

THE STILL TRYST.

How Love transcends our mortal sphere,
And sees again the spirit world
Forgot so daily. Thou art here ;—
I know thee, sweet—though fair impeared
Thy face in a far atmosphere
To others,—hearing in the sea
My love a-crying up to thee.

Thou by the surf, I on the Lake :—
Yet in the *real* world we meet ;
And O, for thy endear'd sake,
Love, all I am is at thy feet.
With *thy* life let me breathing take ;
And through all Nature do thou see
My love a-crying up to thee :

And with thine eyes shall I pursue
Yon shower-veils from the sunset flying,
Blown mid clouds white and lurid-blue
That crowd the rainbow's arch, defying
Him who in red death shoots them through.
Look with me : in this pageant see
My love all glowing unto thee.

"See what I see, hear what I hear,
I too am with thee by the wave,—
One all the day, the hour, the year :
Our trust of love shall be so brave,
We shall deny that death is here
Or any power in the grave.
I know thee : thou canst love like this :
Be ours the endless spirit-kiss."

Dusk falls. How purely shines that star,
Concealed while day was in the sky :
Life, Love and thou not mortal are,
Though atheist noon your world deny.
Dusk falls ;—though in the west a bar
Of bloom on Evening's pure cheek be,
In beauty thy love cries to me.

ALCHEMIST.

THE SINGLE SONNET OF THOMAS GRAY.

IN these days of sonnet-making when every self-laurelled servant of the muses airily undertakes to lay each ghost of a thought, to preserve the unripe fruits of love, or to photograph a field of peas or potatoes in a Petrarchan stanza, it is refreshing to recall the name of a poet who had the ambition to write *one sonnet* and the modesty not to repeat the attempt. Such an unique performance reminds one of that hero of unutterable things, who lighted the long silence of his parliamentary career with one flash of eloquence, never to be repeated and never to be forgotten : "Single Speech Hamilton."

Master Mathew, in "Every Man in His Humour," somewhat conceitedly remarks : "Your true melancholy breeds your perfect fine wit, sir. I am melancholy myself divers times, sir, and then do I no more but take pen and paper, presently, and overflow you half a score or a dozen of sonnets at a sitting"—to which Edward Knowell adds in a stage whisper : "Sure, he utters them by the gross."

Whether "the limestone and mortar" poet intended this as a sly allusion to his friend Shakespeare and his sugared sonnets, is questionable ; but the description certainly applies to many sonneteers. Wordsworth wrote some 480 ; Charles Tennyson Turner, 342 ; Petrarch, 317 ; Shakespeare, 160 ; Sir Philip Sydney, 108 ; William Alexander, 106, etc. It is somewhat remarkable that there are a few poets who have composed one sonnet and no more, for as a rule when a verse-maker has written one sonnet successfully and obtained the knowledge necessary for the proper moulding of the dewdrop poem, he is seized with an almost irresistible desire to write sonnets to everybody and on everything. There must have been some good and sufficient reason for this single sonnet utterance on the part of the six practised writers of verse to be presently mentioned, but the exact ground in each case cannot be thoroughly determined. It may have been that after the first effort the poet recognized that the dainty form was not for his rough hand to fashion ; that Dr. Johnson's dictum concerning Milton as a writer of sonnets might apply in a measure to his genius "that could hew a Colossus out of a rock, but could not carve heads out of cherry-stones" ; perhaps he could not acquire the necessary taste to be induced to try another, and the first sonnet, like a first olive, could not be got over ; possibly it was discovered to be an unsuitable form for the author's peculiar poetic temperament, too cramped a measure for the airy flight of fancy, the sonnet being for condensed thought and restrained imagery and not for free and unbridled imagination. Whatever the reasons may have been the following widely differing versifiers have made themselves renowned in sonnet literature as being single sonneteers ; the names of these worthies are Thomas Gray, Winthrop Mackworth Praed, Lord Lytton, Adelaide Proctor, Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, and Alice Mary Blunt.

Of the six poems one has become famous. It was written by Thomas Gray on the death of his great friend, Richard West, a fellow Etonian and a son of the then Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Gray used to address him familiarly as Favonius in his correspondence. West died in 1742, aged twenty-five years ; Gray was his senior by one

year. They had similar tastes for the classics, had travelled together, and were in constant correspondence. Gray felt the loss acutely and under the smart of grief and inspiration of loving memory penned the sonnet ; it was one of the earliest of his original efforts in English poetry. At Cambridge he had previously published Latin verses and English translations, and his mind was full of classical lore and imagery. The sonnet itself reads as follows :—

ON THE DEATH OF RICHARD WEST.

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire,
The birds in vain their amorous descant join,
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire ;
These ears, alas ! for other notes repine,
A different object do these eyes require :
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine,
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.
Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men ;
The fields to all their wonted tribute bear,
To warm their little loves the birds complain ;
I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
And weep the more because I weep in vain.

Around this sonnet much controversy has arisen, which is deplorable, since the sonnet was composed under great stress of feeling on the death of his dearest friend, and utterances of grief should be respected by critics, however fastidious, and especially when they happen to be brother poets also. Wordsworth never cared for Gray's poetry and has left evidence of his dislike in several places ; but surely he might have passed by this sonnet in silence as an epitaph in the graveyard of poetry entitled to respect. He assailed it, however, in the preface to his Lyrical Ballads in the course of showing the close relation between well-written prose and poetry. Gray he places "at the head of those who by their reasonings have attempted to widen the space of separation between prose and metrical compositions, and was more than any man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction." After quoting the sonnet in question, Wordsworth adds the following : "It will easily be perceived that the only part of this sonnet which is of any value is the lines printed in italics ; it is equally obvious that, except in the rhyme, and in the use of the single word 'fruitless' for fruitlessly, which is so far a defect, the language of these lines in no respect differ from that of a prose."

This was not easily perceived by Coleridge who took up the cudgels for Gray and belaboured Wordsworth, though it is to be regretted that in the course of the encounter the innocent Gray received a blow or two from his own champion. Coleridge says : "In my conception, at least, the lines rejected as of no value do, with the exception of the two first, differ as much and as little from the language of common life as those which he has printed in italics as possessing genuine excellence." Coleridge states that if Gray's lines were not poetically unique, they would prove "a truth, of which no man ever doubted, viz., that there are sentences which would be equally in their place both in verse and prose."

Recently Mr. Hall Caine has attempted to defend Wordsworth, and says : "The passage quoted might, if taken alone, be open to the charge of hypercriticism ; but taken in connection with the essay which it was designed to illustrate, it is in all respects generous and even laudatory." Mr. Hall Caine's conciliatory remark does not agree with the impressions produced by Wordsworth's passage about this particular sonnet, in which it is plainly stated that of the fourteen lines nine have no value and the rest have some value. This is scarcely "laudatory." To be plainly told that the five lines of value do not differ, except in the matter of one defect from prose, is not exactly "generous." Wordsworth clearly intended to demolish the sonnet. Coleridge was not so hypercritical, and defended it in some respects ; but he declared "the second line has, indeed, almost as many faults as words," and describes it as "a bad line, not because the language is distinct from that of prose, but because it conveys incongruous images ; because it confounds the cause and effect, the real thing with the personified representative of the thing ; in short, because it differs from the language of good sense."

Poor Gray ! with such critical onslaughts from two of the greatest poets of their day, it is a wonder this sonnet survived. That it has done so indicates there must be a poetic vitality and intrinsic worth in its lines which are beyond the power of criticism to kill. Leigh Hunt has ably defended it from Wordsworth's ill-concealed animosity, and has retorted against Coleridge's ill-directed remarks.

Regarding the much-abused line, condemned on different grounds by the two giant poets—"And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire"—Mr. James Russell Lowell in a foot-note to his essay on Pope in "My Study Windows," mentions that this line is one of Gray's happiest reminiscences from a poet, in some respects, greater than either Wordsworth or Gray, and quotes as follows :—

Iamque rubrum tremulis jubar ignibus erigere alte
Cum coepat natura.

—Lucretius IV., 404-405.

So far as the charge of artificiality is concerned, Leigh Hunt writes thus : "As if a man so imbued with the classics as Gray, and lamenting the loss of another man equally so imbued, whose intercourse with him was full of such images, could not speak from his heart in such language ! Similar thought—which it might have been thought would have warned Wordsworth off such ungenial ground—has been found by Johnson for Milton's classical lament of a deceased friend and fellow student, in the beautiful poem of 'Lycidas.' Not only did Milton and Gray speak from the heart on these occasions, but perhaps,

had they not both so written, they had not spoken so well."

Regarding the charge of classicity against the opening lines, Leigh Hunt says : "We are too much in the habit of losing a living notion of the sun ; and a little Paganism like this helps, or ought to help, to remind us of it."

But Wordsworth knew how to be classical, when he so wished, even in his sonnets. He could

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

He could refer to

The azure brooks, where Dian joys to lave
Her spotless limbs,

and could speak of

the plausive smile
Of all-beholding Phœbus—

After these it seems a little unfair for him to object to Gray's slight reference.

Gray's sonnet has been translated into Italian by T. J. Mathias, who has also left the following remarks on the original : "Mi pare che il Sonetto il più perfetto che sia mai stato composto in Inglese, nello stile Petrarcesco, è quello del nostro Pindaro Britanno per le morte del suo amicissimo Ricardo West, giovine d'un alto e pellegrino ingegno, e nella poesia allora l'altra speme della nostra Roma. Quel Sonetto è sì pieno d'affetto, e d'una certa tenerezza e melodia cori ricercata, che può sembrare dignissimo di Valchiusa." This somewhat makes amends for the Wordsworth and Coleridge criticism.

Mr. John Dennis thinks this sonnet "is very beautiful." Mr. James Ashcroft Noble is of opinion that "the single sonnet of Gray hardly deserved the savage treatment by which Wordsworth has immortalized it." Another critic calls it "a manly production," and a contributor to sonnet lore states that "though not without beauty, it would probably have been forgotten by all but literary students had Wordsworth not kept its memory green by a savage attack."

The last line of this sonnet, "*And weep the more because I weep in vain*," has become a stock quotation ; but there is a very close parallel noted by Park in his *Heliconia* (published 1815). It is in Fitz Jeffrey's "Life and Death of Sir Francis Drake" (published 1596) :—

O therefore do we plaine
And therefore weepe, because we weepe in vaine.

Whether Gray had ever seen this rare book is very doubtful ; but it is far more likely that he had read Colley Cibber's adaptation of "Richard the Third," which appeared in 1700, and which contains a very similar passage. Gray is also accused of having borrowed ideas from Milton, Spenser and Dryden in this sonnet ; but I have not seen them particularized or noticed anything beyond general poetic resemblances in certain passages.

Such is some of the criticism that has arisen out of Thomas Gray's single sonnet. Personally, I prefer to regard the little poem as the honest expression of a poet's personal feeling on the occasion of the death of a dear friend. Milton's "Lycidas" and Shelley's "Adonais" belong to the same order of poetic utterance, which cannot be ruthlessly subjected to the severe criticism applied to poems founded on general topics or imaginary incidents. Regarded in that light, and remembering the poetic characteristics of the time and the classical affinities of its author, the sonnet will take higher rank in its department of poetry than the criticism which it has evoked will obtain in the history of literary quibbles. Considering the mass of comment that has grown around this poem, it was perhaps better for literary peace that Gray only wrote one sonnet. So far as its structure is concerned, its formula is a. b. a. b. a. b. a. b. c. d. c. d. c. d. ; the octave and sestet being composed on two rhymes each, alternately placed. This is a comparatively easy form of composition, and is rarely used by sonnet writers in any language. In its verbal arrangement it contains seventy-six monosyllables to thirty-two polysyllables—six lines having a proportion of six to two—five lines of four to three, and the last line eight to one. The style is reminiscent in many lines of the famous "Elegy" ; but the subject is elegiacal, and calls for the same careful arrangement and choice of words. The vowel sounds in the two rhymes of the octave are the same and constitute a fault, so far as sonnet composition has been defined by its critics. In this case it adds to the plaintiveness of the melody, as does the repetition of the words "in vain."

SAREPTA.

FROM some particulars given in the *Library* concerning the collection of books, etc., at Windsor Castle, it appears that the total is now about 100,000 volumes. As the royal library which George III. got together at great cost and labour was taken to the British Museum, his successor really founded the present library, which has several specially interesting characteristics. There is a magnificent collection of books on the fine arts, while English history and topography are well represented. It appears, however, that additions cannot be made so liberally in the future as in the past through want of room. The most precious treasure of the library—the great collection of original drawings and engravings collected by George III., is still intact. It is said that "of late years a considerable number of books in fine old bindings, chiefly royal, have been added," one being the "Faerie Queen," which "may have been the copy read by Queen Elizabeth in the very gallery where it is now again preserved."