

in the last quarter of the century. In other words, it was not until society as a whole entered into the valley of the shadow of death that they were able to appreciate the beauty of Arnold's mournful monologues upon the themes of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. Arnold was, in fact, some twenty years ahead of his time, and had to wait till his audience had grown into the frame of mind in which they were able to appreciate him.

Of Matthew Arnold at his best, we may say that it is his great merit to have attained very nearly to what he has himself called "the grand style," and only to have missed it because he lacks that indescribable quality of robustness and majesty which we find in Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth. As my purpose is rather to exhibit to you the social reformer than the poet, I will merely add three specimens of his poetry—interesting not only for the beauty of the style, but for the light they throw upon his intellectual development. My first extract comes from his verses upon "Dover Beach," and illustrates an early phase of despondency through which, like other great minds, he seems to have passed. He is listening to the wave as it breaks upon the beach.

"The sea of faith
Was once, too, at its full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle fur'd.
[But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.
Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
To various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain,
Swept with a confused alarm of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

My second specimen comes from "Resignation," a picture of the poet's soul, from which we may conjecture the thoughts that were passing in its author's. It is interesting among other reasons because it anticipates a note he has struck since in his social utterances:—

"Lead: 'on his gate, he gazes—'—
Are in his eyes, and in his ears
The murmur of a thousand years.
Before him he sees life unroll,
A placid and continuous whole—
That general life, which does not cease,
Whose secret is not joy, but peace;
That life whose dumb wish is not mis'd,
If birth proceeds, if things subsist;
The life of plants, and stones, and rain;
The life he craves—if not in vain
Fate give, what chance shall not control
His sad lucidity of soul."

From the mood of resignation he passes into one of hope in his lines on "The Future."

"Haply, the river of Time—
As it grows, as the towns on its marge
Fling their wavering lights
On a wider, statelier stream—
May acquire, if not the calm
Of its early mountainous shore,
Yet a solemn peace of its own.
And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the grey expanse where he floats,
Freshening its current and spotted with foam,
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast
As the pale waste widens around him,
As the banks fade dimmer away,
As the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea."

Though Matthew Arnold has done much good work as a poet, it is as a prose artist that he will be best remembered. His style I shall have occasion to exhibit in extracts, but I may say here, that in delicacy of touch he is inferior to none of his contemporaries with the exception of Cardinal Newman. He has a style of banter peculiarly his own, asserting much less than it insinuates; covering with ridicule, yet without any approach to personality or vulgarity. His treatment of a subject, at his best, is a masterpiece of skill that leaves no flaw in his opponent's armour untouched. It should also be remembered

that few writers make cleverer use of catch words, an art in which he was a worthy rival of the late Earl of Beaconsfield. To Matthew Arnold we owe among other phrases, the expressions "rigorous and vigorous," "sweet reasonableness," "sweetness and light," "the grand style," and the popularisation of the term "Philistine."

As a critic of literature Matthew Arnold is an avowed follower of the French school, and especially of Sainte-Beuve. And in the field of criticism, he is acknowledged to be *facile princeps* among his English-speaking contemporaries. Mr. Minto can give us characteristics, but Arnold alone distinguishes. Mr. Swinburn loves to eulogise, but Arnold knows exactly where to stop. Mr. Dowden is, to my mind, too full of present phases of thought to realise those of the past. This is never so with Arnold except when he is interpreting the gospel *logia*. The effect of a literary sketch from the pen of Matthew Arnold, in short, is precisely similar to that of an historical picture by Carlyle. We feel that we understand their subject as we never did before. I will say no more upon this part of my subject, but refer you to his admirable studies upon Milton, Wordsworth and Gray.

Though Arnold's work as literary artist and critic has been continued up to the present moment, from the year 1864 an increasing amount of his time was given to writings upon social subjects. Entering the field as an educationist his aim throughout has been in his own words, "to pull out a few more stops in that powerful, but at present somewhat narrow-toned organ, the modern Englishman."* His "Celtic Literature" as well as his educational essays show that for this purpose he was early attracted, and "Culture and Anarchy" appeared in 1869; but the Evolution controversy, and the conflict between Christianity and science, diverted his energies, and from 1870 to 1875 his chief works were of a religious nature. In these years appeared "St. Paul and Protestantism," "Literature and Dogma," and "God and the Bible." In his "Lust Essays on Church and Religion," appearing in 1877, the social side of the question is again in view. The aim of "Literature and Dogma," his chief work, was "to show the truth and necessity of Christianity, and its power and charm for the heart, mind and imagination of man, even though the preternatural, which is now its popular sanction, should have to be given up."† This work, which was felt to be one of great weight and whose influence is strongly marked in Prof. Seeley's "Natural Religion," was sharply criticised, and elicited a series of replies, perhaps among the most successful answers that have ever been made in literature, which, appearing in the *Contemporary Review*, were gathered together into one volume with the title of "God and the Bible."‡ It was in these volumes that Mr. Arnold popularised the now celebrated definition of God as a "tendency: not our selves that makes for good." The peculiar stand that Arnold took will be best explained by remembering his own words upon Spinoza written several years before: "By thus crowning the intellectual life with a sacred transport, by thus retaining in philosophy, amid the discontented murmurs of all the army of atheism, the name of God, Spinoza maintains a profound affinity with that which is truest in religion, and inspires an indestructible interest."§ Side by side with this let us place his later utterance that "the man who believes that his truth on religious matters is so absolutely the truth, that say it when, and where, and to whom he will, he cannot; but do good with it, is in our day almost always a man whose truth is half blunder, and wholly useless."§ Matthew Arnold's contribution to the religious question comes very nearly to a practical atheism thinly disguised under the name of God, defined as a tendency; prayers are permissible, but their efficacy is not asserted; the Gospel miracles and the resurrection of Christ are denied, while a personal immortality is denied by implication; lastly the whole subject of Religion and the Bible is the occasion of two most sarcastic and eloquent volumes which will be ever valuable for their literary suggestiveness.

* Preface to "Essays in Criticism."

† Preface to "God and the Bible."

‡ "Essays in Criticism."

§ Preface to "Literature and Dogma."