

LINES

Written by Goethe, at the age of eighty, on the wall of a cottage in the Thuringian Mountains, where he had gone to view the sunset. [From the German.]

THE forest resteth
Around,
Nor wind molesteth
Nor sound—
Peace all has blest ;
The birds in the still boughs are sleeping.
Wait only, not weeping :
Soon too thou'lt rest.

WILLIAM WANLESS ANDERSON.

GERALDINE—A POEM.*

TICKNOR AND Co.'s handsomely bound and illustrated edition of this noble poem reminds one that, originally copyrighted in 1881, it has been before the public quite long enough to have become, if not exactly a classic, at least a valuable addition to the poetic stores of American literature. This new edition contains a new preface, in which the author still affirms the extraordinary fact that the strong similarity in style and plot to Owen Meredith's *Lucile* is merely an accidental matter, and indeed puts as far away from himself or herself as possible the idea of imitation, since *Lucile* was not even read until after the composition of *Geraldine*. Certainly, one would wish to be the last to suggest such an ugly thing as imitation, but there is such a thing as unconscious suggestion; and if in the present case this is not allowed to be held responsible for the almost startling resemblance between the two poems, there is literally nothing to fall back upon. It might seem a striking matter in itself that a person of literary tastes and inclined to authorship should be able to go through life without ever having come across *Lucile*, but still more remarkable is the fact that upon learning that Owen Meredith had made use of the same metre in his famous and beautiful poem, the author of *Geraldine* "refrained persistently" from reading *Lucile*, or hearing it read, or in any way learning of its character, spirit, and scope, lest unconsciously might be borrowed its style and thought. That this is worth the while is supposed to be gathered from a perusal of the poem in which whatever of other minds may appear nothing of Owen Meredith's at least may be found. But indeed this is just where the critical shoe pinches, for it is a foregone conclusion that if poets will write in one of two well-known metres, such as the In Memoriam quatrain, the Hiawatha trochaics, or the simple ballad rhythms of Campbell and Macaulay, they have themselves to thank for one result, which invariably is that very little of what they say sounds new, and the general impression is conveyed that much of it has been said before. Probably, as frequent critical notices have remarked, blank verse is our only true elastic medium in the English tongue; for what can be more distinct than the blank verse of Shakespeare, of Tennyson, of Browning? It is therefore unfortunate, to say the least, that the author of *Geraldine*, by what occult power no one will ever discover, should have elected to use the same metre—and at its best what an unsatisfactory metre it is!—that is forever associated in the mind with a very popular and gifted English poet. Setting this choice aside, however, it remains to be said that metres are not abundant, like blackberries, and that even if an author chooses a metre likely to be unpopular, he need give no man or critic a reason why, either on compulsion or unless he likes. There are a score of lesser metres to be found in the smaller poems of Tennyson, Clough, Jean Ingelow, and Longfellow that still remain to be worked up by the enterprising poets of the future, but few of them will ever assist in the building up of lengthy epics, such as *Geraldine* and poems of the kind, and the present unknown author really deserves to be congratulated upon the fact that long before the appearance of *Lucile* he had evolved the facile and swinging metre afterwards to be so easily apprehended and rendered familiar by another writer. What a pity, one thinks, that *Geraldine* should not have appeared first.

Apart from this matter of metre, the other striking resemblance is in the number of characters—four, and the general thread of the story. Here the resemblance ceases, for naturally enough the surroundings of the Comtesse de Nevers, the Duc de Louvois, Vargrave, and his English sweetheart, would be vastly different from those of Mrs. Isabel Lee, a "summer coquette," living about at country hotels on the St. Lawrence, her rival, Geraldine Hope, Percival Trent, the hero, the youthful, enthusiastic dreamer of dreams, and the "Major," a cleverly executed man of the world, a trifle coarse, superficial, and cynical. Percival Trent is a young man of unusual gifts, prominent among which are lecturing and writing poetry. Though he takes

To occasional rhymes
With an art that was rather instinctive at times,

He was not at his best in this work of his pen,
For his speech was a power to move upon men,
And he held that the work of his life was to speak,
As he might for the right, be it humble and weak;
And his words were unflinching, fearless and strong,
In the ears of the world in complaint of the wrong.

Still, throughout all his work lurks a vague conviction that he has but half lived his life, that something is still to come that will determine his highest and finest aspirations, and create for him a far wider sphere than he has yet found. This idea frequently finds vent in letters to his beloved fair Geraldine Hope, with whom for the sake of her lovely name alone, the reader is at once favourably impressed. He writes to her—

I have told you before of the fancy I hold,
That my work is to be by some duty controlled
Which I may not discover till years have gone by,
And perhaps through some wilds of experience I
Must pass in to my clear field of labour. . . .

A faint regret that the dead levels of life are not for him permeates his entire being at this time, and while he is profoundly attached to the fair Geraldine he feels that he is predestined to visit

Some valley of grief, where the dark
Never knows the sun's rising or song of a lark,
Singing straight into heaven. . . .

Only too soon are his shadowy predictions verified. Lecturing one evening on his hobby, Reform, he encounters the gaze of a pair of dark ardent eyes belonging to Isabel Lee,

A woman of wit and of rare repartee,
With a lightness of speech that quite often belies
The suggestion of sorrow that lurks in her eyes.

He sups at her house, and afterwards indites another long letter to Geraldine Hope, in the course of which he alludes again to his vague sorrow, confessing that

The great woe
Of a life (or I sometimes have reasoned it so)
May not be a great loss that it ever has known
But a very great want that has silently grown
From an undefined need to the mastering strength
Of a hunger unfed, and that sways one at length
With an absolute will. . . .

It is clear by this time that Trent will find his "wilds of experience" in his intercourse with Isabel Lee, and while one wishes he would not be so foolish, one accepts the old, old story—the fascination that a charming woman of the world, about whom a little mystery hangs, has in every clime and in all ages for a young man who has not yet lost his ideals. Gradually he comes to rely on her counsel, to seek for her advice, to consult her, to open his poet's soul to her, and to tell her that

There is only one road to the mountains of bliss,
And it leads from the levels of longing. . . .

Finally, from generalisations about hunger of soul and invisible wants, they come to closer, more personal themes, and the fourth division of the poem brings them to that delicate ground, the interchange of vows of undying friendship, upon which the author comments.

For what came
In the track of all this they were hardly to blame,
There's a logic in life that is stubborn as fate,
We must learn it, each one, though our study be late.

Pitiful indeed, that following this Byronic admission occurs this beautiful passage from a letter of Geraldine's to her unhappy knight :

I think that there can be no defeat
For a love that is guarded by trust. It withstands
Every effort of cruel and violent hands
To dethrone it; it rules with a wonderful might
Born of weakness and yielding; it strives for no right
But the right to bestow of its largess; it speaks
With an eloquent tongue in a silence that seeks
But to hear the dear words of bestowal; it waits
For the gladness of time that its faith antedates
And is glad in its waiting; it patiently bears
Every strain of the years, all the grief and the cares
They may bring; it is faithful and true to the end,
And we know such a love, I am certain, my friend.

The remainder of the action describes the coincidences and events that cement the friendship and increase the intercourse between Trent and the fascinating Mrs. Lee, and contains much spirited and graceful dialogue. The beautiful islands and the gorgeous sunsets of the St. Lawrence form an impassioned setting for such a story, which moves on to its logical conclusion reached one night during a thunder-storm when Trent and Mrs. Lee are compelled to take shelter in a deserted cabin, and when their mutual passion may no longer be hidden. It is but fair to poor Trent to say that the confession is first of all made by Mrs. Lee who, in her subtle choice of subjects for conversation, steers straight to her desired haven, and works what must be considered the moral ruin of the youthful poet. But not for long is the eclipse of his best feelings suffered to darken all notions of honour, and the end of a bitter struggle sees Trent on the western slopes of our great continent, where he receives a loving letter from Geraldine Hope, breaking off their engagement. The next step in this eventful history is the finding by Trent of Isabel Lee's husband on a slope of the Rocky Mountains, where he dies while engaged in recounting his wife's peculiar traits, a proceeding that considerably undecives Trent, and leads to a complete rupture with Mrs. Lee on his subsequent return to the east. Finally, he is forgiven by the gentle Geraldine, marries her, and lives to smile at a newspaper notice which he reads within a year of his marriage, and which comments upon the union of Major Archibald Mellen and Isabel Lee. For this final *coup* the reader is not quite prepared, and would prefer that the charming coquette had not sought consolation in the mind and person of a man so radically false and sceptical. Trent pursues his avocation with heightened vigour and intensity of purpose, and comes forth from his baptism of fire purified and renovated, and in every way stronger for the battle of life. As before remarked, the dialogue throughout is masterly, and the treatment of social and literary topics novel in its way, but the whole colour of the poem, its tendency and train of thought more suggests the life of cities than the calm solitudes of the St. Lawrence, and thus the author somewhat fails to connect our very highest sentiments with the beautiful river which has an idyllic charm yet unwritten and unexpressed in metric form. A love story is *Geraldine*, and a very true, very tragic, very human love story too, which none can read without feeling a keen admiration for the knowledge of men and women displayed in it, and for the exquisite tact, restraint, and culture which on every page testify to the genius and accomplishments of the author.

* *Geraldine*. A Souvenir of the St. Lawrence. Illustrated. Boston: Ticknor and Co.