

Christian, the idea of abolishing hell, where his *enemies* may be eternally grilled, brings untold anguish; to the devout Theosophist, to do away with a future life where present ills may be remedied is to convert the universe into a hell of injustice; to a Secularist, who sees in this present world and in this present life man's only opportunity of working out his salvation from the ills that flesh is heir to, the Christian's heaven of unending bliss is as pessimistic an idea as he could imagine. But to speak of the Nebular Hypothesis, true or false, as being pessimistic is just as rational as it would be to speak of the Atomic Theory as being pessimistic. Let us, Brother Wakeman, use our words as accurately and as rationally as possible.

Edward Fitzgerald.

BY MINNERMUS.

"That same gentle spirit from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar flow."

—Spenser.

EDWARD FITZGERALD, a great English poet, died in 1883, almost unknown. Only a few people had even heard his name. Indeed, the general public had very little chance of hearing it. He was so shy and retiring that he took more pains to avoid fame than others do to seek it. He wrote about remote subjects, which appealed only to cultured people. When his friend Tennyson dedicated "Tiresias" to Fitzgerald, the tribute seemed merely the outcome of friendship. The average reader discounted the praise of that

..... golden Eastern lay
Than which I know no version does
In English more divinely well.

It is said that a man is known by his friends. If that be so, the world has small need of a formal introduction to Fitzgerald. He was a man of many and notable friendships. At school he made acquaintance with Spedding, the editor of Bacon, and at Cambridge with Thackeray. The years that followed united him to Alfred Tennyson and his brother Frederick Tennyson, Carlyle, Bernard Barton the Quaker poet, Lawrence the painter, and others.

Fitzgerald's biographer, like the immortal knife-grinder, has no story to tell. Edward Fitzgerald was born at Bredfield, near Woodbridge, in 1809, the same year as Tennyson and Darwin. He was educated at Bury St. Edmunds, and afterwards at Cambridge. He followed no profession after taking his degree. Till 1853, though he often shifted his quarters, he lived mainly in a thatched cottage at Boulge, near Woodbridge, near his brother's residence, Boulge Hall. He was in lodgings in Woodbridge from 1860 to 1874, when he settled in a small house of his own outside of the town, named, at the wish of a lady friend, Little Grange. And "Laird of Little Grange," as he liked to sign himself, he remained till he died, aged seventy-four, in June, 1883. He is buried in Boulge Churchyard, and a rose, transplanted from the tomb of old Omar Khayyam, has been planted over his grave.

From this it will be seen that he lived the life of a recluse in Suffolk on the North Sea coast. His friend Carlyle saw in it all only a "peaceable, affectionate, ultra-modest man," and

an "innocent, *far niente* life." Like Shelley, he had a great fondness for the sea, and a great affection for fishermen and sailors. One old viking, the hero-fisherman of Lowestoft whom we know as "Posh," he numbered among his personal friends. The viking succumbed eventually to an undue devotion to Bacchus, but that did not trouble Fitzgerald, for he was no harsh judge of human frailties. Singularly enough, the man who gave us Omar's "Rubaiyat," that immortal rhapsody of wine, women, and song, was very abstemious. He was a vegetarian, and he once nearly killed his friend Tennyson by persuading him, too, to turn vegetarian for some six weeks.

The little Fitzgerald wrote was all published anonymously, except "Six Dramas of Calderon," in 1853. And, curiously, the new popular edition of his incomparable poem, by a publisher's error, has no mention of his name on the title-page. He wrote a memoir to an edition of the poems of his friend, Bernard Barton, in 1849. Two years later he printed his remarkable dialogue, "Euphranor." "Polonius" appeared in 1852, a rendering of the "Agamemnon" was published in 1876 and four editions of his immortal version of "Omar Khayyam" came out before his death, the first appearing in 1859, the year of Darwin's "Origin of Species," apparently without gaining any immediate recognition. Other works appeared in Mr. Aldis Wright's edition of his "Literary Remains" (1889).

We have spoken of Fitzgerald's friendships. The companion of such giants must have been no ordinary man. Nor would it be possible to keep on writing uninteresting letters to such men for nearly half a century. Fitzgerald's letters, then, we take for granted, are not dull. In fact, they are among the best in the language. He was truly a delightful correspondent, and his letters are charming and very piquant reading on account of their heterodoxy. His taste was all for old books and old friends, familiar jokes and familiar places. His special literary favorites were Cervantes and Scott, and Montaigne and Madame de Sevigne, she herself a lover of Montaigne, and with a spice of his free thought and speech in her. Of course he loved Omar Khayyam, who made his fame, and that other old-world Freethinker, Lucretius. He hated London for many things, but chiefly for hiding nature. Like Thoreau, he knew by instinct the life that suited him, and had the wisdom to refuse to be turned aside from it. If any justification were needed, his version of Omar's wonderful "Rose of the Hundred and One Petals" would be enough. The perennial charm of that immortal poem is, that it voices with no uncertain sound the scepticism at the bottom of all thoughtful men's minds, and makes magnificent music of it. In his version of "Omar Khayyam," this shy dreamer of dreams dreamed one dream more lasting than we ourselves, or he, or the very Suffolk coast he lived on. Under the spell of the poet we, who grub among the muck-heaps of the world, may enter the magic realm of poetry. He gives all who care to read the freedom of that ancient Eastern city of dreams, which far transcends in mystery and splendor the Orient men go out in the ships to see.

Oh, immortals of literature! The old Persian poet sees his vision and his dream, and writes it, and eight centuries hence the tired merchant, forgetting for a little space his counting-house and ledgers, lives a freer life in the wonderland of your genius. Here are nymphs and roses, grotesque imaginings and human memories. This is immortality, indeed! Under thy opiate wand he dreams your dream for one little hour—and is refreshed —*Freethinker*.