

AN AUTUMN ELEGY.

is so taken up with the management of its immense armies, that they could not, even were they so disposed, correct the abounding abuses of authority by the thousands of petty despots whom they appoint. They promulgate the general laws against apostates, and leave their enforcement to the tender mercies of the local governors and their subordinates, all of them hardened and brutalized by the atmosphere of autocratic tyranny in which they live. And the free nations of Europe and America look on, either indifferent or powerless to help.

A MIDST the colossal movements and concerns of the great European powers the affairs of a little snow-clad country like Norway attract but a small share of attention. Yet there are features in the present situation in Norway which are full of an interest bordering on the romantic. As most of our readers have probably noted in some cablegram of a few words, Norway is just now engaged in a struggle for political independence. True, this struggle has not yet passed beyond the stage of peaceful constitutional effort, but it none the less has elements of deep interest for onlookers who can sympathize with the patriotic aspirations of a brave and hardy race. This little State, which does not at the present moment contain, probably, more than two millions of inhabitants, has always been more or less restive under its forced union with Sweden, which took place under Charles XIII., in 1818, though it has for the most part managed to retain a large measure of independence and has firmly resisted every attempt on the part of the Swedish monarchs to curtail its constitutional prerogatives. For many years past its patriot leaders, who, in accordance with Norwegian traditions, have also been the national poets, have been demanding complete self-government for their country, without the limitations imposed by the Swedish connection as it at present exists. But what brings the struggle home, in a manner, to the admirers of the poet whose unpronounceable name, Björnsterne Björnson, is almost a household word, is that he is and has been for the past eighteen years the leader of the patriotic movement. The situation at the present moment is, in brief, this: Norway, through its Storthing and responsible Ministry, has demanded separate foreign consuls. The King, who has a power of suspensive veto on all the legislation of the Storthing, refused to sanction this law. Thereupon, Mr. Steen, the head of the Norwegian Cabinet, resigned, but the King persuaded him and his colleagues to retain their portfolios pending an attempt to reach a compromise acceptable to both countries. But the chances are greatly against such a compromise, as it is well understood that this demand is but the entering of the wedge, to be driven home by further demands for a separate Minister of Foreign Affairs, and, in a word, complete equality and co-ordination, or complete independence. Such is Björnson's programme. What will be the upshot of the demand time will tell. In the meantime, the most interesting feature of the affair for foreigners is the personality of the great leader himself. We are, therefore, constrained to transfer to our columns, from the *Christian Union*, to which we are indebted for most of the above details and which publishes a portrait of the man, whose head and face are most striking and betoken immense strength, the following graphic pen-and-ink sketch of the patriot-poet:

As an orator it is doubtful if he has his equal in Europe. In the first place, his colossal frame, surmounted by the great, broad-browed Jupiter head, is tremendously impressive. He looks every inch the chieftain, who looms, physically and spiritually, a head above all the people. Moreover, he is gifted with a voice of the most extraordinary range and flexibility. He begins usually in a conversational tone, but gradually, as his theme takes possession of him, he rises through all the stages of intensity, until there pours from his lips a rushing, foaming, seething, breathlessly hurrying cataract of speech. There is a magnificent daring about the whole man which takes the mind captive. You feel as he feels, you breathe almost with the rhythm of his breath, and, having heard him, strive as you may, you cannot for days and weeks emancipate yourself from the sway of his mighty personality.

Discussing the value of a tree as a schoolmaster, *Garden and Forest* presents as the first of its lessons that "it teaches man to reserve judgment by showing that the insignificance of a germ is no criterion of the magnitude of its product, that slowness of development is not an index of the scope of growth, and proves to him that the most far-reaching results can be attained by very simple means. A barrel of acorns may be the nucleus of a forest that shall cherish streams to fertilize a desert; a handful of cedar cones may avert an avalanche, while a bushel of pine seed may prevent the depopulation of a great section of country by mountain torrents."

TO any true lover of Nature, the decay of the year is as fascinating as the yearly miracle of its rejuvenescence, though the fascination is of a converse character. Instead of the wonders of waking flowers and bursting buds, of bare boughs bourgeoning forth into fresh bright leafage, and showers of fragrant blossom whitening the woodland with summer snow,—we have the silent, kaleidoscopic changes of colouring; green turning into gold and crimson and scarlet, and then fading into saffron and russet; the gradual, daily thinning of the foliage; the brightening emerald of velvet mosses and nodding ferns, and the emphasizing of the green of the pines and hemlocks, as their less persistent companions gradually drop their loosening robes. It is all beautiful, as Nature's normal processes always are, even though it is all suggestive of the sadness of wintry desolation.

Seldom indeed have we had so beautiful an October as the one just past. Without any sharp frosts, there has nevertheless been such a rich glow of colour as shows that this result is by no means dependent on the action of frost, but comes naturally from the gradual ripening of the leaves, as they are gradually loosened by the formation, beneath them, of the germs of next year's buds; so that we are never left without the security of a lawful succession. The heirs presumptive are there, even before they become the heirs apparent. It is interesting to watch the times and colours of the various trees. The birch, beech and maple, among the earliest to leaf in spring, are among the first to show the touch of autumn. The hard maple, indeed, often unfurls a blood-red banner—a somewhat unwelcome adornment—before we have ever begun to dream of approaching frost. The hickory and butternut also speedily lose their saffron foliage. The soft maple, the black birch, the poplars, keep their yellow leaves a little longer, giving a touch of golden glory to the forest, even to the last days of October. And the oaks, in the most exquisite tones of crimson, claret and maroon, are still left for a time, often keeping their rich robes until late in November, and coming out, in spring, in the same livery of rich colouring, only paler and more delicate in tint. As for the sumachs and the smaller forest shrubs, it seems as if a rain of rich colour had descended upon them, making them glow and burn as if set with ruby and topaz, or as if they were modern descendants of the allegorical "burning bush." Nowhere, indeed, can the lover of pure and rich colouring find a greater feast for the eyes than in our Canadian woodland on one of the exquisite mellow days of Indian summer—this year undoubtedly coming in October,—when every tint and gradation of rich and warm colour can be seen interwoven and blended in the mellowing and transfiguring haze—as only Nature in the most favourable circumstances can interweave and blend. Before such a problem, art must fold her hands in despair.

And there are not wanting bird voices, too, to sing the elegy of the dying year. The summer birds have for months past been mysteriously silent. Where they hide themselves during the latter part of summer is a mystery. But for a short period they seem to return, possibly to say farewell to their early summer haunts, with the happy associations of nest-building and family life. The graceful little Phœbes are about again, perpetually flirting their restless little tails and repeating their plaintive little refrain, from whence comes their name of *Phœbe*. The catbirds hover about, with their hoarse feline call, but not with their mocking-bird music of spring. And the robins make their appearance, too, though very sparing of the sweet liquid little carol, which they seem to reserve as a specialty for spring. Then there is a pretty greyish bird that seems to come at this season mainly for the berries of the Virginia creeper, which it seems to regard as a great delicacy, dried up and uninviting as they look. It is a stoutish bird, about the size of the catbird, with a pale grey mottled breast, and dark ashen or dun-coloured wings, which does not seem to come at any other period, to this region at least. And the screaming notes of the blue jay as he flits in and out of the bright-hued trees in his own gleaming livery of blue and silver, are, for a few days, one of the most noticeable sounds of the woodland. The woodpeckers, of various varieties and sizes, are out in full force, and their tap-tapping on the tree bark seems like a tiny drum of the orchestra. The perennial crows are there, too, of course, cawing away in their gruff bass, as if "moralizing the spectacle" of the decaying nature; while the "chic-a-dee-dee" occasionally interpolates its cheerful little cadence, with a hint of spring in its hopeful tones. The chirr-chirr of the squirrel and the whirr of the partridge break the stillness of the woodland when these other voices are silent, and if you sit very quiet on some vantage ground, commanding a view of some secluded nook, you may see the former as he glides gracefully from bough to bough, in search of nuts or pine cones, and catch a few glimpses of the shy partridge in its native haunts, mincing daintily through the fallen leaves, in search of the wild berries on which it lives. It may be that, but for the raid made on partridges each autumn by sportsmen, we should eventually be crowded off the face of the earth by their rapid increase; but to me, for one, the sight of the beautiful living bird in the autumn woodland is so much more delightful than the sight of the poor little cooked one on our tables, that the sound of the distant gun is a most unwelcome and unnatural adjunct to the otherwise tranquil glories of the autumn wood.

But these glories, alas, are but for a few days! Even

before the colours fade they begin to take flight. A slight breeze ruffles the rustling foliage, and lo, a little rivulet of golden leaves flits across the blue above, and falls to mingle with the accumulation of centuries of autumns beneath your feet. Every hour the kaleidoscopic screen is growing thinner, showing more and more clearly the great, gaunt, grey trunks and interlacing branches against the sky. Soon all will be gone, and the leafless trees be left, like stern, silent sentinels, standing patiently on the watch for the returning spring.

Yet one aspect of the falling of the leaves—sad in itself, as is all decay of the beautiful—has in it a happy suggestiveness not to be overlooked by any eye open to the influence of Nature's parables. These leaves which were our delight, and the glory of the woodland in spring and summer, have now even in their decay a beneficent mission to fulfil. No longer needed as a cool shade from the blazing summer sun, they go to form the soft blanket which a motherly nature gently gathers about her forest nestlings to wrap them up safe and warm from the keen frost of the winter. All about the roots of the flowers that shall greet us in the spring, the leaves drift softly, performing in the forest the same office which the gardener laboriously fulfils in his own domain. And as we see the rich, green leaves of the hepatica and wild violet and mitre-flower nearly hidden already by the sere and withered leaves, from which in April and May shall spring many a vision of delight, we feel that, whatever faithless man may do, Nature, at least, covers up her children for their winter's seeming death, "in the sure and certain hope" of returning life and beauty. And if mere cellular tissue has thus its restoration and resurrection, how much more may we hope for the restoration of that life of *soul* and *heart* which is the culmination and glory of Nature's work, to speak merely on the scientific plane. But there are words on a higher than the scientific plane, which seem to rise like a heavenly strain through the plaintive harmonies of the autumn elegy,—words which have a much deeper meaning and more far-reaching scope than that of this present and outward and transitory life:—"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith."

FIDELIS.

PROFESSOR CLARK'S LECTURES ON TENNYSON—V.

IDYLLS OF THE KING.

THOSE who have followed the publication of the various parts of the *Idylls* will, in going through the complete collection, probably be most impressed by the unity and homogeneity of the whole. Here is a series of poems of which one portion appeared in 1842, the most important part in 1859, and the concluding portion in 1885, and yet it reads as though it had been composed out of a single impulse, or in close succession. Yet we know that not only were the separate sections stuck in, so to speak, to their places, but that a good many additions have been made to several of the particular poems. Only the fact that the poet had a clear conception of the general idea and purpose of the poem, and never lost sight of this, could account for the feature to which we have drawn attention.

If the question be asked, whether it is the way with great poets and great artists to recast and amend their literary creations, it may perhaps suffice to recommend the study of the plays of William Shakespeare in the quarto editions and in their later form in the first folio.

It is hardly worth while to determine the respective merits of Tennyson's poems. It is, indeed, rather a stupid enquiry. What should we say to anyone who asked us, whether we preferred "Hamlet," or "The Tempest," or "As You Like it," among the plays of Shakespeare. Each one of these, considered by itself, might be pronounced supreme; but no one versed in literature would think of putting them in the same category. It is quite reasonable that particular persons should have affection for one book or another of any poet. It is also true that different books appeal to us at different times and in our different moods. "In Memoriam," for example, must make a powerful appeal to those who are sorrowing for their lost. Yet even they could have no right to claim for this book a supreme place.

If, then, we decline to compare the "Idylls of the King" with any of the other works of Tennyson, we may at least declare that this great poem is the fullest expression of his genius and of his thoughts in relation to human life in all its phases, public and private, social and individual. There can be little doubt that this was the thought of its author, whether we regard its length, its elaboration, or the long and earnest thought bestowed upon it.

The poem is founded on the ancient legend of King Arthur. It is probable that there was actually a British king of this name in the sixth century. The Christian Britons resisted the heathen Saxons at that time, and won a battle over them at Mount Badon. It is more likely than not that King Arthur was their leader. The earliest accounts of this legendary king are given by Welsh (British) bards of the seventh century; and Mr. Skene, a high authority, thinks that their records are substantially historical. Nennius, in the eighth century, speaks of the twelve battles won by King Arthur. Geoffrey, of Monmouth, writing in 1138, gives in Latin the stories of