

Why the verses are not better known has been a mystery to me ever since they came to occupy a place on my shelves. I have often thought to bring them to the notice of those who read these pages but desisted, doubting whether an article on such a subject might not come as a "bolt from the blue." Henley's death—a week ago—(on July 11th) seemed to afford the right occasion—and forthwith I found that medical men were not alone in their lack of knowledge of Henley and his work. In a great northern English centre, wealthy, very prosperous, a university city, to boot, I spent hours visiting the chief shops for books, both first and second-hand, and never a copy of the "Book of Verses" could I obtain. At one large and long established departmental store, I was gravely informed at the poetry counter, that they did not know any writer of that name, and certainly had never been asked for his works; at another book shop, the first in the city, Henley was known, it is true, and I was offered his last volume—but neither the "Book of Verses" nor his collected poems were obtainable. They did not keep him because he did not sell; he was a disappointment and more than one of his works had proved a drug and had had to be sacrificed at any price. And this on the very day when every reputable paper in Great Britain from *The Times* downwards devoted two to three columns to an obituary and critique of our author, acknowledging him freely to be one of the masters of the late Victorian era. Verily the poet has fallen upon evil days. His lute is played more subtly, his themes and melodies are more varied than ever, but the children of the market place are heedless of his song. But in this case the song seems worth heeding.

It was in 1874 that Henley entered the wards of the old Royal Infirmary at Edinburgh. He was then at twenty-five, after having graduated with distinction at St. Andrews, a struggling writer of verses and contributor to the "Cornhill," under the editorship of Leslie Stephen. There for close upon two years—a weary time for a man of active mind and Bohemian habits—he remained under treatment by Lister for what I gather must have been tuberculous arthritis, a period so long that the hospital and hospitalism sunk into his being. His impressions written upon the sick bed were only published some twelve years later, and then in a little book of "Voluntaries," edited by Mr. H. B. Donkin, for the benefit of a hospital in the East End of London. Later they were incorporated in the "Book of Verses" published that same year.

To make the work known I shall quote freely.

Here first is Henley's entrance to the hospital he was to know so well:—

A small, strange child—so aged yet so young—  
Her little arm besplinted and beslung,  
Precedes me gravely to the waiting room.  
I limp behind, my confidence all gone.