

The Academy and Literature.

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THE LITERARY WEEK 355		ARTICLES.	
REVIEWS.		FICTION AND PROSE 357	Symbolism 358
The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne, B.D. 359		The Roman Jeremiah 358	Impressions—XXVII. A Night Piece 370
Sir A. Henry Layard, G.C.B., D.C.L., Autobiography and Letters from his Childhood until his Appointment as H.M. Ambassador at Madrid 360		DRAMA:	
Poland. A Study of the Land, People and Literature 361		The Tyranny of Accident. E. E. Chambers 370	
The Eldorado of the Ancients 362		ART:	
A Study of Metre 363		New Englishmen and Italy. C. L. H. 371	
Holbein's "Ambassadors" Unriddled. The Counts Palatine Otto Henry and Philip, a Key to other Holbeins 364		SCIENCE:	
SHORT NOTICES:		Between Two Nobles. C. W. Saleeby 372	
The Book of Months—Thoughts from Masterlinek—Swords and Plowshares 364		CORRESPONDENCE:	
FICTION:		"Taken as Read" 373	
All on the Irish Shore—Rosslyn's Raid and Other Tales—A Girl's Life in a Hunting Country 365		"More Mar's Neers" 374	
Notes on the Week's Novels 366		"The Light that Falls" 374	
		Private Copyright in National Manuscripts 375	
		WEEKLY COMPETITION:	
		Description of an April Day 375	

The Literary Week.

We note a new departure in the method of publishing sixpenny editions of popular fiction. A third of the cover of a reprint that lies before us is devoted to an appreciation of the book by Lord Rosebery, which ends thus: "I am especially delighted with your children, and think Miss Fane a most fascinating character." The interesting books published during the past week include the following:—

POETS AND DREAMERS: STUDIES AND TRANSLATIONS FROM THE IRISH. By Lady Gregory.

A fascinating and beautiful volume, dedicated to "Some Undergraduates of Trinity College." Lady Gregory draws her material from comparatively recent times as well as from the far past. The volume opens with a sketch of Raftery, the blind poet and fiddler, whose name is known throughout Ireland to all Irish speaking people. Other chapters deal with "West Irish Ballads," "Herb Healing," "Workhouse Dreams," and "Mountain Theology." "Mountain Theology" opens thus: "Mary Glyn lives under Slieve-nan-Or, the Golden Mountain, where the last battle will be fought in the last great war of the world; so that the sides of Gortaveha, a lesser mountain, will stream with blood." The volume concludes with English translations of four plays written in Irish by Dr. Douglas Hyde.

BLIND CHILDREN. By Israel Zangwill.

In a note Mr. Zangwill says: "This is a selection of the better part of the verses that have accumulated in manuscript, or in magazines, journals, and the writer's own books during the last twenty years, and represents, therefore, as many moods. The piece that has precedence as the longest is also the oldest, or rather the youngest." This piece is "Silva Poetarum." The dedication, "Ad Unam," opens with these lines:—

Take, Dear, my 'prentice songs,
And—since you cared for one,
"Blind Children," let them all
Share in its blessedness,
Find shelter 'neath its name.

The poems, as the author says, cover a wide range of moods.

CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN CIVILISATION. By William Samuel Lilly.

"Being Some Chapters in European History, with an Introductory Dialogue on the Philosophy of History." A considerable portion of the author's "Chapters in European History," which has long been out of print, has been incorporated in this volume. Other chapters are reprinted from the "Nineteenth Century."

A CORRESPONDENT sends us a delightful cutting from a Scotch newspaper, "which shows," he says, "to what a degree of literary criticism we have attained in these northern latitudes." It appears that an Edinburgh firm has recently issued an edition of Omar Khayyam, concerning which this Scotch newspaper says: "One is inclined to think that the Persian astronomer poet Omar Khayyam has been a diligent student of Shakespeare and Burns; if not, then the literary coincidences are somewhat remarkable." He proceeds: "For example, we have Burns' description of pleasure as like a snow-flake in the river, 'a moment white, then melts for ever'; and Omar uses the same idea under local colour:—

The worldly Hope men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like snow upon the desert's dusty face
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone.

Again, in his beautiful song, 'O wert thou in the cauld blast,' Burns says, 'The desert were a Paradise, if thou wert there': and Omar has it:—

Beside me singing in the wilderness—
And wilderness is Paradise enow."

This northern critic finds so many coincidences of a similar kind that he thinks "the Persian Burns" would be an accurate description of our only Omar. The notice concludes: "The work of translation has been done by Mr. Edward Fitzgerald, who has certainly done justice to Omar's lofty theme and still loftier communings."

nature—treats of it humourously. But Mr. Fletcher adds nothing to a theme which has been worked so pitilessly already. His poet cannot find the real country of which he is in search, and by no means can come across a smock-frock. We could find a smock-frock within five-and-thirty miles of London; Mr. Fletcher's poet had not the right instinct. And surely it is no longer funny to send out a couple of men with guns, which they don't know how to use, and make one of them shoot a donkey. The humour, if it exists, is very early-Victorian. Of course this egregious versifier returns to London and finds contentment in his club: he should never have left it. It should be said that two or three of the interpolated episodes are neatly told. It is when Mr. Fletcher gets on to his poet Mercurius and the Time Spirit that we feel ourselves wrapped in the banal and the commonplace.

"The Caprices of a Royal Incognita" and "The Danger of Innocence" may be put together as representative of what we must call the unpleasant and the unnecessary. That there are readers for such books we have as little doubt as that such books make no contribution to literature. The scandals and intrigues of petty courts supply matter for the one, the preposterous follies and incredible sillinesses of the smart set the other. There is cleverness in both these books. Mr. Cosmo Hamilton is jauntily epigrammatic, makes points, of sorts, with accomplished ease, and succeeds in wearying us. His story—he calls it a "Flippancy"—is too absurd for farce, too vulgar for satire. He refers to Eton as the "insanitary menagerie on the Thames where fathers send their sons in order that they may not receive any education." An American heiress talks in this sprightly manner:—

"Piff Charley Valley," she said, only the "piff" was something quite different. "I'll see you piffed before I marry such a piffing little piffler, so there, Beau, darling. It's all piffed rot about your piff aunt, ain't it—what?"

We do not feel ourselves called upon to say more concerning "The Danger of Innocence."

The jaunty manner in fiction is perhaps the worst of all manners; it seems to have the wink of knowingness, the buttonholing familiarity of the undesirable acquaintance. Above all it disguises the things that matter, or leaves them altogether out of sight. We conclude as we began by repeating that what fiction requires to-day is not a fanciful return to a fanciful nature, but an actual return to actual life. Any careful observer of the growth and development of, say, a couple of allied families will see enough human material for the making of a book worth writing. The point is that he should approach his work with some sense of responsibility and some sense of art.

Symbolism.

To love literature so well as to refuse to write save at the moment of invention, in that brief heart's beat of inspiration; to be scornful of anyone who supposed that art could be the result of mere industry, would seem to be counsels of perfection too severe for an age that has produced the annual novelist and popular fiction. And yet in spite of the hurly-burly there are those who are content to produce but little so that that little be perfect. In looking around on professional literature to-day, perhaps with a little involuntary shudder, we remind ourselves quickly what exquisite work has been produced from time to time in England by men who in the best sense of the term were amateurs. Sir Thomas Browne, for instance, in an age of amateurs produced work that is even yet among the most exquisite in the language: and in our

day, too, those amateurs Walter Pater and Joseph Henry Sherthouse gave us work of a perfection scarcely attempted by the professional writers. Had Pater, for instance, been obliged to earn his bread by his critical and imaginative work, how much it must have lost, inevitably, in its contact with necessity. In France, where perhaps literature is more generally respected, or at least taken more seriously than in England, there has always been the amateur, who thought last of all of earning money from his work. Mr. Mosher, of America, has just reprinted an essay by Mr. Arthur Symons upon such an one. Stéphane Mallarmé was born in 1842 and died in 1898. His life work is but a collection of fragments, beautiful and various, suggesting the exquisite remnants of a statue from the hands of a great sculptor the main part of which had been lost or never finished.

"With either more or less ambition" (says Mr. Symons) "he would have done more to achieve himself, he was always divided between an absolute aim at the absolute, that is the unattainable, and a too logical disdain for the compromise by which after all literature is literature." That seems to us to be a very happy explanation, so far as explanation is possible, of a man who avowedly discarded ideas for words; using words partly as symbols, partly as living and lovely things in themselves, to express not ideas but moods, the moods of a poet, who was a little repelled by the reason. He was a Symbolist, but not a Mystic. For Mysticism, as we see it in St. John of the Cross, for instance, or St. Teresa, is really an exact science as reasonable as algebra to a mind properly prepared and equipped. With Mallarmé it is not the thought, not the idea, still less a sequence of ideas that he seeks to express, but just a mood, or the shadow of a mood, a fugitive ecstasy.

Such a writer, however exquisite his work might be, could not hope to gain popularity, could not hope to become a professional writer. "Never having aimed at popularity," Mr. Symons writes, "he never needed, as most writers need, to make the first advances. He made neither intrusion upon nor concession to those who, after all, were not obliged to read him. And when he spoke he considered it neither needful nor seemly to listen in order to hear if he were heard. . . . No one in our time has more significantly vindicated the supreme right of the artist in the aristocracy of letters. . . . Has not every artist shrunk from that making of himself 'a motley to the view,' that handing over of his naked soul to the laughter of the multitude? But who in our time has wrought so subtle a veil shining on this side where the few are, or thick cloud on the other where are the many?"

Here is a prose poem in which the matter is almost nothing, and the form almost everything; very happily it shows us something of Mallarmé's manner, not in its obscurity, but in its most expressive perfection:—

FRISON D'HIVER.

The old Saxony clock which is slow and which strikes thirteen amid its flowers and gods, to whom did it belong?

Thinkst that it came from Saxony by the mail-coaches of old time?

(Singular shadows hang about the worn-out panes.)

And the Venetian mirror, deep as a cold fountain in its banks of gilt work; what is reflected there? Ah! I am sure that more than one woman bathed there in her beauty's sin; and perhaps if I looked long enough, I should see a naked phantom.

Wicked one, thou often savest wicked things.

(I see the spiders' webs above the lofty windows.)

Our wardrobe is very old; see how the fire reddens its sad panels! The weary curtains are as old, and the tapestry on the arm chairs stripped of paint, and the old engravings, and all these old things. Does it not seem to thee that even these two birds are discoloured by time?

(Dream not of the spiders' webs that tremble above the lofty windows.)

Thou lovest all that, and that is why I live by thee. When one of my poems appeared didst thou not desire, my sister, whose books are full of yesterdays, the words, the grace of faded things? New things displeaseth thee; thee also do they frighten with their loud boldness, and thou feelest as if thou shouldst use them—a difficult thing indeed to do, for thou hast no taste for action. Come, close thy old German almanack that thou readest with attention, though it appeared more than a hundred years ago, and the kings it announces are all dead, and, lying on their antique carpet, my head leaned upon thy charitable knees, on thy pale robe, oh! calm child, I will speak with thee for hours; there are no fields, and the streets are empty, I will speak to thee of our furniture. Thou art abstracted.

(The spiders' webs are shivering above the lofty windows.)

Well, it is thus Mallarmé, with a very delicate, sensitive art, as exquisite as that of the finest goldsmith, suggests his mood, as it were, setting it free for a moment from the fetters of silence. With him the style is the man, and as Mr. Symons tells us, "After a life of persistent devotion to literature he has left enough poems, a single small volume (less certainly than a hundred poems in all), a single volume of prose, a few pamphlets, and a prose translation of the Poems of Poe." But in the tiny handful of poems, in verse and prose, there are certainly masterpieces, "poems which are among the most beautiful poems of our time," prose so subtle, so exquisite, that its brevity is our only regret.

Well, after all, Mallarmé is not the only Symbolist. Something he owes to Gerard de Nerval, that inspired madman who was found in the Palais Royal one day leading a lobster by a blue ribbon, and who hanged himself outside a Paris dross house with the garter of the Queen of Sheba. There are Arthur Rimbaud, who at last went eastward and left our world; and Paul Verlaine, for whom poetry was surely the only excuse for life; and Huysmans, that serpent who peers from a monk's cowl and whispers of jewels and precious stones; and Maeterlinck, how much simpler than they all, who has expressed "The Treasure of the Humble"; and others, lesser men scarcely known in England, who have been content with nothing less than a kind of perfection.

In "The Symbolist Movement in Literature," from which Mr. Mosher has in his "Bibelot" reprinted the essay on Stéphane Mallarmé, Mr. Symons has written of all those here named, and of some others with an understanding and a sympathy that it would be difficult to find elsewhere in English. Symbolism, as expressed in the works of these men, is, he seems to suggest, but an experiment towards the solution of the riddle of life. It presents us with a theory of life, supernatural perhaps, which frees us from the material fetters of a sordid world. It is as though, by some fine perception, some delicacy of mind or soul, these men had become aware that the earth with her bars was about us for ever, in a way that others less sensitive had as yet scarcely been aware of. Truly the saints had in their own way felt the same unrest. And, in the well-known words of one of them, we may perhaps find the best explanation of much that is almost inexplicable in these men, who, irregular as they often were in conduct, would seem to have pressed so much real insight into that which cannot die, the soul of man: Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.

The Roman Jeremiah.

A new translation of Juvenal is welcome not only for its own excellent quality, or for the sanity which has refrained from turning a good prose version into a poor verse rendering. Juvenal is welcome in himself. As all men (it has been said) are born either Platonists or Aristotelians, so all satirists are either Horatian or Juvenalian. And while the Horatian way is essentially that of good-

humoured ridicule, having for its logical descendants the skit and *vers de société*, Juvenal is the father of all true and typical satire. Nor among his many descendants is there a name so great; not that of Dryden, his most authentic son. Dryden has faded, so much as an immortal can; he was contracted, "topical," largely personal; his splendid Muse must needs go forth with a cortège of notes. But Juvenal is of a range which makes him universal: whatever men do, or did in a city which was a microcosm of decivilising man, came within his stern criticism. Personal quarrels, spites, or criticisms bulk largely in Dryden and Pope, to say nothing of Byron or lesser men; on such poor quarry Juvenal never stooped. When Pope or Dryden plays the indignant moralist, roused to invective by a degenerate world, we smile: the pose is too obvious, too conventional. Juvenal compels our conviction, our confidence: the whole spirit of the man is so largely, so exaltedly, sincere. Save in the case of an occasional politician (as we should nowadays call him), he never launches a personal attack: his individuals are merely names which head an indictment of general corruption.

This convincing impression of sincerity is the stranger, because his style is what we call rhetorical (a misleading term). But it is spaciously rhetorical. We cannot agree with Mr. Owen, who has translated thirteen satires of Juvenal (Metheun), that it is poetry—the spirit of satire is anti-poetic. But it is magnificent eloquence. His whole eye is on the degeneration of his age and country. Rome was then as London is now: enervated by wealth, conquest, and long prosperity; a sink for the waste and filth of every nation in the East, West, or South, whose corruptions mingled with and overbrimmed her own. Juvenal was a Roman of antique spirit, and they stank in his nostrils, and fretted his heart. In Rome religion was become a ghost; a practical scepticism and agnosticism gave license to crime, as he fiercely declared.

There are who think by sightless Chance all mortal laws
are given,
With native force the vast world hurtles around the
heaven,
That Nature in set order leads the dance of days and
years,
Hence swears in any fane his lie the suserer, stript of
fears.

Nay, in his comprehensive indignation, he accused Heaven itself of partaking the universal degeneracy and corruption. He called for the Saturnian days—

When Juno was a maid, and Jove realmless in caves
Idean;
Was no immortal wassailing in chambers Cyclopean,
No Trojan stripling, no fair dame of Hercules bare the
cup,
Nor Vulcan in black Lipari's forge would drain the nectar
up,
Then wipe his grimy arms. Each god in those days dined
alone;
Nor was there such a rabble of gods as nowadays we own,
And heaven, oppressed with fewer powers, a lighter load
weighed Atlas down.
No one had drawn as yet the gloomy empire of the deep,
Dire Pluto and his ravished bride had no pale court to
keep;
No wheels, no furies, restless stones, and no swart vulture's
palm,
But cheerful Shades led cheerful hours, without infernal
reign.

A more daring rhetorical stroke could not well be in those days, nor a profounder proof of pessimism. Nor were the burglar and the bravo, or the church robber, lacking to Juvenal's vision of Rome:—

Think of the villain stabber, with his poniard out at hire,
Think of the stealthy sulphur, when your gate goes up
in fire,
The thief of massy temple-cups, sacred with antique rust,
Of popular gifts, or votive crowns from monarchs lapped,
in ancient dust.