

The line, "except the Laurell that is ever greene," refers to Edmund Spenser, then known as the "new poet," but now known as "the poets' poet." Webbe, in his "Discourse of English Poetrie" (1586), bestowed the laurel on Spenser, "who, if not only, yet, in my judgment, principally deserveth the title of the rightest poet that ever I read." And Bishop Hall, in one of his satires, says:

Renowned Spenser! whom no earthly wight
Dares once to emulate, much less dares despight;
Salust of France and Tuscan Ariost,
Yield up the laurell garland ye have lost.

Also Barnefield, in the sonnet once attributed to Shakespeare, speaks of Spenser as his favourite poet.

Spenser is esteemed by some critics as the finest sonnet-writer anterior to Shakespeare. He was undoubtedly the most daring, for he first wrote sonnets in blank verse, then in the style of Surrey, and finally invented a form of his own, which Leigh Hunt thought less happy than the Italian style. Spenser wrote about ninety sonnets, mostly in his own manner, the peculiarity of which is that the last rhyme of each quatrain supplies the first rhyme to the next, and the whole is closed with a couplet. One of his contemporaries was Gabriel Harvey, who was in the critical battles of those days a prominent figure, and though his writings are little known except for ridicule, he was highly thought of by Spenser, who addressed the following sonnet: To the Right Worshipful, my singular Good Friend, M. Gabriel Harvey, Doctor of the Laws.

Harvey, the happy above happiest men,
I read, that, sitting like a looker-on
Of this world's stage, dost note with critic pen
The sharp dislikes of each condition;
And, as one careless of suspicion,
Ne fawnest for the favour of the great;
Ne fearest foolish reprehension
Of faulty men, which danger to thee threat;
But freely dost, of what thee list, entreat,
Like a great lord of peerless liberty;
Lifting the good up to high honour's seat.
And the evil damning ever more to die;
For life and death is in thy doomful writing;
So thy renown lives ever by ending.

The sonnet is dated and signed as follows: "Dublin, this 18 of July, 1586. Your devoted friend during life, Edmund Spenser." But life and death was not always at the command of Master Gabriel Harvey, for in 1580 he commended nine comedies written by Spenser, and tried to dissuade him from writing "The Faerie Queen."

Most of Spenser's sonnets were the offspring of love; but his "Amoretti" are not so warm with passion as those of many of his contemporaries, although choice and elegant and full of fine lines and images. The conceit of the following is common with the poets of his day, whose devotion to their mistress was supposed to overshadow all other earthly and (if we are to believe some of them) heavenly desire. Of course the mistress of their poetic intimacy was seldom the sharer of their prosaic domesticity.

Happy, ye leaves! when as those lily hands,
Which hold my life in their dead-doing might,
Shall handle you, and hold in love's soft hands,
Like captives trembling at the victor's sight;
And happy lines! on which, with starry light,
Those lamping eyes will deign sometimes to look,
And read the sorrows of my dying spirit
Written with tears in heart's close-bleeding book;
And happy rimes! bathed in the sacred brook
Of Helicon, whence she derived it;
When ye behold that Angel's blessed look,
My soul's long-lacked food, my heaven's bliss,
Leaves, lines and rimes, seek her to please alone,
Whom if ye please, I care for other none.

The second line is eminently Shakespearian in its construction and potency. The phrase, "dead-doing might," reminds one of Shakespeare's "dead-killing eye." "Lily hands" occurs in Shakespeare and other poets of the period. "Those lamping eyes" is an expression of imperishable beauty, and the line, "Written with tears in heart's close-bleeding book" puts very tersely and prettily an image often used by the love-sick poets of his day.

Spenser's poems, however, were not destined to be pleasing only to the object of his affection. Sir Walter Raleigh has left on record an eulogy which is in itself a matchless masterpiece of fine fancy. It is one of many panegyrics passed on the literary adventures of him whom Lowell has happily christened "the Don Quixote of poets," and is quaintly entitled "A vision upon this concept of the Faery Queene." It was printed in 1590 with the first three books of the noble poem. It will be noticed that Raleigh employed the three quatrain form, but he stepped right out of the beaten track of eulogy and struck a broad path for himself by the splendid massing of strong images. Dean Church calls it "a fine but extravagant sonnet"; but it is probably the grandest sonnet written before Milton dipped his mighty quill in ink. Leigh Hunt says that after reading it, in spite of structural deficiencies, "no impression remains on the mind but that of triumphant force."

It will be remembered that Raleigh had met Spenser in Ireland, and that the admiration of the great men was mutual is attested both by this sonnet and the reference by Spenser to Raleigh as "the Shepherd of the Ocean." The sailor persuaded the poet to go to London and publish his Faery Queene.

Methought I saw the grave where Laura lay,
Within that temple where the vestal flame
Was wont to burn; and passing by that way
To see that buried dust of living fame,
Whose tomb fair Love and fairer Virtue kept,
All suddenly I saw the Faery Queen,
At whose approach the soul of Petrarch wept;
And from thenceforth those graces were not seen,
For they this Queen attended; in whose stead
Oblivion laid him down on Laura's bier.
Hereat the hardest stones were seen to bleed,
And groans of buried ghosts the heavens did pierce,
Where Homer's spirit did tremble all for grief,
And cursed the access of that celestial thief.

A relation and fellow-sailor of Raleigh was Sir Arthur Gorges, who, like many of England's fighters of that time, occasionally laid down the sword to pick up the pen. This literary seaman was a Latin scholar, but a poor rhymmer, and translated Lucan's "Pharsalia" into octosyllabic verse, which was published in 1614 with a commendatory sonnet by Raleigh. The ring of it is manly and independent; it strikes the keynote of true poetic impulse, and affords such a crushing condemnation of literary servility that it may well be read to-day when literary cookshops are filled with the nauseous steam of praise. The sonnet is so cleverly constructed with subtle allusions to the lives of both Lucan and the translator of his best work, as well as an honest admiration of their lofty characters. It is also written in the three-quatrain style:

TO THE TRANSLATOR.

Had Lucan hid the truth to please the time,
He had been too unworthy of thy Penne,
Who never sought, nor ever car'd to climb
By flattery, or seeking worthless men.
For this thou hast been bruised; but yet those scars
Do beautifie no lesse than those wounds do,
Receiv'd in just and in religious warres;
Though thou hast bled by both, and bear'st them too,
Change not; to change thy fortune 'tis too late:
Who with a manly faith resolves to dye,
May promise to himselfe a lasting state,
Though not so great, yet free from infamy.
Such was my Lucan, whom so to translate
Nature thy Muse (like Lucan's) did create.

SAREPTA.

(To be continued.)

LONDON LETTER.

AMONG my correspondence of this morning I find a letter written by a sprightly young gentleman acting in the capacity of Marshal or aide-de-camp to one of the Assize Judges, which letter contains so many odd bits of information that I chose to copy it here.

"Durham Castle, where we are now, is a superb place," he writes, "full of tapestry, dead bishops, Jacobean fire-places, arms, Norman pillars and chests of black oak. There are many broad shallow staircases, and old iron lamps fixed against the rubble walls of the keep. It's the most interesting combination of castle, bishop's palace and university; quite splendid. There are long terraces and scraps of garden, with just room for a tennis-court; and a huge hall, with a dais, and Cann's portraits, and long mournful Spanish saints, brought from Spain by the fiery Peterborough. The trumpeters blow, and the lodge-keeper clangs the ancient bishop's bell, and the sheriff comes in and takes us to the Cathedral across the Palace Green just outside, and the organ plays 'God Save the Queen' as we go up the aisle, and oh! a Marshal's life is very hard!"

"When the Principality was broken up in 1836 (there were formerly Prince Bishops) all sorts of splendour of furniture and pictures were sold for absolutely nothing, and the finest port, over which G—, who told me, nearly cried, went for a shilling a bottle! The university bought it for the ordinary drinking of the students. 'Think of it,' said G—, and was quite silent.

"In Newcastle I found the house from which Bessie Surtees eloped with Eldon, a fine Jacobean place, with innumerable windows, out of one of which, marked with a pane of blue glass, the young lady climbed. Collingwood was born there, Nelson's 'noble fellow,' (there's a cenotaph of him by Rossi, very bad, and a fine Flaxman of Matthew White Ridley in the Cathedral), and I came on Bewick the engraver's cottage, solid dark stone with a plaque fixed on the wall.

"Yesterday, in frightful rain, we went to Auckland—the inn we lunched at was the Phoenix; 'we shall have hashes,' said the Judge—and saw the chapel where Cosin, great Archbishop of the Restoration, lies buried, who was very angry because he meant to be the first put there, and his brother-in-law forestalled him. At Oshaw, founded in 1806, a college for priests, we saw St. Cuthbert's ring; at least some say it isn't his ring, being thirteenth century work. They paid for some relics a thousand pounds to a Neapolitan family in difficulties, bones tied up in ribbons like bridecake or stuck over with paper rosettes like the meat at Christmas. Long frosty corridors, hung with Catholic prints and Doré engravings, and among them Frith's Ramsgate Sands, lead to the Chapel. Gusts of incense came sweeping past every now and then.

"At Newcastle, our final ceremony was the presentation of a Carolus to one of the Judges, and a Jacobus to the other by the Mayor and Corporation. In the old days the Mayor was bound to give the judges safe escort to Carlisle. Then he gave them money to buy daggers; and now, these broads, as they are called, are the latest innovation of the old custom.

"By the way the Judge tells me the bar wig is the ordinary mourning wig of the time of Queen Anne. The Bar went into mourning for Her Majesty, and have never come out!

"Here's a ghost story for you: When Father Matthew was first a priest he had a little room over the chapel, where he used to sleep. One night very late, tired with work all day, he was coming out of the confessional after silent prayer, where he saw mysterious lights, and heard mysterious music, and lo! his predecessor, dead of course, came out of the vestry in full mass fig, and, hollow-voiced, demanded who would help him to serve the mass? So Father Matthew assisted, and they did the mass together solemnly, and the ghost told the trembling priest how he had come back to earth because of chapel work unaccom-

plished, and masses not duly sung, and further commanded Father Matthew to take up the temperance cause and never leave it; which he did, and always told this tale of how he first began.

"And what do you think of this? A man tried for the murder of a child was defended by Armstrong, who afterwards came to great eminence. A worsted ball was found in the possession of the murderer. The grandmother swore it was the child's. Armstrong should have said nothing and left it to the jury—an ordinary ball, gentlemen, and hang a man for that!—but he got up and cried out triumphantly, 'This is it, isn't it? Common ball enough, every child has one, and so on.' The grandmother rambled on, half talking to herself. 'Yes, Jim made it for her, and wound it round a bit of Bible in the middle.' 'Sh!' said the Judge, the only man who heard her muttering; made her repeat it; and had the ball unwound in court. 'There's a man's life on that,' he said to the Marshal, when at the end they came on a piece of book-cover with Holy Bible printed on it, forming the heart. And the man was hanged."

In how many ways do Gray and FitzGerald resemble each other; in their quiet studious lives, their engrossing love of literature, their tender feeling for those friends and workers in the world of whose successes they were so keenly sympathetic. He never spoke out. Gray's touching epitaph, written by Dr. Warton, whom Matthew Arnold quotes in his charming essay, is suitable for FitzGerald, too. Of their work, the quality of which was unlike, neither of them ever willingly made mention. Had they lived in the same years Gray—lodging in a cloister where, according to Bonstettin, *le quinzième siècle n'avait pas encore déménagé*—would, I am sure, often have left the panelled Peterhouse room decorated with the rope-ladder (you recollect the false alarm which made the poet migrate to Pembroke Hall?) to visit Old Fitz in his "suburb grange." Their volumes of letters should stand side by side in the library. From each we learn exactly what we want to know of his own life, and the simple story is told in a fashion that is touching indeed to the outsider who listens to the refined gentle tones of these hermit scholars. Gray occasionally went up to London, to see his odes through the "Strawberry Hill Press," may be, and to hear the nightingales in the Strawberry Hill Gardens, or he journeyed about England, always glad to return to the quiet of Cambridge, to his lonely life and his books. FitzGerald would have stayed on in Suffolk all the year had his friends allowed it, with the doves about his windows and the lugger "on the salt road between the trees, called Bewdsey Haven."

As one reads on one finds FitzGerald making mistakes sometimes that are not a little perplexing. He is "quite certain Richardson (with all his twaddle) is better than Fielding," an astonishing statement. He cares little for Miss Austen who "never goes out of the parlour," though he shares her affection for Crabbe, that dull rhyming story-teller. At first he cannot like "Pendennis," and we all know his opinion as to "Aurora Leigh," and woman's work generally. One could quote a dozen instances where his judgment is at fault, the reason being, I think, that he is oftener governed by the heart than the head. Books he read and loved when he was young, in the first quarter of the century, he read at the end of his days with an immense admiration, and welcomed in his old age the heroes and heroines with precisely the same enthusiasm as when first they were made known to him, fifty years before.

"And before the day was closed Dandie Dinmont came into my room on his visit to young Bertram in Portanferry Gaolhouse." How many times during FitzGerald's life did he not greet Dandie Dinmont. Dandie Dinmont and a score of others of that brave Scotch nation with whom (*pace* Leslie Stephen) one has spent the happiest hours before (and even after) one knew stucco from marble. Those kind eyes could find no fault in work that had given pleasure. Wisely he took his old friends and old books to his heart with their mistakes and shortcomings, which he never knew, with all the good qualities about which he was never tired of thinking. The tactful sympathy of the shy Suffolk recluse for those few great men whom it was his privilege to call his friends, the great unaffected affection for those dead writers whom he knew so well and about whom he spoke so often, these things make this bundle of Letters quite delightful reading, flawless in their excellence.

It has been much the fashion amongst a certain set to praise and quote FitzGerald's translations (which Rossetti first found in 1861 hidden away in the Fourpenny Box on a bookstall) of the poems of that Persian poet, astrologer, and tentmaker, over whom young Mr. McCarthy has just been rhapsodizing. But in the future, FitzGerald will not be remembered so much for that work over which he was so commendably modest (if you, a minnow, live with Tritons, you must be insensible enough if you are not conscious of your own littleness) as he will be for the scores of charming scenes which he has skilfully drawn with his leisurely delicate pen. Does it please you to hear of Tennyson and his magic music, of Thackeray—his little child dies again in these pages, that immortal little child who lies enshrined in its cradle in The Great Hogarty Diamond—of the good Barton dining with Sir Robert Peel, of Carlyle and his search for human bones on the Naseby battle-field? Of all these things and many more FitzGerald has time to speak in the pleasantest manner, his words reminding one now and again of that great language, those dear accents, learnt from him who wrote of "Vanity Fair."

What a grief to this "peaceable man," as Carlyle calls him, had he known how inaccurately and unjustly Brown-