

formerly seized. China did not go to war to recover it, but by a process, which is still hardly understood, she kept on during a period of six or seven years steadily pouring a stream of Chinese into the region, until in some way or other Russia was quietly crowded out and glad to quit. If the Chinese in the United States persist in declining to register or to come forward to be photographed, it will be interesting to see what the American authorities will do about it.

THE Latin adage, "Whom the god wishes to destroy he first makes mad," is almost too much worn to bear quotation, but the rumour that the Emperor of Germany is contemplating a restriction of the suffrage irresistibly recalls it. To the Anglo-Saxon the patience with which the Germans have listened to the offensive assertions of the prerogative which William has from time to time put forth in public is a matter of wonder. But as these extravagant claims have for the most part evaporated in words, while His Majesty has in the end bowed as gracefully as he could to the necessities imposed upon him by the constitution, and by popular opinion, there has not been much real cause for complaint. The Germans are quite too philosophical to make even their Emperor an offender for a word, so long as their constitutional rights and liberties are tolerably well respected. They are sufficiently warlike, moreover, to relish rather than otherwise the indomitable spirit and energy which he has so constantly exhibited, and to take pride in his evident pluck and determination to keep the military prowess of the nation at the highest possible pitch. Nevertheless, should his impatience of opposition in the Reichstag and of constitutional control drive him, as it must be admitted it is not unlikely some time to do, into a serious attempt to limit the suffrage or take away any of the popular rights which have been gradually obtained as the result of persistent pressure, there is reason to believe that he would quickly discover that he had overrated the popular docility. There can be little doubt that a serious attempt to do away with universal suffrage would, as the *Volks Zeitung* declares, "mean revolution—real, living revolution." "Institutions like universal suffrage, when once they have been introduced and have struck their roots into the soil," cannot be abolished. Whatever the Emperor may have said in a moment of excitement, it is very unlikely that he will be so ill advised as to attempt to carry any such restrictive measure into effect.

ONOMATOPEIA AND MR. BLISS CARMAN.

IN the last issue of THE WEEK appeared a poem from the pen of Mr. Bliss Carman which has caused some little discussion amongst the daily papers. It is said that Mr. Bliss Carman, has given us in this poem an exact imitation of the thrush's song, and that as such it has claims to distinct literary merit; fortunately Mr. Carman's version is not the only one in existence, and it may be interesting and possibly not unprofitable to compare "Marjory Darrow" with Tennyson's "The Thrush." Before doing so, however, I should like to say a few words about Onomatopœia in general. In the first place, should not this beautiful and artistic figure of speech be used only in connection with a clear and definite meaning? Secondly, should not this meaning, harmonizing as it does with the sound, be clear to every one who listens? Thirdly, is it not in the very nature of Onomatopœia that the sound and the words express one and the same thing: that is to say, if the words fail in clear and definite expression, do the mere associations of sounds of themselves produce Onomatopœia?

Onomatopœia, "imitative harmony," as it has been not unhappily named, abounds in the greatest productions of many languages? This blending together of the natural and artificial, this mingling of varieties which, while producing one harmonious effect, appeal at once to the ear and to the mind, is perhaps the most beautiful and the most natural, while at the same time, the most difficult and illusive task that any poet can perform. Beyond all else it must be spontaneous—it is the joyous triumph of sound rather than the accomplishment of laboured thought, or rather it is thought going half-way to meet sound, naturally and without effort.

Δεινὴ δὲ κλαγγὴ γένετ' ἀργυρέοιο βιοιο.

When a circle of young Greeks heard this for the first time and caught, as it were, the very echo of the twanged bow-string of the Delian God speeding onward, like unto the darkness of night, think you that they hung upon each word to discover a meaning possible or impossible? Not at all, the line is moderately safe even in the hands of an English schoolboy; it is a Hexameter like the rest, simple and unaffected.

Let us take another line from the same source, perhaps the best example of Onomatopœia in any language:—

πολλὰ δ' ἄνακτα, κάταντα, πᾶραντὰ τε, δοχμῶν τ' ἤλθοον

the most uncultivated ear will form an identification in this instance between the sense, i. e. the galloping of horses and the sounds conveyed in the line. This last naturally recalls the well known

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum

from the *Æneid*.

In both these cases, it is undoubtedly the sound which suggests the sense, but neither Homer nor Virgil apparently considered this a reason for the omission of the latter commodity. You will say that my illustrations are from the most hackneyed quotations, you will yourself unconsciously quote Macaulay by some phrase commencing with "Every school-boy knows," but I think you will pardon the remark, merely on account of its veracity, when I maintain that the very fact of these lines of "imitative harmony" being still familiar phrases, even upon Anglo-Saxon lips, shows us that a period of more than two thousand years has not robbed them of their suggestive beauty; a fact which would seem to my mind utterly impossible were they devoid of a clear and simple meaning.

Let us take another familiar instance, one in our own literature—

Shocked like an iron-clanging anvil banged  
With hammers,

from Tennyson's "The Princess." Here also the Onomatopœia is very obvious, but I can believe it possible that to some people the meaning actually suggests the similarity of the sound.

So far I have been speaking subjectively in the narrowest sense, that is, from the egotistical, but intensely human, standpoint, the standpoint from which one cries out: "Give me something that I personally can understand. I, the irresponsible, irrepressible Ego which refuses to lose itself in what to it, at least, is incomprehensible." We may observe *en passant* that the more ignorant and prejudiced the Ego is, the louder and the more dictatorial this cry becomes. There is, however, another standpoint—the subjective in its broader and deeper sense, which is of necessity linked with the objective, and which recognizes the fact that there is much immeasurably beyond itself.

No one has, perhaps, sounded the philosophic depths of "Hamlet," very few have absorbed all the rugged tenderness of the "Cid." There are not many who can tell us the full significance of "Childe Roland," or detect the exquisite shades of meaning in "The Statue and the Bust." There are graceful touches in Racine, which are only half revealed, lightning flashes from Hugo which, while they dazzle, are not clearly seen. There are in literature nooks and crannies which we pass over without detecting their beauty. Amongst these world-masters there is always something to search for, some hidden truth to discover; perhaps this search is on the whole wiser than a diligent perseverance in detecting their weaknesses. In music, who has not heard what for him, at least, no one can adequately express, vague, tremulous suggestions of things that never are and never were, that leave behind them an indefinable mingling of pleasure and regret? With great pictures and statues it is the same. Truly we should not pass by in scorn everything that we cannot understand. All this being freely granted, we must still return to our old standpoint, that in *Onomatopœia* the charm lies in the mingling of sound and sense, and that when the latter is indistinct and involved rather than transparent and lucid, this is seriously impaired, and that when it is altogether absent the charm is altogether lost. If a boy, at the age when the observing faculties are most acute, by careful practice manages to reproduce sounds more or less resembling the familiar croaking of the frogs in his father's horse-pond, are we to allow to this series of sounds, however accurate, the same literary merit that is due to the

Quamquam sunt sub aqua sub aqua maledicere tentant

of Ovid? I think not! In answer to this, however, the hypercritical may bring forward the deep poetry of the βρεκεκεκέξ κοῦξ of Aristophanes; this last, I am told, forms the basis of "a college yell" in an American university, a species of inharmonious madness dear to the initiated alone. All things considered, clear and definite meaning is, I repeat, most desirable to Onomatopœia, meaning of some sort a *sine qua non*. Let us now take a glance at Tennyson's charming poem entitled "The Thrush." Here it is in its entirety:—

"Summer is coming, summer is coming,  
I know it, I know it, I know it,  
Light again, leaf again, life again, love again,"  
Yes, my wild little Poet.

Sing the new year in under the blue,  
Last year you sang it as gladly.  
"New, new, new, new!" Is it then so new  
That you should carol so madly?

Love again, song again, nest again, young again,  
Never a prophet so crazy!  
And hardly a daisy as yet, little friend,  
See, there is hardly a daisy.

"Here again, here, here, here, happy year!  
O warble unhidden, unbidden!  
Summer is coming, is coming, my dear,"  
And all the winters are hidden.

I shall not quote the whole of Mr. Carman's poem as it has appeared in the previous issue of this journal, but

shall select from it the second and last stanzas; as the poem contains eighteen verses, my reason for doing so, though perhaps insufficient, is at any rate obvious:—

Clear, clear,  
Dawn in the dew,  
Dawn in the silver dew!  
Reap, reap,  
Gold in the dawn,  
Clear. . . .

Sheer, sheer,  
Sheer in the blue,  
Far in the sweep of the blue,  
Deep, deep!  
Gone, thou art gone,  
Dear. . . .

Now from the standpoint of phonetics, to my ear at least, the poem of Tennyson is infinitely more suggestive of the thrush:—

Light again, leaf again, life again, love again,  
Here again, here, here, here, happy year!

that neither are perfect imitations of the bird, no one will hardly deny, but

Summer is coming, summer is coming,  
I know it, I know it, I know it,

speaks to the senses in clearer and brighter tones than

Dear, dear,  
Dearer than dawn,  
Two with the scar of the dawn,  
Sweep, sweep,  
Through the drear of the dawn,  
Year on year,

to quote another verse from "Marjory Darrow," and then consider what a simple, charming story the Laureate tells us—

And hardly a daisy as yet little friend  
See, there is hardly a daisy,

a story which beats with the very pulse of spring, which the youngest of us grasps almost unconsciously.

That "Marjory Darrow" has no meaning I shall not presume to assert, but I think that it is a pity that this meaning, in close connection as it is with sensuous sounds, should be a cause of perplexity to the average reader. Surely we do not require wet towels around our foreheads to enter into the divine music of the thrush's notes.

It was not in this spirit that Shelley cried to the skylark:—

Teach us, sprite or bird,  
What sweet thoughts are thine!  
I have never heard  
Praise of love or wine  
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.

Or Keats addressing the nightingale:—

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown!  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn.

Such lines as these appeal to all that is best and most spiritual in man for every age. It is before great minds like these that we smaller ones are silent, thankful if we can catch one faint breath of their inspiration. Everyone reading the "Skylark" or the "Ode to the Nightingale" in the words of M. Mérimée "pour comprendre la poésie, n'a pas besoin qu'un pédant lui en démontre les beautés!" And let us be thankful that it is so. We have in literature so much of transcendent beauty that if we are unable to discover the real worth of that which is shrouded in mist, there is infinitely more which, like the rain of heaven, falls upon the just and the unjust, the wise and the unwise. For the rest, "Opinion," as Schopenhauer puts it, "is like a pendulum and obeys the same law."

In conclusion, we would observe that, in our opinion, the effect of Mr. Carman's poem is almost negative in its obscurity. It may be said, as it has often been said before, that this is the case with many of Browning's, but does this obscurity enhance our enjoyment of these works? One might reply that the poet writes to satisfy the cravings of his own soul, and not for the pleasure of the "anonymous multitude." Well, so much the worse for us! But surely it is our duty, as rational beings, to ask these great ones, who voice the emotions, the hopes and the terrors which are common to us all, to do so in such a way that we can understand them? If, however, they yield to our entreaties, they are not what they seem; the true poet is unconscious—spontaneous. It was absolutely useless for Smith, or Jones, or Robinson to appeal to Browning (they did it for a long time) to write for *them*! But, what are we to say of this spirit of conscious, I had almost written *unning*, vagueness which we see so much of in modern versification? Have we no right to protest against this, to ask, if not for "sweetness," at any rate for "light"? Our protest at all events can do no harm; it will never stultify the efforts of true genius, but possibly it may help to modify a *fashion* singularly devoid of esthetic charm.

We wish distinctly to observe that these closing remarks are not in reference to the author whose name appears in the title of this paper. Some of Mr. Carman's verses possess undoubtedly the genuine ring of spontaneity and truth. Whatever we have said is directed rather against a system which no one who is at all *au courant* with magazine poetry generally can have failed to notice, a system which tends to make sense altogether subordinate to sound.

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