

March 17th, 1893.]

things do not, and they buy and weep and laugh over the one, and they throw the other aside, never troubling themselves over the question, so interesting to the critic, as to what causes the divergence in their feelings. The other, the professional critic, is too apt to limit his view to the form, to the manner in which the writer has worked out his ideas, given the materials which he had chosen. Or if he be not wholly occupied with this narrow view, he goes off at a tangent and tells us much about the author, constructing him as best he may from the manner in which he has written; which is delightful and interesting in its way, and no doubt forms a quite important part of the thing called criticism, but which no more explains why this man's work is immortal and that man's ephemeral than the spectrum explains why sunlight vivifies.

In short, there are actinic rays and audible notes in literature which no literary optics or acoustics will ever explain, to say nothing of that hidden, inner and mysterious revivifying and thrilling power of the winged word which no critic and no public will ever define.

DION.

A POEM.

ARGUMENT.

Dion, of Syracuse, (408—353 B.C.) philosopher, was a near relative through his wife Arete of the tyrant Dionysius the Second, by whom he was banished. He took up his residence at Athens, but on hearing that the tyrant had seized his son and given Arete in marriage to another, with a small and faithful force he returned to Syracuse, captured the place and drove Dionysius into Ortygia, a fortress within the city walls. As soon as their oppression was relieved, the suspicious Syracuseans began to fear the power of Dion, although Dionysius when urged thereto by the passionate appeals of Arete and her son held captive against him among the citizens by Heracleides, without taking revenge on the thankless city, Dion withdrew to Leontini, but only to be speedily recalled to rescue the people a second time from the ravages of Dionysius, who had charged out upon the town as soon as Dion had withdrawn. Again Dion returned to Syracuse and this time succeeded in routing the tyrant from his strong-hold and restoring peace. With a magnanimity equal to his valour he pardoned Heracleides and his confederates. On breaking into the deserted fortress at the head of his troops, Dion, after years of separation, found his wife Arete. Dion naturally succeeded to the throne of the deposed monarch, but his reforms, and the severity of his manly rule rendered him unpopular with his fickle fellow-townsmen, and plots were formed for his assassination. He scorned to take precautions against attack, and so fell a victim to his valour. He was surrounded on the day of the festival of the Koreia, in his apartment in the palace, by a band of youths of distinguished muscular strength, who endeavoured to throw and strangle him. But the old warrior proving too strong for them they were obliged to send out one of their number through a back door to procure a sword. With this, Dion, a man in many ways too great for his age and circumstances, was despatched.

Pray youths, what urgent business claims our ear
On this high feast when all keep holiday?
Already do the gay-decked barges move
Across the harbour to the sacred grove,
And shouts and music reach us even here
Where through the balustrades the dancing sea
Marbles this chamber with reflected lights.
What! Is it treason? Ye have come to slay,

I read your purpose right. The palace guards
Have been secured and all retreat out off,
And I am at your mercy. It is well.
So often have I met death face to face
His eyes now wear the welcome of a friend's.
Is it for hate of Dion, or for gold,
Ye come to stain your honour with my blood?
And think ye I shall kneel and fawn on you,
And cry for mercy with a woman's shrieks?
Though me, like some old lion in his den,
Fate, stratagems, not ye, have tracked to death.
The lion is old, but all his teeth are sound.
What! ye would seize me? There I shake you off.
Ye did not deem these withered arms so strong
That ye five cubs could thus be kept at bay.
Despite your claws and fury and fierce barks.
But I am Dion—Dion, Plato's friend,
And I have faced the rain of human blood,
The lightning of the sword-strokes on my helm,
The thunder of on-rushing cavalry,
When ye were sucking babies at the breast.
And think ye I am one whom ye can slay
By throttling, as an out-cast slays her child,
Pinching the life out of its tiny throat.
Not this shall be my death, for I am royal,
And I must royally die. Go fetch a sword
And I shall wed it nobly like a king.

I brought you manhood with my conquering arm,

I offered Syracuse a way to fame.
I could have made our city reign as queen,
With her dominion founded in the sea,
Cemented with wise bands of equal laws,
A constitution wrought by sober minds,
Expanding with its growth, yet ye would not,
But mewled and babbled, cried and sulked again,

Like children that will quarrel for a coin
And yet its value know not. I am king.
Beyond this honour, if it honour be,
To sit enthroned above so base a herd,
A king of mine own self. My thoughts are matched

With those of gods, I have no kin with you.
Go, publish my last words when I am dead
And sting the city's heart with them, say,
"Thus

O men of Syracuse, thus Dion spake,
Falling upon the threshold of his death,
With face turned back, eyes fixed and cheek
unblanched,

For one last moment at the braying mob,
Ere into dark he passed to meet his peers,
The gods and heroes of the nether world."
Yea, tell the foolish rabble Dion sends
His love and duty as a warrior should
Unto the sweet earth of his native town,
Soon to be watered with his warmest blood.
He loved her pleasant streets, her golden air,
The circle of her hills, her sapphire sea,
And he loved once and loved unto his death,
The poor, half-brutal thing her mob became
Under the heel of tyrants; had he not,
He might have finished out his course of days
And died among the pillows on his bed.
But he so loved his Syracuse that she,
Grown sick of his great heart, let out its red
Upon the pebbles of her streets, and cried,
"Mine own hands slew him for he loved too much."

Too much, ay, at her piteous call he came
And gripped the tyrant's heel upon your neck,
And overthrew him bidding you uprise.
And when your silly fathers feared his strength
And set their murderous snares around his path,

The sword he drew for her, for her he sheathed,
Disdaining as a warrior to be wroth
At the snake's use of its recovered power
To sting the breast that warmed it back to life;
And he whose word could then have crushed
the town

Into a shapeless ruin at his feet,
Led off to Leontini a l his men,
Who, had ye slain him, would upon the ground
Have heaped your bodies for his funeral pyre;
And who with eyes that cursed her very stones
Left Syracuse unharmed, at his command.
Yet on the morrow in your new distress
Ye were not loth to send with craven haste
Your weeping envoys fawning at his feet
And crying, "Come and save us, oh forget,
Great Dion, how we wronged thee, come again
Yet this once more and save our Syracuse."

There are no depths in ocean, earth or sky
As deep as Dion's pride, there is no force
Commensurate with the scorn which curls his lip,

In detestation of the fickle world,
Before he plunge for ever down death's gulf.
So proud was he, that he despised success,
His manhood was the crown his spirit wore.
His stern heart felt no pulse of arrogant joy
When he charged foremost on the routed ranks

Of Dionysius in precipitous flight;
Nor when as conqueror, up the city's hill
The wild mob bore him with their loud acclaims,
And women from the house-roofs hailed him king.

And shrilled his praises out to the great deep.
But he was proud, as might some god be proud,

At his self-conquest, when for mercy sued
False Heracleides, whose perfidious plot
To overthrow him well nigh wrought your doom.
Ye saw the traitor kneel, ye heard his words,
How his swift tongue did hide the poisoned fangs.

But when all voices shouted "Let him die,"
The one most wronged obeyed that inner voice
Which bade him spare a fallen enemy,
And stooping down, he raised and pardoned him,

Well-knowing as ye the baseness of the man,
But being too great for meanness like revenge.

Had Dion not been proud, O Syracuse,
He might have told such tale of woes endured
As would, like some moist, south-wind after frost,

Have made your very walls and porticos,
Run down with tears of silent sympathy,
Ye thought that day he read to you unmoved
The letter that his own son wrote to him
In his young blood, sobbed out with broken cries,

While Dionysius pressed the red-hot irons
Close on his slim boy's back, that he was stone,
Inhuman, or if human, weak like you,
And would with treason buy him from his chains.

Nay, but ye knew not how his father's heart
Burnt with the fury of the molten sun,
And how the ashes of his being choked
The steadfast voice which cried "I will not yield,"

I will not wrong my blood with treachery:
To what is right—the gods deliver him."

'Twas well ye marked him not that other day
When he broke first into the citadel
Deserted by the tyrant, and there found,
Whiter, more stone-like than the marble shaft,
'Gainst which she crouched in fear and dread of him,

His wife, his long lost Arete, and went
And drew her white hands from her face and said

"My wife, my own, thy Dion comes again,
And his great love doth wash thy body clean
From sins forced on thee, which were not thine own."

For as she rose and clung about his neck,
Panting and quivering like a hunted fawn,
She downward bent her face in guileless shame,
And told him, with her cheek against his breast,

How through those years of captive misery
She, like a priestess, had in secret shrine
Of wedded heart, kept ever bright and pure
The vestal flame of her great love for him.

'Twas well ye marked not, Syracusan men,
How unlike stone was Dion then, how fell
His woman's tears upon her woman's hair.
'Twas well ye heard not what his heart pulsed out

Without one word, into her tight-pressed ear,
Else might ye and your wives have called him weak,

When ye had seen that inner self laid bare
Which he forsook to serve his native land.

A strong tree which has braved a thousand storms

May totter in the wind which brings its fall,
So now methinks my pride is dying down
When thus I talk before my funeral
Of all the love, hate, duty, self-restraint,
Ingratitude and sorrow, which have graved