

## ROMAN SONNETS.

The name of no other place in the world conjures up in its single utterance such panoramic visions of the past or sends swift thought retrieving along the highways and byways of history to such a purpose as that of Rome. It is a talisman revealing the old western civilization and modern eastern decay of Europe. "Civis Romanus Sum" was the proud charter of the old Roman people, beyond whom all men were reckoned more or less barbaric; but the Roman citizen of to-day has nothing to boast of but ruin—physical, moral and spiritual. That Rome was not built in a day is amply proven by the *debris* yet remaining, for we speak only of ancient Rome. They form a weird and wonderful record, these fallen bricks of history that can never be builded again. Like the fossil remains of an extinct species of civilization, temples, amphitheatres, fora, mausolea, arches, aqueducts, basilicas, baths, villas, mosaics and frescos lie the exposed bones of an old-time gigantic structure, wonderful and awe-inspiring to the most illiterate traveller; but full of hidden meanings and profound lessons for the learned philosopher and the enlightened poet. It is not strange, therefore, that to old Rome a few sonnet-writers have turned their attention at odd times and, as will be seen, in odd humours.

Rome! the very word itself is ominous and pregnant with force. It falls from the lips like a clap of thunder—subdued, if we speak it softly, like the echo of a far-off storm; but mighty and vengeful if we utter it with full power of lung. It begins with the incipient crushing roll—it ends with the muffled reverberation. No Saxon monosyllable, mimetic of natural force, is more significant in sound than the name of the old centre and spreader of civilization. It conveys grand but terrible associations, mighty but mysterious meanings. The position of Rome in the Italy of to-day in no way dispels these ideas. Compared with other glad Italian cities, Rome is gloomy; it seems crushed beneath the weight of historical crimes and attended by a burdensome and remorseless conscience.

Lamartine wrote in his record of travel "Rome is a monastery; Naples the garden of Italy," and the same thought was with Prosper Merimée when he said "Naples after Rome is like comedy after tragedy." The ruins of Rome are the stage remains of a vast human tragedy—the longest ever acted in this world's history.

But Rome was not gloomy in its olden days, when her great builders borrowed much from the Greek and a little from the Egyptian and invented the arch, to which the Greek never attained and the Egyptian merely approached, when they put up their fine solid brick buildings in preference to the costly marble, though occasional marble pillars and facings are yet to be found where temples and palaces stood. Though stone, chiefly travertine, was used for some large erections, as the Colosseum, Adrian's Tomb, Fortune's Temple, etc., solid and sensible brick was the chief material of ancient Rome—good brick and good cement, much of which will last longer even now than the bad brick, worse cement and worse iron fixed up in America.

Canadians have chosen the maple leaf as an emblem, and it is occasionally to be found in decoration, though not so often as it might be, being so delicately beautiful in form and mass; but the leaf the Romans loved was the acanthus, and it formed their chief external decorative ornament, being occasionally supplanted by the honeysuckle turning its tendrils towards Greece and the lotos bending over to Egypt.

Rome suggests war with its legion of horrors, and work with its blessings of peace. The wonderfully disciplined and well drilled armies, inexhaustible and invincible, of whose soldiers Josephus said truly they would never meet their equals; the triumphs, sacrifices, gladiatorial exhibitions, wild beast fights, water combats and other symbols of Rome's perpetual strife contrast strangely with that other and quiet phase of ancient life, whereof—the civic functions, peaceful business, profitable commerce and calm agricultural pursuits—the people were so fond—especially agriculture, for which the Roman had an innate affection. The two great pleasures of the old Roman seem to have been a good farm and a good fight—Cincinnatus was a typical example. The law and polity of to-day's civilization are the results.

Food for the philosopher, study for the politician, authority for the statesman, field for the antiquarian, lesson for the warrior, subject for the historian have been supplied by Rome, and why not a theme for the sonneteer?

In the course of much sonnet-reading we have not found many sonnets dealing either directly or indirectly with Rome, and this has been a source of some surprise. The older sonnet writers never ventured much abroad, preferring to love, languish, live and die at home, and seldom touching historical ground except to find a simile or dig up a conceit; whilst the more modern turners of the octave and sextet have had, perhaps, so wide a margin and such a multitude of subjects for choice that only a few—very few—have elected to "see Rome and die" in a sonnet. Wordsworth and Charles Tennyson Turner one would certainly expect to air their philosophical and poetical meditations over the ruins of departed glory, and in these instances expectation will be realized; but there were and are other minds capable of concealing beautiful thought in fourteen lines, and from whom we might also expect a sonnet smacking something of the Roman—Shelley, Cary, Russell, Keats, for instance—but they have silently passed Rome and landed in Greece and Egypt, to our present disappointment. However, for what we have received let us be truly thankful; for the quality is great if the quantity is small, and to a sonnet-lover that is the main feature of the poetic repast.

Charles Tennyson Turner has a sonnet on Rome, dealing with his subject from the reflective side of two incidents—one ancient and the other modern. It is altogether unworthy of the title ("Great Localities: Rome") which was given to it; but is, nevertheless, quite Tennyson-Turneresque in its quiet treatment. Out of the three or four hundred sonnets which the Laureate's brother wrote, we cannot recall one that steps out into the very front rank. Manzini said that "the sonnet is the touchstone of great genius," which is true; but it is no less a fact that the sonnet is the lodestar of lesser talent. Charles Tennyson Turner used the sonnet as a channel for his reflections on all subjects; but he never rose above the quiet dignity of the poet philosopher in contemplation of the phases of Nature and the incidents of life. A stirring passion never roused him to a burst of sublime eloquence; but he breathed forth gentle lessons and good morals. There is none of the volcanic outbreak of inspired utterance; but the calm fire of altar and home are reflected in his verse. Thoughts came to him like sweet zephyrs, perfumed by the honey beds of life; not like the hurricanes that blew poor Alexander Smith off his feet in ecstasies of verbal passion.

Turner's style is placidly Wordsworthian and never Miltonic; but it is always chaste, moral and refined. It is always regular and beautiful crystal; but the flash of the diamond is never seen. His sonnet on Rome reads thus:

Keen was the vision which Ambition lent  
To Rome's great captains, when the vacant realm  
Was waiting for a chief to seize the helm,  
And their stern martial looks were southward bent  
From Gaul or Britain, like a wizard's gaze  
Constraining some weak victim to his harm,  
While yet the nations had no counter charm  
Against a despot's eye, in those fierce days:  
The city of their greed seem'd well-nigh theirs,  
Half in their grasp, full clearly bodied forth;  
My Rome should softly float into the north  
At my fond wish convey'd by gentle airs—  
Rapt into Freedom's land a little while  
From Pio's grief and Antonelli's guile!

The finest sonnet written directly on Rome has been composed by the Rev. F. G. Scott, a young Canadian poet of great promise, to whom we have previously referred as the author of one of the three best sonnets on Shakespeare. It has well been said that those sonnets are most successful which give the salient points of their subject rather by a series of touches than by a finished elaboration of details. This is precisely the feature which distinguishes the best sonnets of Lampman, Scott and Roberts from their own inferior work and from the mass of other contemporary sonnets produced in Canada. Mr. Scott's sonnet on "Shakespeare," as we pointed out when dealing with it, is marred in structure by non-conformity with the recognized rules laid down for this special form of verse, though the harmony of the whole is in no way impaired by the irregularity of the parts. In his sonnet on "Rome" we have a sonnet built on the best and most beautiful Italian type—the octave of Fra Guittone and the sextet of Piero delle Vigne, embraced in the formula *a.b.b.a., a.b.b.a., c.d.e., c.d.e.*

The sonnet referred to reads thus:

## ROME.

Imperial city, slumbering on the throne  
Of vanished empire, once thy voice and hands  
Rocked the wide world; thy fingers wove the lands  
Into thy girdle; who for crown alone  
Didst wear the stars. Yet still in undertone  
Man hears thy deathless utterance, tho' Time's sands  
Roll centuries; thou clasp'st the earth with bands  
Of speech, art, law, and subtle powers unknown.  
Thou wast not meant to die; thy mighty heart  
Pulsed with the universe. Thy deeds of old  
Flame like the sunset skies thro' clouds which throng;  
They blazon on thy throne a name apart  
In red of mighty victories, in gold  
Of all things valorous and great and strong.

The rapid uncertainty of petty rhymesters is missed in this sonnet; there is no photographic nicety giving the ornament and leaving out the solidity; but there is a breadth of tone and feeling and a breathing of deep thought and poetic instinct which place it in the front rank of topical sonnets, and make it a simple and splendid creation, worthy to rank with the best of English sonnets. The whole conception is grand, and every image adds to its grandeur. It is an imperial pageant of fourteen stirring and striking lines.

Speaking of Rome in 1848, Sir Francis Doyle in his "Reminiscences and Opinions," says: "I must confess that with Rome, taken as a whole, I was somewhat disappointed. The Rome of Cicero, of Horace, of Virgil, of Livy, the only Rome with which we are familiar, has so entirely disappeared that we feel as it were in an unknown place when we find ourselves among the late emperors predominating there. This, of course, does not apply to the art galleries, nor yet to the inside of St. Peter's, where you discover what is left of the real ancient Rome to a much greater extent than among her nominal ruins."

Not only the galleries of Rome, but the museums of Europe are full of the small relics of ancient Rome, and it is from these common and everyday mementos that the real life of the old Roman may be reconstructed. England holds many precious relics, and scarcely a week passes but something is added to the collection.

The contemplation of certain antiquities found at old Penrith aroused Wordsworth to write a sonnet upon the higher lessons to be sought from these precious materials of the past, which Time has kindly preserved unto us. Old Penrith was the old Roman encampment, Bremeternacum, and lies a few miles from Ullswater in Cumberland.

## ROMAN ANTIQUITIES.

How profitless the relics that we cull,  
Trouting the last holds of ambitious Rome,  
Unless they chasten fancies that presume  
Too high,—or idle agitations lull!  
Of the world's flatteries if the brain be full  
To have no seat for thought were better doom,  
Like this old helmet, or the eyeless skull  
Of him who gloried in its nodding plume.  
Heaven out of view, our wishes what are they?  
Our fond regrets tenacious in their grasp?  
The sage's theory? The poet's lay?  
Mere fibulae without a robe to clasp;  
Obsolete lamps, whose light no time recalls;  
Urns without ashes, tearless lachrymals.

Bishopstone, a village in Herefordshire, has added a few treasures to the relics of Roman England, and a mosaic pavement unearthed there called forth another sonnet from the master:

While poring antiquarians search the ground  
Upturned with curious pains, the bard, a seer,  
Takes fire. The men that have been reappear;  
Romans for travel girt—for business gown'd;  
And some recline on couches, myrtle-crown'd,  
In festal glee. Why not? For fresh and clear,  
As if its hues were of the passing year,  
Dawns this time-buried pavement. From that mound  
Hoards may come forth of Trajans, Maximins,  
Shrunk into coins with all their warlike toil;  
Or a fierce impress issues with its foil  
Of tenderness—the wolf whose suckling twins  
The unlettered ploughboy pities when he wins  
The casual treasure from the furrowed soil.

There are two eminently Wordsworthian touches in this sonnet. The sharp "Why not?" in the middle of the sixth line breaks in almost grotesquely in its swift alteration of the thoughts consequent to the last image, while the feelings of the unlettered plough-boy when he gazes at the wolf and the babes could not have been suggested as a possibility to any other mind than that of Wordsworth. It is simply beautiful and beautifully simple. Out of the slime of the Thames have been dragged Roman curiosities, some of which may be seen in the Guildhall collection. Charles Tennyson Turner has a pair of sonnets on "An Old Roman Shield," which are well worth placing before our readers:

## I.

Drowned for long ages, lost to human reach,  
At last the Roman buckler reappears  
And makes an old-world clang upon the beach  
Its first faint voice for many a hundred years;  
Not the weird noises on the battle field  
Of Marathon, as thrilling legends tell,  
Could speak more sadly than this ancient shield,  
As ringing at the fisher's feet it tell.  
How can'st thou to be grappled thus, and hauled  
To shore, when other prey was sought, not thou?  
How strangely was thy long-lost chime recalled,  
As when the arrows struck thee! Then, as now,  
The tented plain was thronged with armed men;  
Our weapons change, we quarrel now as then.

## II.

He drew it home,—he hurled it to the bank—  
No modern waif, but an old Roman target;  
The wild familiar swan in terror shrank  
From the rude plash, and left the weltering marge.  
Low rang the iron boss; the fisher stared  
At his new capture, while, in mystic tones  
The lost shield called its legion, whose death-groans  
And clash of onset it had seen and heard.  
Oh! when shall better thoughts be dear to man  
Than rapine and ambition, fraud and hate!  
Oh! when shall war, like this old buckler, fall  
Into disuse, drowned by its own dead-weight?  
And commerce, buoyant as the living swan,  
Push boldly to the shore, the friend of all!

The above reflections on a venerable piece of martial equipment must please all lovers of peace and progress, for they are the opinions of the philosopher and poet as opposed to the bluster of the buckram politician; but to the questions propounded by this gentle and genial soul Echo answers When? and nothing seems able to answer Echo.

SAREPTA.

## THE USE OF PYRETHRUM FLOWERS.

The flowers of the pyrethrum (*Pyrethrum roseum*) are used in making the powder which is sold under various names—"insect powder," "Persian powder," "death to insects," etc. In Europe these flowers are only found in Dalmatia, but these are white, and not rose-violet, like those of the Caucasus. The Dalmatian pyrethrum is greatly appreciated, and when its crop is scarce the Caucasian flowers are eagerly sought for, and their price increases by from 200 to 300 per cent.; this was the case in 1887 and 1888. Prices, which had varied between three and seven roubles for the previous ten years, reached all at once, in 1887, fifteen and sixteen roubles at Tiflis. Formerly a certain quantity of pyrethrum in powder was exported from the Caucasus, but Europeans were not satisfied with receiving this delicate article in this form, because it was not discovered to be mixed with foreign substances, and growers in the Caucasus could not reduce it to the impalpable state requisite to preserve its efficacy. At the present time the flowers only are exported. It is necessary they should be cut as short as possible at the stalk, gathered when ripe, dried in the shade and in a current of air, because in the sun the bloom and rose colour are lost, and lastly, that they should be mixed with other herbs when being gathered. Recently a fraud has been noticed in the packages of Caucasian flowers, other flowers resembling the pyrethrum and dyed the same colour being found. The exports amounted to between 176,000 and 200,000 kilogrammes last year; of those three-fourths were badly prepared, the season having been a very rainy one."