

NOT AN ORDINARY MAN.

OSCAR WILDE, THE POET OF THE BEAUTIFUL.

Works which discover something of the genuine singing faculty and are always above the level of mere versification, but lack scope and intensity.

He was with us once; and now, being absent, and seen in the long perspective, it may not be amiss to call him again into memory. Of late we gazed our fill upon the lily-man, esteemed the very prince of dilettanteism; we went our way, and made our comment, as it suited us, upon the phenomenon just passed. Perchance we saw little deeper than contour and integument; we may not have got beyond the sunflower, the knee-breeches, and the Adonis-locks, undreaming there was anything beyond to arrive at; but, at least, we saw what it was to be aesthetic—to make a boast of the beautiful—when quite an accomplished man sets about the business.

Pro and con, the newspapers spoke about him, and multitudes saw him chiefly through their medium—or some phantasy, well-meant for him. It would appear that the average journal finds difficulty in giving us the exact truth about men and measures, particularly when they cannot be cut and squared in the level of commonplace. Certainly, Oscar Wilde and friends, looking in the pier-glass of the public press, must have wavered at the distorting power, common enough to mirrors, by which a very shapely head is elongated or narrowed down, till the eyes are ready to burst out. Mrs. Wilde, it is needless to say, is neither a mollusk, nor a saurian, nor a shaggy creature on all fours; but a very human and shapely being, with the right sort of flesh and bone, having a really gentle heart, with some of the heart's nobler fire, and with a brain, having in it some of the better sort of ideal furniture;—that he is a man, after all, with plenty of frailty, 'tis true—with a few foibles, maybe, that seem to have earned him the contempt of people feeling themselves to be peculiarly sensible; but yet not an ordinary character on the town, as his lecturing career bears witness.

But, turning aside from the dilettante and the lecturer, his principal claim on our attention, after all, arises from his poetical pretension; and he has certainly given us poems which discover something of the genuine singing faculty, and which are always above the level of mere vulgar versification. He does, indeed, sing about himself, as our healthiest and grandest poets do not; and that self is not the amplest, and not the worthiest, yet, within the range he occupies, his art is usually good. Art, and the spirit of the beautiful, however, must win their way when attired in modesty, with the reticent finger often placed upon melodious lips; for, when in the hurly-burly of the bread-and-butter world, we do not hold out the delicate nymph of song for the vulgar to spit upon, but think and say of her, as did Goldsmith—

My shame in crowds, my solitary pride. He belongs to the English school of Pre-Raphaelites in poetry, and seeks his place in the line that comes down from Keats and Shelley, through Swinburne, Morris and the Rossettis. There are occasional echoes of these poets heard among the cadences of his verse, and also reminiscences of Matthew Arnold, especially in "The Burden of Itys" and in "The Garden of Eros." Sometimes he touches his harp in an original and noble spirit, as in "Ave Imperatrix," which is, in some respects, his finest poem. Note where he sings of England's brave boys who have gone down, in the wild night of storms, to their ocean graves. Rarely does he "speak out strong and bold," as thus:

Go! Crown with thorns thy gold-crowned head, Change thy glad song to song of pain; Wind and wild wave have got thy dead, And will not yield them back again.

Wave and wild wind and foreign shore, Possess the flower of English land— Lips that thy lily shall kiss no more, Hand, that shall never clasp thy hand.

What profit now that we have found The whole round world with nets of gold, If hidden in our hearts is found The care that growth never old.

What profit that our galleys ride, Pine-forest-like on every main? Rain and wreck are at our side, Grim wardens of the House of Pain.

Where are the brave, the strong, the fleet, Where is our English chivalry? Wild gashes are their burial sheet And sobbing waves their therapy.

O loved ones, lying far away, What word of love can dead lips send? O wasted dust! O senseless clay! Is this the end? Is this the end!

Peace! peace! we wrong the noble dead, To vex their solemn slumber so; Though children, and with them-crowned head Up the steep road must England go.

The following pictures of rural England show lines and tints of the true artist. There is a luxury of color in these verses; the full-fledged honey of Keats' lines can have scarcely greater richness, while at the same time we are reminded of some of Jean Ingelow's pieces:

The blue-green bean fields yonder, tremulous With the last shower, sweeter perfume bring Through this cool evening than the odorless Flame-jewelled censers the young deacons swing. When the gray priest unlocks the curtained shrine, And makes God's body from the common fruit of corn and vine.

Sweet is the swallow twittering on the eaves At day-break, when the answer wafts his scythe,

And stock-doves murmur, and the milkmaid leaves Her little lonely bed, and carols blithe To see the heavy-lowing cattle wait, Stretching their huge and dripping mouths across the farm-yard gate.

And sweet the hops upon the Kentish leas, And sweet the wind that lifts the new-mown hay, And sweet the fretful swarms of grumbling bees That round and round the linden blossoms play; And sweet the heifer breathing in her stall, And the green bursting fig that hangs upon the red brick wall.

And sweet to hear the cuckoo mock the spring, While the last violet loiters by the wall.

He revels and luxuriates amid all fair sights and sweet sounds, and his rich fruits are sometimes brought inconspicuously together, and clotted into a preserve that soon cloy the unappetized appetite. His religion is the worship of whatsoever is beautiful, and he throws himself open to the charm of every influence of light and shade, of form or harmony. Christianity and Paganism are alike beloved by him as they disclose a treasure-house of varying but beautiful ideas, and they fascinate his mind with delightful images and associations. But he is bound by none of them in obedience; he conceives himself as having no mission on the battle-ground of the present, amid the conflicting principles and passions filling the sky with clamor; he is the Apostle of Taste, preaching the Gospel of the Beautiful, and exhorting us to the attainment of aesthetic repose of mind. Thus he declares himself in his sonnet, entitled "Theoretikos":

This mighty empire hath but feet of clay: Of all its ancient chivalry and might Our little island is forsaken quite; Some crenelated tower its crown of bay, And from its hills that voice hath passed away Which spake of Freedom; O come out of it, O come out of it, my soul, thou art not fit For this vile traffic-house, where day by day Wisdom and reverence are sold at mart, And the rude people rage with ignorant cries Against a heretic of centuries. It nours my calm; whereof in dreams of Art And loftiest culture I would stand apart, Neither for God, nor for his enemies.

We are silent before a sentiment such as this, having little sympathy with it. The quality of verse in which he most excels is melody. For flexibility and harmony in his use of English numbers he may stand among the highest of that school to which he belongs, and indeed compare favorably with any minor poet of past or present. We select a specimen—an adequate one, if not the best—from a

SENECADE FOR MUSIC. The western wind is blowing fair Across the dark Egean sea, And at the secret marble stair My Tyrian galley waits for thee. Come down! the purple sail is spread, The watchman sleeps within the town, O leave thy lily-flowered bed, O lady mine, come down, come down!

O noble pilot, tell me true: Is that the sheen of golden hair? Or is it but the tangled dew That binds the passion-flowers there? Good sailor, come and tell me now Is that my lady's lily hand? Or is it but the gleaming prow, Or is it but the silver sand? No! no! 'tis not the tangled dew, 'Tis not the silver-fretted sand, It is my own dear lady true, With golden hair, and lily hand! O noble pilot steer for Troy, Good sailor, ply the laboring oar,— This is the queen of life and joy Whom we must bear from Grecian shore!

The waning sky grows faint and blue, It wants an hour still of day; Alas! alas! my gallant crew— My lady, mine, away! away!

You may search through many a volume of verse till you find any more mellifluous arrangement of vowels and consonants than in the above amorous and effeminate ditty. Yet there is something brisk and breezy about it, as well as beautiful. We cannot fancy a musician who would have trouble in marrying it to his music. On the whole, we can be better pleased with the mechanic and melody, with the occasional beauties of description and felicities of diction, in Oscar Wilde's verse, than with much of its substance and meaning; and we think that, with all his fine talk of Art and Beauty (though we deem some of it to be fit and excellent), and his leaning to intellectual repose, we shall hardly learn from him their deepest and truest secret. He lacks moral insight, spiritual strenuousness, and a noble purpose in writing, and joins in the common fault of today, too much sensuousness. His exaltation of certain types is, to us, belittling, and ministers to the narrow and vulgar in us. We miss the universality and scope, the beautiful intensity of such rich and generous teachers as Wordsworth and Ruskin, if we turn to him for guidance. Then he has confessed, if confession were needful, a too great bias toward mere self-enjoyment, and has disclaimed the conflict of life, and disavowed the nobler motives. Nor will he show us the beauty which is highest and divinest, even moral beauty—the light the soul strikes out in the swiftness of flying upward—the flash, as of an archangel's wing, where beauty and glory are blended—though we may listen to him never so intently. There is more of beauty to the rapt than to the sensuous soul. The Venus of Milo may well deserve our praise, and win our favor, if nature have made us fit for such delights; but not to the Venus, though her merits are perceived, shall we yield the homage of our hearts; rather will we pause before the rugged, sculptured face of Abraham Lincoln, giving our assent, worshipful and unreluctant, where shows the Godlike, and discerning, amid its angularities, lines of the sublimest and serene loveliness. Beauty rushes upon us in superior and unexpected revelations, when on the lowly-road of human duty; but gives her tamer, delights, withholding her raptures, when men will be always seeking to worship her in her secluded vales and upon her lonely mountains.

ARTHUR JOHN LOCKHART. \* Kent is the principal hop-growing county of England.

OUR PRINCE OF POETS.

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS, SINGER AND TEACHER.

Descended on the Maternal Side from an Ancestor of Emerson—Formative Influences in Early Life—The Abiding Effect of His Work, as Editor and Instructor.

[The Magazine of Poetry for January.] Charles George Douglas Roberts was born Jan. 10, 1860, at the old parsonage of Douglas, a parish on the east side of the St. John river, only a few miles above Fredericton, the capital of New Brunswick. His father, the Rev. G. G. Roberts, had been appointed rector of the parish soon after his marriage with Emma W. Bliss, one of that Loyalist family which traces its descent through a line of lawyers back to the Rev. Daniel Bliss, Emerson's progenitor and the first pastor of Concord. In less than a year after the birth of their son, Mr. Roberts was transferred to West-cock, in Westmorland county. Here, in that charmed land of wind and meadows, and dykes and seafaring folk, which has lent its enchantment of flying color and bending grass to "In the Afternoon,"



CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.

"Tantramar Revisited," and many another bit of inspired realism—

The long, strong wind, thro' the lonesome golden afternoon, blew rough and blithe under the youngster's hair. "Inspired realism," indeed, is only a make-shift term. There is a quality in these poems and their fellows which touches every-day things, pasture lands and fishing boats, and the common work of men, and ennobles them—sets them in their higher, more subtle relations with the beauty and sweep and pathos of those shadows on the face of Nature which man calls life and death.

In 1874, Mr. Roberts, *per se*, again removed his family, this time to Fredericton, where he undertook the responsibilities of the rectorship, whose duties he continues to discharge, with an unflinching kindness, with a thorough goodness and gentleness of heart that has secured a large share of love among his townsmen.

Mr. Roberts, *poet*, entered the Collegiate school in that town upon a two years' course of preparation for college. His only teacher up to this time had been his father; he now passed into the hands of Mr. George R. Parkin, head master of the school, (whose predecessor, by the way, was Dr. Roberts, Professor Roberts's grandfather,) a teacher of remarkable quickening power, whose ideas on English public school life and on "The Reorganization of the British Empire" we have just seen reading in *The Century*. Roberts remained in this school until 1876. In that year he won the silver medal of the school for proficiency in classics, and matriculated at the University of New Brunswick, also in Fredericton. Here he won a classical scholarship at the end of his freshman year, a gold medal for Latin prose at the end of his second year, and graduated with honors in mental and moral philosophy and political economy, in June, 1879. At the end of his summer vacation after graduation he was placed in charge of the Grammar school at Chatham, N. B. In the summer of 1880 Roberts's first volume, *Orion and Other Poems*, was published. Towards the end of the same year, Dec. 29, Mr. Roberts was married to Mary Isabel Fenety, daughter of George E. Fenety, Esq., of Fredericton.

In 1881 Professor Roberts received the degree of M. A. from his alma mater, and in 1882 was appointed master of one of the public schools in this "shadowy town of the tall elm trees," a position he retained for a little more than a year. In December of the same year, 1883, *The Week* was started in Toronto, a new departure in Canadian journalism, whose subsequent unqualified success in work of a high grade gives interest to the fact that Roberts was its first editor. His connection with it, however, was not a long one; and in 1885 he was called to the chair of English and French in King's college, Windsor, N. S., where he now lives.

His second volume of verse, *In Divers Tones*, appeared in the first months of 1887. *Poems of Wild Life*, edited by him, has just been added to the series of *Canterbury Poets*, and a college text-book of Shelley's "Alastor" and "Adonais," with critical introduction and notes, will soon be in press.

Not to speak of the original work of Prof. Roberts, it is safe to say that his marked success as a teacher is due to an unswerving and strongly individualized energy of purpose, coupled with wide sympathy and an unusually inspiring enthusiasm for literature, and directing a penetrating critical faculty. He is a strenuous lover of his native land (one almost says, of his native soil), sturdy, virile, patriotic, easy of approach, a good friend, and (if one may venture a hazy opinion), but an indifferent enemy. It is upon the loyal, uncompromising and un-questioning patriotism of such men that Canada—the true Canada, mindful of her history, loving her heroes, keeping faith with the greatness of her destiny, rests her bud for fame and honor among the nations.

THE LAST SWEET THINGS

IN EVERY KIND OF FASHIONABLE FANCY WORK.

New Patterns for Sofa Cushions, Chair Seats, Slippers, Party and Knitting Bags, Toilet Sets, Ties and Mantel Drapes, as Sold in the Ingleside Club.

The Ingleside club met last evening, at Mrs. Waldo Brown's residence. She hardly expected all the members would be present, but when the hour came fifteen of us were seated in our president's cosy library, anxiously awaiting the newest ideas on fancy work.

Constance read to us what she had gathered about art needlework: "The taste of the day in art needlework has become more educated of late years, and it is fast growing into a fine art.

"A very pretty sofa cushion can be made of pale greyish green satin, very soft in tone, with a pattern of wild roses and hawthorns running over it, worked in satin stitch in delicate shades of red, pink, blue and green—such as one sees on old china plates.

"A seat for a Chippendale chair is an arrangement of peacock's feathers, which would work very well on dark blue cloth or satin sheeting. The colors must not be exactly brilliant. It can easily be made by copying feathers placed in the proper position. Covers for all chairs must be worked on material 4 or 5 inches larger than the design, which is to fit within an inch or so the shape and size of the chair seat, because it has to be drawn down all around, and fastened to the chair with a close row of brass-headed nails.

"A very rich pair of slippers that I saw recently was made of brown plush, with a design of natural buttercups worked in silk. Dark green plush, with conventional patterns outlined in gold, makes pretty and effective blotters or albums."

Eleanor's report was on fancy bags: "The India silk party bag for gloves, slippers, etc., is very popular with Boston girls. Sometimes it is highly ornamental, when made of plush and ribbon, and decorated with the owner's initials. Satin sheeting is also used for these party bags and when worked with flowers and lined with a contrasting shade of satin or silk, they are even more serviceable than the India silk or plush ones and quite as pretty.

The knitting bag is a very welcome present to give old ladies as they can carry it over their arms and thus keep their ball of wool within reach and unsoiled. It can be made of Roman or satin sheeting and lined with quilted satin. To make up the bag cut out two fiddle shaped pieces of material, length 17 inches, width of the lower end 8 inches, at the top 4 inches. Shape and sew in the lining to each piece, then sew the two pieces together, joining them across the narrowest part and leaving an opening in each side of 8 inches to pass the arm through. At the narrow part of the bag make a single box pleat and bring the 4 inches of material into a 2 inch space. Sew a silk cord around the edges of the bag, concealing the seams at the sides, and carry it around the arm hole openings. A yard and three-quarters is sufficient cord to use."

Beatrice gave us some ideas about toilet sets, satchets, etc.: "Pretty and inexpensive toilet sets can be made of strips of satin ribbon, about 2 inches in width, joined together by fine torchon insertion, and edged with lace of the same. I saw a set the other day, made with rich yellow satin ribbon and white lace, and thought it very delicate and pretty. Mats or long bureau scarfs can be made according to taste. Pin cushions are very large, oblong in shape, and ornamented with handsome bows. Some prefer them made in sachet shape; that is, three small bags tied together, and faintly perfumed. A useful article for a lady's bureau drawer is a piece of China silk, in any delicate shade, cut the shape of the drawer, wadded and scented with sachet powder. When laid over the contents, it gives everything a dainty perfume. A new style for scented sachets is round like a plate. The top is covered by finely-gathered lace, with a pretty bow in the centre."

Lastly, Mrs. Brown told us the latest fancies in ties, mantel and piano scarfs: "Ties are of all styles, shapes and shades, and it is hard to report anything especially new. Among some of the prettiest are those of hand-painted scrim. China silk, plain and flowered, seems to be more used than anything for pine bags, etc. Ties of India silk with the threads drawn (same as handkerchiefs are done) and knotted with silk of a contrasting shade, are very pretty. One that I saw was of apple green silk and had five rows done on each end, knotted with pale pink flosselle. It was caught up near one end with a careless bow of apple green and pink satin ribbons. Hem stitching is very fashionable for finishing all kinds of fancy work, toilet sets, ties, etc. Mantel drapes are not so fashionable as formerly. Instead, a scarf is used, either of plain plush, of some rich shade lined with delicate satin, or of flowered silk. Terra cotta lined with palest pink, or moss green lined with white, is very effective. These scarfs are gracefully draped across the front of the mantel. Copper-colored plush is a very fashionable shade. Ribbons are much used for decorative purposes and are both fancy edged and plain. Piano scarfs are made of felt, satin sheeting, plush, or fancy colored scrim. Some are worked only on the ends, others are worked in conventional pattern down the centre."

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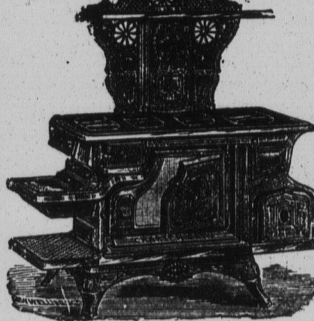
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