

TENNYSON'S FIRST POEM.

THE "LOVER'S TALE," WRITTEN AT NINETEEN, IS PUBLISHED AT SIXTY-NINE.

Readers of Mr. Tennyson's poem, "The Golden Supper," will remember that it is the last chapter in the story of a disappointed love. There are a few glimpses of the earlier chapters, but only enough to make the sequel intelligible. It begins suddenly—

He flies the event; he leaves the event to me;
Poor Julian—how he rush'd away; the bells,
Those marriage bells, echoing in ear and heart—

the "event" being the marriage of Julian's cousin and foster-sister Camilla to his friend Lionel. "The Golden Supper" tells how, when Camilla is believed to have died, a strange chance enables Julian to bring her back from the grave, and restore her to her husband.

"The Lover's Tale," now published as a whole for the first time, is a poem in four parts. As many touches show, the scenery is not English but foreign, and this will explain itself to those who recognize the plot of the story as taken from Boccaccio. The fourth part is "The Golden Supper," a work of the author's mature life. The other three parts, which form a prelude to it, were written in his 19th year. "Two only of the three parts then written were printed," says Mr. Tennyson, "when, seeing the imperfections of the poem, I withdrew it from the press. One of my friends, however, who boy-like admired the boy's work, distributed among our common associates of that hour some copies of these two parts, without my knowledge, without the omissions and amendments which I had in contemplation and marred by many misprints of the compositor. Seeing that these two parts have of late been mercilessly pirated and that what I had deemed scarce worthy to live is not allowed to die, may I not be pardoned if I suffer the whole poem at last to come into the light, accompanied with a reprint of the sequel—work of my mature life—"The Golden Supper!"

If pirates often courted such benefits on the public, there would be some danger of their occupation becoming more popular than it has been since the days before Minos. The three new parts, or rather oldest parts, of "The Lover's Tale" contain many passages of very great beauty and power. They are also of the highest interest in relation to the development of Mr. Tennyson's style, and their publication adds a new value to "The Golden Supper." That noble but hitherto fragmentary poem now takes its proper place as part of a finished whole. Probably the first feeling of many readers will be surprise that a boy in his nineteenth year could have written thus. No one, indeed, can fail to perceive how greatly this early performance is surpassed by his mature work in subtle felicity of expression, in command of metrical and rhythmical resource, in richness of music, in depth of thought and feeling. Still, when this wide interval has been recognized, it may be said that the essential characteristics of the boy's style are those of the man's. Poetical genius is often precocious in manifesting the imaginative and creative faculties; but, considered as an artist of language, a poet has seldom, perhaps, been so ripe at such an age. The real lessons which these earliest poems teach is, that the form of Mr. Tennyson's work is more spontaneous and original, and less the result of a slowly elaborated art than some of his critics have been inclined to think. The following passage may be taken as a specimen of what Mr. Tennyson could write at eighteen:

"Last we came
To what our people call 'The Hill of Woe,'
A bridge is there, that look'd fit from beneath,
Seems but a cobweb filament to link
The yawning of an earthquake-cloven chasm,
And hence one night, when all the winds were loud,
A woeful man (for so the story went)
Had thrust his wife and child, and dash'd himself
Into the dizzy depth below. Below,
Fierce in the strength of far descent, a stream
Flies with a shattered foam along the chasm.
The path was perilous, loosely strown with crags:
We mounted slowly; yet to both there came
The joy of life in steepness overcomes,
And victories of ascent, and looking down
On all that had look'd down on us; and joy
In breathing nearer heaven; and joy to me,
High over all the azure-circled earth,
To breath with her as if in heaven itself;
And more than joy that I to her became
Her guardian and her angel, raising her
Still higher, past all peril, until she saw
Beneath her feet the region far away,
Beyond the nearest mountain's bosky brows,
Burst in open prospect—health and hill,
And hollow-lined and wooded to the lips,
And steep down walls of battlemented rock
Gilded with broom or shatter'd into spires,
And glory of broad waters interused,
Whence rose as it were breath and steam of gold,
And over all the great wood rioting,
And climbing, streak'd or starr'd at intervals
With falling brook or blossom'd bush—and last
Framing the mighty landscape to the west,
A purple range of mountain-cones, between
Whose interspaces gush'd in blinding bursts
The incorporate blaze of sun and sea."

The splendour of this passage, again, is not unworthy of his matured genius:

"O day which did enwomb that happy hour,
Thou art blessed in the years divinest day!
O Genius of that hour which dost uphold
Thy coronal of glory like a God,
Amid thy melancholy mates far-seen,
Who walk before thee, ever turning round
To gaze upon thee till their eyes are dim
With dwelling on the light and depths of thine.
Thy name is ever worshipp'd among hours!
Had I died then, I had not seem'd to die.
For bliss stood round me like the light of heaven—
Had I died then, I had not known the death;
Yea had the Power from whose right hand the light
Of life is useth, and from whose left hand floweth
The shadow of Death, perennial offences,
Whereof to all that draw the wholesome air,
Somewhat the one must overflow the other,
Then had he stemm'd my day with night, and driven
My current to the fountain whence it sprang—

Even his own abiding excellence,—
On me, methinks, that shock of gloom had fall'n
Unfelt, and in this glory I had merged
The other, like the sun I gazed upon,
Which seeming for the moment due to death,
And dipping his head low beneath the verge,
Yet bearing round about him his own day,
In confidence of unabated strength,
Steppeth from Heaven to Heaven, from light to light,
And holdeth his undimmed forehead far
Into a clearer zenith, pure of cloud."

But certainly the most powerful passage in the poem is that in which the pathos of the story finds its natural climax—where Camilla confides to Julian her love for his friend:

"Hither we came,
And sitting down upon the golden moss,
Held converse sweet and low—low converse sweet,
In which our voices bore least part. The wind
Told a love-tale beside us, now he woo'd
The waters, and the waters answering lip'd
To kisses of the wind, that, sick with love,
Fainted at intervals, and grew again
To utterance of passion: Ye cannot shape
Fancy so fair as in this memory.
Methought all excellence that ever was
Had drawn herself from many thousand years
And all the separate Edens of this earth,
To centre in this place and time. I listen'd,
And her words stole with most prevailing sweetness
Into my heart, as thringing fancies come
To boys and girls when summer-days are new,
And soul and heart and body are all at ease:
What marvel my Camilla told me all!
It was so happy an hour, so sweet a place,
And I was as the brother of her blood,
And by that name I moved upon her breath,
Dear name, which had too much of nearness in it
And heralded the distance of this time!
At first her voice was rather sweet and low,
As if she were afraid of utterance;
But in the onward current of her speech
(As echoes of the hollow banked brooks
Are fashion'd by the channel which they keep),
Her words did of her meaning borrow sound,
Her cheek did catch the colour of her words,
I heard and trembled, yet I could not hear;
My heart paused—my raised eyelids would not fall,
But still I kept my eyes upon the sky.
I seem'd the only part of Time stood still,
And saw the motion of all other things;
While her words, syllable by syllable,
Like water, drop by drop, upon my ear
Fell; and I wish'd, yet wish'd her not to speak;
But she spake on, for I did name no wish.
What marvel my Camilla told me all
Her maiden dignities of Hope and Love—
Perchance, she said, 'returned.' Even then the stars
Did tremble in their stations as I gazed;
But she spake on, for I did name no wish,
No wish—no hope. Hope was not wholly dead
But breathing hard at the approach of Death,—
Camilla, my Camilla, who was mine
No longer in the dearest sense of mine—
For all the secret of her inmost heart,
And all the maiden empire of her mind,
Lay like a map before me, and I saw
There, where I hoped myself to reign as king,
There, where that day I crown'd myself as king,
There in my realm and even on my throne,
Another! then it seem'd as tho' a link
Of some tight chain within my inmost frame
Was riven in twain: that life I heeded not
Flow'd from me, and the darkness of the grave,
The darkness of the grave and utter night,
Did swallow up my vision; at her feet,
Even the feet of her I loved, I fell,
Smit with exceeding sorrow unto Death."

It is an open secret that the friend who distributed a few copies of the partly-printed poem was the same to whom "In Memoriam" is inscribed. If, as may be inferred, Arthur Hallam warmly admired the poem, it is only another proof that even then his critical insight was true. He was assuredly right in desiring that the poem should live and should be known. As Arthur Hallam judged nearly half a century ago, so, we believe, the English-speaking world will judge now that these first fruits of Mr. Tennyson's genius have at last been given to it.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR.

I.

For some weeks past the engagement between the Earl of Beauvray and Miss Millicent Moyle had been chronicled in the fashionable intelligence of newspapers, and the marriage was appointed to take place in July. Beauvray House, Piccadilly, had been placed in the hands of the decorators; Beauvray Castle, in Northshire, was being refurnished and beautified by the combined energies of upholsterers, painters and landscape gardeners, and grand subscriptions had been set on foot amongst his lordship's tenants, his brother officers of the Guards and his fellow-members of the Northshire hunt to make the new Countess some handsome presents. There were many who considered Miss Moyle a lucky girl, for Lord Beauvray was not only of ancient family, young, immensely wealthy and well looking, but he was popular everywhere owing to his sunny temper and perfect uprightness of character. There are young noblemen who make their grandeur consist in throwing away their money and making their reputation into ducks and drakes. But Lord Beauvray had been merry without being dissolute. He was the most irreproachable of gentlemen, just as his betrothed, Miss Moyle, was the fairest flower among that bouquet of pretty girls who had been presented at court in the same season as herself. Millicent Moyle was a rich heiress as well as a pretty girl; but this was all that could be said of her. Her father, Josiah Moyle, a bill-discounter of Lombard street, was a "new man" of the city plutocracy—one of those financiers who have made such rapid fortunes that everybody expects to hear of them next in the bankruptcy court. It was said that he and Lord Beauvray had become acquainted while travelling abroad, and that the peer's relatives had been much scandalized on hearing of his lordship's intention to marry the daughter of a man whose antecedents were just a little misty. As for Mr. Moyle, quite conscious of how great a piece of luck had befallen him, he could

not refrain from bragging before his city friends about his future son-in-law, "the earl." He talked of retiring from business, of obtaining a seat in Parliament through Lord Beauvray's influence and devoting himself thenceforth to the assiduous study of conservative politics and the cultivation of aristocratic connections. The poor man had been admitted, on Lord Beauvray's presentation, to one or two first-rate clubs, and he had been introduced to so many ladies and gentlemen of title that his head was turned. He sighed over his business ledgers from twelve till four every day as if he had begun to realize the degradation of commercial pursuits; and as soon as the counting-house closed he would hurry off in a white waistcoat and with a flower in his button-hole, to take a drive round the park in his spanking phaeton, drawn by a pair of bays whom he could ill manage. It was honest Moyle's delight in these drives to meet the finely-appointed barouche, which carried his wife, his daughter Millie, and Lord Beauvray; and to note the number of hats which were lifted as it passed. Such bows made him grin in pure glee.

One sunny afternoon, just a fortnight before the date fixed for the marriage, the bill-discounter's phaeton was drawn up as usual alongside the pavement of Lombard street, waiting till the stroke of four from an adjoining steeple should bring out the plutocrat from his office, when a brougham, with a coronet on the panels, clattered up behind, and Lord Beauvray alighted. He was ghastly pale. The hall porter, who knew him by sight, and had always admired his pleasant smile, was startled by his appearance not less than by the broken voice in which he inquired if Mr. Moyle had left. Just then Mr. Moyle himself strutted out, all glorious with a geranium in his coat and a white hat perched acock on his pointed gray head. "Ah! Beauvray!" cried he, with cheerful welcome, but perceiving the look on the peer's face, he exclaimed: "Why, what's the matter? Not ill, I hope?"

"No, not ill; but I want to speak to you in private," said Lord Beauvray, hoarsely.

"Shall we go off in the phaeton?" stammered Mr. Moyle, full of uneasiness.

"No, into your room; but let us be quite alone," repeated the earl, and he himself led the way towards the sanctum, where the bill-discounter transacted most of his business. Mr. Moyle had a trick when agitated of grasping his nose with the whole of his hand, and working it up and down as if it were made of India-rubber which he wished to elongate. His nasal organ underwent a deal of pulling in the brief interval that elapsed before he and Lord Beauvray were closetted together. Then, plumping down in the arm-chair at his writing-table, Mr. Moyle stared in bewilderment while the peer sat down opposite and produced a long blue envelope with several black seals. Laying this on the table, Lord Beauvray placed his hand on it, and looked into the financier's eyes.

"Mr. Moyle," said he, sadly, "I have a painful communication to make; but I will not beat about the bush. I find that I have no legal right to the title which I bear, or to the fortune which I am using."

"Eh! what?" exclaimed Mr. Moyle, with a gasp.

"I made the discovery this morning in rummaging through a box of deeds," continued Lord Beauvray, whose voice grew steadier.

"You know that I inherited the title from my uncle. He was the eldest of three brothers. My father, the youngest, died whilst I was a boy; my second uncle died a few years later, and we fancied he had been a bachelor, but it appears that he was clandestinely married, and left a son—a lad whom you know, by the bye, for I have seen him in your house. His name is Timburel."

"Timburel?" echoed Mr. Moyle, with a start; "young Timburel who used to be a clerk in our firm, and whom I dismissed for presuming to make love to our Millie?"

"I was not aware of those particulars," said Lord Beauvray, "but young Timburel is the man; he bears his mother's name (she was an actress), and we used to think he was the natural son of my second uncle; but it seems that his parents were lawfully married."

"And do you mean to say that Timburel—a vulgar, conceited upstart who is living on his wits at this moment, with not a shilling in his pocket I'll be bound—do you mean to say he has become Earl of Beauvray?"

"Not only that, but he becomes absolute owner of all my estates and property. My poor father left me a mere pittance. When I have put Timburel in possession of his own I shall have nothing but my commission in the Guards and about three hundred a year."

"Come, come, don't say such bosh," blurred out old Moyle, grasping his nose again. It had just occurred to him that Lord Beauvray was hoaxing. "He wants to find out whether our Millie loves him for himself or his title," reflected the money-man; but in a moment this idea was dispelled by Lord Beauvray displaying the contents of his envelope—a marriage certificate and a number of letters which substantiated this story. Then he entered into explanations. It seems that his uncle, the Hon. Colonel de Vray, being in garrison at Malta, had privately married an Italian actress named Timburelli. After a year's union this fickle person had deserted him, leaving her child to his care; and soon afterwards she died. Under the circumstances the Colonel, though he provided for his boy's maintenance, deemed it convenient to conceal his marriage, and eventually

he died suddenly without having acknowledged it. Apparently, however, his conscience had tormented him, so that while lacking the moral courage to speak the truth during his lifetime, he had left evidence by which it might be known after his death. Unfortunately, the envelope containing his marriage certificate had laid mixed up with some other documents in a box, which Lord Beauvray (who inherited the deceased's papers) had never thought of examining till that morning, when he had begun to sort his family papers in view of his marriage. There were the facts which the young peer explained, whilst old Moyle, with a series of wheezes like moans, ruefully examined all the documents one by one.

Suddenly the bill-discounter crumpled all the papers in his hand with a feverish grasp, and looked at Lord Beauvray. There was an expression in his dull eyes as of a light behind an uncleaned pane of glass: "I say," he whispered, "have you told anybody beside me about this secret?"

"No; I came to you first, as in duty bound." "Then what prevents us from destroying these papers? I shan't say anything about it. That young Timburel is a skunk and a snob; it will be ridiculous to see him a lord, and he'll ruin himself, or become mad with conceit—so foolish is he. I say, Beauvray, if I throw this envelope into the fire, who will know anything about it?"

"I shall," answered Lord Beauvray quietly, and he held out his hand for the papers.

The shifty glance of the money man quailed before the light of unquenchable honesty in the eyes of one who happened to be a nobleman in something more than the name.

II.

There was a pretty hubbub in society when it became known that the Earl of Beauvray—or George de Vray, as he now simply called himself—was going to abandon his title and estates to a man who had been a city clerk. Lord Beauvray did his utmost to make the thing public; for as the legal formalities for reinstating his cousin into his rights would require some time, he was anxious that the new peer should obtain at least social recognition of his rank as soon as possible. For this purpose he placed the amazed and elated Mr. Timburel in possession of his mansion in Piccadilly, and a large sum in ready money "to go on with." Mr. Timburel was decidedly a snob; Lord Beauvray could not like him, as much as he forced himself to be friendly, and he was soon forced to reflect with a sigh that the house of De Vray would be poorly represented by its new chief. But this did not check his diligence in doing his duty, and he quite dismayed his solicitors, who were advising him to defend the action for ejectment that was going to be instituted, and to dispute the claim for the title that would be laid before the House of Lords.

"I wish to have no disputes," said George de Vray. "Even if a legal flaw were discovered, I should not avail myself of it so long as a moral certainty existed. And that certainly does exist." The lawyers grumbled, but they were fain to own the marriage certificate was genuine, and that nothing but chicanery could spoil the suit of Mr. Timburel, who now described himself as "Ralph de Vray, claimant to the Earldom of Beauvray."

Of course, George de Vray's marriage was postponed. The turn in his fortunes had thrown so much business on his hands that it was impossible he could devote a month to honeymooning until it was all disposed of; besides which, he felt bound to make Mr. Moyle the offer of releasing his daughter from her engagement. At first this proposal was pooh-poohed equally by the bill-discounter and by Miss Moyle herself. Millie, who was not quite so sensible as she was pretty, wept a good deal at not becoming a countess; then she wept at the nobility of George's action which everybody was praising. In fact, during a week or two she bedewed a good many pocket-handkerchiefs with her weeping over one thing and another. But, in the main she was disposed to remain faithful to George, and took some credit to herself for her fortitude.

Now there was staying in the house of the Moyles a poor little cousin of Millie's named Gertrude Brown. She was a soft-eyed brunette of eighteen, very quiet and lovable, who acted as a companion to Millie, and had to bear much of the whimsical humours of this spoilt child. Gertrude had always received marked kindness from Lord Beauvray, who treated her as if she had been his sister; and she looked upon him with admiration as the most noble being she had ever seen. His renunciation of rank and wealth had struck her as an act of surpassing heroism, and she could not so much as allude to it without tears gushing from her eyes. Gertrude Brown had a heart that beat in unison with all that was great and good. A shrewd, merry little thing, too, in her way, she was capable of discerning the difference that existed between a genuine man of honour like Lord Beauvray, and a mere man of money like her uncle Moyle. When she saw George de Vray after his "ruin," as old Moyle called it, behaving with the same cheerful grace as usual—not seeking praise, but shunning it—giving himself no airs of a hero, but talking and laughing simply like a man who has done his duty without any fuss and is glad of it—she thought her cousin happy amongst all girls, and sighed to reflect that Millie did not, perhaps, appreciate her treasure as fully as she ought.