

TENNYSON AS A POET OF NATURE.



VERY near to Mother Nature are her poet children; the others play about her feet and catch a chance word, a passing caress perhaps. Her bright smile that shines out from beyond the sunset glow—the calm tenderness of the harvest moonbeams—the joyousness in the song of woodland birds, are common property; but the poet, Nature carries in her strong arms against her heart, and in his ear she whispers hints of mystic wonders wrought on land and sea. She lulls his coarser faculties to sleep with crooning lullaby of forest trees and murmuring rivulet, and teaching him her language she tells him to interpret to his brothers the ever-new old story of love and beauty, and to show them how to live in harmony with the laws that weave the universe into the visible garment of its Creator.

Still, even for the most favored, the time is gone by, when genius could dispense with study, when men were slowly opening their eyes to the knowledge that mountains might be something more than simply obstacles to be surmounted; that the river was worth looking at for its own sake, independent of the use it might be put to as a highway for merchandise. A vague cry attracting attention to the exceeding fairness of earth and sky, was all sufficing; but now that the earlier poets have made the surface-beauty that lies around us our own possession, we ask those of to-day to explore for us hitherto unthought-of regions, to distil fresh nectar joys of wandering vines and bring us the exhilarating draught that we quaff at our leisure.

And not far away need we send our caterers of beauty. The man who unfolds new charms from bracken and daisy-studded meadows, is more akin to us than he who sings of distant splendors.

More definite knowledge about the common things around us, is the cry of the age, and art as well as science must be ready to meet our growing wants, or fail to find an abiding place with us.

Loudest, aye, and sweetest among the

voices that express our mighty Nineteenth Century, ring the clear English notes of Tennyson. Hand in hand with the Pre-Raphaelites, and going straight to Nature, he gives her to us in the new-born freshness that comes from looking so closely as not only to read the generalities, but the individual characteristics that belong to one special object.

There are many lovely valleys in poetry that we only catch vague glimpses of, through the golden mists of the poet's fancy. Not so with the vale that lies in *Ida* :

"Lovelier than all the valleys of Servian Hills."

We feel ourselves there, in that valley and no other :

"Watching while the swimming vapor
Slopes across the glen,
Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine
And loiters slowly drawn. On either hand
The lawns and meadow ledges midway down
Hang rich in flowers, and from below them roars
The long brook falling thro' the clov'n ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea.
Behind the valley topmost Gargarus
Stands up and takes the morning."

We wander with the forlorn *Ænone* breaking into mournful plaint of faithless *Paris*, and the pathos of her cry :

"Dear Mother *Ida*
Hearken ere I die !"

sweeps through

"The noonday quiet
That holds all silent but her sorrow."

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"The lizard with his shadow on a stone,
Rests like a shadow
And the Cicada sleeps.
The purple flowers droop;
The golden bee is lily-cradled;
I alone awake"—

The scene is complete; we are not so much told about it, as that we have it placed before us, to feel its influences for ourselves. We are not wearied with an enumeration of needless details, but every one tells, and could not be omitted without injury to the picture.

Combining the Pre-Raphaelite accuracy of detail, with the entrancing suggestiveness of the impressionist, Tennyson transports whither he pleases. A prose writer would labor long to describe to us "*Mar-*