

## OF ENGLISH BLANK VERSE.



WITH that power of natural selection which has been called instinct by those who know not the meaning of intuition, a poet uses those metrical forms which best adapt themselves to the intricacies of his thought. The mea-

asures of a true poem are ever in unison with the sentiment of its author: the dreamy tale of "The Faerie Queene" is not more Spenserian than the magical verse in which it is told, nor is the stanza of "In Memoriam" less Tennysonian than the noble sadness of the poem itself. This harmony results from the nature of a poetical thought—a thing so humorous and passionate as to disdain a dwelling whose architecture is not to its taste, and the arrangements of which are ill adapted to its comfort. Hence the personal characteristics of a poet appear as strikingly in his verse as in his poetry and inclinations. Moore in his boyhood handled a fiddle-bow with dexterity, and in manhood he wrote "Lalla Rookh" in clever rhyme; Milton in his youth preferred the organ, and the bass viol, and in maturity composed "Paradise Lost" in blank verse. What is true in the case of the individual is true in that of the nation: the poetry of a nation tastes of its spirit, as the wine of a district smacks of the soil; and a national poetical form is in itself an expression of a national character. The Iambic Trimeter was as intensely Greek as the Dactylic Hexameter in its later development was Roman; interlacing rhymes are as characteristic of Celtic genius as alliterative rhythm was of Saxon. Nowhere is this principle more remarkably exemplified than in blank verse. This is now distinctively our national measure; and so essentially British is it in structure and in feeling that as we trace it back to its beginnings in these isles, we wonder when we find that it is not a native growth. But with blank verse it has been as with the German Handel, who, in this country, under the influence of its poetry and of its life, created a "Judah Maccabæus" and an "Israel in Egypt," more national in feeling than the works of any native composer. It is the nature of the coast which has caused the wave that rose by another shore to break on ours as it has done—in the myriad-voiced roar of a Shakespeare, the brood of a Milton, and, even at our feet, in the tuneful murmurs of a Tennyson.

Obedient to that law of Oscillation which sways the pettifogging of a parish and the affairs of a world, Europe swung from the glories of Greece into the gloom of the middle age, only to swing again into the splendors of the Renaissance. Not without significance did the light that died away on Olympus break along the Apennines after the dreary night; for in its beginnings the Renaissance was but a recoil from the deathful stagnation of the middle-age to the paganism of Greece with its bold invention and passionate genius. Nearer, however, than the paganism of Greece was that of Italy, with all the possibilities of a fire which had never become extinct, kept alive by language and genius of race, as by Vestal virgins. It was this fire which, in the fifteenth century, seized on the filthy rags of a mediæval Christianity, and burst into a blaze of invention and ideality that illumined all Europe.

Small wonder, surely, when, early in the sixteenth century, the youthful Surrey, with his poet's soul and tuneful ear, wandered from his England, all voiceless as yet in the night of the middle-age, where never a nightingale had sung since Chaucer died, and travelled into Italy, where the birds were singing in the glory of the morning. Many are the melodies he hears; and, to be detected amid their tuneful cadences chiefly by its uncouthness, is a ten-syllabled, unrhymed verse, used in a translation of two books of Virgil by Francesco Molza, a dashing young poet, who, not without reason, gave the credit of the work to a Cardinal of the Medici. Deep calleth unto deep; this voice will not let the stranger be; the poetic intuition of the English Surrey says "this is it." Wait but a little, and blank verse will be in England!

Wonderfully uncharacteristic, however, of this gay Lothario of a Molza, wonderfully uncharacteristic, too, of his brilliant age, is this measure which, strong and yet so free, soundeth like the voice of a god—surely it is not a product of this golden time! There has been a king before this Agamemnon.

A king, indeed, there has been; aye, and a priest, a very Melchizedec! standing between the night and the day, with his face to the East, and the light already on his brow, for it is St. Francis of Assisi! With a passionate love of nature, and a something in his eye that will tame a wolf and charm a bird, do we wonder that the saint becomes the poet, and as he wanders in the woods of Perugia, bursts into song, transmuting the dying inspiration of the troubadours into a spiritual minstrelsy? Rough was the unrhymed Creation-Hymn that he gave as a marching song to the noble brethren who went out to battle with a corrupt faith, but in the rugged lines we hear strains which in the coming years will fill the world as with sphere-music.

Returning to England, Surrey brought with him the divine fire which, Prometheus-like, he had stolen from the Italian heaven; and he translated soon after into the first English blank verse the very books of Virgil which had been rendered into Italian by the luckless Molza. "Only a coincidence, however," say the enthusiasts, who tell us that blank verse was the result of Surrey's own conception. If a coincident, truly a marvellous one—nay, not a coincidence, a miracle! Not so, however. Surrey's genius was not of that high order which demanded a new form; he was not a founder, but a reformer—an English Petrarch, plaintive and platonic, who sang of his fair Geraldine to a troubadour's guitar, but who knew not the withering might of the love of love.

Yet surely he deserved better things at the hands of his England than that his golden hair, all dabbled with blood, should sweep the dust of a scaffold, ere his life was well begun. Ah me! was it ever otherwise? But shine on, contented in thy proud place, oh deathless youth! thou wast the first of the Elizabethans, and preparedst the way for a Shakespeare and a Milton, and all the glory of summer sun and cloudless sky has not made the best forget the star that glowed before the dawn, and led on the sunrise!

(To be continued.)

## OUR PROFESSOR—A MEMORY.

We held him one whose steps were ever sure,  
And toiling followed where he, loving, led,  
Till from our hearts the doubting shadows fled,  
And on firm faith we knew to stand secure.

He taught to shun each mad, misleading lure  
That sophists shape to show in Reason's stead,  
And in our search with trusting steps we sped  
As far and high as mortal may endure.

Then came a day when through the whispering halls  
There grew the pain as of the chilling dearth,  
When in eclipse the trusted morning dies;  
Then came the truth whose sternness yet appalls,  
A loveliness had vanished from the earth,  
A beauty passed forever from our eyes.

P. McARTHUR.

Iowa State University has a gymnasium class for professors three times a week.

A religious census was taken of the class of '95 at Harvard, under the auspices of the Harvard Y.M.C.A., at the time of their registration.

The Students' Christian Association of the University of Michigan offers a four years' course in Biblical instruction, after which a certificate will be given.