



In the last issue of the DOMINION ILLUSTRATED brief mention was made of the presence in Montreal of Mr. William Sharp, the English poet, novelist and critic. His stay in this city was unfortunately so short that many who would gladly have paid their respects to one whose writings they admired had hardly heard of his coming till he was gone. It was our good fortune to have a few hours' intercourse with Mr. Sharp under circumstances exceptionally happy. He impresses one favourably at first sight. His well-knit frame, massive head, handsome features and ruddy complexion bespeak physical and intellectual health and vigour and explain his wondrous capacity for continuous labour. It was no slight strain that put that grand physique out of gear and made complete rest for a season an absolute necessity.

Though still in his prime, Mr. Sharp has wrought in every department of letters—poetry, fiction, criticism, biography—and in every case his work has borne the seal of excellence. To journalism of the higher class he is no stranger. In art matters his judgment is accepted as a test of worth. As a literary critic his place is among the foremost authorities of the day. His treatise on Dante Gabriel Rossetti is deemed by many the best estimate of that master's genius. His "Life of Shelley" and "Life of Heine" reveal still further his psychologic grasp, his sympathy and insight in dealing with creative minds of rarest originality. In "American Sonnets"—to which he brought the experience gained by preparing "Songs, Poems and Sonnets of Shakespeare" and "Sonnets of this Century"—he penetrated to the essential faculty which made Heavyssege—with all his limitations—one of the grandest poets of his time. Some day we hope to show how far this gift of interpretation is accompanied in Mr. Sharp with the creative gift. For the present it may suffice to recall that his note has been recognized as one of the clearest, truest and most self-sustained in the voices of his country's younger choir.

That cruelly urgent call for versatility—for the "generally useful" business in literature—a call to which England's poet primates have, with wise obstinacy, turned a deaf ear—must, doubtless, weaken the tone of the inspired singer. Other arts resent a divided allegiance; not less does Poetry—"that one talent which is death to hide," by whatever intrusive agency the eclipse may be brought about. Yet it is often for the very sake of having his wings one day free from all burden of sordid cares to soar into the clear heaven of imagination, that poets-born like Mr. Sharp give their energies to tasks that are more or less alien from their birth-right. The serene sabbath of pure devotion to the Muses is for them the goal of the unrelenting "Six days shalt thou labour," but alas! how often is the looked-for rest attained only when the night cometh in which no man can work. After all, to be "generally useful," in literature as in other spheres of labour, though it robs life of the joy of a ruling passion, is not without a solace and even prizes of its own.

It was as the poet, however, rather than as the versatile *littérateur*, that we greeted Mr. Sharp. For, though we had known him better in other capacities, all that we had seen of the fruit of his pen was essentially poetic in its self-disclosure. *Ed io pittore!* There is a marvellous fraternity in literature, but more especially in poetry. Is it that the poet is so often a man of sorrows? Or was there ever a true poet who had not learned in suffering what he taught in song? Certainly Mr. Sharp has had exceptional opportunities of knowing the reality of this melancholy association. It was a privilege to hear him speak of living celebrities whose names have long been to us as household words, but whom he sees daily in the flesh, whose hands he presses and whose voices he hears; or of "great ones gone"—some of them within a few years—with whom he had lived on terms of in-

timacy and, in some cases, the solemnity of whose last hours would abide with him while he lived.

Question and answer covered a wide range. In the retrospect it seemed surprising that so many important individualities should have been passed in review in so brief—so comparatively brief and, to the sentient perception, so wonderfully fleeting—a period of time. For we talked of George Meredith, of Grant Allen, of the Hawthornes (father and son), of Hall Caine and "The Deemster," of Rider Haggard, of "Maxwell Grey," of Oscar Wilde, of Buchanan, of Heine, of Heavyssege, of Crémazie, of Roberts, of Fréchette, of Victor Hugo, of Balzac, of Octave Feuillet, of Delpit, of Droz, of Pierre Loti, of George Moore, of Alfred Clarke, of Arthur O'Shaughnessy, of James Thomson, of Philip Bourke Marston and, incidentally, of a great many others, English and Canadian, American and European. Of two Mr. Sharp told us much that only he, perhaps, and, in one case, two or three others, could tell us so trustworthily.

The author of "The City of Dreadful Night" he knew well and of his life—the incarnation and microcosmic stage of his own sweeping pessimism—he gave us some graphic pictures which we shall not forget. He was a giant genius—a veritable Titan, a Prometheus Vincetus, whose chains, indeed, fell not off, yet who was not denied his ministering spirits—true offspring of an age of conflict and transition, terribly and (in the letter) fearlessly clairvoyant, but shuddering through all the depths of a strong passionate nature at the desolate blankness of his one-sided apocalypse. For in his creed

The world rolls round for ever like a mill;
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.

Man might know one thing were his sight less dim:
That it whirls not to suit his petty whim,
That it is quite indifferent to him.

Nay, does it treat him harshly as he saith?
It grinds him some slow years of bitter breath,
Then grinds him back into eternal death.

Thomson's chief poem is a tragedy; his life was a tragedy. We used to think Clough's fragment, "The Shadow," the most ironical and, at the same time, the most pathetic of all apocalyptic poems. But Thomson's persistent nihilism and steady gaze at that deep, of which Heavyssege writes in his great sonnet, makes Clough's poem look like the timid peep of a child into a dark closet, the door of which he had been forbidden to open. There is in "The Shadow," nevertheless, a weird dramatic power which affects one curiously. Matthew Arnold is sometimes classed with Clough as an intellectual pessimist. In neither poem does the gloom of even the saddest mood become the felt darkness of "terrible night," and in both there is much that tends to give peace and, indirectly, to inspire hope. Even in poor Thomson's life and work, the black, pall-like clouds are not without the silver lining of human love.

Every age of man's strange story, like the great cycles of geologic time, brings forth its own types of life. And in every instance, the hour of birth is an hour of pain and convulsion, after which there generally comes, in due time, a season of joy, however transient. The representative poets of our generation, especially those whose voices were raised in or near the moment of birth-throe, when the old order began perceptibly to change, could not repress the note of pain, could not make-believe that the anguish was all imaginary. In Matthew Arnold's poem, "The Future," the highest rational aspiration that suggested itself was that though the day of quiet trust had gone, in the new dispensation the "River of Time" might

"acquire, if not the calm
Of its early mountainous shore,
Yet a solemn peace of its own.
And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the gray expanse where he floats,
Freshening its current and spotted with foam
As it draws to the ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast,
As the pale Waste widens around him—
As the banks fade dimmer away—
As the stars come out, and the night wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite Sea."

Nothing charmed us more in Mr. Sharp's conversation than his simple story of the life and work of that martyr-singer, Philip Bourke Marston—the "Philip, my King," of Mrs. Craik (Miss Mulock), who was his godmother. One of his godfathers was Philip James Bailey, the author of "Festus." Mr. Sharp was one of the circle of the poet's intimate friends—a circle which included at various times Browning, Swinburne, Dickens, Thackeray, the Rossetti family, Theodore Watts, Iza Duffus Hardy, Mary Robinson, the Browns, Mrs. Margaret J. Preston, Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton (who has written a sketch of his life), Julian Hawthorne, and other Americans of note. In a later issue we shall tell the story as Mr. Sharp told it to us.

Of Canadian poets, Mr. Sharp thinks highly of Fréchette, of Heavyssege, of Crémazie, of Lampman, of Roberts (with whom he had spent some weeks) and of John Lesperance, with whose "Epicidium," published in the "Songs of the Great Dominion," he fell in love at first sight. As our readers are doubtless aware, Mr. Sharp is editor-in-chief of the excellent "Canterbury Poets," in Mr. Walter Scott's admirable series of publications, a position which made him familiar with many of our poets, while Mr. Lighthall's anthology was going through the press. In a sense, therefore, he was no stranger when he came to Canada. We are happy to learn that his sojourn amongst us has done him much good, and that he returns to England, to resume his intermitted toils, with a fund of health and energy acquired in the Land of Evangeline.

Pastor Felix, who never writes fruitlessly, has not appealed in vain to some of his younger brethren in song. Mr. Arthur Weir who (as we have already intimated) is leaving Canada to take an important position in Detroit, wishes to inform his esteemed friend that he has not been idle, and is by no means snuffed out. In evidence whereof he sends us some recently written sonnets, of which we present our readers with this fine one on

THE ETERNITY OF LIFE.

Within an ancient temple in the East,
Full of quaint tributes of idolators,
To the broad roof a cloud of incense pours
From sacred fires; and by each fire a priest
Stands ready with fresh fuel; nor has ceased
For years one numbers by the hundred scores
Those fires to burn upon the foot-worn floors
In honour of the sun or some strange beast.

Priestess of Life is Nature, and its fires
Mysterious she feeds with flesh unceasingly.
We die, but life dies never. Like the flames
That burn forever on the pagan pyres,
It merely changes shape. The life in me
Long æons since quickened ancestral frames.

Montreal.

ARTHUR WEIR.

Mr. Weir has undertaken the preparation of a new Canadian anthology, and will be glad to receive volumes of verse, fugitive poems and biographical notes of the authors from any of his poet compatriots whom this announcement may reach. His present address is "in care of Dr. Brodie, 64 Lafayette Avenue, Detroit." Those who send him their books will gratify him by inscribing their names in them. Mr. Weir pays a graceful tribute of admiration to Mr. W. W. Campbell, whose "Lake Lyrics" he has been rapturously reading. We may add that, Mr. Weir's letter having been written before he had decided to leave Montreal, and consequently requiring certain alterations which, being pressed for time, he was unable to make, he asked us to give the substance of it. He has kindly promised us a fuller communication at an early day.

TALK.—The power to converse well is a very great charm. You think anybody can talk. How mistaken you are! Anybody can chatter, anybody can exchange idle gossip. Anybody can recapitulate the troubles of the kitchen, the cost of the last new dress, and the probable doings of the neighbours. But to talk wisely, instinctively, freshly, and delightfully is an immense accomplishment. It implies exertion, observation, study of books and people, and receptivity of impressions. Plato banished the musicians from his feasts that the charms of conversation might have no interference; but in our later fashions many prefer music rather than the gossip of the hour, which often degenerates into trivialities wearisome and commonplace.—*Ruskin.*