who was a civil engineer, came to England early in life.

As the name shows, he, in his turn, was of English descent, so that the nationalities in the poet are nicely confounded. At the age of eight or nine the latter was taken with his parents to Holyhead, in the island of Anglesea; he was educated at Beaumaris, at Coventry, and finally at Strasburg, whence he returned at the age of sixteen with the intention of becoming a civil engineer. It was decided, however, that he should enter the civil service; and accordingly, in December, 1856, he received an appointment at the Board of Trade, where he has remained ever since, nearly a quarter of a century. Mr. Dobson's first ambition, like that of Théophile Gautier and others, was to be a painter. He did, as a matter of fact, design with great delicacy; but professional training, at the schools of art in South Kensington, seemed merely to destroy this native faculty. Strange to say, it was not until his twenty-fourth year that he began to write; but his success at

once showed this to be his true vocation. When Mr. Anthony Trollope started his magazine *St. Paul's*, in 1868, Mr. Dobson was one of the authors whom he first introduced to the public. "Une Marquise," printed in that serial in March of that year, was the earliest intimation that was given to the world of this new and striking talent. Nothing is more quiet than the life of a man of letters. Mr. Dobson's career has been as uneventful as that of most modern poets. In 1873, at the age of thirty-three, he first collected his scattered lyrics in a volume which he called "Vignettes in Rhyme." This book achieved, as it deserved, a very wide success. In 1874 he lost his father and his mother, and a brother, who died in Brazil. Fate often seems to concentrate her blow when she persuades herself to strike one of her favorites. When Mr. Dobson's next volume, "Proverbs in Porcelain," appeared, in 1877, the consensus of critical

attention showed how much position the writer had gained among the judicious in these four years. Since then he has published many charming things; and I cannot help fancying — not too indiscreetly, I hope — that we may see a third volume of his delicate work before many months are past. I hope it will be as welcome in America as it is sure to be in England. For the time being, the American public possesses, in the collection published last year by Mr. Holt, a great deal more of Mr. Dobson's late work than he has yet given to us.

There is no one living on this side of the Atlantic in whom Mr. Dobson can, in my opinion, see a dangerous rival. He has made the field his own: it is, after all, but a narrow plot, and there is scarcely standing-room upon it for more than one at a time. He reigns where Prior and Praed have reigned before him, and this is no little thing to be able to say of any man. I do not know that

he has ever reached the highest level of Prior, that true and exquisite poet, who so seldom was true to his own force and music. "The God of us Verse Men" has a manly tenderness, a sort of heroic and sentimental levity, which surpasses all modern writing of the same kind; and even the author of the "Ballad of the Spanish Armada" has not quite the roar and animal spirits of the "Ode on the Taking of Namur." It is more fair and more easy to compare our latest humorous poet with Praed; nor do I think that this is a comparison by which the living writer will suffer. The turns of Praed are rapid and telling, his vivacity extraordinary, and his rhythmical movement singularly bright; but he is slight and monotonous in sentiment, and his muse is like a performing bullfinch, that goes through three tricks with infinite skill, and whistles one tune and a half as prettily as possible. Now, in Mr. Dobson's work we do not find these limita-

tious: he can do many things very well. He is not merely a writer of *vers-de-société*: he is a fabulist, a dramatist *in parvo*, a lyrist pure and simple. The only occasions upon which he seems to me to fail are those in which he attempts the romantic and heroic styles. "The Prayer of the Swine to Circe" is flawless in construction; but it leaves us as cold and indifferent as the "Solomon" of Prior, or Gay's tragedy of "Dione." We are obliged to say, as Dryden said to Swift, "Ah! Cousin Dobson, you will never be a pindaric poet!" But in his own way, how perfect an artist, how exquisite a poet! Whether he rattles, in ballad-style, through the adventures of Beau Brocade and his cynical crew of admirers; whether he whispers worldly wisdom, and sighs a note of regret over the fish-pool with Denise and the princess; whether, behind a curtain in the chateau corridor, he giggles at the discomfiture of the Abbé Tirili, — he is always

the same acute and refined observer, passing lightly over the surface of things, because to go deeper would wound a heart not callous at all, but indolent, perhaps, and touching the harmonious frivolities of by-gone times as the fingers of some *maestro* might lightly run over the keys of an old-fashioned harpsichord. He is most at home, it seems to me, in the first half of the eighteenth century. Had he been a contemporary of Hogarth, how singular would it have been to note the different point of view of two such observant artists! From Mr. Dobson we should have had no satire of any crushing or slashing kind; but what new lights on the career of Counsellor Silvertongue, what urbane consideration of the merits of Farinelli, what a disposition to throw warm color and fragrance over the absurdities of Mrs. Fox Lane! Since we are set upon comparisons, we may say that Dobson is really a sort of Thackeray in miniature; a more timid, a

more indulgent, but a not less perspicuous, student of society. There are many passages in the "Roundabout Papers" that are pitched in exactly the same key as such verses as these: —

You are just a porcelain trifle,
Belle Marquise!
 Just a thing of puffs and patches,
 Made for madrigals and catches,
 Not for heart-wounds, but for scratches,
 O Marquise!
 Just a pinky porcelain trifle,
Belle Marquise!
 Wrought in rarest *rose-Dubarry!*
 Quick at verbal point and parry,
 Clever, doubtless — but to marry,
 No, Marquise!

There is plenty of room in the world for social verse when it is done in this way, by an artist and a gentleman; but it is limited ground, after all, as we began by saying. Not merely is the least breath of vulgarity

fatal to the entire structure, which melts upon us in a damp horror, like Cowper's vitreous palace, but the interest of the flying buttresses and onion-domes is easily exhausted. In *vers-de-société* not only is nothing tolerable short of the best, but the best itself should not be too often repeated. I think Mr. Dobson has felt that he must adventure, like Ulysses, upon new seas, and make fresh conquests. The province of fable is one that lies open to his invasion, and which has been utterly neglected of late. I hope he will return to those exquisite little dramas in octosyllabic rhyme, with which he opened his "Proverbs in Porcelain," and which so much delighted the best critics. These tiny pieces will never be broadly popular; but Mr. Dobson has now so firm a place in literature that he may be content to address only the judicious. It would be fatuous to lay down any limit to the advance yet to be made by a poet who began to write

•

rather late in life, and is still so young ; but it may be prophesied that he will write successfully just in so far as he remains true to the French streak in his blood, and to the picturesque instinct that has only just missed finding expression with brush or pencil.

EDMUND W. GOSSE.

XII.

ALPHONSE DAUDET.

XII.

ALPHONSE DAUDET.

THE distinctive quality of Alphonse Daudet's genius is his passion for nature. Since notoriety came upon him unawares, he has devoted himself to the arts by which notoriety is preserved, describing the flash manners of the town, the flaunting vices of metropolitan life ; and if each successive book of this period shows little advance upon its predecessors, it is because the novelist's heart is not in his work. He is sighing for the Provençal woods, for the mill where he sang the charms of rusticity, for the monastery of the White Fathers where he sipped the golden cordial, and listened to Erasmian stories while the mistral rushed howling

through the belfry. He has never been very happy when absent from the scenes in which his childhood was spent. He was born at Nismes forty-one years ago; and there, while his father was busy at a silk-manufactory, and his mother and aunt, strict Churchwomen both, discussed at home the misfortunes that had befallen the Papacy, the boy would slip away to the river, playing truant from school, selling his books, for the sake of an afternoon on the water. Often, in those summer days, tying his boat to the chain of barges which were being towed down the stream, he would silently watch the beauties of the passing landscape, his meditation only broken by the noise of the screw or the barking of a dog on the steam-tug. Often, caught in the reeds, he would gaze for hours on the river, the bridges that gradually grew smaller and smaller, the green islets that trembled on the horizon. Then coming home, he would every day seek

a new excuse for his truancy. "Mother," said he, on one of these occasions, "I staid from school because I had heard that—the Pope was dead." Thereupon dismay fell on the household. The father sat silent at the table, the mother wept; the aunt alone had courage to discuss the event, recalling the days when Pius VII. had passed in post-chaise through her village; and next morning, when the boy's news was found to be false, the joy was so great that nobody had the heart to scold him. The youth of Alphonse Daudet lay in scenes like these. They were more typical of his life than the stories which he wrote of "*Le Petit Chose*," and which were manifestly constructed for dramatic effect.

When he came to Paris to make his way in literature, he was very poor, and put up with such company as he could get. There were in those days many clever men in the Latin Quarter; and the young poet, wander-

ing through the cafés, saw something of Rochefort and Gambetta. He also received an occasional invitation to the houses of actresses or of such literary notorieties as lived in the neighborhood of the Odéon. These experiences seem to have gained for him the reputation of an incorrigible Bohemian. No reputation could fit him less well. He was then, as he is now, the most sensitive of men. He delighted in solitary rambles, wherein he could study odd phases of life at his ease. While his comrades were singing in the brasserie, he would quietly make his way to the Seine, peep through the windows of the little riverside house, where a muslin dress hung dripping on a nail, and an old man sat roasting apples at a stove, viewing in his lap the objects which had been found with the muslin dress, — a thimble filled with sand, a purse with a sou in it, a rusty pair of scissors, — and turning for a moment aside to write in his official register, “Félicie Ra-

meau, milliner, seventeen years old." Or he would cross the bridge, and enter the workmen's quarter, watching the lights that gleamed in the low cabaret, the drunken orator who was bellowing at one of its tables, and the thin, pale wife's face that was pressed against the glass, trying to make a signal to the speaker and warn him that the night was spent and the children were starving at home. Or, again, he would pass before the old-fashioned houses of the Marais, now turned into stores and warehouses, and re-clothe them with their antique glories of two centuries ago, when torches flashed, and sedan-chairs swung in the streets, and in the drawing-rooms there was a rustle of silks and clank of swords, and minuets were danced to the music of four violins, with smirkings, and trippings, and bowings innumerable.

The change in Daudet's life began with his introduction to the Duc de Morny.

Many stories are told of that first interview, and most of them are apocryphal. The poet is reported to have said, that, as the son of a Legitimist, he could hardly serve a Bonapartist. To which, according to one account, the duke replied, "Be whatever you will. The empress is more Legitimist than you;" or, according to another, "Have whatever political views you please. All I ask of you is that you shall cut your hair." His new life was very novel, and not very palatable, to Daudet. He had no thought in those days of writing sensational novels. In the duke's antechamber he would see the late King of Hanover, the King of Naples, Don Carlos, and Queen Isabella, and was not careful to study them for the purposes of fiction. He would hear of the scandals of royalty, the Prince of Orange's escapades, the intrigues of Russian grand dukes, and was not struck with the idea of using them to spice the history of King Christian II. of

Illyria. If he went to the agencies of the Rue Castiglione, or hunted for *bric-à-brac* at the Hôtel Drouot, or carried a diplomatic message to Worth the dressmaker, or watched the gamblers at the Mirlitons or the dancers at Mabille, he was not in search of Mr. J. Tom Levis, Sephora Leemans, M. Spricht, the Prince d'Axel, or any of the personages whom he afterward introduced to fame in "Les Rois en Exil." These people and their doings he afterward recalled when he found that the public wanted to hear about them. He sickened of their company in the days when he knew them. He obtained a long furlough from the duke, and fled from Paris. In a ruined mill of the country around Avignon, he wrote many of those short stories which should be his best title to the regard of posterity; and, when the strong southern winds came to disturb his solitude, he made his way to a little island off the Corsican coast, and took up his abode in a light-house.

The whole day he would spend in quiet contemplation on the rocks, the seagulls whirling over his head. At night he slept beneath the rays of the huge lantern. It was the happiest period of Daudet's life.

When the war of 1870 was drawing to a close, he was enrolled as a volunteer. None of his later work can rival the sketches which he then made. While Ducrot was fighting on the heights of Champigny, the battalions of the Marais were encamped at night in the Avenue Daumesnil, and tried to kill time as best they could. "The Eighth are giving a concert," said some one to Daudet: "come and hear it." They entered a large booth, lighted with candles on the points of bayonets, and filled with men half asleep and half drunk. The singer, mounted on a platform, was shouting in a hoarse voice the popular song of the period, —

"C'est la canaille !
C'est la canaille !
Eh, bien ! J'en suis."

He was followed by other singers, all blasphemous, ribald, and obscene; and in the distance the cannon joined in the refrain. Daudet hastened from the tent, speechless with indignation, and did not stop till he reached the Seine. The night was dark. Paris was sleeping in a circle of fire. Dimly a gunboat could be seen trying to force its way up the river against the tide. Again and again the river swept it down, again and again it returned to the effort; and at last, as it began to conquer the stream, and made its way toward the scene of battle, a cheer burst from the crew. "Ah!" cried Daudet, "how far away is the concert of the Eighth!" No historian of the war will be able to paint it so vividly as Daudet painted it. His pen has the qualities of De Neuville's brush. His story of the "Siege of Berlin"—of the paralyzed veteran who thought the French would win, and of the imaginary campaign which his

granddaughter planned for him — is only rivalled in pathos by his tale of "La Dernière Classe," — of the schoolmaster who, being told that he must never more teach French in Alsace, could say nothing to the boys, but with a heart bursting with grief, wrote in large letters on the slate, "Vive la France," and then, leaning his head against the wall, signed with his hand, "C'est fini. Allez-vous-en."

Ten years have passed since then. To-day Alphonse Daudet is famous. Emile Zola slaps him noisily on the back, and claims him as a disciple of realism. Popularity may have its advantages for Daudet, but the familiarity of Zola is a heavy price to pay for it.

P. M. POTTER.

XIII.

THE BOSTON CULTURE.

XIII.**THE BOSTON CULTURE.**

A PROFOUND thinker, returning some years ago from a visit to Boston, where he had been entertained in the "Culture" clubs, declared that he could almost see the fine essence of inspiration steaming upward as a visible vapor from the scalps of the members. Whatever satire lay under this grotesque imagery, there can be no doubt that the New-England atmosphere is and has long been one of scholarship; and it is the essential pride of Boston and its neighborhood that the best element of this atmosphere finds its origin there. To be sure, it would be easy to name a dozen towns that are little Bostons, with circles as re-

served, as severe in their tastes, as refined, as the best in the metropolis; and it would also be easy to show that a hundred New-England villages, from Lenox to Lexington, possess the essential quality,—an innate respect for scholarship, for intellectual supremacy,—which makes Boston what it is.

The quality goes far back, and spreads widely in New-England life. It has never been confined to a select circle. One is sometimes inclined to test with a sharpened weapon the apparent claim of a few Boston families to the noble inheritance of the Puritan. The claim is shared with equal justice by many a farmer and cobbler and tin-peddler. Whatever fine ichor there was in the colonial magistrate and the scholarly divine is inherited in equal proportions by the elegant diplomat and the rustic squash-vender. It has been our good luck in past summers to be served with milk by one

who bears the name of an illustrious vice-president, to find in our wood-chopper blood from a stock which furnished the most eloquent defender of colonial liberty, to hand over our horses to a man whose ancestral tree for many years supplied the two colonies of Massachusetts with their governors. The blood contains the old elements still in all that produces energy and sound action, and may in a generation find its way to as high station as it has ever reached. With such a population there is a basis for any degree of greatness. With such an equality of inheritance there is all the stimulus of a great past to make a great future. Where the blood lacks only the refinement which education brings, or the opportunity which belongs to locality, every New-England boy is taught to feel that he has only to pack his book in his bundle, and start on the road which leads to a foreign mission. If he reaches the court of England at last, he will

find the ancestral blood in the best veins there. This is that which makes what we may call the Boston culture a pervading element in all New-England life. Where there is such a proud inheritance, such a stern present necessity, and such a glorious possibility, the conditions of a fine life are always present. New England has certainly held the mastership in energetic intellectual life, and to-day finds its chief competitors in its own transplanted stock. Its supremacy is threatened, if threatened at all, in the house of its children. Some years ago we asked a distinguished lawyer to name the twenty leading men of the New-York bar. When he had done so, we found that the larger half were born, and had received their early training, in New England. The same rule held good for the leading clergymen—those, that is, whose names were known outside of their own denomination; for the great journalists, orators, and public writers.

If we were asked to mention the one leading quality in this inherited excellence, we should say that it lay in the home life, in the spirit of reading, and independent thinking, the reverence for learning and the learned, which pervades almost every home there. A good book finds entrance and welcome in the New-England home as nowhere else. It is respected by the father, revered by the mother, and read by the children. It may be a poem, or the last report of the Department of Agriculture; it may be a literary magazine, or the Farmer's Almanac, — it finds readers in the family, — appreciative, it may be, or merely ambitious, but anyhow *readers*. The same may be sometimes true of the New-York home. In rural districts it is often so, but of city life who would dare to claim it as the rule? Here the student reads, — the scholar, the professional man in his department; but the family does very little reading. Books are

bought, and put upon the centre-table, but they are seldom opened. They are rarely discussed, and almost never revered. In Boston, Cambridge, Concord, Plymouth, they are at least *read*, — whether they are assimilated, or only cause intellectual dyspepsia. There is an audience, therefore, always present for the speaker or the thinker. The greater part of New Englanders may be classed as lecturers and audience. Here in New York there is no audience anywhere for the best products of intellectual activity. There is none visible from the platform, none in the parlor. The audience in Boston is often sophomoric and brags. It too often reminds us of that precept of Sir Philip Sidney: “If you heare a wise sentence, or an apt phrase, commytt it to your memorye, with respect to the circumstance, when you shall speak it.” But it presents the material of growth. The lecturer, the thinker, is generally worthy; and the silent, invisible

auditors in the home circle are vastly more than the visible ones. The "Culture" clubs are but a showy efflorescence, but the genuine culture is sweet and rich and modest. It is a real gift to New York whenever it feels the currents of this intellectual life. We have virtues of our own with which New England cannot equip us, — our unguarded generosity, our unflinching charity, a wide receptivity, and richer experience in practical activities: but a reverence for the best in thought, for the inspiration of fine sentiment, we have not; and as long as we are without this, we shall produce millionnaires, but not high thinkers, — Vanderbilts, but not Emersons. We shall have bustle, but not fine recreation, and shall be known abroad for the immensity of our railroad system, rather than for the soundness and elevation of our mental life. The shrewd observer who praised Newport because it was equally removed from the virtues of

Boston and the vices of New York, might have constructed from the two extremes a possible metropolis nearer to the millennial city even than Newport. Let us hope that we see the beginning of such a city in the fresh impulse given here of late in art, in music, in architecture, in science, and in some departments of literature.

J. H. MORSE.

XIV.

THE LATE SIDNEY LANIER.

XIV.

THE LATE SIDNEY LANIER.

[The following brief essay on the life and genius of the late Mr. Sidney Lanier was read at a memorial gathering in Hopkins Hall, Baltimore, on the evening of Saturday, Oct. 22, 1881. The meeting was not only a tribute to the memory of Mr. Lanier, but was designed to initiate a movement to raise money for the support of his widow and the education of his children. President Gilman, of Johns Hopkins University (in which Mr. Lanier served as lecturer on English literature), presided, and to him Mr. Stedman's letter was addressed. It was courteously withheld from publication in any report of the meeting, in order that it might be printed in "The Critic."]

MY DEAR SIR, — I have expressed already my regret that I cannot be present at your assembly commemorative of the poet and gentle scholar, Sidney Lanier. But I gladly avail myself of your permission to write a

few words in recognition of his original genius, and in expression of the sorrow with which his fellows lament him, as one gone before his time.

Certainly all who care for whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report, must be deeply concerned in the record and ending of Lanier's earthly pilgrimage; concerned no less, if ever they chanced to meet him, in the mingled softness and strength of his nature, the loyalty with which he sang his song, pursued his researches, and took the failures and successes of his consecrated life. For, if there ever was a pilgrim who bore a vow, or a life consecrate to an ideal, such a votary was this poet-artist, and so manifestly ordered was his too brief life.

You will speak to one another of his brave spirit, of the illness and trials that handicapped him, and of the cheerful industry with which he went through daily tasks, and yet so often escaped to the region of poetry

and art. That he had the graceful and practical talent that can adapt itself to use, and give pleasure to the simplest minds, was proved by his admirable books for the young, and the professional labors fresh in your recollection. But in the mould of Lanier, as in that of every real poet, the imaginative qualities and the sense of beauty governed and gave tone to all other senses and motive powers. He was first of all a poet and artist, and of a refined and novel order.

No man, in fact, displayed more clearly the poetic and artistic temperaments in their extreme conjunction. It may be said that they impeded, rather than hastened, his power of adequate expression. He strove to create a new language for their utterance, and a method of his own. To reach the effects toward which his subtle instincts guided him, he required a prolonged lifetime of experiment and discovery; and to him how short a life was given, — and that how full

of impediment! He had scarcely sounded the key-note of his overture, when the bow fell from his hand; and beyond all this he meant to compose, not an air or a tune, but a symphony,—one involving all harmonic resources, and combinations before unknown.

I find that I am involuntarily using the diction of music to express the purpose of his verse; and this fact alone has a bearing upon what he did, and what he did not do, as an American poet. What seemed affectation in him was his veritable nature, which differed from, and went beyond, or outside, that of other men. He gave us now and then some lyric, wandering or regular, that was marked by sufficient beauty, pathos, weirdness, to show what he might have accomplished, had he been content to sing spontaneously — as very great poets have sung — without analyzing his processes till the song was done. But Lanier was a musician, and still heard in his soul “the music

of wondrous melodies." He had, too, the constructive mind of the artist who comprehends the laws of form and tone. How logical was his exposition of the mathematics of beauty, is seen in that unique work, "The Science of English Verse."

Now, it is a question whether, art being so long and time so fleeting, a poet should consider too anxiously the rationale of his song. Again, he strove to demonstrate in his verse the absolute co-relations of music and poetry — and seemed at times to forget that rhythm is but one component of poetry, albeit one most essential. While music is one of the poet's servitors, and must ever be compelled to his use, there still remains that boundary of Lessing's between the liberties of the two arts, though herein less sharply defined than between those of poetry and painting. The rhythm alone of Lanier's verse often had a meaning to himself that others found it hard to understand. Of this he was conscious.

In a letter to me, he said that one reason for his writing "The Science of English Verse" was, that he had some poems which he hoped soon to print, but which "he could not hope to get understood, generally, without educating their audience." To this he added that the task was "inexpressibly irksome" to him, and that he "never could have found courage to endure it save for the fact that in all directions the poetic art was suffering from the shameful circumstance that criticism was without a scientific basis for even the most elementary of its judgments."

If, in dwelling upon the science of his art, he hampered the exercise of it, he was none the less a man of imagination, of ideality; none the less, at first sight, in bearing, features, conversation, a poet and lover of the beautiful. His name is added to the names of those whose haunting strain —

"Ends incomplete, while through the starry night
The ear still waits for what it did not tell."

Yet the sense of incompleteness and of regret for his broken life is tempered by the remembrance that the most suggestive careers of poets have not always been those which were fully rounded, but often of those whose voices reach us from early stages of the march which it was not given them long to continue.

EDMUND C. STEDMAN.

DANIEL C. GILMAN, LL.D., *Baltimore, Md.*

XV.

ENGLISH SOCIETY AND "ENDYMION."

XV.

ENGLISH SOCIETY AND "ENDYMION."

A CLASSIC name, as little suggestive of the work that bears it as was Mr. Longfellow's "Hyperion" of the accompanying narrative. Books nowadays are often named like ships, with a view to what will sound and look well, and with no possible reference to what they are or to what they carry. This work of Lord Beaconsfield's will hardly add more to his reputation than will Mr. Tennyson's last volume to his half-century of fame. A dull book, with a rambling, insignificant story, it has yet, from one point of view, a certain importance and interest for the student of men and manners. It unfolds some of the secrets of that dazzling

London life whose features, imperfectly translated through various mediums, have always had for most polite Americans a great attraction.

This book does or should do much to dispel the illusions with which distance and imagination are wont to invest the "high life" of Great Britain. Its author does not give us a single glimpse of the *noblesse oblige* as we understand it. The society which his facile pen depicts is at once shallow and silly. Even the tradition of the blue blood which, Heaven knows why, so touches our transatlantic reverence, gives way before his treatment. In his narrative, men of the humblest rank rise to posts of high honor and influence. The butler of Endymion's father, married to his mother's maid, makes such a transition from humble to high life, while the sister of the female attendant just mentioned weds a noble lord, and becomes a leader of fashion. A London

tailor gives entertainments at which a peer of the realm finds it delightful to be present, and in time attains to a baronetcy and a seat in the House of Commons. Why not? some may ask; and we will say in reply, that, according to American views of life, all this is natural enough. There is nothing repugnant to our theories in such changes of outward fortune. What should shock the worshipper of rank is the discovery which Lord Beaconsfield allows us to make, that human nature, in its intrinsic qualities and genuine manifestations, is much the same in Belgravia as elsewhere. Stripped of their exceptional wealth and of the prestige of their position, the men and women he depicts are rather more commonplace and uninteresting than the average of our own acquaintance. They have nothing whatever upon which to found a claim of superiority in character, talent, or true breeding. Love, ambition, anger, avarice, are the same with

them as with the civilized world in general. Among them, as among us, the *parvenu* whose object in life has been to climb from the base to the top of the social ladder is the true bigot of rank and distinction. Those born in recognized position are familiar with its conditions, which they usually do not exaggerate. Those who "with a great sum (of money or of effort) obtain this freedom" often manifest a fantastic devotion to that which has cost them so much. The historical value of Lord Beaconsfield's book is far beyond the interest of his story. He speaks as an eye-witness of political changes and complications which occurred during the two reigns preceding the long-continued dominion of the present sovereign. He has inevitably known something of the internal history of events which the sexagenarian of to-day will remember as having been matters of comment and of interest in his own early days. He has

seen Bismarck and Louis Napoleon at a time in which the world troubled itself little about them. He represents them as meeting on friendly terms at the great entertainments of fashionable houses during the London season. They are very likely so to have met, and the suggestion calls grimly to mind the *denoûment* of their relations which the future held in store.

The circle to which Lord Beaconsfield's talents and personal attractions gave him access in early manhood was indeed an exceptionally brilliant one. London society might be proud when it could boast of such men as Sydney Smith, Samuel Rogers, Monckton Milnes, Edwin Landseer, Dickens, and Thackeray. These luminaries were matched by an equally brilliant set of women, among whom we may name the Duchess of Sutherland and her beautiful daughters, Lady Blessington (in her restricted but privileged coterie), and the

Sheridan sisters, of whom the Hon. Mrs. Norton was pre-eminent in beauty and talent. More than one American still lives who has grateful remembrance of those palmy days, to whose high pleasures a good introduction or an exceptional reputation sometimes admitted a transatlantic cousin. To know a little even of what Lord Beaconsfield must have known of some of these persons is a boon of interest, even if his presentment of them must involve some disappointment. The noble lord does not describe this exceptional time, these exceptional people at their best. His story is like a game of chess, in which lord and lady, prelate, commoner, and men of letters, are but the pieces which his skill manœuvres on the checkered board. It is a devil's game too, in which the victory rests with ambition, freighted with talent, and guided by cool judgment. The glimpse which he tries to give us of the world of letters in

the persons of one or two of its prominent citizens is scarcely worthy of one who must have himself enjoyed the freedom of the intellectual guild. The two great satirists of the age, Dickens and Thackeray, are spoken of in the novel under the names of Gushy and St. Barbe; and the portraiture of the latter is so unpleasing that we are glad to hear of the former only as hated and decried by his literary rival. The characterizations of Baron Rothschild and Cardinal Manning, under the pseudonymes of Mr. Neufchatel and Nigel Penruddock, are more happily hit off. The one has the calm poise and kindliness of the man who has achieved transcendent fortune by fair means. The other starts in life with that mistaking of the symbol for the substance which makes him first the slave, then the instrument, of spiritual tyranny. The family of the rich manufacturer, Job Thornberry, is also well painted. The sound sense and genuine

pluck of the farmer's son, who becomes not only a rich man, but also a political power, the snobbish aristocracy of his son, the easy surrender of his wife to the blandishments of the Romanist archbishop, — all of these points are simply and strongly given.

The attitude of the writer in relation to the society which he describes is perhaps the most singular feature of the book. No depth of his own contrasts with the shallowness of his characters. Their likings and dislikings, acts, prejudices, and undertakings, are all painted in the flattest relief. We find in his picture no background of affection, philanthropy, or steadfast belief. All is glittering surface, from which there is no retreat. Thackeray's "Vanity Fair" seems to us the only parallel of "Endymion," for the dreary moral waste which it unfolds to us. Pride, ambition, cunning, vanity, make up the feast of life, to which the apples of Sodom furnish the only appropriate

dessert. From such a kingdom an empire of India would be a relief. The greatest point of interest for Americans is the contrast which this life of shams affords to the realities of freedom, energy, and affection which form the staple of our national life. And this interests us most because it is this very quintessence of frivolity which seems to attract the golden youth of our own country. Our literary men and women once looked to England for the seal and sanction of their merit. We have now developed a literature of our own by which England is glad to profit. Heaven forbid that we should look to the England of Lord Beaconsfield for our standard of morals and manners! He does not depict our mother country, for motherhood there is none in his portraiture. A different England some of us know,—cheery, hospitable, rich in family life, earnest in philanthropy, reserved but steadfast in reform and progress. Give

us the England of Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; the England of Shakespeare, Bacon, and Milton. She lives in an unrivalled literature, in thrifty colonies, in a robust and well-dowered daughter. To her we may look with love and veneration. Of her we may learn in the future as we have learned in the past. Honor to those who can show us this truly noble England! Honor to those who study her great lessons, and cherish her grand traditions! And as for the fribble of the Old World and the fribble of the New, it is perhaps well enough to let them pair off harmlessly together.

JULIA WARD HOWE.

XVI.

HISTORICAL CRITICISM OF CHRIST.

XVI.

HISTORICAL CRITICISM OF CHRIST.

THERE are two natural processes in respect of all great personalities that attract the interest and win the honor and reverence of the race, — the process by which they are magnified and exalted into demi-gods and mythic divinities; and the process by which, in ages of critical inquisitiveness, they are reduced to their original historic proportions. The two processes are by no means necessarily contradictory. The mythic greatness, the glamour and imaginative exaltation, of the human spirits that have wrought upon the souls of men with transcendent power, is just as truly a part of the history of humanity, and a deserved tribute to their mag-

nitude as persons of vast original force, as if it were biographically true in its details. And the later necessity which the critical or strictly historic spirit falls under, of discovering just what the literal facts were touching the person who is thus idealized, does little to disturb the place the object of this inquiry holds in the reverence of men. We have seen a general resurrection of the heroes and martyrs and poets and patriots of the past, called up in the last half-century by the spirit of modern historic criticism, to pass under the review of a strictly rational inquest, and to undergo not the last, but a later judgment, from the beneficiaries of their genius, or their doings and sayings. An intense curiosity has animated the modern world to see the kings, the patriots, the poets, the saints and heroes of the past, as men, and not merely as splendid apparitions; to bring them not down to, but within, the immediate range of human sympathies; to

know them as they really lived and moved, and get as near to their private hearts and experiences as the utmost pains could bring the closest and most microscopic investigators. We have, perhaps, lost some beloved personalities under a process which has undraped figures that seemed warm with human blood, to discover beneath only an *idea* that had passed into human form, and taken a name — like that of Tell — where only a group of national feelings really existed. But, as a rule, the greatness and glory of historic names have not suffered from modern criticism, even when it has revealed much that was private and human on the feebler side. What they have seemed to lose by familiarity they have regained by sympathy and reality. The more human they have been made, the more interesting. Washington is himself growing in estimation from the critical development of his human personality; for it is not only supernatural

beings to whom the world assigns a double nature,—the nature that belongs to their public, and the nature that belongs to their private character.

The multiplication of works on the strictly human nature of Jesus is one of the most marked features of the times. The Christian world for eighteen centuries was wholly occupied with the supernatural side of the founder of Christianity. His humanity was deemed of comparatively little importance, except as a sign of his humiliation, and a ground of doctrine. That the Supreme Being should have condescended to incarnate himself in flesh and blood, and take upon him the nature of man, was indeed a matter of profound theological interest, and naturally became the foundation-stone of a vast dogmatic system which still rules the creeds and the religious imagination of the Church and the world. But the life of Jesus from a human point of view necessa-

rily became denaturalized by the hypothesis, however well founded, of his being really a god, shrouded in a human form. Human he must be considered on one side, to make effectual the very dogma of his divine condescension, and to render him capable of expiating the sins of the race, whose lineage and nature he shared, and whom he came to save by his self-sacrifice. But this humanity of Christ's was, after all, if metaphysically real, practically fictitious. He was a man, and human only so far as a God of omniscient and omnipotent wisdom and power could be a man; and he could only be a man as a king could be a beggar if he put on his rags and assumed his filth and poverty, and went about asking alms. All the while the king keeps his crown, and knows his royalty, and must feel the unreality of his destitution; and it is at least very difficult to conceive how the man in Jesus could be a real man, while the God in him was a real God. The

difficulties of this union made a large part of the dogmatic speculation and controversy of the early Church. But the double nature got itself at last established as a fundamental dogma,—a mystery and riddle of hopeless obscurity, but none the less an article of faith, fruitful of the most intricate and puzzling, but also of the most awful and decisive convictions. Under its influence the man Jesus for eighteen centuries wholly disappeared. The Christ came forward, wearing indeed his human habiliments, and carrying in his divine person all the dogmatic fruits of his crucified humanity, but really only a god; nay, God himself, and overwhelmingly interesting as God, while his proper humanity continued only as a foil, or means of setting off more effectively and dramatically his divinity.

But in the last half-century the Church has brought forth children in all its branches, to whom the study of Jesus, not so much as the

Christ, but in *himself* as a genuine man, — a man to himself, to his first disciples, to his mother and brethren, to his fellow Galileans, and to the Jewish people, — has become a matter of the same interest it seems to have been to his original biographers, the Synoptics. How easy it was to lose this interest in contemplating the Christ, and not Jesus, appears in the extraordinary departure made in the Fourth Gospel from the simplicity of the three Synoptics; and still more in that departure, once for all, which Paul in his epistles made from the biographical or purely historic and actual Jesus of Nazareth, to set up the Christ, the divine Saviour, or deific Messiah, as the sole object of contemplation, faith, and confidence, for his disciples. Paul, who must have known fully the earthly history of Jesus, hardly thinks it worth while to dwell on any part of it, — not his birth, or his works of mercy or love, or his human graces, — but only on his death and resurrec-

tion, and elevation to heavenly powers, and his speedy return in the clouds of heaven to set up his divine kingdom amid his risen saints in the earth. Is it any wonder that the Church for eighteen centuries has mainly followed in the track it so early took under the great authority of Paul, in neglecting the strictly human side of the founder of the faith?

H. W. BELLOWS.

XVII.

WHITMAN'S "LEAVES OF GRASS."

XVII.

WHITMAN'S "LEAVES OF GRASS." ¹

VIRTUALLY, but not actually, this is the first time that Mr. Whitman has issued his poems through a publishing-house instead of at his private cost. The two volumes called "Leaves of Grass" and "The Two Rivulets," which he had printed and himself sold at Camden, N.J., are now issued in one, under the former title, without special accretions of new work, but not without a good deal of re-arrangement in the sequence of the poems. Pieces that were evidently written later, and intended to be eventually put under "Leaves of Grass," now find their

¹ Leaves of Grass. By Walt Whitman. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co.

place; some that apparently did well enough where they were have been shifted to other departments. On the whole, however, the changes have been in the direction of greater clearness as regards their relation to the subtitles. It is not apparent, however, that the new book is greatly superior to the old in typography, although undeniably the fault of the privately printed volumes, a variation in types used, is no longer met with. The margins are narrower, and the look of the page more commonplace. The famous poem called "Walt Whitman" is now the "Song of Myself." It still maintains:—

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable;
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

It still has the portrait of Whitman when younger, standing in a loose flannel shirt and slouched hat, with one hand on his hip, the other in his pocket. "Eidolons" has been taken from the second volume, and placed,

for good reasons that the reader may not be ready to understand, among the first pieces gathered under the sub-title "Inscriptions." It ends with the "Songs of Parting," under which the last is "So Long," a title that a foreigner, and perhaps an American, might easily consider quite as untranslatable as Mr. Whitman proclaims himself to be. The motive for the publication seems to be to take advantage of that wider popularity which is coming somewhat late in life to him whom his admirers like to call "the good gray poet."

One great anomaly of Whitman's case has been, that while he is an aggressive champion of democracy and of the working-man, in a broad sense of the term working-man, his admirers have been almost exclusively of a class the farthest possibly removed from that which labors for daily bread by manual work. Whitman has always been truly caviare to the multitude. It was only those who

knew much of poetry, and loved it greatly, who penetrated the singular shell of his verses, and rejoiced in the rich, pulpy kernel. Even with connoisseurs, Whitman has been somewhat of an acquired taste; and it has always been amusing to note the readiness with which persons who would not or could not read him, raised a cry of affectation against those who did. This phenomenon is too well known in other departments of taste to need further remark; but it may be added that Mr. Whitman has both gained by it and lost. He has gained a vigorousness of support on the part of his admirers that probably more than out-balances the acrid attacks of those who consider his work synonymous with all that is vicious in poetical technique, and wicked from the point of morals. As to the latter, it must be confessed, that, according to present standards of social relations, the doctrines taught by Whitman might readily be construed, by the over-hasty

or unscrupulous, into excuses for foul living; for such persons do not look below the surface, nor can they grasp the whole idea of Whitman's treatment of love. However fervid his expressions may be, and however scornful he is of the miserable hypocrisies that fetter but also protect the evilly disposed, it is plain that the idea he has at heart is that universal love which leaves no room for wickedness, because it leaves no room for doing or saying unkind, uncharitable, unjust things to his fellow-man. With an exuberance of thought that would supply the mental outfit of ten ordinary poets, and with a rush of words that is by no means reckless, but intensely and grandly labored, Whitman hurls his view of the world at the heads of his readers with a vigor and boldness that takes away one's breath. This century is getting noted among centuries for singular departures in art and literature. Among them all, there is none bolder or

more original than that of Whitman. Perhaps Poe in his own line might be cited as an equal. It is strange, and yet it is not strange, that he should have waited so long for recognition, and that by many thousands of people of no little culture his claims to being a poet at all are either frankly scouted or else held in abeyance. Literature here has remarkably held aloof from the vital thoughts and hopes of the country. It seems as if the very crudity of the struggle here drove people into a petty dilettante atmosphere of prettiness in art and literature as an escape from the dust and cinders of daily life. Hence our national love for "slicked up" pictures, for instance, by which it is often claimed in Europe that promising geniuses in painting, there, have been ruined for higher work. Hence our patronage of poets that have all the polish of a cymbal, but all a cymbal's dry note and hollowness. Hence, at one time, our admi-

ration for orators that were ornate to the verge of inanity. Into this hot-house air of literature Walt Whitman bounded with the vigor and suppleness of a clown at a funeral. Dire were the grimaces of the mourners in high places, and dire are their grimaces still. There were plenty of criticisms to make, even after one had finished crying "Oh!" at the frank sensuality, the unbelievable nakedness of Walt. Every thing that decent folk covered up, Walt exhibited, and boasted of exhibiting! He was proud of his nakedness and sensuality. He cried, "Look here, you pampered rogues of literature, what are you squirming about, when you know, and everybody knows, that things are just like this, always have been, always will be?" But it must be remembered that this was what he wrote, and that he did it with a plan, and by order from his genius. It has never been heard of him that he was disgusting in talk, or vile in private life; while it has been

known that poets celebrated for the lofty tone of their morality, for the strictness of their Christianity, the purity of their cabinet hymns, can condescend in private life to wallow in all that is base. That is the other great anomaly of Whitman. He rhapsodizes of things seldom seen in print with the enthusiasm of a surgeon enamoured of the wonderful mechanism of the body. But he does not soil his conversation with lewdness. If evil is in him, it shows only in his book.

Whitman's strength and Whitman's weakness lie in his lack of taste. As a mere external sign, look at his privately printed volumes. For a printer and type-setter, reporter and editor, they do not show taste in the selection and arrangement of the type. A cardinal sin in the eyes of most critics is the use of French, Spanish, and American-Spanish words, which are scattered here and there, as if Whitman had picked them up, sometimes slightly incorrectly, from wander-

ing minstrels, Cubans, or fugitives from one of Walker's raids. He shows crudely the American way of incorporating into the language a handy or a high-sounding word without elaborate examination of its original meaning, just as we absorb the different nationalities that crowd over from Europe. His thought and his mode of expression are immense, often flat, very often monotonous, like our great sprawling cities with their endless scattering of suburbs. Yet when one gets the "hang" of it, there is a colossal grandeur in conception and execution that must finally convince whoever will be patient enough to look for it. His rhythm, so much burlesqued, is all of a part with the man and his ideas. It is apparently confused; really most carefully schemed; certainly to a high degree original. It has what to the present writer is the finest thing in the music of Wagner, — a great booming movement or undertone, like the noise of

heavy surf. His crowded adjectives are like the mediæval writers of Irish, those extraordinary poets who sang the old Irish heroes and their own contemporaries, the chiefs of their clans. No Irishman of to-day has written a nobler lament for Ireland, or a more hopeful, or a more truthful, than has Walt Whitman. Yet it is not said that he has Irish blood. Nor is there to be found in our literature another original piece of prose so valuable to future historians as his notes on the war. Nor is there a poet of the war-time extant who has so struck the note of that day of conflict as Whitman has in "Drum Taps." He makes the flesh creep. His verses are like the march of the long lines of volunteers, and then again like the bugles of distant cavalry. But these are parts of him. As he stands complete in "Leaves of Grass," in spite of all the things that regard for the decencies of drawing-rooms and families may wish away, he cer-

tainly represents, as no other writer in the world, the struggling, blundering, sound-hearted, somewhat coarse, but still magnificent, vanguard of Western civilization that is encamped in the United States of America. He avoids the cultured few. He wants to represent, and does in his own strange way represent, the lower middle stratum of humanity. But, so far, it is not evident that his chosen constituency cares for, or has even recognized him. Wide readers are beginning to guess his proportions.

