

PLAGIARISM.

Plagiarism, in its widest sense, is not wholly wrong. It includes the legal crime of infringing copyright, but as in its literary aspect it is both a vice and virtue. Its literary wrongdoing is complete when it is only the outpouring of imperfectly assimilated matter, and its forgiveness is assured when it has shaded upward into the expression of the thoughts of others in a new and vivid form.

The line between the right and wrong of the literary evil of plagiarism is as impalpable as that which divides the light from the darkness. Independent thought is rare, and most literary work consists of giving forth in new form ideas conceived by others. The ways of doing so may be different. One method may be compared to that which the monks of old in their missal decoration expounded well. The ancient parchments may almost be seen in the lines—

"Some are crossed with later writing,
Palimpsests of earlier days,
Old remembrance faintly gleaming
Thro' the thinking and the dreaming,
Outlines dim in noontide haze."

Another so impregnates the older thought with the life and intellect of the writer that it seems instinct with his vigour. It merges its identity in the new and distinct personality of its adapter, and reminds one of the definition of a proverb, "The wisdom of many, and the wit of one." We have all perhaps thought the thoughts which have been put in words for us. It does not detract from the beauty of the workmanship that the metal was mined by other hands. Even actually independent thought has occasionally offended the rigid will of originality.

The purely scientific theory of evolution was the creation of Darwin, but Wallace in another hemisphere had grasped it too before it was given to the world by the great thinker. Chemistry and physics have many such examples of simultaneous discovery. Is it then incredible that a thought, once given to the world, may find expression, varied and differently adorned, by the diverse minds it has influenced? It is a fair conclusion that while the imperfect assimilation of an idea of one may give rise to censure its complete transmutation by another may be entitled to the highest praise. The difference is only in degree not in kind.

No one would accuse Mrs. Alexander of plagiarism from William Cullen Byrant when she thus describes the tomb of Moses:

"By Nebo's lonely mountain,
On this side Jordan's wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab
There lies a lonely grave.
And no man knows that sepulchre,
And no man saw it e'er,
For the angels of God upturned the sod,
And laid the dead man there."

Yet Byrant had written:

"God made his grave to men unknown,
Where Moab's rocks a vale enfold,
And laid the aged seer to rest,
To slumber while the world grows old."

Alphose de Lamartine in his "Raphael" says:

"Man is so truly born to love that it is only when he has the consciousness of loving fully and entirely, that he feels himself really a man. Until then, he is disturbed, restless, in-

constant, and wandering in his thoughts: but from thenceforward all his wanderings cease, he feels at rest, and sees his destiny before him."

Tennyson expresses much the same idea in "The Talking Oak":

"For when my passion first began,
Ere that which in me burned,
The love that makes me thrice a man
Could hope itself returned,
To yonder oak within the field
I spoke without restraint,
And with a larger faith appealed
Than Papist unto saint."

There is a cynical echo of the last sentence quoted from Lamartine, in Lytton's "Disowned": "A celebrated Cardinal said, very wisely, that few ever did anything among men until women were no longer an object to them."

To quote again from Lamartine, how similar in conception is his description of the beauty of the eye, "Eyes of that dark heavenly hue which the Appennine wears at the approach of dawn," and "Owen Meredith's" poetic fancy,

"Hair
Neither black, nor yet brown, but that tinge which the air
Takes at eve in September, when night lingers lone,
Thro' a vineyard, from beams of a slow setting sun."

Both may be plagiarists, for did not Wordsworth write:

"Her eyes as stars of twilight fair,
Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair."

The fascinating prose of Kinglake, in his description of the Turkish language, is paraphrased by Mark Twain in explaining the construction and the difficulties of the German tongue. In "Eothen" we are told that "the structure of the language, especially in its more lengthy sentences, is very like the Latin; the subject matters are slowly and patiently enumerated, without disclosing the purpose of the speaker until he reaches the end of his sentence, and then at last comes the clinching word, which gives a meaning and connection to all that has gone before. If you listen at all to speaking of this kind, your attention, rather than be suffered to flag, must grow more and more lively, as the phrase marches on." Mark Twain thus describes German sentences: "An average sentence, in a German newspaper, is a sublime and impressive curiosity; it occupies a quarter of a column; it contains all the ten parts of speech—not in regular order, but mixed; it is built mainly of compound words constructed by the writer on the spot . . . it treats of fourteen or fifteen different subjects each enclosed in a parenthesis of its own, with here and there extra parentheses, which re-enclose three or four of the minor parentheses, making pens within pens, finally all the parentheses and re-paragraphs are massed together between a couple of king parentheses, one of which is placed in the first line of the majestic sentence and the other in the middle of the last line of it *after which comes the VERB*, and you find out for the first time what the man has been talking about . . . You observe how far that verb is from the base of operations; well, in a German newspaper they put their verb away over on the next page, and I have heard that sometimes after stringing along on exciting preliminaries and parentheses for a column or two, they get in a hurry and have to go to press without getting to the verb at all. Of course, then, the reader is left in a very exhausted and ignorant state."