NEW PUBLICATIONS.

A NEW POEM.

DEIRDRE. 12mo. pp. 262. Roberts Brothers.

Everything possible has been done in the way of heralding this poem. The mystery dear to publishers has been thrown over its author's name; the judgment of Mr. Lowell, slightly strengthened in the repetition, has been entered in advance to the public; and a Crockery journal has pronounced it one of the great poetic works of this century. Such devices generally result upon a literary venture, unless it be of almost phenomenal excellence. It makes little difference to the reader whether the author of "Dierdre" be Dr. Joyes, or somebody else, so the poem itself give true intellectual delight. Any name grows sweet when the public has learned to know it as the representative of sweetness.

"Dierdre" would have attracted attention without the adjunct of mystery. It is a narrative poem, original in its material, boldly conceived (if, indeed, it be not, as we suspect, drawn from one or more actual legends), and written with sufficient poetic skill and feeling to separate it wholly from the crowd of crude and ambitious attempts which are constantly issuing from the press. It possesses enough positive excellence to make us regret the anticipatory hints of dazzling genius, which it does not fulfill, and probably never was intended to fulfill, by the author. He writes with too much intelligence not to measure his own performance at something like its true proportions. He is no beginner in song, but a man of culture, and of advanced though not yet matured taste. While he is no imitator, he distinctly shows the influence of three poets, curiously blended yet separable. In his frequent episodes of conflict and battle, he betrays the Homeric influence; in incident and painting of details, the Tennysonian; and in fluent narrative meter, that of William Morris. But he is bright and strong where Morris is subdued and depressed; he sings in the major key, and even his strains of woe seem sunny beside those which are meant to be joyous in the "Earthly Paradise."

The story is purely Celtic, and the evident familiarity of the author with the sources whence he drew it gives it a strong, racy flavor of its own. It opens with a description of the visit of the King of Eman (Armagh) to his story-teller, Felimid, to whom a daughter is born during the banquet which follows. This daughter is Deirdré, wondrously beautiful as a babe. But Caffa, the King's seer, predicts that her beauty will bring destruction to Eman. The nobles demand that the infant shall be slain, but the King orders that she shall be kept in a palace and inclosed garden until she is old enough to become his own wife. Here she grows up, a wild, wayward, elfish creature. She climbs trees and catches glimpses of the outside world; and one day, like Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, she sees the gay and strong young knight Naisi, the son of Usna and cousin of King Connor of Eman. The result is, they meet; Deirdré runs away with Naisi, who is accompanied by two brothers. On reaching the shore, they find their fleet burned by the King's emissaries; so they stay awhile in the adjoining kingdom of Connaught, then march to the north-western corner of Ireland, defeat the Fomorian pirates, and in the captured vessels sail for Alba (Scotland). During this time a son, Gaeir, is born to Naisi and Deirdré. They settle near Loch Etive, in Argyle, and remain there until the King of Alba is smitten with love for Deirdré. Then they leave and take refuge upon one of the isles of the Hebrides, where they abide five years in peace. But King Connor of Eman outlives neither his love nor his thirst for revenge. He sends Fergus, son of Roy, to invite them to return. Naisi, swayed by keen longing for his native land, consents, disregarding the prophetic forebodings of Deirdré. They all go back with Fergus, and Naisi and his brothers, chiefs of the House of the Red Branch, are treacherously slain by the order of the King, who, when he comes to claim Deirdre for his own, finds her dead upon her husband's breast. This is the outline of a tale strongly stamped with Celtic love and Celtic hate, Celtic fidelity and Celtic treachery. All the roots of the poem draw their nutriment directly from the fierce, volatile, constant, and inconstant Irish nature. No hint is given of the historic period, but as the ancient gods are always introduced, and the Christian faith is not in the slightest wise indicated, the time must have been prior to the fifth century. We cannot censure the author for his assumption of a civilization far beyond the historic reality, since Tennyson has assumed the same in his "Idyls of the King." The predominance of the pure Celtic element, however, is so strange that we are not always certain whether it most attracts or repels. This is the author's picture of the maiden Deirdré:

And thus she questioned them, and told the smart
That 'gan to prey on her young budding heart,
Till sixteen slender years away had flown
Over her golden head, and she had grown
Queen of all the beauty that once graced
Eriú and Banba, Fodla, and the chaste
Crede of Anann's Paps, and gay Aileen
Of Leinster, and the young Momonian Queen,
Morna, and the Danann Goddesses;
Una of Iriú woods and blossomy leas;
Aine the Fair, the Brightness of the grass;
And Samhain said, who holds the Moon's pale glass;
Sad Cliona, ruler of the Southern storm;
And regal Finevare of the Sun-bright form;
And Aevin, Guardian of Kincora's gate;
And Amarac the Wise and Fortunate!

The descriptive passages of the poem are carefully studied, and are almost always agreeable, without being either suggestive of the manner of other poets, or sufficiently fresh and imaginative to impress the reader with the stamp of a marked originality. The following, painting the transition of Autumn into Winter, is one of the best:

But soon all soft airs died, and from between
The east and north a strong wind blew full keen
For many a day, and from the steely sky
The sun deceptive let his arrows fly
On bank and brake, and without heat to fall
Ev'n 'gainst the garden's gleaming southern wall;
And colder still it blew, till one bright morn
It lulled awhile. Upon the spreading thorn
The field-larks twittered in the ruddy haws,
The last fruit of the year; the thievish daw
Fought on the palace gable with his wife;
And the fierce magpie, born to ceaseless strife,
Swung on the linya and told his household woes,
Or plumed his tail and threatened all his foes
With vicious screams and angry rhapsodies;
And loud the finches chirped in the trees;
While, high o'er all, in blue, thin columns broke
From the tall chimney-tops the palace smoke.
All things alone crisp and cold, till from the sea,
Between the east and north, rose gradually
A great gray woolly cloud, that grew and grew
Voluminous, till from the ether blue
It blotted out the sun ere evening's hour,
And wrapt the glossy garden, tree and bower,
In its thick folds obscure. Then from on high,
To earth slow spiralling adown the sky,
The first great feathery snow-flakes made their way,
Till all the garden changed from black to gray,
From gray to white. Then rose the wind again
From the fell North and growled against the pane
And round the house, and each successive blast
As the night fell grew stronger than the last,
Till, as the great whales, gathered in a shoal,
In some far bay anear the shining pole,
Gambol in thunder, while the waters boil
Around them like the Mariner's whirling coil,
And high to heaven the wheeled foam-wreaths toss,
So that strong wind against the feathery floss
Of falling snow wallowed the livelong night,
Tumultuous, till at length the morning light
Rose calm and clear, and upward sprang the sun,
And with his level beams serenely shone
On the soft snowy robe that lay white and pure
O'er glade and splendid hill and dazzling moor.

Here, as in William Morris's narrative poems, the picture as a whole is pleasantly satisfactory, although there is not a couplet or line which haunts the memory after reading. We feel the same impression of the artistic skill being predominant over the native faculty. The images are so nicely adjusted, the lines so fairly balanced, the epithets so delicately chosen, that we constantly await some strong, informing spirit which never comes. But we cannot do justice to the author without also quoting one of his battle-pictures. The fight of Naisi, and his two brothers, Ardan and Aindi, with the Fomorian pirates, is so prolonged and metaphorically illustrated, that we may assume it to be the author's highest exertion in this line. The culmination and close of the strife run thus:

As a captain brave
Who steers his bark through stormy wind and wave,
Naisi, now here, now there, his battle led,
And with high word and deed their valor fed
Unflagging, though the gradual rising tide
Floated full many a corse, and far was dyed
With blood-streaks of his kindred. On his car
The tramp of a great host now drawing near
Down the wild isle fare there fell, and through the gloom
A broad black banner came, with many a plume
Behind it waving; then a savage roar
Of joy arose that shook the island shore
From the Fomorian ranks. "With swooping wing
The Eagle comes! Great Tale! the King! the King!"
They cried exulting; then a sudden trace
Of moonlight fell, and showed the dreadful face
Of the Fomorian King, as down he came,
His black hair on the wind, his eyes aflame
With cruel light; then all was dark; the shower
Of darts fell tenfold thick, the fatal hour
Of the great Three seemed nigh. From the attack
On the right wing strong Ardan turned his back
A moment; on the center, Naisi's shout
Was heard in vain by his retreating rout
Of flies confused; yet on the leftward bray
Young Aindi, like the hill-cat to its prey
Clung to the palisade full stubbornly;
And now, as Naisi turned, the rising sea
Rolled inward wave by wave, and ere his waist
Leaped at his mail-shirt, and full soon embraced
His warriors arm-pit high, and stopped their flight;
And, as he yearning looked upon the light
To see his loved ones, sudden overhead
The moon shone out through parting clouds and shed
A long, bright shaft of gory, gleaming down
Athwart the darkness on the mitock's crown,
Showing young Deirdre on her brazen chair,
Holding her child aloft in her despair
And terror, that the little eyes might see
His father's death scene. Gleaming vividly
The light illumed them, then came trailing fast
Its splendor down the sloping hill, and passed
Across the sound still gleaming, and was gone;
And in that fleeting moment, even as one
Who gropes his way through midnight woods and sees
At last some welcome light amid the trees,
Bringing new courage, Naisi's soul took fire
At sight of his beloved ones. On the dire,
Dark run of his battle he keen gaze
Fell hopeful, as that sudden moonlight blaze
Flashed on the sound, and showed amid the wreck
A most wind-torn from some great galley's deck
Slow floating toward him. Like the Trump of Doom
Unto his startled foes rang through the gloom
His rallying shout; his warriors turned; the mast
Some poised on the strong shoulders, and the blast
Sang through their plumes, as forward the hostile door,
With a good rush, at Naisi's word they tore,
Slashing, till like a war-ram 'gainst a wall
Top-weighted beam strikes the door whose dread fall
Followed the shock like thunder. Inward poured
The Danannian now. Out flashed the Sengel's sword
Flessing in Naisi's grasp, and far and near
Shrank the Fomorians, shuddering to their fear
Before him, as they saw the dreadful brand
Rising and falling in the hero's hand!

The poem is marked throughout by finish, strong light and shade, picturesqueness and movement, rather than by a distinct poetic individuality. The old classic form of simile, beginning with *As* or *As when*, and continuing a certain number of lines, to be taken up with *So he*, or *So they*, is repeated so often that it at last becomes decidedly unpleasant. From p. 111 to p. 122 we find eight such similes, one of them interrupting the narrative by an episodical passage of 14 lines! The Homeric imitation is sometimes deliberately designed, as in the triply compounded adjectives: "loud-war-thundering," "strong-spear-bristling," and "high-wave-curling." The Celtic words, however, are generally used with good effect, although it will puzzle most readers to guess what "a fount of carnegal" is, or what article of clothing is represented by "a lork."

We should judge, simply from the evidence afforded by the poem itself, that the author is a man of considerable poetic faculty, and very decided poetic taste; that his talent is developed from his collective culture rather than keenly and separately possessed; that he has reached an artistic development which secures him against mediocrity, but does not yet give him a just claim to distinguished honor; and that whatever success he may now achieve will be partly due to his choice of new material, or at least to more judicious approbation of its poetic capabilities than any of his predecessors in the same field have exhibited. We have read his poem with pleasure, but without those surprises which indicate the dawning of a fresh, original genius, and without that involuntary memory of lines and passages which are the sure preliminary signs of permanent fame.

The Phrenological Journal for November contains a biographical sketch, with a portrait, of Professor Huxley, in which ample justice is done to the ability and energy of that celebrated physiologist. A new view of his aptitudes is presented in the following sentence: "Had his field of activity been that of business, he would have made his mark, we think, in managing large operations and handling an extensive trade." There is force in the remark, apropos of the death of Dr. George H. Wakefield, the Boston athlete, who had trained himself to lift 3,000 pounds, that "the unnaturalness of his system seems to have been shown by his early death. It is a notorious fact that prize-fighters, acrobats, and all who seek reputation for great muscular strength as a class are short-lived."

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