

A LINE FROM EMERSON.

"But thou, God's darling, heed thy private dream!"
 To thee is given to know that the ideal
 Is the immortal spirit of the real;
 From every liquid-throated bird shall stream
 Thy wordless joy; for thee alone shall gleam
 The stars, the flowers; e'en grim old age shall steal
 Upon thee soft as summer twilights feel,
 And Death's dread touch thy mother's arms shall seem.

To thy soul's highest instincts, oh, be true!
 Though thick around thy heaven-girt solitude
 The earth's low aims, low thoughts, low wants shall teem;
 The myriad voices of the world shall sue
 With scorn, persuasive wile, or clamours rude,
 "But thou, God's darling, heed thy private dream!"

A. ETHELWYN WETHERALD.

LITERARY PERSONALITIES.

THE extent of the claim of ordinary human beings upon extraordinary human beings has been so long and so unsatisfactorily in dispute that the conclusion that it never will be fairly determined is not wholly unreasonable. The fact that it includes one individual, body, soul, and shoe-strings, and quite falters before the lightest possession of another, seems to show that it is arbitrated by the extraordinary themselves; and if the opinions of this very various class must form the basis for its adjustment it is clearly seen to be unadjustable. So long as the earthly tabernacle in which genius is set, with its likes and dislikes, its prejudices and its habits of life, is permitted a controlling interest in the invaluable stock it represents, so long will the general public be perplexed to know its privileges in the matter. And that, unless Socialism, carried to its legitimate end, some day propounds it as criminal to inherit brains as other property, and demands for everybody a share in the immediate proceeds of the divine afflatus, is likely to be always. It is, of course, only to the living author that the choice as to whether he will hob-nob with *hoi polloi* in his private relations, or not, is given. He may leave his dictum in the matter, with his other effects, to his relatives and friends, when it is sometimes regarded, and sometimes, as in Carlyle's case, disregarded. Even when the trust is most sacredly held, as the years roll on that separate the mortal from the immortal part of him, the responsibility grows less binding, and the home truths leak out. It is not long since we read poor Keats' love letters.

The ethics of his relations toward the subject and toward the public anxious to be enlightened are the Scylla and Charybdis between which the biographer must sail. He is fortunate indeed if he does not fall a prey to both—if he is not accused of pandering to morbid curiosity on the one hand, and of withholding important facts for unworthy or unsubstantial reasons, on the other. To keep the mean between the action of a literary scavenger and that of a grasping monopolist of interesting and valuable information can be no easy task, especially when the mean has its own particular obloquy attached to it. The sins of the "bad Bart." of "Ruddigore" are doubtless venial compared with those of the bad biographer of modern times, but his position and all that it entails should be considered in passing sentence upon him. He is pre-eminently the martyr of the literary class.

Perhaps one most reasonable extenuation even for "morbid curiosity" concerning people familiar to us as authors is the part and lot they have in our being. They have it quite unconsciously, and are justified, on this ground, in resenting our disposition to presume upon it. Yet they cannot be said to have it unintentionally, and therefore should resign themselves philosophically to the consequences. Far finer and stronger than the common social tie is the bond by which the great mind that is inspiration and refreshment to us draws us to itself. Our favourite author does not know the fruit of our vine or the shade of our fig-tree, perhaps; but he is more closely and sacredly our friend than nine-tenths of the people who do. He enters into our holy of holies; between the covers of his confessional we leave the thought that never finds expression. He is the exponent, to us, of the world's intellectual best. We tingle spiritually with his thought as we should bodily with wine on the lees, thrice refined. He represents by all odds the most potent of the forces that enter into the life that is usually broadly distinguished from the physical. It is to employ the terms of a patent truism, to say that the *rapport* which most of us have with certain well-thumbed pages is the keenest and finest of earthly delights. It is legitimate and natural that we should desire to know of masters in art as they walked and talked among lesser men and women.

The lineaments of a friend are of such an uncommon facial type that we suffer when they are unnecessarily veiled. Vulgar and abnormal curiosity demands information a friend would rather not have, cavils where a friend would accept, criticises where a friend would ignore, and has its source not in admiration or sympathy, but in the characteristic that showmen operate upon—the desire that draws the crowd to see the dog-faced man.

"All I want from a celebrity," said the husband of one to me not long ago, "is his work. His personality does not affect me, and does not interest me. If I meet him, I meet him as one civilised human being meets another, not as a genius masquerading in evening dress, and I find him agreeable or disagreeable on his merits in that capacity only."

This rather laboured divorce of the author, artist, or musician from his brains struck me at the time as being a possible result of a doubtless uncomfortable experience of the literary and unliterary curiosity of this world, of long standing, as one of the fortunes my acquaintance had found in matrimony; and I refused to believe it a general or a favourite view. We cannot dissociate the product of a man's genius from him as we do that of his potato patch. If the verse of Browning or the canvas of Tadema or the impersonation of Irving, or the score of Liszt were all we cared that they should give us—or sell us—then his generalship would be all we should want from Gordon, and there would be no hero-worship in the world; and as hero-worship is about our noblest capacity, the source and reason of our loftiest endeavour, to salvation itself, this would be unfortunate. But the work of genius, no more than that of intrepidity or any other semi-human, semi-divine quality in the world, can be wholly bought, sold, or possessed. Its value to humanity cannot be approximated in the tables of civilisation, much less rendered in the book-shops. It makes for the general uplifting of mankind, and there is a cosmic suggestion in its leverage. We can hardly take too vivid a personal interest in the agency through which its work is done.

It would be hard to maintain that this interest is unwarrantable when it is not based upon any very profound knowledge of greatness as exemplified in its works. Doubtless many people noted with attention Mr. Browning's negotiations about his Venetian palace, who would not know dramatic monologue when they saw it; and the most bookish among us can hardly claim the intimate intellectual acquaintance with every man of letters that alone fully justifies a demand to know how he got on with his mother-in-law. Perhaps, after all, the dignity of literature and the general fitness of things demand as a minimum only an intelligent apprehension of the intrinsic difference between a genius and a dog-faced man. In any case it would seem that the greater evil of unlimited consumption of personal detail concerning an author, by a public only vaguely familiar with him in the capacity that made him great, redounds chiefly upon the public itself. It propagates an entirely false idea of what constitutes literary culture, by elevating this love of gossip about celebrities—discriminating as it may be, it is love of gossip notwithstanding,—to the place of a refined taste. There is not the least doubt that in this day and in this country of somewhat superficial acquirement—save the mark!—thousands of people know literary life that have the slightest possible knowledge of literature. It will be interesting to know, after a proper interval, how the sale of Beecher's biographies compares with that of the great preacher's sermons. Naturally the masses are better with this savour of the thing than totally without it; the harm is that they insist upon confounding the savour with the thing itself—the shell with the kernel. The interior of the house in Cheyne Row, as revealed by Mr. Froude, passes current for an immense amount of Carlylean philosophy. We substitute for a knowledge of Mr. Spencer a careful mastery of the details of his controversy with Mr. Harrison and the Appletons, know Rosetti by the pathetic story of his manuscripts in his wife's coffin, construct Thoreau out of his forest hut, and are happily conscious that we have taken all literature to be our province.

Upon genius perhaps, grand, self-centred, inexplicable as the Sphinx, the wave of popular deification beats and retreats harmlessly, as on a rock; but upon talent, whose family resemblance to genius is marked enough to give it prominence and ensure for it public regard, the effect must be more or less undermining. It cannot but set a limit to everything but the most inspired endeavour to find with comparative ease such abundant recognition as awaits effort in America. To rest upon his laurels must be the constant temptation of many a Pegasus over the border whose wings are hardly grown. The ease by which reputations may be made on this side the Atlantic must tend to change too the quality of the inspiration. "Go to, now; let us be famous!" might very naturally be the burden of many a youthful *littérateur's* communings with himself, with the result that he finds in his art a means and not an end. Lord Tennyson to the contrary notwithstanding, the "desire of fame" pales into futile insigni-