

June 16th, 1893.]

OTHER PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS.

"A certain kind of preachment," says Mr. Stedman, "antipathetic to the spirit of poetry, has received the name of didacticism." And indeed when we come across a suggestion of this "preachment" in what were otherwise the expression of the beautiful alone, we feel, as it were, that a "double-mindedness" has been at work, and that the result has been a false note. The analysis of this result is not difficult. Didacticism in this sense is subjectivity, which necessarily fails to harmonize with the purely impersonal. It is the intrusion which is born of self-consciousness, and which is utterly antagonistic to spontaneity. It is man's individual comment upon the universal, as if the expression of the universal were not in itself the supreme lesson of art. In short, when a great poet gives vent to this conscious didacticism, he comes down from the sublimity of the seer and stands amongst us, teaching still—we grant it—but only as a pedagogue teaches. And dull as we are, we see the change and feel vaguely that one flash of inspiration is worth a volume of platitudes.

And yet in the higher and real meaning of the word, didacticism, is not only common but essential to creative writers. Essential to them, because a great mind cannot reveal the expression of a noble thought without at the same time imparting a lesson of greatness and nobility. And in this sense, it is perhaps the objective and non-self-intrusive writers in almost the most purely impersonal form of literature, who are the greatest teachers of all. It is to Shakespeare that we turn in the hour of conflict or doubt, and not to the so-called didactic poets. The "malice" of Moliere's mockery vibrates through centuries, while the appeal of the novelist, "writing for a purpose," dies only too often before that purpose has been fulfilled.

The writer of a great tragedy or of a great comedy is, we repeat, of necessity—whether he will or no—a teacher. Whether tragedy or comedy has the more important role in this higher didacticism, is a question worthy of the most serious reflection. The eternal kinship between the two, the innate connection of humour and pathos, does not even modify the difficulty of the question. For to most of us—however evident the superficiality may be—comedy is the reflection of the laughter of life, tinged perhaps with irony, tragedy the picture of its gloom, with something also of its bitterness. The greatest tragedian, perhaps, is not without some touch of irony, the writer of a great comedy must, in our opinion, have in his nature something of tragedy. But the pictures of life which they present are so different that we have become accustomed to consider the difference of their lessons as one of kind rather than of degree.

The tragedian towers above us, showing us a conception of life which terrifies, while it enthral. The figures of Prometheus and Lear stand out apart from us, isolated and unapproachable. The trivial feelings of anger and revenge, modified in the case of most of us by conventionality or timidity, become in tragedy enduring passions. The vague impulses towards what is felt to be right,

which in ordinary life constitute what for want of an appropriate word, we have styled "goodness," appear to us in tragedy, transformed and radiant with sublime possibilities. The result is a feeling of awe in those souls which are capable of reverence, a feeling of oppression in those which are incapable of such. The pleasure derived from witnessing violent situations and intense emotions merely because they are violent and intense, need not, in passing, be considered a recognized factor, however difficult it may be to ignore it.

Comedy, on the other hand, deals precisely with those smaller emotions which tragedy transforms. Comedy shows us the mean man without exaggerating his meanness, the kindly man without exalting him to the sublime. The creator of comedy holds his mirror so near that each of us recognizes his neighbour's reflection and takes comfort and warning accordingly.

What tragedy effects on a grander and nobler scale, comedy effects no less inevitably. The tragedian raises—the writer of comedy comes down to—the many. Tragedy is lofty, but alien, comedy humbler, but nearer home. The words of the tragedian are too deep for most of us, the voice of comedy strikes home to each. The lesson from both is inevitable, and while we preserve Iago, we must not forget Tartuffe. For if, in the words of Landor, "The tragic poet rolls the thunder that frightens," it is "the comic" who "wields the lightning that kills."

O GOWAN BY THE BROOKSIDE.

O gowan by the brookside,
Awake! it is the spring
That calls thee from thy slumber:
What message dost thou bring?

Hast heard the stormwind raging,
Or felt the frost or rain?
I thought thee dead, pale gowan,
Yet there you smile again!

MARY MORGAN,

June 1st, 1893. (Gowan Lea.)

ART NOTES.

Mr. G. R. Bruenech, so well known to Canadian art lovers for his graceful and pleasing representations of scenes in Norway and Muskoka, and of many a beautiful nook and landscape in Canada and the United States, returned recently to his old home, Toronto, from holding a series of exhibitions of his art work in the United States, which were well and profitably attended. Mr. Bruenech deserves success—as apart from being a conscientious, painstaking and gifted artist, his courteous, gentlemanly demeanour, and excellent character cannot fail to win for him just commendation. Now on a sketching tour down the Gulf of St. Lawrence, extending probably to the Maritime Provinces, we may expect to find many new scenes to admire and to compare with old favourites when we are again favoured with an exhibition by this favourite artist. Mr. Bruenech tells a good story of an old American, one of a party of tourists viewing the solitary grandeur of the North Cape at midnight, who remarked to the artist that if they had the North Cape in the States they would soon make money out of it by clapping a summer hotel upon it—and, said the artist, rob it of its distinctive character and natural attractiveness.—Not at all, said the Imperturbable Yankee, we would make it popular and make it pay, at the same time.

said Malcolm, senior, bringing to the front the uninitiated young man.

Mistress Maciver looked. That was enough; she knew her son, he knew his mother.

The other Ned stood aghast at what was going on.

"Am I not then your son, that I take no part in all this reuniting?" he asked, with a tinge of sorrow in his voice.

"My son in everything but blood; you are my adopted son," explained sire Maciver.

"Then my name is still Ned Farrier?"

"It is."

A scream from the younger Maggie, as she threw herself into Ned Farrier's embrace, was more eloquent with happiness than could have been a thousand words. Malcolm, junior, saw it all, and was amazed and pleased. He had become a changed being, as had his father, since each confided in each other and laid bare their mutual and horrid taint.

There was much felicity in that residence that day. Ned Maciver recounted, with great gusto, his adventures in New York, from whence he had just returned, and whither he had gone when his father took up arms against the patriots. While talking, he suddenly bethought of and produced a valuable document, which he had discovered in the breast-pocket of the overcoat his father had given him on his departure for the Land of Jonathan. This was the long-lost chart showing the whereabouts of the buried treasure.

"And now," interjected Malcolm, junior, turning to his sister, "you must finish the relation of your romance, Maggie, which I cut short sans ceremonie last night."

"There is not much to tell," said Maggie; "the man with the broken leg was father, but he concealed his identity; we did not know him. Mother and I were there and brought him to the city in our care."

"I shall supply a missing link," Maciver spoke up. "I was on one of my rushes over the country, resisting my insane desire to kill, and dutiful Ned Farrier was posting after me. He heard at Guelph that I had gone on to Toronto; and he was away on the chase when the accident occurred to our stage at the Humber bridge, just west of Toronto. He arrived home just as our mother and sister were having me carried into the house on Cruickshank street."

So all ended well and, according to the traditional proverb, all was well. No. 9 Cruickshank street became the Farrier home, with young Maggie as its mistress. The re-amalgamated Maciver family dwelt happily in the other house. Father and son perpetually encouraged each other to fight against their fearful malady; and by much prayer, with the help of their Creator, and after strenuous struggles they succeeded in subduing their fell disease. Experience had taught them that it would thrive only by cultivation, and this they manfully avoided at every appearance of temptation. JOHN A. COPLAND.

I know the past; and thence I will essay to glean a warning for the future, so that man may profit by his errors, and derive experience from his folly.—Shelley.