

## AUBREY DE VERE.

Aubrey de Vere has made himself known to lovers of literature by his labors in both prose and poetry, but chiefly through the latter. He is sprung from a family, long resident in Ireland, of the old Norman stock, and derived from his father, Sir Aubrey de Vere, the friend of Wordsworth, a predisposition to verse, nor are the few stirring sonnets and the dramas of his father yet forgotten, though obscured by the splendor of the great poetic age in which he lived. The family has been loyal to Ireland, and a large part of Aubrey de Vere's verse is devoted to the celebration of the historical and mythic legends, the piety, humanity, and sorrow of his own land. He belongs to the generation of Tennyson, having been born in 1811, but the voice in his verse is that of the "large language"—of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley—and echoes with an



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earlier day whose song has long fallen silent in our books; and there mingles with this strain of our most noble modern English speech the indefinable melody and the simple and spirited quality which seem indigenous to all Irish poetry.

Here, however, it is not meant to describe or praise his verse, but only to pay some brief tribute to the man, as we print his portrait, and to the life he has led in self-devotion to high and humane ends, in scenes and among men that make his reminiscences of unusual and lasting value. As a boy he was the guest of Wordsworth, and the friendships which began with this and other eminent names make a roll of the century in England of astonishing fullness and brilliancy. He became Roman Catholic in early manhood at the era of the Oxford movement, and the church has been, perhaps, the chief poetic inspiration granted him. Several of his volumes deal with legends, glories and aspirations with an amplitude and a loftiness not elsewhere to be found in our literature, and with a pure fervor such as characterizes only the best of the "books of the spirit" that are so rare in the English tongue. The religious and poetic instincts united to lift his thought into a region almost Platonic, as respects the principles, the abstract motives, and ends of life, as is seen in his essays, which are bathed in a difficult air, while in his poetry the same elements take on an extraordinarily picturesque detail, and an individuality often heroic.

In these "Recollections" one soon discovers a strongly marked personality. The kindly nature; the strong sense of humor; the mind laboriously just in thought, and delicate, while frank, in appreciation; the cheerful enjoyment of varied life; the piety toward friends as well as toward heaven, and much else, will now for the first time, as here familiarly revealed, aid those who have enjoyed his very impersonal prose and verse to make near acquaintance with the man who has won their regard; and they will follow the completion of his work with more than friendly interest.—G. E. W. in the Century.

## RECOLLECTIONS OF GERALD GRIFFIN.

By Aubrey de Vere.

Gerald Griffin, a friend of mine in youth, lived about four miles from us in a village called Pallas. He was a man of remarkable genius, and of a character yet more remarkable, though his life was too short to allow either to be recognized widely. He was the youngest of four brothers, whose parents had emigrated to America. As a boy he lived with two brothers, both of them physicians, whose talents and conduct eventually made them eminently successful in their profession, but in early years their career was a struggling one. The boy had a high spirit of independence. He resolved to be no longer a burden to them, to cast himself upon the huge world of London, and there make his way as he might. Knowing that his brothers would not sanction a design apparently so hopeless, he took his departure without an adieu; and for a considerable time they did not know where he was. At first he supported himself by reporting for newspapers, and afterwards by writing short dramatic pieces for the small theatres. He could thus however, win but a precarious existence, and during several years seems to have been in danger of starving for he never allowed his brothers to know of his difficulties. Later he wrote tales illustrative of Irish life in the lower and middle classes entitled "Holland Tide," "Tales of the Munster Festivals," etc. All at once to his great surprise his little spark of local reputation burst out into a flame. His "Collegians," appeared: it met with a great and immediate success. Some of the critics pronounced him the best novelist of the time next to Sir Walter Scott; his publisher sent him £800, and he despatched the whole of that sum to his parents in America. "The Collegians" has been frequently reprinted, and presents the best picture existing of Irish peasant life, at once the most vivid and the most accurate. Its comic parts are the most comic, and its tragic the most tragic, to be found in Irish literature. The tale is founded on a terrible crime perpetrated in the county of Limerick early in this century: A young man of gentle birth fell in love with a beautiful and virtuous peasant girl, married her secretly, got tired of her, and drowned her in the Shannon. For a considerable time it was impossible to arrest the murderer; his capture was described to me by a near relative of mine, the magistrate who arrested him. He had received secret information, and led a body of police to the house of the murderer's parents at a late hour of the night. Apparently there had been a dinner party in that house, for on the door being opened after a slight delay he was received in the hall by its mistress, a tall and stately lady in a black velvet dress. She addressed him with quiet scorn, informed him that her house, a hospitable one, had been favored by many guests, but none resembling those who had come at that unusual hour to visit it; that she knew his errand; that her son had not been in that house for many weeks; but that he was welcome to search for him as they pleased. They searched the house in vain—they next searched the offices. When on the point of retiring one of the party remarked a ladder within the stable, the top of which leaned against a small door in the wall. The policemen refused to mount it, for they said that if the murderer was hid on the premises he must be behind that door and would certainly stab the first to enter. The magistrate mounted. The search was again in vain, and all had descended from the loft except the last policeman, who, as he approached the door, carelessly prodded with his bayonet the straw with which the floor was covered. A loud scream rang out from beneath it, and the murderer leaped up. He had been grazed, not

wounded, and if he had held his peace must have escaped. His scream was almost immediately re-echoed by a distant one louder and more piercing. It came from one who knew her son's voice well. That magistrate told me that the most terrible thing he had ever witnessed was the contrast between that mother's stately bearing at first and the piteous abjectness of her later appeals as on her knees she implored him to spare her son.

The guilt was conclusively proved, and the murderer was sentenced to be hanged; but in those times justice was not always impartially administered, and the peasantry were certain that a gentleman never would be hanged. He requested that he should be taken to the place of execution in a carriage, but his crime had excited universal abhorrence, and none of the livery stables in Limerick would supply one. One was procured from a distance on the morning of the execution, and the unhappy man entered it. When midway on the bridge in Limerick that spans a small arm of the Shannon, the horses stopped, and no efforts could induce them to go farther. The crowds were more certain than ever that somehow there would be an escape: a gentleman could not be hanged. The horses plunged more and more furiously, but would not advance. The murderer fell into an agony of terror. He exclaimed, "Let me out, and I will walk!" He walked to the place of execution, and was hanged.

The "Colleen Bawn," which had an extraordinary success at one of the London theaters, was a dramatic condensation of "The Collegians." I went to see it, but could not remain for more than ten minutes. All the refinement which, not less than strength, marks the original, and especially the scenes that describe the Irish peasantry, had vanished, and a vulgar sensationalism had taken its place. This vulgarity has been so common in the delineations of Ireland, whether in novels or on the stage, that the ordinary English conception of the Irish peasant is the opposite of the truth in many cases: at least it wholly ignores that delicacy, pathos, and sympathy which characterize the humbler and the better among them, and remind us that manners are a tradition, and that in the centuries gone by many a political convulsion placed nobility "in commission" among the poor. In Gerald Griffin's day, when whatever crime might be stimulated by violent passions, or whatever exaggeration might mingle with a generous "Nationalist" enthusiasm, the preaching of that vilest of all things, Jacobinism, had never been heard, a man of genius like him could not fail to feel the charm both of the Irish character and the Irish manner, a thing then so much valued that "bad manners to you" was an ordinary malediction. Many of his poems illustrate Irish peasant life with singular grace and pathos; and to become the Irish Burns, as he once told me, was long the great object of his ambition.

After the publication of "The Collegians," Gerald Griffin took up his abode once more in the small dispensary house of his brother at Pallas. My father thought that he would there find little room for his books, and many interruptions of his studious hours. He invited him to pass the winter at Curragh Chase, placing two rooms at his disposal, and telling him that he would find quiet in the woods, and a large command of books in the library; but Gerald declined the invitation. He built an arbor in his brother's garden, and there, I think, made a study of Homer. He had a great knowledge of early Irish history, and we all expected from him a long series of historic romances illustrating Ireland as Scott's had illustrated Scotland. An unexpected obstacle frus-

trated that hope. He was a remarkably religious man. Prosperity, which weakens religion in many Irishmen, deepened it in him. Whatever ambition belonged to him in youth left him early: things spiritual remained to him the sole realities, and literature was of worth only so far as it reflected them. He startled his friends by asserting that strong passion, one of the chief attractions in imaginative literature, did little but mischief. It was in vain that those friends, clerical as well as secular, maintained that in wise hands it should have an elevating tendency. He clung to his doctrine all the more because it involved self-sacrifice, well aware that it must be fatal to the success of literature, such as that for which his gifts and his experience had especially fitted him. He wrote no more popular novels, though a later production, "The Invasion," recording one of the Danish piratical descents on Ireland, is full of admirable description. One day his brother found the fireplace black with the cinders of papers recently burned. He had just destroyed the whole of his manuscripts, verse and prose alike, and answered all inquiries by stating that he had devoted the rest of his life to the instruction of little peasant boys, as one of the "Christian Brothers"—the humblest of all religious communities. He labored assiduously for a few years at Cork; there, a few years later, I saw his grave, and heard his fellow laborers declare that if Ireland had ever had a saint, Gerald Griffin was one. No doubt, his choice was the best, not only for himself, but for the children who came under an influence so benign. But the country he loved so well lost its chance of an Irish Burns, or an Irish Scott; and the unfriendly critic will say, "So fares it with Irish gifts; the lower hit their mark, the highest miss it, sometimes by going to one side of it, and as often by going above it!" Macready, later, brought upon the stage a drama called "Gisippus," written by Gerald in early youth. I think it proved a success, and the £300 paid for it brought out a new edition of Gerald's works. In his religious retreat he found a peace and solemn happiness of which he wrote in rapturous terms. In person he was dignified; and his face was eminently handsome, as well as refined and intellectual.—Century.

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