

vited the bailiff to call at her residence, close to the Faubourg St. Honoré, hired expressly to perpetrate the crime, at eight in the evening. In the meantime Engaud had purchased cords and a pulley, and fixed them between the curtains of a folding door where Engaud lay concealed.

All the furniture had been removed from the room save a table and a long chair, whose head was run up to the curtained door. The bailiff arrived punctually at eight o'clock. Gabrielle opened the door and led him into the execution room; hardly had he sat upon the sofa chair when instantly the curtains separated, the cord with a noose descended, the bailiff was hoisted up, and when insensible taken down; suffocation being rendered surer by closing the victim's mouth and pressing his windpipe with their hands. The body was then stripped, the head battered to prevent recognition, wrapped in oilcloth and sacking prepared three days previously by Gabrielle, the whole put into the trunk. Then Gabrielle re-arranged the room and resumed her needle-work, while Engaud put on the deceased's hat and coat, took his office keys, proceeded to his office and carried away receipts for money lent—Gouffé was a usurer—bills and cash.

Later the trunk was conveyed by rail to Lyons accompanied by the assassins, who emptied the remains into a ditch in the suburbs, smashing up the trunk in a neighbouring wood. Next they went to Marseilles, then returned to Paris. They informed their families of their crime, who made up a purse to send them to New York. Next they went to San Francisco and swindled people near a place called St. Helena till they bolted for Vancouver. Next they reached Montreal. From here Gabrielle was brought to Paris by a certain Captain Garanger. Failing to blackmail Engaud's family, she confessed her crime to the police. The guillotine is too good for the wretch who is devoid of all feeling and morality. Engaud is now tramping through Canada, where it is to be hoped that exception to humanity may be arrested.

Z.

BROWNING'S OBSCURITY.

BROWNING is not always obscure. Where can we get more vivid word pictures than in the latter half of "Waring," or in "Love among the ruins"? When he writes of horses galloping his verse seems to keep time; when music is his theme he uses alliteration to make his words glide on melodiously. Some of his love poems have a dreamy, soothing effect, while in another variety we hear the true martial ring. Everywhere his style suits his subject, and it is therefore not surprising that it should seem obscure when he deals with questions that relate solely to the inner consciousness.

His thought is condensed, every line full of meaning, and here and there he appears simply to have rubbed out connecting words which he considered unessential. He is an architect who believes in abstraction more than in imitation, for though he has shown himself to be master of the latter art, he prefers to accomplish his grandest effect through the instrumentality of light and shade, shape and mass.

Browning embraces all subjects in his many-sidedness. Some of his shorter poems are as clear and bright as one could desire, but he cannot write long on any theme, he cannot bring his microscopic gaze to bear on men and women, without seeing, within the body, the soul it envelops, and being overwhelmingly impressed with the superior importance thereof. He does not believe in scratching the surface, but pierces deeply wherever he strikes.

The problems he discusses are insoluble, and were it not so they would be of no moral value. For instance, if the existence and conditions of a future state could be demonstrated with mathematical exactness, there would be no virtue in faith,—

Oh, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?

In the most subtle manner, Browning leads our minds, by the very unanswerableness of his queries, to turn to the only source whence, if not replies, at least consolations for the want of them may be drawn. The doctrine which was "to the Greeks foolishness" is the sole possible solution which Cleon can imagine for his problems.

Shakespeare, alone, can be compared with Browning in his grasp of these truths of the inner life. He deals with them objectively, in a figurative way, while Browning is intensely subjective in his soul pictures. Shakespeare gives us an outside, as well as an inside view, and hence there is a surface interest in all his plays, while he further rewards the diligent student in his deepest researches. He is the majestic river which has ripples and gleams of sunlight above, as well as strong current below, while Browning is the spring for which he must sink a well before its beauties can be revealed. Browning works from within, outward, and when he touches an action or incident, it is merely to show how these are entirely dependent on what men are. Shakespeare, on the other hand, works from without, inward, and is constantly proving that circumstances would character. In striking the deeper chords of human nature, Browning scorns to descend to a level where he will be perfectly understood. He writes for spirits kindred to his own, who can enter into his involved manner of thinking, judging that these problems are suggested only to the few, while Shakespeare makes himself at one with humanity by taking it for granted that the questionings of his soul are those common to all men.

The dramas of Browning are obscure in the same sense in which Wagner's operas are. We are not yet fully educated up to either, but they represent the poetry and the music of the future and already their worth and importance are being recognized in all intelligent communities.

No doubt much of Browning's obscurity is due to his constant underlying attempt to discover the true meaning of life, but is not the English language also to blame? It has not yet gained the power to express abstractions. German would be a better medium.

The ordinary poet writes glibly of Love and Nature, but skims along the outer edge of these and deeper topics with the greatest ease, contenting himself with platitudes and a musical flow of words. He sacrifices matter to manner, but Browning errs in the opposite direction. So intent is he upon calling to life the cold statue of poetry which, with all her beauty of form, is but inanimate marble, that he sometimes is rather rough in his awakening. But he has fulfilled his highest mission, and most men find life too short to attain both to ideality of thought and perfection of detail. The infinite suggestiveness of his poetry will leave plenty of scope for his successors, though they be not men of talent, to make more clear the ideas evolved by this greatest genius of the age.

JEAN FORSYTH.

FIT, NON NASCITUR.

A RECENT number of the *Spectator* furnishes all thinking people with a solution of a difficulty—a modern difficulty—which threatens us on all sides, and which is by no means one to be easily minimised. That very erudite and progressive periodical, in reviewing a recent volume of poems, declares it to be a common thing nowadays for people of high culture to be able to express themselves poetically from their great familiarity with all acknowledged masters of verse. From this fact, such a journal as the *Spectator* naturally looks with caution at least upon every new volume of poetry, a caution which is intensified by the knowledge that it is possible to write very good poetry indeed, characterized by fair rhythm, almost perfect form, and consistent and eloquent ideas, without being—a poet.

Every critical journal in every age has had such an experience, and we do not draw attention to this paragraph as if the truth of it were now made public for the first time. May it not be that it is one of those truths which start up simultaneously and contemporaneously every dozen years or so and demand examination and ratification, retiring afterwards into obscurity? However this may be, we are satisfied of the *Spectator's* penetration. A marvellous improvement in education, many aids to intimacy with the best in literature, have naturally given great impulse to composition. Besides, this revelation of oneself through original, or shall we say individual, expression is one of the signs of the times. It takes the place with us that the art of conversation, the art of letter-writing, and the habit of keeping diaries and journals, each held by turns among our ancestors—people who had little or no aspirations towards authorship, regarding *literati* as a class by themselves, and keeping such at the distance warranted by their peculiarities, actual, assumed, or imagined. Whereas to-day, there is no class of persons possessed of any education at all worthy the name that may not at some moment break into literary bloom, blossom forth into essayists, paragraphists, novelists, dramatists, and poets. The domains of scholarship and criticism, and perhaps those of theology and philosophy, are comparatively safe from the invaders, but scarcely any others, for even the once thorny path of Science and the tortuous one of Art are in these days lightly intruded upon, as anyone who keeps abreast of the publications of the past two or three years can testify. This tendency to authorship all over the world does then exist, seeming to crystallize chiefly in the two directions of fiction and verse, and really conduces to the preparation and publication of many intensely respectable volumes. But apart from witnessing to the wonderful spread of general bookishness, and a little special culture, the movement reveals very little. It records, perhaps what otherwise might not have been recorded, in the case of the novel, but not even this much in the case of poetry.

We feel that the whole matter comes to this. It is possible for a person of culture to write correct, and even pleasant poetry, which shall express much of what has been said before while still remaining fairly individualized. It is possible from study of the best models, and from natural love of rhythm and poetic forms to evolve a performance in print which shall go very far indeed towards creating a temporary reputation, providing the models borrowed from are in fashion. Upon this last clause a great deal depends, as we may show presently. In the meantime, what is gained? The chief result is the knowledge on the part of the poet (*sic*) of his subject.

In short, he had to become a poet before he could know he was not himself a poet. Thus far, so good, for out of would-be poets have many fine critics been made, and in order to understand any subject and branch of study thoroughly, it is, as we know, a capital plan to endeavour, either to teach the same or master it in detail, oneself. But *après*—it is a very open and vexed question how far general literature gains by these conscientious, sometimes cultured, but totally uninspired productions. It is no answer to say, what upon reflection is true enough, that after the lapse of a few years, they will find their level,

and be relegated to their proper places—not the altitudes, by-the-way, designed for them by the confident architect of their fortunes—because the trouble is, that the present generation which reads them does so to the neglect of valuable classics and the detriment of all critical faculty.

When the poet Campbell issued his "Specimens of the British Poets," he cited nearly two hundred and fifty authors, only twenty-five or so of whom were known to his reviewer Francis Jeffrey, who died in 1850. Thus it was so, even in Jeffrey's time, and he himself said, "There never was an age so prolific of popular poetry as that in which we now live; and as wealth, population and education extend, the produce is likely to go on increasing. The last ten years have produced, we think, an annual supply of about ten thousand lines of good staple poetry—poetry from the very first hands that we can boast of—that runs quickly to three or four large editions—and is as likely to be permanent as present success can make it. Now, if that goes on for a hundred years longer, what a task will await the poetical readers of 1919?" In 1890 may we not assert that the "task" is already at our door—that Jeffrey, face to face with the American school, with the colonial schools and with the home school of versifiers "after" the Morris, the Arnolds, the Brownings, the Turner-Tennysons, and the Dobson-Langs, might well remark, as he did in the closing sentence of the article already quoted from, "If we continue to write and rhyme at the present rate for two hundred years longer, there must be some new art of short-hand reading invented, or all reading must be given up in despair."

Jeffrey, too, it may be supposed, had not in 1819 quite grasped the fact that a hundred years hence the female portion of the community, having once been shown what could be done by them under exceptional conditions, and by exceptional individuals, rushed immediately into action, and if somewhat vaingloriously, at least enthusiastically. Of late years women have made immense strides in the art of literary composition, the art of saying things tersely and well, and especially the knack of supplying the periodicals with matter more or less interesting and important, ground out with a regularity that surely proves the sex to be only too business-like. If Jeffrey and his colleague Sydney Smith together could visit some of our vast Public Libraries, and take in their various aspects both internally and externally, what genuine astonishment would assuredly be theirs as they witnessed the readers attending those crowded institutions, and stole a glance at the books. Said Sydney Smith himself upon this same subject: "As to the notoriety which is incurred by literature, the cultivation of knowledge is a very distinct thing from its publication; nor does it follow that a woman (or a man) is to become an author merely because she has talent enough for it. We do not wish a lady to write books to defend and reply, to squabble about the tomb of Achilles or the plain of Troy, any more than we wish her to dance at the opera, to play at a public concert, or to put pictures in the exhibition because she has learned music, dancing, and drawing. The great use of her knowledge will be that it contributes to her private happiness. She may make it public, but it is not the principal object which the friends of female education have in view."

Well—both the tomb of Achilles, and the plain of Troy are no longer fashionable topics of the pen:

What's not destroy'd by Time's devouring hand?
Where's Troy—and where's the May-Pole in the Strand?
Bramston's "Art of Politics."

But Duchesses jostle Countesses in the English reviews, and practical *Americaines* fall into position, all eager for the fray, in the *Forum* and the *North American Review*—subjects: "Sanitation," "Divorce," "The Gold Coast," "The Future of Fiction," "The Destiny of the Drama," "Reports of Committee on Sweating," "The Postal Service," "The Dangers of Co-operation," "The Condition of Ireland," "The Policy of the Germans in South Africa," "Dress vs. Disguise"—and so on, and *infinitum*. A perfect flood of talk is being poured upon the universe, to keep up with which demands our constant attention and prevents many busy people among us from appropriating and assimilating the older and nobler treasures of our unparalleled literature. The inordinate desire for authorship recalls poor Goldsmith's remark—"In England, every man may be an author that can write; for they have by law a liberty not only of saying what they please, but of being also as dull as they please." For the mechanical contrivance of modern poems and tales, Pope's celebrated receipt is still vigorous and adequate.

"Take out of any old poem, history-book, romance, or legend (for instance, Geoffrey of Monmouth, or Don Belias of Greece) those parts of story which afford most scope for long descriptions. Put these pieces together and throw all the adventures you fancy into one tale. . . . You may in the same manner give the venerable air of antiquity to your piece, by darkening it up and down with old English. With this you may be easily furnished upon any occasion by the dictionary commonly printed at the end of Chaucer."

A delightful phrase is that "darkening it up and down with old English," to be had of the nearest bookseller. Clearly the Laureate has not studied the Twickenham wasp in vain, and as the reviewer of 1890 peruses the scores upon scores of books presented to his consideration he comes to the conclusion that a good many beside the second Alfred—King in his own realm of poetic literature—have unconsciously followed the advice of the cynical Alexander. Imitation is not only the sincerest flattery but the natural outcome of undigested unassimilated reading, and imitation is the keynote to nearly all of the modern poetry.