

BOOK NOTICE.

OLD WORLD IDYLS. By Austin Dobson. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co. Into this delightful little volume Mr. Dobson has gathered, with a few exceptions, the cream of his two previously published volumes, *Vignettes in Rhyme* and *Proverbs in Porcelain*, both of which are out of print at the present time. So popular indeed has his graceful work now become, that the entire first edition of the present work, was sold in the first week after publication, and yet the audience to which he appeals is not a particularly extended one, as may be seen from his own delicate—we might almost say—invocation, since there can be but little doubt that his muse is a dweller in May Fair, and takes form astral or otherwise in the "English Girl."

To you I sing, whom towns immure,
And bonks of toil hold fast and sure;—
To you across whose aching sight
Come Woodlands bathed in April light,
And dreams of pastime premature.

And you, O sad, who till endure
Some wound that only time can cure,—
To you, in watches of the night,—
To you I sing!

But most to you with eyelids pure,
Scarce winking yet of love or lure;
To you, with bird-like glances bright,
Half-paused to speak, half-poised in flight;
O English Girl, divine, demure,
To YOU I sing!

Perhaps the most striking thing in all Mr. Dobson's work is his lightness of touch and perfect ease and grace of expression, which must certainly be his own good gift and inheritance of the gods, as we are told he 'had writ nothing' until he was twenty-four, and so can scarcely have served apprenticeship, through the usual fustian producing period, of most verse makers, who are invariably recorded, without exception, as having lisped in numbers for their first came, which proved in most cases a somewhat worse misfortune than the impediment referred to, and not so easily cured, but if indeed the reader will here be the effect of that time of probation, we can certainly heartily recommend all youthful aspirants to refrain as wisely.

In order to give the reader some idea of Mr. Dobson's power of portraying delicate humour and simple pathos, we propose to give some short illustrations from the selections from his two earlier works and the miscellaneous poems, included in this volume.

The poems coming under the general title of *Old World Idylls* are, unfortunately, for our purpose, too long to reproduce at length, but we give some suggestion of their character, from the following quotations from the poem entitled "A Dead Letter," of which we quote the first two verses:

I drew it from its china tomb;—
It came out feebly scented,
With some thin ghost of past perfume,
That dust and days had lent it.

An old, old letter, folded still!
To read with due composure,
I sought the sun-lit window-sill,
Above the gray enclosure.

Here its (the enclosure's) quiet beauty, as it lies "glimmering in the sultry haze, faint-flowered, dimly shaded," leads our poet's thoughts astray for a moment from his dusty treasure, while he expatiates in tinkling, limpid verse on its general desirableness as a place of abode.

A place to live in—live,—for aye,
If we too, like Tithonus,
Could find some god to stretch the gray,
Scant life the fates have thrown us.

But he returns at last.

The time is out of joint; who will
May strive to make it better;
For me, this warm old window sill,
And this old dusty letter.

Then comes the letter. We presume it is a love-letter, but whether of the modern fashion or not we are unable to say, having no personal knowledge of such matters, and not having access to any documents of the sort, from an unreasonable and selfish desire on the part of the possessors of such things to keep them religiously for their own perusal.

Dear John (the letter ran), it can't, can't be,
For Father's gone to Chorley Fair with Sam,
And Mother's storing apples,—*True* and me
To our elbows making Damson jam;
We shall meet before a week is gone,—
Tis long lane that has no turning John!

Then she appoints the trysting place, with praise worthy deference to the conventional, if not to the proprieties—"Behind the white-thorn, by the broken stile." It continues in the same pretty, simple, ingenuous strain, and ends with not a little passion.

My dear, I don't think I thought much
Before we knew each other, and
And now, why John, I don't finger soul,
Gives me enough to make me suffer through.
See, for I send you love there, 'tis I!
Look in this corner, and find it John!

The italics are our own. Then follow some pretty verses, descriptive of her who sent this simple old world message, but it is of her as the poet knew her, with "pale, smooth forehead, silver-tressed;" a sweet and gentle dame, with her "old store of garnered grief," for to that one of all men to whom it should have proved a living thing, it was but a "dead letter."

Peace to your soul I you died unwed—
Despite this loving letter.
And what of John? The less that's said
Of John, I think, the better.

The prologue to *Proverbs in Porcelain* we think sufficiently explains their *raison d'être*, but is unfortunately too long for reproduction. The two following verses may however serve the purpose.

Then I produce my Prize, in truth;—
Six groups in *Sèvres*, fresh as youth
And rare as Love. You pause, you wonder,
(Pretend to doubt the marks, forsooth!)

And so we fall to why and how
The fragile figures smile and bow;
Divine, at length, the fable under—
Thus grew the "Scenes" that follow now.