

MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN.

ADMIRABLE SKETCH AND CRITICISM.

Post, Essayist, Novelist, Journalist and All-round Literary Man—The Professor and Student—His Busy and Well-filled Life.

The poet-critic Stedman, in his book on American poetry, gives a few lines to what he terms the Irish-American school. His definition is a little misleading, as some of the poets he cites were more American than the troop of lesser bards that grace his polished pages. It is rather a strange notion of American critics that Prof. Boyesen, having cast aside the language of Norseland to sport in the larger waters of our English tongue, is metamorphosed into a true American, while the literary sons and daughters of Irish parents, born and striking root in American soil, are marked with a foreign brand. It is the old story of English literary prejudice reproduced by American critics. American *modistes* go to Paris for their fashions, American critics to the Strand for their literary canons. It is pleasant to know that the bulk of the people stay at home. In this Irish-American school one meets with the name of Maurice Francis Egan. "A sweet and true poet" is Stedman's criticism. Coming from a master in the art of literary interpretation, it must occupy a place in all coming estimates of Mr. Egan's poetry. This criticism is nevertheless short and unsatisfactory. It gives no true idea of the poet's place in the letters of his country. It merely, if one is inclined to agree with Stedman, establishes that Mr. Egan has a place among the bards. In the hall of Parnassus, however, there are so many stalls that the ordinary reader prefers to have the particular place assigned to each bard pointed out. The author of this sketch, while not accredited to the Theatre of Parnassus, may be able to give to those who are not under the guidance of a uniformed usher, some hints whereby Mr. Egan's particular place may be discerned; that place is among the minor poets. The major stalls are all empty, waiting for the coming men, so glibly prophesied about by the little makers of our every day literature.

MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN,

poet, essayist, novelist, journalist, and all-round literary man, was born in Philadelphia, Pa., May 24, 1852. His first instructors were the Christian Brothers, at their well-known La Salle College in that city. From La Salle he went to Georgetown College, as a professor of English. After leaving Georgetown he edited a short-lived venture, McGee's Weekly. In 1881 he became assistant editor of the Freeman's Journal, and remained virtually at the head of that paper until the death of its founder and the passing of the property to other hands. The founding of the Catholic University, and the acceptance of its English professorship by Warren Stoddard, made a vacancy in the faculty of Notre Dame University. This vacancy was offered to and accepted by Mr. Egan.

There are few places better fitted as a poet's home than Notre Dame. Beautiful scenery to fill the eye, brilliant society to spur the mind, and a spacious library freighted with the riches of the past. In comparison with the majority of the Catholic writers, the poet's journey in life has been comparatively smooth, though far from what it should have been. The poet has published the following volumes:—That Girl of Mine, 1879; Preludes, 1880; Song Sonnets, London, 1885; Theatre, 1885; Stories of Duty, 1885; Garden of Roses, 1886; Life Around Us, 1886; Novels and Novellists, 1888; Patrick Desmond, 1893; Poems, 1898. To this list must be added innumerable articles in magazines and weekly journals. Judged by the signed output, it is safe to write that the English professor of Notre Dame is a very busy man. The wonder is that a mind so occupied by so many diverse things can write entertainingly of each.

THE POET'S FIRST BOOK,

a few sonnets and poems, was for "sweet charity's sake," and had but a limited acquaintance. It is safe to say that

every first book of a genuine poet, despite its crudities, will show the seeker signs of things to come. Egan's book was not without its promises, but in truth these promises, are only partly fulfilled in his latest volume of verse. There may be many reasons adduced for this disparity between promise and fulfillment. One of them is the haste with which poetry is published. Horace's dictum of using the file has been long since forgotten. The rabble calls for poetry, and, like the Italian and his lentils, care little for the quality. If the poet hearkens to the calls, and who among the contemporary bards has laughed it to scorn, he exchanges perpetuity for the present, notoriety for fame. Nor will the rabble leave the poet freedom in choosing his material. He is simply a tradesman, and must use what is placed at his disposal. Things great and grand must be left unto that day when the poet, untrammelled by worldly care, shall write his heart's dream. If the time ever comes, the poet learns in sorrow that his dreams will never float into human speech, for the hand has lost its cunning. So the days of youth and manhood pass, blowing bubbles or decorating platitudes. Death snatches the poetling, and oblivion is his coverlid. The songs he sang died with the rabble. The new generation asked for a poet that could drill into the human heart and bring forth its secrets—a listener to nature, her interpreter to man. To such a one the vocabulary of a minor bard is useless. Another reason, more applicable to our author, is that he has been unfortunate to be a pioneer in Catholic American literature. His poems, appealing, as they do, to a distinct class, and that far from being a book-buying one, will fail to attract only the lynx-eyed critic who cares only for the general literary purveyor. From such a source the poet's chance of corrective criticism has been slight. The class to which Mr. Egan belongs has no criticism to offer its literary food-givers. If an author's book sells, his name is blazoned forth in half a hundred headless petty journals.

HIS MOST GLARING DEFECTS

become through their glasses mystic beauty spots. He is invited to lecture on all kinds of subjects. A clique grows around him, whose duty it is to puff the master. In a mutual admiration society he passes his days and nights aureoled in glory. Little wonder, then, that such an author comes to look upon himself as a being whose every written word is pregnant with wisdom.

These reasons, frankly adduced, have limited the scope and dwarfed the genius of Maurice Egan. His latest volume, while containing poems that reveal hidden powers, has many of the crudities and faults of his early work. Some of the longer poems are thin of thought. They were evidently written with a haste that has no time to winnow. Here and there we meet with beauties that hold the mind and fill the ear with true music; but, like a slight vein of gold hidden in a mountain, they will not repay the quarrying. There is about them a mechanic-like air as if they were made "to order and for pay."

Product and purchase of the magazine.

In his shorter poems, and notably in his sonnets, the poet is more happy. In these, strange as it may seem, the scope is broader, the touch firmer. The mastery of musical expression, so lacking in his longer poems, is here to be met with in the fullness of its beauty. Even these, lovely as they are, will fail to herald the poet as a master-singer. They argue but talent. That ecstasy, that inspiration, which we experience in the reading of the masters of song are not found in Mr. Egan's book.

"A flower branch of the garden one brings to the town,
But brings not the whole garden of flowers to town."

As yet the poet has shown no higher powers than are required

"To burnish wit in m-a-u-r-d-e-r's, to wind
A weary labyrinth of labored rhymes
And cipher verses on an abacus."

What of the early promise? It may be fulfilled if the poet will consecrate himself wholly to his art, shutting his mind to the rabble shout and eulogious criticism. Then may he hear the rhythms and cadences of that music whose orchestra comprises all things from the shells to the stars, all beings from the worm to man, all sounds from the voice of the little bird to the voice of the great ocean. To these translations man will cling to the last, and in their

clinging is the poet's fame. As a good specimen of Mr. Egan's powers in his shorter flights, "The Old Violin" comes to the mind:

Though tuneless, stringless, it lies there in dust,
Like some great thought on a forgotten page;
The soul of music cannot fade or rust
The voice within, it stronger grows with age;
Its strings and bow are only trifling things—
A master touch! its sweet soul wakes and sings.

The sonnet "Of Flowers" gives a happy setting to a beautiful thought.

There were no roses till the first child died,
No violets, no balmy-breathed heartsease,—
No bell-tropes, nor lads so dear to bees,
The honey-hearted woodbine, no gold-eyed
And white-lashed daisy-flowers, nor, stretching wide,
Clover and cowslip cups, like rival seas,
Meeting and parting, as the young spring
breeds
Runs giddy races, playing seek and hide.
For all flowers died when Eve left Paradise,
And all the world was flowerless while,
Until a little child was laid in earth.
Then, from its grave, grew violets for its eyes,
And from its lips rose petals for its smile;
And so all flowers from that child's death
took birth."

To those who have lovingly lingered over the pages of Maurice De Guerin, pages that breathe the old Greek world of thought, the following sonnets, that paint that modern Grecian with a few masterly strokes, will be keenly relished. It is the fine implications of these lines that is the life of our hope for the poet and the future.

MAURICE DE GUERIN.

The old wine filled him, and he saw, with eyes
Anoint of nature, fawns and dryads fair,
Unseen by others; to him maiden hair,
And waxen lilies and those birds that rise
A sudden from tall reeds, at slight surprise,
Brought charmed thoughts, and in earth every-
where,
He, like sad Jacques, found unheard music,
rare
As that of Syrinx to old Græcians wies.
A Pagan heart, a Christian soul, had he,
He followed Christ, yet for dead Pan he
sighed,
Till earth and heaven met within his breast!
As if Theocritus, in Sicily,
Had come upon the Ficus crucified,
And lost his gods in deep Christ-given rest!

As an essayist, Mr. Egan has touched many subjects, and always in an entertaining vein. Some of his essays are remarkable for their plain speaking. He has studied his race in their new surroundings, knows equally well their virtues and failings. If he can take an honest delight in the virtues, he is capable of writing with no uncertain sound on the failings, failings that have been so mercilessly used by the vulgarly comic school of American playwrights. His essays are corrective and should find their way into every Irish-American home. They would tend to correct many abuses and aid in the detection of those bunnions so sacredly kept on the feet of the Irish race—last relic of the Penal times. A recent essay throws a series of blue lights—the color so well liked by Carlyle—on

OUR SHALLOW COLLEGIATE SYSTEM.

Will it be read by our Catholic educators? That is a question that time will answer. If they read it aright they will be apt to change their system of teaching the classics parrot-like, an empty word translation. They will transport their pupils from the bare classroom to the sunny skies of Greece and Rome, and under these skies see the religious dogmas, the philosophical systems, the fine arts, the entire civilization of those ancient thought-giving nations. "What professor," says De Guerin, reading Virgil and Homer to his pupil, "has developed the poetry of the Iliad or Æneid by the poetry of nature under the Græcian and Italian skies. Who has dreamt of showing the reciprocal relation of the poets to the philosophers, the philosophers to the poets, and these in turn to the artists—Plato to Homer, Homer to Phidias? It is a want of this that makes the classics so dull to youth, so useless to manhood."

Mr. Egan, as a novelist, has written many books, dealing mostly with Irish-American life. These novels are filled with strong, manly feeling, and Catholic pictures beautiful enough to arrest the attention of the most fastidious. In these days of romance readers such books must serve as an antidote to the subtle poison that permeates the fictive art. While his novels reveal no extraordinary gift of the novelist's craft, they are pleasant and instructive, and that is a high tribute in these days of dullness and spiced immorality. Take him all in all, perhaps the most acceptable tribute is, that whatever may be his gifts in the various roles he has essayed, heavy or light, they have been ungrudgingly used for his race and religion.

WALTER LEON.

PROVE THE CHARGES!

An Episcopalian Defence of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

The following sturdy utterances are taken from the editorial columns of the Parish Messenger, a paper published in the interests of the Episcopal church at Omaha, Neb. The rev. editor is the rector of one of the episcopalian churches of that city:

"If the Roman Catholic Church is committing any offence against the laws of the land let it be shown, and let its priests and its bishops be implicated in our courts, and if guilty, convicted and punished; and if need be let its profession be forbidden. If there be anything in its constitution that is in plain statutory contradiction to our laws and constitution let it be so decided by competent authority. If its religious houses be houses of infamy, and its priests and nuns the vilest of the vile, let it be so charged and proved by others than apostates degraded for drunkenness, licentiousness and crimes against nature."

And yet, no priestly apostate is too vile to find a place and ministry in this propaganda of slander and hate; and men who call themselves ministers of Christ do not hesitate to give credence and circulation to stories which, if true, except in rare instances, would present to us a riddle which no man could solve; namely, that no part of the Christian Church can show a more indomitable courage and devotion, a more tireless spirit for the conversion of heathen men and savages, at every cost of comfort, of ease, of home, of worldly advantage, of life itself, than the Roman Catholic Church. Her priests penetrate into every heathen fastness; her nuns also. On every battlefield her Sisters forego the natural weakness of their womanhood, to minister to the dying, on the war-swept field of slaughter. They are found by day and by night in the plague-swept cities of the laud, and in the hospitals amid the dead and dying and suffering. When in Memphis and New Orleans Protestant ministers fled like craven cowards—many of them before the horrors of yellow fever—Roman Catholic priests stood like men to their posts; some of them to die beside their more manly Protestant brethren, and the men of the Red Cross, and Sisters also.

What has become of Protestant manhood, of American honor, if it keeps silent in the face of this utter denial of Christian virtue among men and women who give daily proof of heroic courage and rare devotion on behalf of the bodies and souls of men and women, without waiting to inquire what their creed or nation is?

The Sisters of the Good Shepherd are a Roman Catholic Order of Women, whose principal, if not only work, is the reclamation of fallen women. Their work being what it is, their houses, in the different cities, are usually walled in, and have the character of places of confinement.

In some cases, fallen women enter voluntarily; in some cases they are taken to them by relatives; and in some cases they are committed by the public authorities, just as refractory girls are committed to civil reformatories.

Sometimes it happens that a woman escapes from her confinement, or gets word out to pitiful members of some Orange or A.P.A. lodge; and then from end to end of the land goes the tale of oppression of imprisoned virgins by tyrant nuns. Not a word of explanation goes with the slanderous tale, to show that the wronged women are fallen women, whose fall perhaps, could be traced to some of their valiant knights errant, who would riotously tear down the houses of these Sisters; or that these Sisters themselves are Christian women who are giving their lives with a ministry almost divine, to rescue the victims of men's devilish lusts and appetites, from temporal and eternal death.

And then the cry goes out, "Open up the nunneries! Let the light of day in to them! They are houses of shame and oppression!"

What has become of our American manhood, that it can stand by untouched with indignation; that men, alien to American principles of fair play and manly honor, should masquerade in its name to rob women of their honor and fair fame, and of their just rights under our laws, to receive just and equal treatment?—Catholic Columbian.