

READINGS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

AN UNPROGRESSIVE POET.

For Keats, knowledge emphatically meant disillusion. Reality, romance—these were essentially contradictory terms. To explain the processes of Nature was to remove them once and for all from the soft twilight of poetry, through which they loomed dim but beautiful, into the lurid white glare of actuality, where they stood out, gaunt, naked, revolting. The sense of real things constantly present to break in upon his sweetest fancies, he could liken only to a muddy stream, the turbid current of which was forever sweeping his mind back to darkness and nothingness. In the well-known passage in *Lamia* about the rainbow, with its emphatic protest against philosophy, we have the man's horror of science, so frequently revealed elsewhere in his work by implication, set forth in a kind of formal declaration. Such an outburst inevitably reminds us of the diatribes in Mr. Ruskin's *Eagle's Nest* against physiology and what he calls Darwinism—perhaps the foolishness of utterances to be found anywhere in his voluminous writings, which is itself saying a good deal. But, after all, perhaps the best commentary on the lines in question is Haydon's statement that, three years before *Lamia* saw the light, Keats and Lamb, while dining with him (Haydon), had agreed together that "Newton had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colors. We may imagine how these two sage critics would have laid their heads together over the more modern legend of the cynical chemist who is said so have remarked that a woman's tears had no longer any kind of power over him, since he knew their precise constituent elements—muriate of soda and solution of phosphate!"—*From Poetry and Science, by Prof. W. H. Hudson, in The Popular Science Monthly for October.*

MR. JAMES PAYN'S "GLEAMS OF MEMORY."

The September number of the *Cornhill Magazine* contains another chapter of Mr. Pavn's recollections.

"As to the calling of Literature, which has been so much abused of late by some of its own followers," writes Mr. Pavn, "if I were to live twenty lives I would choose no other profession. It is the brightest and most genial of all of them, and, so far at least as my experience goes, the most free from jealousies and acrimonies. There are times of course, when one would like to sentence a critic to be put to death "to slow music," but I have never felt inclined "to put my knife"—unless it was the paper-knife—into any of my brother authors. They are very pleasant company, as kindly friends as can be found, and more inclined to look upon one's faults with tenderness than what are invidiously termed the respectable classes. The pursuit of letters makes us friends all over the globe, but it does not lead to fortune. Leisure in old age has been unhappily denied me. I suppose without vanity I may say that, as regards popularity, I have been in the first dozen or so of story-tellers; but my gains have been small indeed when compared with anyone in the same position in any other calling. A judge and a bishop get £5,000 a year and a retiring pension. I have been exceptionally fortunate in receiving such small prizes as literature has to offer, in the

way of editorships and readerships, but the total income I have made by my pen has been but an average of £1,500 a year for thirty-five working years. As compared with the gains of Law and Physic, and, of course, of Commerce, this is surely a very modest sum, though it has been earned in a most pleasant manner."

Referring to the well-known Tennyson and Timbuctoo story, Mr. Pavn writes:—"When I re-peruse the little story, 'How Jones got the Verse Medal,' I cannot resist the conviction that the original of that fortunate young person was Tennyson. I heard the tale while I was an undergraduate, and wrote the story before years had brought the sense of reverence; and it must be confessed that 'Timbuctoo' is a poem that does not itself preclude levity. The examiners for the year (as I heard the tale) were three—the Vice-Chancellor, who had a great reputation, but a violent temper, and did not write very well; a classical professor who knew no poetry that was not in a dead language; and a mathematical professor. It was agreed that each should signify by the letters 'g' and 'b' (for 'good' and 'bad') what he thought of the poems, and the Vice had the manuscripts first. When the mathematical professor got them he found 'Timbuctoo' scored all over with g's, and though he could not understand why, nor indeed the poem itself, did not think it worth while, as he afterwards said (though the fact was he was afraid), to ask the Vice his reasons; so he wrote 'g' on the poem also. The classical professor thought it rather funny that both his predecessors should admire so unintelligible a production; but, as he said, 'he did not care one iota about the matter,' and so wrote 'g' on it also; and as no other poem had three 'g's,' the prize was unanimously awarded to the author of 'Timbuctoo.' After all was over, the three examiners happened to meet one day, and the Vice, in his absolute fashion, fell to abusing the other two for admiring the poem. They replied very naturally, and with some indignation, that they should never have dreamt of admiring it if he himself had not scored it over with 'g's.' 'G's!' he said: 'they were "q's," for queries, for I could not understand two consecutive lines of it.'

The following story of a club-foot is also well worth quoting:—"When instituted in his new office he [a certain curate who suffered from great shyness] went round the parish to make acquaintance with his congregation. It was very wet weather, and he got almost swamped in the Devonshire lanes, but he persisted in his duty. On one occasion he called on an honest farmer of the good old school, who asked him how he liked Devonshire. 'Oh, I like it exceedingly,' said S—; 'but I find it rather muddy. I notice, however, pointing to the farmer's boot, 'that you take very sensible precautions to keep yourself out of the wet.' 'Well, you see, Mr. S—, I've got a club-foot.' S— waited to hear no more, but fled instantly from the house, and only after much solicitation could he be induced to remain in the living. The farmer never understood why he had run away, and thought he had been taken suddenly ill. What he suffered, however, was nothing to what I subsequently suffered in consequence of S—'s mishap. I thought the story very humorous, and told it in my best manner at a large dinner-party at a house at which I had never dined before. During the narration I received a violent kick on the leg from my next neighbor, but thought it

accidental. The tale was received in total silence, and it was some time before general conversation was resumed. 'That was a very amusing story,' whispered my neighbor. 'But,' being very angry at the want of appreciation shown to it, I put in quickly, 'but, you would say, deuced stupid people to tell it to.' 'No, my dear fellow, it isn't that, but our host has a club-foot.' Then I knew what S— had suffered, and wished I could have run away as he did. A bevy of fair and fashionable young ladies made existence intolerable to him by occasionally addressing him in public; by a young lady in private I do not think that S— had ever been addressed. He used to go into the neighboring town daily to procure articles of furniture for his lodgings, and the lady of the house asked him at the breakfast table one morning what his plans were for the day. 'Well, he said, turning as red as a rose, 'I am going into Exeter to buy a pair of drawers.' I am sorry to say for the manners of the aristocracy that this little mistake of a 'pair' for a 'chest' caused a shout of inextinguishable laughter, and poor S—'s face remained for a week less like a rose than a peony."

"The first book of tales," writes Mr. Pavn, "I ever published ('Stories and Sketches') contained one called 'Blobs of Wadham,' the foundation of which is the accidental likeness of two strangers to one another. This was the case with another Trinity man, whom I had never seen, and myself. Not only was I often addressed by persons who took me for him, but people used to ask, *a propos* of nothing, whether I knew So-and-so. I remember making a considerable impression upon a chance passenger in a railway train on the Cambridge line, who was staring at me rather hard, by suddenly observing, "No, sir, I do not know Mr. So-and-so." It had been the very question he was going to ask me, but my anticipating it seemed to him so uncanny that he got out at the next station. Mr. Sherlock Holmes had not at that time been heard of. When I came to know my double I saw but little resemblance between us except that we both wore an eyeglass; but I believe no one does see any likeness to himself in anybody, so true it is that after having beheld one's natural face in a glass, one straightway forgets what manner of man he is. The exception was Narcissus, which proves the rule."

Another humorous incident on the same railway line was as follows:—"I was travelling up to town with two undergraduate friends, A and B, the former of whom was a particularly shy man. We wanted to play whist, but disliked dummy; and the only other man in the carriage was a very High Church clergyman, as we knew by what was then called his M.B. waistcoat. B, however, cut the cards and shuffled them, and looked at him appealingly; while A murmured, 'Don't! don't! he will think we want to play the three-card trick.' We two, however, were resolute. At last it was agreed that we should draw lots who should ask him to play, and the lot fell upon poor A. I can see him now, pink and palpitating, as he made his plaintive request. 'Well, of course,' said the parson, 'that is just what I have been waiting for.' And I remember that he won our money."—*London Public Opinion.*

Good men are a public good.

He who gives to the public gives to no one.