

THE BOOKLOVER'S CORNER

Shelley and Francis Thompson.

(Concluded.)

To return to Thompson's essay. After giving his reasons for writing on Shelley, he turns to criticize Shelley's poetry, and has perused some paragraphs that have taken the literary world by surprise. "I will say that it is the most important contribution to pure letters written in English during the last twenty years," writes the Rt. Hon. George Wyndham. "Thompson's article, though an essay in prose criticism, is pure poetry." To illustrate this remark, let us quote what seems to me the most beautiful passage in the book in which Shelley is portrayed as the child-poet. "He (Shelley) is still at play, save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch, and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growing the knelled thunder, and laughs at the shanking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven; his floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions to see how she will look nicest in his song." (Pg. 46.) Poetry in prose. The short sentences admirably fit the description of the child's "bright mischief" and merry riot, its desire for novelties and perpetual craving for new toys which are snatched up eagerly, then thrown aside. The quality of child-likeness in Shelley is again seen in his mythological treatment of subjects, added to an intense love of nature. "The lark that plucks the grey from the beards of the billows, the clouds that are snorted from the sea's broad nostril, all the elemental spirits of Nature take from his verse perpetual incarnation and reincarnation, pass in a thousand glorious transmigrations through the radiant forms of his imagery." Thompson classes Shelley as belonging to the Metaphysical School of poetry as being what Crashaw should have been. His elaborate unlabored imagery (if the paradox be allowable) is the ideal of the Metaphysical School achieved. His very spontaneity saved him from mere word-toying. He was his own "Skylark."

"That from heaven, or near it
Proudest thy full heart.
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

"No trappings are too splendid for the swift steeds of sunrise. His sword-hilt may be rough with jewels, but it is the hilt of an Excalibur. His thoughts scorch through all the folds of expression. His cloth of gold bursts at the flexures, and shows the naked poetry." To this great power of imagery must be attributed the ease with which he turns the most difficult abstractions. "The coldest moon of an idea rises halved through his vaporous imagination. The dimmest sparkled chip of conception blazes and scintillates in the subtle oxygen of his mind. The most wrinkled Aeson of an abstruseness leaps rosy out of his bubbling genius." And this again he is the ideal of the metaphysical school realised. He walked with daring tread the space between the visible and invisible, between the material and immaterial, artfully expressing one in terms of the other. The best example of this faculty Thompson thinks is to be found in the poem "Prometheus Unbound", where there is a very prodigality of all that is insubstantial. There, indeed, Shelley is the Prospero of an island.

"Full of noises
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight
and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices
That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open,
and show riches
Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
I cried to dream again."

If "Prometheus" is Shelley's greatest poem, "Adonais" is the death of Keats is lamented, is considered his most perfect. "Seldom is the death of a poet mourned in true poetry. Not often is the singer confined in laurel wood." And yet in this theme of death, there is a note of despair. There is not the consolation of Milton:

"So hyccidas sunk low but mounted high
Thro' the dear might of Him that walk'd the waves"
"For the resignation of pagan Horace
"Ergo Quincitium perpetuus sopor
Urguet"

Durum! sed levius fit patientia
Quid quid corrigere est nefas."
"A portion of that lovelessness
Which once he made more lovely";
Unsatisfying; for does not Shelley
sing in his last lines:
"The soul of Adonais like a star
Beacons from the above where the
eternal are?"

Reverting to Shelley's smaller poems, "The Cloud", "The Skylark" etc., by which the poet is perhaps most known, Thompson observes: "Here Shelley forgets for a while all that ever makes his verse turbid; forgets that he is anything but a poet; forgets sometimes that he is anything but a child; lies back in his skiff and looks at the clouds. He plays truant from earth, slips through the wicket of fancy into heaven's meadow and goes gathering stars." Here too is to be heard the marvellous music of Shelley at its best—not a monotonous rhythmic beat, but a deep and powerful harmony. "Shelley could at need sacrifice smoothness to fitness. He could write an anapaest that would send Mr. Swinburne into strong shudders (e.g. "stream did glide") when he inductively felt that by so foregoing the more obvious music of melody, he would better secure the higher music of harmony." His estimate is interesting, for, in this, as we hope to point out, Thompson resembles Shelley.

But we are nearing the end of our remarks. Thompson has spoken to us of the poetry; he must needs say something of the poet, and the last few pages form a plea for Shelley, the man. He was an atheist from his boyhood, and to what can that be traced but to early neglect of his moral training? From atheism he passed to pantheism, and that was a step in the right direction. Can we say to what he might have arrived in the end? "We do not believe that a truly corrupted spirit can write consistently ethereal poetry." In the light of this enforced standpoint we must view the revolutionary principles that he held. "He was an anarchist. Well? And is it not a mere fact—regret it if you will—that in all European countries, except two, monarchs are a mere survival, the absolute buttons on the coat-tails of rule, which serve no purpose but to be continually coming off?" Again, he desired a religion of humanity; the Christianity of his day seemed to him too "special." "And the feeling is one with which a Catholic must sympathise, in an age where, if we may say so without irreverence—the Almighty has been made a constitutional deity, with certain state-grants of worship, but no influence over political affairs. In these matters his aims were generous, if his methods were perniciously mistaken." His theory of "free love" was revolting and mischievous, but logical from his point of view; it is not impertinent to ask whether tends our present day system of facilitation of divorce.

There are undoubtedly passages in Shelley by which exception must be taken, but "we cannot credit that any Christian ever had his faith shaken through reading Shelley, unless his faith were shaken before he read Shelley."

In his closing paragraph we see a little of Thompson's own sorrow. "Now is it, he asks, that the greatest poets, the Coleridges, the Keats, are among the saddest records in literature?" Thompson was no doubt mindful of his own misfortunes which some biographer must yet chronicle for us. He answers this question by other questions which for very beauty of conception are almost unequalled. "Is it that the harvest waves richest over the battlefields of the soul; that the heart, like the earth smells sweetest after rain; that the spell on which depend such necromantic castles is some spirit of pain charm poisoned at their base? Such a poet, it may be, mists with sighs the window of his life until the tears run down it; then some air of searching frost, turns it into a crystal wonder. The god of golden song is the god, too, of the golden sun; so, peradventures, songlight is like sunlight, and darkens the countenance of the soul. Perhaps the rays are to the stars what thorns are to flowers; and so, the poet, after wandering over heaven, returns with bleeding feet."

And so we leave Shelley, hoping with Thompson that "amidst the supernatural universe, some tender, undreamed surprise of life in doom awaited that wild nature, which, worn by warfare with itself, its Maker and all the world, now "Sleeps, and never palates more the dug."

The beggar's nurse, and Caesar's."
We must be pardoned for dwelling thus long on this essay. But it is a monumental work and will hold its place in English literature among the best of its kind. It first appeared in the "Dublin Review," and for the first time in its history that periodical ran into a second edition. The essay has since been published in book form by Messrs. Burns and Oates (price 1s 6d) and has already seen a third edition. It forms in every way a most attractive volume.
A. B. PURDIE.

POET'S CORNER

MY GUEST.

The day is fixed that there shall
come to me
A strange, mysterious guest;
The time I do not know, he keeps
the date,
So all I have to do is work and
wait
And keep me at my best,
And do my common duties patiently.

I've often wondered if that day
would break
Brighter than other days?
That I might know, or wrapped in
some strange gloom,
And if he'd find me waiting in my
room
Or busy with life's ways;
With weary hands, and closing eyes
that ached.

For many years I've known that he
would come
And so I've watched for him,
And sometimes even said, "He will
come soon."
Yet mornings pass, followed by afternoon,
With twilight dusk and dim,
And silent night-times, when the
world is dumb.

But he will come, and find me here
or there,
It does not matter where
For when he comes, I know that he
will take
In his, these very hands of mine
that ache
(They will be idle then),
Just folded, maybe, with a silent
prayer.

Yes, he whom I expect has been called
Death,
And once he is my guest
Nothing disturbs of what has been,
or is;
I'll leave the world's loud company
for his,
As that which seemeth best,
And none may hear the tender
words he saith,

As we pass out, my royal guest, and
I,
As noiseless as he came,
For, naught will do, but I must go
with him,
And leave the house I lived in, closed
and dim,
I've known I should not need it
by-and-by!

And so I sleep and wake, I toil and
rest,
Knowing when he shall come
My Elder Brother will have sent for
me,
Bidding him say that they especially
Have need of me at home,
And so, I shall go gladly, with my
guest.
—Anon.

MOTHER-LOVE.

The great white God who loves us
well,
The dear white God who heeds our
way,
Down-looking where His children
dwell,
Saw that their feet had gone
astray,
And lo! their tears fell down like
rain,
And souls were crucified by cruel
pain.

Then spake the dear white God, and
said:
"Somewhat they need to make
them strong,
And cheer the hearts whence hope
hath fled,
Till through life's discord strikes
her song."
And straight He thought—and,
thinking, smiled—
Of one rare gift to bless His child.

Then from our God His gift was
sent—
Ah, soul of mine, thou knowest
well!
To fill the air with full content,
And lighten haunts where shadows
dwell:
To gladden those who weep, for-
lorn—
And so sweet mother-love was born.

THE LOOM.

"Children of yesterday,
Heirs of to-morrow,
What are you weaving—
Labor and sorrow?
Look at your looms again;
Faster and faster
Fly the great shuttles
Prepared by the Master.
Life is the loom,
Room for it, room.

"Children of yesterday,
Heirs of to-morrow,
Lighten the labor
And sweeten the sorrow.
Now, while the shuttles fly
Faster and faster,
Up and at it—
At work for the Master.
He stands at your loom,
Room for him, room.

"Children of yesterday,
Heirs of to-morrow,
Look at your fabric
Of labor or sorrow,
Seamy and dark
With despair and disaster.
Turn it and lo!
The Lord's at the loom,
Room for Him, room."
—From Ireland's Own.

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The patriot's ringing lay,
Only a boy, yet O'Connell's name,
Shall be my theme to-day.
And that dear Isle he loved so well
Birthplace of saint and song,
His birthplace, too, our glorious
dead,
Who suffered and grew strong.
Suffered for thee, grew strong for
thee,
Bright jewel of the sea,
His work through life, his prayer
in death,
Was Erin to be free.
Free from thy tyrant's cruel rule,
Free in thy native vogue,
Free, once again to take thy place,
Mid nations of the earth.
When strong men's hearts grew faint
with fear
Of gibbets, gyves and chains,
O'Connell's clarion voice rang out,
For Erin and her claims.
From Connaught's mountain passes,
From hillside, lake and glen,
They came in numbers numberless,
Old Ireland's stalwart men.

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office of the secretary of Quebec, this 7th of July, 1909.
DODDLE ROY,
Provincial Secretary.