

The Greatest Book.

Fast fails its greatness when a thought is penned ;
 Its majesty is in its being made,
 Its circling into shape in secret shade,
 And broadening like a cause towards some wide end :
 Into a volumed room I viewed one wend
 His way ; his eyes were dim, yet sought no aid,
 For in them shone a light which could not fade,
 Whose beams thought's origin alone attend,
 Upon no tomes fell feebly his wan eyes,
 Though myriads filled from roof to floor the stands,
 He neared a sire, who, though with empty hands,
 Perhaps held that for which heaved strong sighs —
 Thought when most great—and ere I ceased to look,
 I heard, "Give me the yet unwritten book."

ALBERT R. J. F. HASSARD.

The Rhymes of Tennyson.

PERMANENT literature differs from the passing transitory utterances of men, not less in its form than in its substance. Too often in our criticisms we are told that this and that work is great because of the greatness of the truth which lies within it. Truth is a necessary attribute to permanence, but it is not that alone which places a work among the indestructible monuments of human thought. There is many a careless gossip of the street, whose sayings, as ephemeral as the day, are at times those flashes of wisdom into the heart of things, which should endure through time if truth were in itself, as is often loosely and erroneously stated, a life, or an essence in connection with some life-principle. But truth is as dependent for permanence on its environments as any other weak thing in this universe, and like a jewel that will tarnish, or rather like a light that will go out for want of the food-giving air on which it lives so will such a truth become the most meagre ephemeral gleam, and die away forever, unless there be placed around it safeguards, strong, well-fitted, and complete, and it has given space and position to draw on the limitless supply of the oxygen of human research and thought. So, although the foundation principle of a literature must be truth, hardly less essential is the form and the structure, those protecting frameworks by means of which the central idea is preserved, exalted, taken from the daily and made the eternal.

It is along these lines that we find the most enduring of literatures, that which is safeguarded with a perfection in form and expression,—poetry. Let us then turn for a short time to a study of one of the most important of the "work-shop attributes" of poetry—the use of rhyme. Having a clear idea of the importance of the subject, we shall take the work of the greatest poet of the age for the field of our investigations, for as Tennyson's work is the greatest literary achievement of these years, we shall find it widest and most varied in its contents, and a plain index of the tendencies and powers of our time.

In the first place we must recognize the effect in poetry of what the Germans call "tone-color." It is especially important in the lyrics, with which class we have almost entirely to deal. In a recent article Dr. Munger has drawn attention to the mystery of music ; how an infinitesimal variation in tension of chords produces in us feelings entirely different ; how a human voice through the medium even of a wordless song can communicate painful or joyous thoughts. And, as it is with music, so with its sister art, poetry. Although the underlying thought is much more a modifying factor, yet the preponderance of one tone, of one vowel sound, or of one set of vowel sounds, will have a strong effect on the listener. As the quality of modern verse is of more importance than its quantity, it is from the sound of the stressed syllables principally, and of the rhyming syllables most of all, that we get the vague but lasting suggestions of tone colour, for these stand out strong and prominent, while the unaccented syllables form the unnoticed background.

If we are struck with some sudden terrible thought, or suffer a bodily injury we exclaim "O"; if we are caused to think upon some sad scene or incident, or to meditate on weakness, or conquest, or grief, we say "Ah." Why the difference in sound? What is the philosophy of this? It lies in the fact that with the strong emotion every muscle of

the organs is at full tension, while in the second case the sound is of a lax and careless formation. Simple as these elements are, we shall expect to find in the perfect utterance of a lyric poem, reflected in its tone colour, and especially in the nature of its rhymes, an index to the subject, and be able in part to judge thereby how nearly the lyric burst is true to the elementary single interjectional sounds belonging to the dominant mood of the poem.

Turning now to Tennyson, let us look first at that triumph of art, his first official poem, in which the silence of England broke into the wild music of a dead march for Wellington. There is no better example in the English language of the power of a rhyme than in the third section.

Lead out the pageant ; sad and slow,
 As fits a universal woe,
 Let the long, long procession go,
 And let the sorrowing crowd about it grow,
 And let the mournful martial music blow ;
 The last great Englishman is low.

Here we are made to ignore almost entirely everything but the rhyme. The effect of the whole stanza is scarcely more than that of a strong, full bugle blast. It may be that an extra prominence is given to the repetition, because of the weakness of the third and fourth lines, which stake almost all on the sound of their rhyme. Whether the device was a wise one, whether such a mere blare should be in the poem, is not for our consideration here ; we have merely to notice that the rhyme has been a perfectly adequate instrument by means of which to bring out the intended effect.

It is along these lines that we shall see a principle in the formation of some of Tennyson's verse not to be found elsewhere in English poetry except in isolated examples. The ordinary lyric relies on a well-balanced verse, clearly musical throughout, on fine contrasts of metre and many other such general artifices for its effect. Many of Tennyson's lyrics, on the other hand, neglect such things, and ignore the symmetry of structure almost entirely. Staking all on a rhyme made prominent by a pulseless line, or persistent repetition, they allow the metre to run free to the thought, and we are made to feel that often where the verse is regular, it is accidental or a fact of minor importance. The first stanza of "Claribel" furnishes us with as good an example as may be found. "The Window" and indeed nearly all his songs are written on this plan. One of the best examples of all is the "Ballad of Oriana." To such a point does the poet carry his art that we are made to reconcile as parallel, lines as different in metre as these :

"She saw me fight, she heard me call."

and

"Winds are blowing, waters flowing."

one a perfect iambic movement, the other trochaic throughout.

Now, as to the success of such a method. It will be seen at once that the first elements of speech have been carefully follow and emphasized. As the lyric is the voice of emotion, it can most adequately give its expression in simple imitation of Nature. The ballad of "Oriana," for example, is scarcely more than a bitter, mournful wail. Place it side by side with any ballad of the old regular style, and the full contrast will show to what an extent art has triumphed by turning away from itself and back to Nature.

It has been said by some critics that Tennyson was poor in rhymes. As no English poet has used rhymes in such profusion, so labored to give them strength and effect, and so added refrains and doubled and trebled the repetition—as nowhere else do we find so many lyrics resting only on the force of the rhymes—we must conclude that the criticism is not based on the limit of their employment but on the substance of the rhyming words chosen. Here we enter upon a wider and more technical field ; for, besides an accurate survey of all of Tennyson's work, we must, to get the groundwork for criticism, have an accurate summary of the rhymes of the other poets as well. It is true that certain words and sounds occur very often in Tennyson. His range does not seem to be very wide ; but we are inclined to think it was largely a matter of choice. Tennyson's vocabulary is one of the best in all literature. Since the time of Milton it is doubtful if anyone has shown himself such a master of English. And we think an impartial critic will agree that truth to the highest laws of poetry will warrant the repeti-