

AMIEL AND PESSIMISM.

The Religion of Christ Teaches Suffering;
Luther the Father of Pessimism.

The King is dead, long live the King. Amiel, hardly known in his day, reaps fame in death. A professor in Geneva, with a German drilling, he toils for years to create something. He writes poems, meaningless and prosy. The world would not listen; life is a weary round; its daily weariness is recorded in a journal; years and years pass, the journal becomes more gloomy; Amiel is dead, the journal stops. Friends could not understand how it was, a man so richly gifted produced nothing or only trivialities. These friends, as most friends are, were sadly mistaken. Such is the irony of things. He held himself in reserve so to say. Byron slept and fame found him. Amiel will not wake, but he is equally famous. What he longed for in life was granted in death. While the friends regretted his play for life he had been in reality working out the mission assigned him in the spiritual economy, and faithfully obeying the secret mandate which had impressed itself on his youthful consciousness.

"Let the living live and you gather your thoughts, leave behind you a legacy of feeling and ideas; you will be most useful." So say his lovers. A charming tale, but let them not adduce the journal to prop it: this is the age of type. Nothing is sacred: friendship ceases with death: the dead do not speak; dust is a severer of ties. Amiel dead, his friends looking for a legacy of feelings and ideas—and there is well founded suspicion that the dying pessimist puts them on the track—gathered the thousand sheets, added their own advertisement, telling that these sheets were above all the confidence of his most private and intimate thoughts, a means whereby the thinker became conscious of his own inner life; a safe shelter wherein his questionings of fate, and the future, the voice of grief, of self-examination and confession, the soul's cry for inward peace might make themselves freely heard. This journal, like the letters of George Eliot, was written with an eye to its future publication. His friends may, and it is their shrewd play to hold the other end.

The picture of the professor all misunderstood, writing to ease his mind wearied with world pain, on any slip of paper, careless of its fate, is a picture to bug. His English introducer, Mrs. Ward, to whom came literary notoriety by an accident, labors porpoise fashion to impress this picture. "But," says the author of Rob, "a talking woman is an awful judgment and mystery and oppression."

Amiel had an eye on the future, who could blame him, to revenge the past. The future has a fascination for most writers. Southey, who when he wrote a poem, "his heart and all his feelings were upon it," appealed to it for Roderick. His case has not come up for trial. Amiel was as intense with his sheets as Southey with his poems. He has had better luck. His expressed wish, that his literary executors,—he deemed his work of sufficient importance to give it guardians,—should publish those parts of the journal which might seem to them to possess either interest or thought or value or experience. The executors were brave men, they did more, and from a pecuniary point of view, with success. The confidences of a solitary thinker have tickled Europe. The strange thing about this thinker's confidences is that they are unreal, rapid vaporings, without body or bone.

In vain will the reader con the pages, to be startled by an idea, or hurriedly rushed along by an impetuous tide of imagery or diction. The style is stiff, heavy and lumbering. Amiel thought in German, the transfer to the most polished of tongues is cumbrously done. The process is interesting, the outcome a jargon. He is not in his element, a want of ease runs through his pages. His vague, formless, vacant thought cuts a sorry sight, in the language of precision. Had he written in German, the most fitting of civilized tongues for gymnastic word display and obscurity of thought, his absurdities might have had a longer life. As it is, his book is but a passing show. It happened to come in time. A century earlier or later, its life was short. It preached the philosophy of the age, sorrow, suffering, the mad fight for life, the survival of the fittest. It was the outcome of canker and rust, the negation of the Christian God, the dedication of

self. It was not a new doctrine—an old one revived under fitting conditions and given a new impetus. Its clothes were ragged and torn, it had few graces to recommend it. This was a trifle. It was in the swim, it went with the current. That current was the muddy waters of pessimism.

Pessimism is not a novelty. Its late defenders claim it is. Instead of showing fight for the belief, they sulk and reckon all investigators ignorant. The usual trick is to call it a verity and then loudly trumpet, foolish is he who questions a verity. A verity is truth, but so man of the human race are color-blind that falsities pass for verities. Truth is a subject which men will not suffer to grow old. Each age has to fight with its own falsehoods. Pessimism is one of them. Filtering through the ages, in this age it has reached its high water mark. To the body loving Greeks it meant little. Socrates might tell them that

"'Tis something better not to be," and their great tragic poet, "Not to be" is the supreme word: the next best is that having been, a man should depart as quickly as possible thither whence he came.

The people heeded them not. Life, while not free from suffering, was far from comfortless and discouraging. Yet, from a pagan point of view, with its pale doubts of a future state, pessimism could be condoned. One would rationally surmise, that with the coming of Christ, and the unfolding of the true aim of life, that this old ism would seek his grave. "There is nothing new under the sun" has been worn smooth. Yet it is useful as emphasizing the historic fact that every new generation is but a tailor shop for old isms. The religion of Christ was the recognition of suffering. Suffering was the crucible wherein the human dross was destroyed. It was a path to the promised land—a land cleared of mists, having reality and a name. Pessimism, prior to its coming, had a support for its tendrils in the religion of egotism and pleasure, yet its growth was dwarfish. In the religion of altruism and suffering, strange as it may seem, it has attained its greatest growth.

Nor is this wholly baffling to the student of its history. The Greeks and Romans had little time for the contemplation of suffering or speculation on its origin. Even their slaves, whose lot was a sad one, ameliorated it from their point of view, by revelling in the games and pastimes. They valued life, and clung to it with as much tenacity as the ordinary pessimist. Their religion of self was superseded by one of abnegation, teaching that life was a dream of vapor, time but a breath, pleasure and ambitions all folly; while self-denial, inward searchings, charity, prayer, self-discipline are the only means of gaining the promised land. In such a soil pessimism must dwindle and die. Had this teaching alone continued, modern literature was free from the black death of pessimism. Its perversion was Protestantism.

Protestantism cut and put together its own original creed. It was eclectic. It was progressive. This progressiveness meant decadence, decadence, rottenness, and rottenness is ever the fruitful soil of pessimism. Luther was a destroyer of religious feeling, a breaker of continuity, the wedge of dissensions. "The causes of atheism," says Bacon, "are divisions in religion, if they are many." Luther was their father. Pessimism, as atheism, strikes deep root in the sects. From Luther to Kant one follows the widening stream of pessimism and irreligion. With the advent of the last named philosopher, a new impetus is given. The reformers unto his time held to revelation. Now it was to be challenged, each word was to be put under the microscope, the earth was to be dug for controverting theories and given a new value. The supernatural was to be ignored, what reason could not conceive rejected. The moral heaven of Christianity was to be destroyed at all cost. Suffering was meaningless, unsanctified. In such a soil pessimism struck deep its roots. The end of man should be enjoyment, and owing to the complicated ills of modern life this being clearly impossible—life was labelled "not worth living."

This dreary doctrine taught by his disciple Schopenhauer and his followers, notably Von Hartman, whose "Philosophy of the Unconscious" is as yet its most marked presentation. With him non-existence is preferable, and the misery of life in every form greatly ex-

ceeds its happiness. Goethe, Byron, Leopardi, have thrown around the dry bones of this philosophy a certain poetic glamour. Minor minstrels have willingly caught their disease.

The modern novel, the most powerful means for the dissemination of ideas, closely hugs pessimism. It is irritating to watch what Dudley Warner calls "The confidence young novelists have in their ability to upset the Christian religion." Fame has lost its significance. Once it meant a desire to perpetuate, for all time, the best founts of the intellect. Now it is another name for notoriety. To gain it one must follow George Sand's dictum and write something very scandalous. Christianity must be scoffed at, pessimism defied. A modern novel must repudiate any idea of a moral purpose, it must be a series of "slit throat, rope dependent figures, placarded across the bosom, Diillusioned, Infidel, Agnostic, Mererrimus."

Amiel knew his age. His diary is in evidence. One lays it aside, in his own words, "Nothing is so melancholy and wearisome as this journal," and let us add that nothing is so melancholy and wearisome than to have its author dubbed a philosopher. The abuse of words is great. Authors use them without attaching any definite sense to them. The reading of such books is a mere waste of time. They can teach nothing worth knowing. Mere literary offal, husks for swine, labelled food for men. Through them runs an intense hatred for the Catholic Church. It is evident that she alone is worthy of their blade, albeit they loudly proclaim the cosmopolitan tendency of their minds, a mere catch-word, they keep aloof from the literature of the church they so bitterly attack. Their animus is founded on ignorance and prejudice. They will feed on all literatures save that of the Catholic Church. Now and then a genius like Newman will force his way and make them listen. It is reluctantly done, and with the retort, a weak position cleverly defended.

Weary with the world-pain, eagerly seeking in many languages and literatures a hint of rest, still they purposely avoid the treasures of the ancient Church. Yet she alone has the ointment that cures world-pain. She looks at the souls for whom Christ died, and who are made over to her; and her one object for which everything is sacrificed—appearances, reputation, worldly triumphs—is to acquit herself well of this most awful responsibility. Her one duty is to bring forward the elect to salvation and to make them as many as she can—to take offences out of their path, to warn them of sin, to rescue them from evil, to convert them, to protect them and to perfect them. She overlooks everything, in comparison of the immortal soul. She answers that parrot question of pessimism "Is life worth living?" in the affirmative.

Pessimism will not crown himself victor unless he has examined her philosophy. Pessimism, in the past, has purposely abstained, fearing defeat. Its malevolent hints are poor instruments to crush truth. It must soon enter the arena. Catholicism is aggressive. It is a quality of truth to extend her dominions to conquer. The so-called leaders of enlightened and liberal thought, in the hopes of defeating her, shall be compelled as Newman, to study her, thereby getting glimpses of her beauties—glimpses that will light up their encompassing gloom.

At present their ideas of her, so far as fairness and insight go, are on a level with the wives and mothers of our small provincial shopkeepers, or the beadle or church warden of a country parish. But prejudice, even when so virulent and so dogged as this, will lift and disappear some day like a London fog. The conflict must come and we have no fear of the result. Long before that day such books as Amiel's will have had an end. Pessimism, like all falsities, must be daily presented in new forms to live. Other and more brilliant men may wallow in its cesspool, they cannot prolong its life, nor can they imitate the jesting Pilate by asking "What is truth?" and not staying for answer.

"Ira Nominis non implet Justitiam Dei."—Walter Lecky, in the Catholic Reading Circle Review.

A young gentleman at a ball, in whisking about the room, ran his head against a young lady. He began to apologise. "Not a word, sir," cried she; "it is not hard enough to hurt anybody."

ROMAN NEWS.

The Holy Father has received in private audience Mgr. Benedetto Lorenzelli, Apostolic Internuncio in Holland.

His Eminence Cardinal Vincent Vanutellia has taken possession of his office of prefect of the *Economia* of the Congregation of the propaganda.

The Rev. Mother de Sartorius has been elected Superior-General of the Dames of the Sacred Heart at Paris in place of the late regretted Mother Lehon.

There has been a vast assembly of the faithful in the Basilica Eudossiana at Rome during the octave of the devotions, and the osculation of the sacred chains of the Prince of the Apostles.

We regret to learn the demise of Signora Meszyzski at Posen, mother to the faithful secretary of Cardinal Ledochowski, who attended His Eminence in his prison at Ostrowo. R. I. P.

Mgr. Keane, rector of the Washington University, has been received in private audience by the Holy Father, with whom he had a long and cordial interview. He is soon to return to America.

The police in Rome have discovered a revolutionary band who correspond regularly with foreign anarchists. Society women have acted as go-betweens for the correspondents in order that the suspicions of the police might not be aroused.

The Sacred Congregation of Rites met in the Vatican in the presence of their Eminences the Cardinali Componenti, to inaugurate the preparatory meeting for the discussion of the heroic grade of the virtues practiced by the Venerable Fra Bernardino da Calenzana, of the diocese of Ajaccio, professed priest of the reformed Minors. The vote was in the affirmative.

On the Feast of Portiuncula the Holy Father, assisted by his chaplains, celebrated Holy Mass, and afterwards heard the Mass of Thanksgiving said by Mgr. Boncompagni, his private chaplain, in the Pauline Chapel in order to receive the plenary indulgence called *Il Perdono d'Assisi*. In the afternoon His Holiness likewise took share in the closing function of solemn Benediction. Many Sisters, *religieuses*, and persons of distinction were present by special tickets of admission.

A PROTESTANT MINISTER VINDICATES IRISH CATHOLICS.

Few Established Church ministers have the courage of the Rev. C. C. Macdonald of Aberdeen, who, the other day, stood up in a hostile assembly and—dissenting from a speech by Dr Scott on the subject of the Irish Presbyterian Church—said, with reference to the Catholic Church, that he personally regretted that a single syllable disrespectful to such an honorable institution should be uttered in that house. He was not a Roman Catholic, nor half way towards it, but had found in co-operation with Roman Catholics the highest Christian sympathy and goodness of feeling; and he had felt that, as a member of the Church of Scotland, it was impossible for them to defend their own National Church without having some sympathy for the Roman Catholics of Ireland, who really constituted the National Church of Ireland. As truly as the Church of Scotland did that of Scotland they constituted the Church of Ireland. They had no evidence or proof that the Roman Catholic Church would establish a religious ascendancy and dominate the members of Parliament in the House of Commons in the legislative house. If they looked to France—if they looked to Italy itself—did they find that the Roman Catholic Church had the power to dominate the legislators of the country? He believed that it was beyond a doubt that the very act of Mr. Gladstone in giving Home Rule to Ireland would develop free political life, and that that free political life would do more to bring Roman Catholicism into accord with the spirit of the times than any other action they could possibly conceive.—*Glasgow Observer*.

The Unsympathetic Boarder—"If I had the wings of a bird," sighed the lady, "I'd fly away and be at rest." "Well, my dear madam," ventured the boarder, "you may get them yet. I see by a note you sent up to my room this morning you already have a bill."