

[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

"Quam multa in sylvis autumnum frigore primo
Lapsa cadunt folia."

Virgil.

How oft we've wandered in some joyous wood
When each ray low, in brightest colours clad,
Danced to the summer breeze, as if 'twere glad
That winter's voice was hushed, himself subdued!

And we have come again, when autumn's blast
Through the stripped branches sent a dismal moan,
And seen each leaflet pitilessly strewn,
Its little life of joy and beauty past.

'Tis thus, when fond affection leads us back
To cherished spots in life's great wilderness,
We miss the forms beloved that used to bless
When first we wandered o'er the sunny track.

But leaves and friends alike must fade and fall,
Death's icy breath must once be felt by all.

JOHN READE.

THE POEMS OF FRED. WM. FABER, D.D.

BY JOHN READE.

(Continued.)

There are a great many sonnets in the collection—all of them deeply thoughtful and most of them religious. They are rich with the fruits of travel and varied learning.

The following one is quite original, and we doubt whether many will be found to appreciate the kind of resignation which it inculcates:

"To be thought ill of, worse than we deserve,
To have hard speeches said, cold looks displayed,
By those who should have cheered us when we swerve,—
Is one of Heaven's best lots, and may be made
A treasure ere we know it, a love field
Which to hot hearts may bitter blessings yield."

If we were to stop here the words would be hardly intelligible, but there is wisdom in what follows:

"Either we learn from our past faults to shrink
When their full guilt is kept before our eye,
And, thinking of ourselves as others think,
We so are gainers in humility;
Or the harsh judgments are a gloomy screen,
Fencing our altered lives from praise and glare;
And plants that grow in shade retain their green,
While unmet sternness kindly chills the air."

It is quite possible, however, that the air may be sometimes too chilly.

The sonnets on "The four religious heathens"—Herodotus, Nicias, Socrates, and Seneca—are very fine. The last one we consider the best. Seneca is supposed, as he hurries by, spurred by great thoughts, to have come, at times, beneath

"The Christlike shadow of the gifted Paul,"

and thus

"Some balmy truths most surely did he borrow
From the sweet neighbourhood of Christ."

The idea is a nursing of that love which "hopeth all things."

Under the heading, "Thoughts while reading history," there are twenty sonnets. In these there is too much forced laudation of the past at the expense of the present. In his treatment of the middle ages he is no disciple of Hallam. And yet he is no blind slave to his prejudices. He has three sonnets on "Chivalrous Times"—very fine ones, in which he presents us with two pictures, one bright and the other dark. In the first they are—

"Beautiful times from whose calm bosom sprung
Abbeys and chantries, and a very host
Of quiet places upon every coast,
Where Christ was served and blessed Mary sung."

In the second they are—

"Unlovely times, when the sweet summer breeze,
A merry traveller wending thro' the land,
Found no fair farms and lovable cottages
Whose casements he might stir with his soft hand."

And in the third he tells us to

"Think no scorn
Of those great times whose double aspect seems
Like the revolving phases of our dreams."

It will readily be seen that the days of the Church's power and glory are in his eyes the best. The humiliation of Henry the Fourth at Canossa, when, (as he says)

"At one solemn hour,
The passing shadow of eternal power,
In momentary transit, deeply fell
On all the pride and pageant of the world,"

is to him "a thing to be much dwelt upon."

With whatever feelings we look upon the Papacy, they must be mingled with wonder. We give the following sonnet, not so much for its poetic merits, as for the interest which is naturally attached to the object at present:

"That such a Power should live and breathe doth seem
A thought from which men fain would be relieved,
A grandeur not to be endured, a dream
Darkening the soul, though it be unbelieved.
August conception! far above king, law
Or popular right; how calmly dost thou draw
Under thine awful shadow mortal pain
And joy not mortal! Witness of a need
Deep laid in man, and therefore pierced in vain,
As though thou wert no form that thou shouldst bleed!
While such a power there lives in old man's shape,
Such and so dread, should not his mighty will
And supernatural presence, godlike, fill
The air we breathe and leave us no escape?"

In the last line, the dogma which has given to the year 1869-70 so signal a position in the annals of Christendom, is very plainly anticipated.

But we are verging on dangerous ground, ground from which, so temptingly does Mr. Faber sometimes combine his twofold functions, it is no easy matter to keep at safe distance.

In many of the poems there are charming little pictures of scenery with which the author was acquainted. Some of these possess chiefly a local interest, but others are not only like all "things of beauty," "joys forever," but joys everywhere. Such a little *morceau* is the following:

"There is a well, a willow-shaded spot,
Cool in the noontide gleam,
With rushes nodding in the little stream,
And blue forget-me-not

Set in thick tufts along the bushy marge,
With big bright eyes of gold,
Where glorious water-plants, like fans, unfold
Their blossoms strange and large.

That wandering boy, young Hylas, did not find
Beauties so rich and rare,
Where swallow-wort and pale bright maiden's hair
And dog-grass greenly twined.

A sloping bank ran round it like a crown,
Whereon a purple cloud
Of dark wild hyacinths, a fairy crowd,
Had settled softly down.

And dreamy sounds of never-ending bells
From a city's ancient towers,
Came down the stream, and went among the flowers,
And died in little swells.

There did I keep my birth-day feast, with all
These gentle things around,
While their soft voices rising from the ground
Unto my heart did call."

In this way Mr. Faber makes us sharers in all his joys, sorrows and aspirations. He photographs his soul for us by its own gentle light, and seeing the likeness, we cannot help loving the original. In "The Styrian Lake," (we hope the reader will pardon us for returning to it) he lets us into the inmost secrets of his spiritual nature:

"I cannot pray amidst a crowd,
Nor with organs pealing loud,
Nor with chains upon my sense
From ritual magnificence.
Ever fair forms like tyrants bind
With spells the currents of my mind.
Sweet sights and sounds my spirits fill,
And ritual beauty leads me still
A passive victim at its will:
The creature of all outward shows,
My heart into the pageant throws
Its ardent self, and dreamily
Floats out as on a sunny sea.
When the Church with functions bright
Wraps calmer spirits in delight,
I am rather proud of God,
Than humbly at his footstool bowed;
And 'mid the beautiful display
I feel and love but cannot pray.
I would fain be lone with God,
Else are all my thoughts abroad."

And

"When the crowd have left the shrine,
Then the season shall be mine."

How pure and childlike is this confession! The poet overcomes the priest. With this passive enthrallment to beauty of his poet's nature, he sometimes struggles alarmed. Yet he tells us that—

"Priests, like poets, have an eye
For radiant earth and changeful sky,
And mightier signs mayhap can trace
In river, nook and greenwood place."

This is doubly true of himself. He can always turn the most ordinary incidents of every-day life to religious account. Thus, in his verses "To a Lake Party," all of whom should never meet again "on Rothay's white-lipped strand," he says:

"We shall all meet again,
Not in the wood or plain,
Nor by the lake's green marge
But we shall meet once more
By a far greener shore,
With our souls set at large."

In another little poem of kindred spirit and occasion, "The Prince," he draws the following beautiful lesson from the disappointment of the young lady who had planned an excursion at the day on which she had set her hopes turning out rainy:

"Angels are round thee and Heaven's above,
And thy soul is alive within;
Shall a rainy day and a cloudy sky
Make a Christian heart to sin?"

What young lady, however vexed, could resist the delicate flattery of this verse:

"Oh! anger and beauty, my lady dear,
Will never agree to share
That little white brow that lifts its arch
Through the parting of thy hair."

Mr. Faber has the keenest sense of the near reality of the things which are unseen. But in this sense there was no terror, no shrinking, but a joy and love that yearned for closer intimacy. His poem on "The Holy Angels" is worthy of a high rank in the anthology of sacred song. We cannot forbear seeking the sympathy of the reader in our enjoyment of these sublime stanzas:

"Angels and Thrones and holy Powers,
And Ministers of light—
God's primal sons and mystic bands
In various orders bright,
And hidden Splendours wheeling round
In circles infinite—

Celestial priests and seraph kings

In links of glory twine:

And spirits of departed men

In saintly lustre shine,

With Angels dear that fold their wings

Above the awful shrine—

Chariots of living flame that fill

The mountain's hollow side,

Breezes that to the battle-field

Over the forest ride,

Spirits that from the Bridegroom come

To wait upon the Bride—

These are among us and around
In earth and sea and air,
At fast and feast and holy rite
And lonely vigil prayer,
Morning and noon and dead of night,
Crowding the heavenly stair."

Mr. Faber's spirituality makes for him a constant feast of earth's commonest things. For him

"All over doth this outer earth
An inner earth unfold,
And sounds may reach us of its mirth
Over its pales of gold."

There spirits live, unwedded all
From the shades and shapes they wore,
Though still their printless footsteps fall
By the hearths they loved before."

How sweetly comforting must these lines be now to those who had the happiness of holding companionship with the author. Right gladly would we linger still near the precincts of the temple of holy song, which is his monument, but we are warned that other duties await us, and we must, for a while, at least, say adieu.

Just one look more and we go our way. The following lines were our introduction to Mr. Faber many years ago. They are very dear to us, as well from their sweet beauty and truthfulness, as from their association with a happy time which is now no more:

"The sunny wisdom of the Greeks
All o'er the earth is strewed;
On every dark and awful place,
Rude hill and haunted wood,
The beautiful bright people left
A name of omen good."

They would not have an evil word
Weigh heavy on the breeze,
They would not darken mountain side,
Nor stain the shining seas,
With names of some disastrous past—
The unwise witnesses.

Here legendary Argos touched
In this blue-watered bay,
Here dark Medea in pursuit
Her poisons cast away,
Polluting even the odorous shades
Of pure Therapia.

Look how the interlacing trees
Their flowing blossoms weather!
Is this a spot for poison plants,
For crime or savage death?
The Greeks endured not that on it
Should pass so dire a breath

Warlike the children of romance—
From out whose spirit deep
The touch of gloom hath passed on glen
And mountain, lake and steep,
On Devil's Bridge and Raven's Tower,
And lovelorn Maiden's Leap:

Who sought in cavern, wood and dell,
Where'er they could lay bare
The path of ill and healed
Terrific legends there,
Leaving a hoarse and ponderous name
To haunt the very air.

Not so the radiant-hearted Greeks,
Who hesitated still
To offend the blessed Presences
Which earth and ocean fill:
Whose tongues, elsewhere eloquent,
Stammered at words of ill.

All places where their presence was
Upon the fruitful earth,
By kindly law were chased within
The circle of their mirth,
And in their presence had a new
And consecrated birth.

O bless them for it, travellers,
The fair-tongued ancients bless!
Who thus from land and sea trod out
All footmarks of distress,
Illuminating earth with their
Own inward cheerfulness.

Unto the Axine sea they sent
A name of better feeling;
Dark powers into Eumenides,
(A gentle change) were stealing,
And poisoned stained Therapia
Became the Bay of Healing!"

To those who have read thus far we refrain from apologizing for the long quotations which we have made from Mr. Faber's poem. We have sought the *cols* of Cicero rather than of critic. If we were disposed to be critical we should say that Mr. Faber sometimes wears by too great volubility. Though there are no glaring faults of metre or rhyme, there is often evidence of haste, and sometimes the same idea is repeated in the same poem in different words. These slight faults, which might have been remedied had Mr. Faber lived, are, however, atoned for by beauties of thought, expression, and music, which glitter everywhere like the stars on the midnight sky. To these it would be impossible to do justice in one short notice.

* The Euxine (hospitable) Sea was originally called by the sailors who navigated it the Axine (inhospitable). By a figure of speech called "Euphemism," the Greeks were accustomed to give good names to bad persons or things. In this way they fancied they propitiated the powers of evil. Thus they called the "Furies," "Eumenides,"—"kind gentle ladies;" and Therapia, (Healing) in the Bosphorus, received this name because its neighbourhood was invested with poisonous plants. On the same principle the Irish peasantry call the Fairies, whose occasional evilfulness they dread, by the conciliatory epithet of "good people," and "gentry." But the use of Euphemism, as also of its counterpart "dysphemism," is continuous with history and geography.