

GENIUS AND PHYSICAL HEALTH.

Perfect mental and perfect physical health are perhaps necessary concomitants; but the evidence of biographical records leave no doubt that abnormal (and especially one-sided) mental preeminence is compatible with all sorts of physical infirmities—occasionally even with cerebral disorders. Cromwell and Dr. Johnston often passed weeks in a state of mental despondency bordering on despair. In the case of Swift, Tasso, and Cowper, that disposition became chronic. Rousseau's eccentricities justified the suspicion of madness. Lord Byron's best friends pronounced him unfit for the duties of domestic life. Saint Simon was subject to fits of hypochondria, which at last drove him to suicide. Fourier, Swedenborg, Luther, and Dr. Zimmerman were troubled with bewildering visions. Julius Cæsar was subject to epileptic fits. Newton, Pascal, Auguste Comte, Albertus Magnus, and Cardan had periods of mental aberration that terrified their friends with doubts of their mental sanity. Richelieu suffered from hallucinations as strange as that of Nebuchadnezzar; "he would fancy himself a horse and prance round the billiard-table neighing, kicking out at his servants, and making a great noise, until, exhausted by fatigue, he suffered himself to be put to bed and well covered up. On awaking, he remembered nothing that had passed." Peter the Great was eccentric to a degree that would have doomed any other man to the insane asylum. Charles XII, of Sweden, Felix Sylla, Mohammed the second, Haroun Al Raschid, Alexander the Great, and Sultan Bajazet were subject to fits of uncontrollable rage. So were Dr. Francia and the poet Landor. Mozart died of water on the brain; Beethoven was morbidly sensitive and eccentric; Moliere was liable to cataleptic fits; Chateaubriand to attacks of the darkest melancholy; George Sand to suicidal temptations. Chatterton, Gilbert, and probably Rousseau yielded to that temptation. Alfred de Musset and Poe died a drunkard's death, and Donizetti ended his days in a mad-house.

Yet all these examples seemed to confirm Schopenhauer's theory rather than the hypothesis of Dr. Moreau, who held that genius is merely an incidental symptom of nervous disorders—"a mere allotropic form of that abnormal condition of the nervous centres which elsewhere manifests itself as epilepsy, monomania, or idiocy—the physiological history of idiots being, in a multitude of particulars, the same as that of the majority of men of genius, and vice versa."

That strange assertion would be sufficiently refuted by the frequent concomitants of nervous disorders and the most commonplace intellectual mediocrity, but also by the still more frequent contrast in the hereditary antecedents of idiocy and genius. Imbecility can nearly always be traced to an ancestral taint of mental unsoundness or vice, while genius springs as often from a lineage of health and physical vigour. Queen Christina's and Marshal Saxe's fathers were stalwart kings. Goethe's and Schiller's, robust burghers of conservative habits. So were Napoleon's, Mozart's, Heine's, Schopenhauer's, Franklin's, Galileo's, Haller's, Herschel's, Newton's, James Watt's, Milton's, Beranger's, Beethoven's; and Vandyck's, Bunsen's, Burns', and Carlyle's parents were honest peasants. Lessing's and Addison's were simple country parsons. Schopenhauer's view is still further supported by the genealogical infecundity of genius. Not one of a hundred great statesmen, poets, or philosophers, has transmitted his talents to his offspring. —*Open Court*

ANECDOTES OF GORDON.

To many of those lately serving in the Soudan the following anecdotes of the late General Gordon, which have come to our knowledge from a thoroughly authentic source, will, we trust, be a source of pleasure. That they are not generally known we feel certain; but their authenticity will, we are equally positive, bear the strictest investigation, for our information has been derived from a gentleman who at one time served under Gordon at Khartoum in a very responsible position. When Gordon was appointed Governor-General of the Soudan he proceeded to Khartoum to be installed as the representative of the Khedive. The emirs and people had flocked in from the surrounding districts to be present at the ceremony, and one and all expected that the new potentate would, on the occasion of his first entering upon his duties, make, according to custom, a high flown and hyperbolic speech; but, to the surprise of all assembled, Gordon, after taking the usual oath, merely said to the crowd of sheikhs and chiefs who thronged the palace, in his usual quiet and, we might be almost justified in saying, quaint manner, "By the help of God I will hold the balance level." To those who knew Gordon and his peculiar type of character, this utterance will be perfectly intelligible. Gordon was very fond of visiting the different provinces of his enormous principality, and as often as not used a "dahabayah," or Nile boat, as a means of conveyance. On one of these excursions Gordon, as was his wont, was walking along the bank with a small escort of two or three Egyptian soldiers and a few European officers. Suddenly a number of armed Arabs were described rushing towards the party. Gordon was a few yards in advance of his followers, and seeing that all means of escape was cut off he deliberately aimed at the leading Arab with his rifle and fired. The shot missed, and Gordon fired his second barrel, but with the same result. The Arab was within twenty yards of him when one of his Egyptian escort knelt down and dropped the fanatic. The soldier got up well pleased with himself, and expected, somewhat naturally we must confess, to receive some meed of praise from the Governor-General.

tary duty of England to withstand certain well-known pretensions of the Court of Saint Petersburg, and to manifest cordial sympathy with the aspiration of young and growing communities for enlarged freedom and increased civilization. Almost equally interesting will be the disclosure of the endeavours, equally persistent and equally vain, made by Prince Bismarck to divert the ambition of Russia, wholly from Europe to Central Asia. Whether it would have been wise, had it been possible, to enter into an explicit alliance with Germany, Austria, and Italy, whereby, thanks to the assistance promised by us to them in Europe, we should have obtained an engagement from them to cooperate with us in the event of our being assailed by Russia in Asia, is an interesting but a disputable matter. But our constitution practically precludes the Government from signing any such agreement. But the nature and force of things is more valuable, more cogent, and more valid than any written treaty; and no man who understands the situation can doubt on which side the sympathies and the sword of England would perforce be, in the event of Russia seeking to make good its claims in the Balkan Peninsula, or of France attempting to expunge Italy from the list of Mediterranean Powers.

The strengthening of our own navy is a circumstance not to be lost sight of by those who wish to complete for themselves the survey we have attempted to make.

To predict the advent of war this year would be gratuitous folly. Not to contemplate it as a possibility, and a not unlikely possibility, would be equally fatuous. What an unspeakable comfort it is, in such anxious circumstances, to know that our affairs are in the hands, not of cosmopolitan sentimentalists, but of statesmen who are, at one and the same time, practical men and patriots.

TENNYSON AND POLITICS.

JUST as we look through the completed works of a poet in order to get some clue to his general view of society, so also, with many poets at least, it becomes necessary to ascertain their view of the larger movements of life which go under the name of politics. With some poets only; because some of the greatest poets have worked so purely in the region of imagination that no outlook upon the common world has been possible or permitted to them. Keats was one of those who lived in a world apart, and to whom poetry was a divine seclusion, which

Still will keep
A hower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

Wordsworth, having once renounced the great hopes with which the French Revolution had filled him, definitely turned aside from politics, and, save by an occasional word or stanza, displayed no further interest in them. But to Tennyson belongs another cast of thought. Very early in his career he was attracted by the great political movements of Europe, and the fascination of politics has never left him. We have, therefore, in his writings a cluster of poems, and many touches of allusion and sentiment, which reveal a general attitude toward politics. It will be interesting to examine these poems.

In the first place, no reader of Tennyson can miss the note of patriotism which he perpetually sounds. He has a deep and genuine love of his country, a pride in the achievements of the past, a confidence in the greatness of the future. And, as we have already seen, this sense of patriotism almost reaches insularity of view. He looks out upon the large world with a gentle commiseration, and surveys its un-English habits and constitution with sympathetic contempt. The patriotism of Tennyson is sober rather than glowing; it is meditative rather than enthusiastic. Occasionally, indeed, his words catch fire, and the verse leaps onward with a sound of triumph, as in such a poem as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, or in such a glorious ballad as the story of the *Revenge*. Neither of these poems is likely to perish until the glory of the nation perishes, and her deeds of a splendid and chivalrous past sink into an oblivion which only shameful cowardice can bring upon her. But as a rule Tennyson's patriotism is not a contagious and inspiring patriotism. It is meditative, philosophic, self-complacent. It rejoices in the infallibility of the English judgment, the eternal security of English institutions, the perfection of English forms of government. This is his description of England:

It is the land that freemen till,
That sober-suited Freedom chose—
The land where, girt with friends or foes,
A man may speak the thing he will;

A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent:

Where faction seldom gathers head,
But by degrees to fulness wrought,
The strength of some diffusive thought
Hath time and space to work and spread.

In these verses we have the gist of Tennyson's general view of English political life. Freedom is not to him a radiant spirit, flooding the world with a divine splendour; nor a revolutionary spirit, moving through the thunders of war, whose habitation is cloud, and smoke, and the thick darkness; nor a God-like spirit, putting the trumpet to his mouth, and sounding the divine battle call, which vibrates through the heart of the sleeping nations and wakens them to victorious endeavour; it is "sober-suited Freedom," a "diffusive thought," a scientific growth evolving itself through long ages of patient struggle, a heritage only won by patience, and only kept by sobriety of judgment and mutual compromise. Freedom indeed

makes "bright our days and light our dreams," but she also stands disdainfully aloof from over-much contact with common men,

Turning to scorn with lips divine
The falsehood of extremes.

Of the falsehood of extremes Tennyson is keenly conscious. His philosophic insight perceives the peril, and holds him back from any unregulated enthusiasm. There is no abandonment about his patriotism. It is the cool and scholastic patriotism of the moralist, not the ardent patriotism of the man standing in the full stream of action and moving with it. And for this reason it lacks vigour, and it does not inspire men with any real warmth. There is little in Tennyson's patriotism that could feed the flame of spiritual ardour in a time when men actually had to fight and die for liberty. It is retrospective; it gilds the past with a refined glory, but it does not mould the present. It immortalizes the work of the fathers,

The single note
From that deep chord which Hampden smote
Will vibrate to the doom.—

but if the work of Hampden had to be done over again we should scarcely look to Tennyson for encouragement; and when the new Roundheads "hummed a surly hymn" and went out to battle, we are pretty sure Tennyson would be found with the king's armies, and would be the accepted laureate of the ancient order.

There is no doubt room for this species of patriotism, and it is certainly a not unpopular species. It is the patriotism of the well-bred and cultured classes, of the merchant who has made his fortune, the aristocrat who lives in feudal security, the student or specialist of life whose money is safely invested in the funds, and brings in its uneventful dividends. Nothing is more common than the praise of English institutions by men who have an imperfect sympathy with the processes by which they have come to be. It is the cant of after-dinner speeches, the infallible note which always wakens thunders of applause for the utterances of otherwise indifferent speakers. Nor can we be surprised at the popularity of this kind of patriotism. It produces a gentle stimulating warmth of self-complacency which is very pleasant to the average Englishman. It tells him what he most loves to hear, that upon the whole he possesses the monopoly of political wisdom, and holds the patent for the only perfect form of political government. But we usually find in this species of patriotism a very deficient sense of present needs as compared with past glories. And this is pre-eminently true of Tennyson. When he is brought face to face with the actual conditions of modern political life, he recoils in angry dismay. It is one thing to praise the British constitution in theory, it is quite another to approve it in fact. The spirit of Freedom who moves in the thick turmoil of present affairs is anything but "sober-suited." The phrase, "sober-suited Freedom," may admirably describe a Freedom who has been tamed and domesticated, but it does not describe the spirit of liberty which actually worked in the fiery clangour of the English civil wars, or the French Revolution, or who moves in the hot parliamentary encounters of to-day. Both there and here, then and now, Freedom is the radiant and constraining spirit, inspiring stormy impulses and emotions, trampling on ancient wrongs, ever busy and never resting, carrying on the continual war for the rights and heritages of man. When that actual reality of what Freedom means is grasped, the mere connoisseurs of a tame and domesticated Freedom, adapted to household uses, always fall back alarmed, and repudiate Freedom in something like dismay. Tennyson does not do this altogether, but the recoil is nevertheless evident. He fears "the many-headed beast," the people. He distrusts their instincts and impulses. Their idea of liberty is not

That sober freedom, out of which there springs
Our loyal passion for our temperate kings.

The pulse of the democracy throbs too fast for him, and liberty moves with an undignified breadth of stride in these modern days. His contempt for trade breaks out at every pore, and he thanks God "we are not cotton-spinners all." And so it happens that while no poet has had a keener patriotic sense of the greatness of the past of England, yet Tennyson usually fails to sympathise with the modern spirit, or to recognize the real moral greatness of the modern England. We instinctively feel that he distrusts the age, and is afraid of the growth of popular liberty. There was a great England once, but that was long ago: over the England of to-day, too frequently in Tennyson's vision, the darkness of decadence gathers, and the work of slow disruption and decay is threatening, even if it be not already commenced.

One result of this philosophic and tempered patriotism in Tennyson is that he naturally has little sympathy with forlorn hopes and unpopular causes. The men who fail, the great eager-hasty spirits of humanity who fling themselves with noble impulsiveness on the spears of custom, and gather the cruel sheaf into their hearts, do not fascinate him. He does not see the noble side of failure, the quickening vitality of a true impulse, even though it be misguided, and fail wholly of attainment. The steady growth of constitutional liberty, "broadening slowly down from precedent to precedent," always respecting precedent, never failing in a proper loyalty to the reigning classes, is a drama on which he can brood with sober pleasure; but the angry uprising of the multitude to whom the bitter yoke can no longer be made tolerable does not thrill or inspire him.—*W. J. Dawson in Great Thoughts.*

FOUR things come not back—the spoken word, the sped arrow, the past life, the neglected opportunity.—*Hazlitt.*