

O WORLD, BE NOBLER.

BY LAURENCE BINYON.

O World, be nobler, for her sake!
If she but knew thee what thou art,
What wrongs are borne, what deeds are done
In thee, beneath thy daily sun.

Know'st thou not that her tender heart
For pain and very shame would break?
O World, be nobler, for her sake!

The New-York Tribune.

ILLUSTRATED SUPPLEMENT.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1900.

Of course we have, about this time, the familiar symposium of big people and little people on "the two books which, during the last year, they have read with most interest and pleasure." It is held this year, as it has been held before, in the pages of "The Academy." Some of the contributors are amusing. Dr. Joseph Parker, for example, names "Robert Orange" and "The Master Christian," between which one would suppose there would be a great gulf fixed. The rider to Dr. Parker's confession is even more diverting. "They should be read one after the other," he says, "and in the order named." We wonder what for. The problem is susceptible of more than one solution. Mr. Frederic Harrison, as always, goes straight to the point. "The only first class book of 1900 has been Mr. Maurice Hewlett's 'Richard Year-and-Nay.'" The statement is sweeping, but we can sympathize with the author of it. Mr. Hewlett himself has preferred "Tommy and Grizel" and "An Englishwoman's Love Letters," the latter book being mentioned also by three other members of the symposium, one of them being Mr. Max Beerbohm. Mr. Leonard Huxley's biography of his father receives four tributes, and Lord Rosebery's "Napoleon" gains an equal number. In fact, while fiction is duly honored, and some meed of praise is given to poetry and pure literature, the claims of biographical works of one sort and another are recognized by half the total of votes cast—the one really interesting fact disclosed by the whole rather trivial transaction.

Mr. Andrew Lang protests that he doesn't know much about Sirens, but he nevertheless declines to take Lady Pippinworth, in "Tommy and Grizel," as the real thing. We are not made to realize her "unholy fascinations," he complains. "Mr. Barrie, after cataloguing her perfections, . . . says, 'Now we have the secret of her charm,' but I do not feel that we really have it." Lady Pippinworth, perhaps, does not greatly matter. She is not, at any rate, the heroine of the book. But Mr. Lang's indictment could be so drawn as to include most of the personages supposed to be fascinating in contemporary fiction. This is, indeed, the one conclusive proof of the difference between the average novelist—be he never so successful—and the few really great figures in the history of the art. How many speeches, in novels, have we been asked to take as brilliant, when they have been almost preternaturally dull! How much talk has been poured upon us, from the lips of novelistic heroes, which has been flat boredom in essence! How much beauty have we been asked to admire, without a tithe of it being made manifest on the printed page!

"Unless our breed of great men is exhausted (and I for one do not deny this) some expansion or annex to the Abbey is a necessity of the age." These are the words of Mr. Frederic Harrison. Mr. William Archer, commenting on the subject in "The Monthly Review," cheerfully assumes, for the sake of argument, that "there is a reasonable probability of our having a certain number of great men (and women) to bury, for some generations to come." He then addresses himself to the making of one of those futile class lists which are commoner in July than in December, grouping Mrs. Browning, the Rossettis, Matthew Arnold and William Morris as poets who deserved to be buried in the Abbey, talking about what "a distinct loss to posterity" it is that they should not by such burial have been "brought within the pale of national hero worship"—as though fame depended upon the disposition of one's ashes—and so on. But to this sort of thing we are accustomed; it is an old story. Mr. Archer must say something new, however, and so he delivers himself of the most astounding proposition we have encountered in a long time. Mediocrity and charlatanism may slip into the sacred circle, he imagines. But suppose they do? "Need we shrink in horror from such a possibility? I am not at all clear on the point. Why should not a national burial place record some of the nation's manias, along with its just enthusiasms? Must there never be a monument which we pass with a smile, among those to which we pay grateful reverence? There is no lack of such monuments in the Abbey as it stands. Do they profane it? No—they make it human." We confess ourselves unable to answer any of these momentous interrogations. We can only say, with Celia, "O, wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful! and yet again wonderful, and after that, out of all swooping!"

VAN DYCK.

A WELL WRITTEN AND SUPERBLY ILLUSTRATED LIFE OF THE MASTER.

ANTHONY VAN DYCK. An Historical Study of His Life and Works. By Lionel Cust, F. S. A., Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London. Illustrated. Imperial octavo, pp. xviii, 300. The Macmillan Company.

When summing up, in a last chapter, his impressions of Van Dyck, the author of this book observes that the *art* of the Fleming "was in-

great virtue of the volume before us is that it explains this fact not simply by analysis of the paintings, but by an account of the artist in his every aspect, personal or professional, which is the fullest, clearest and best thus far produced by an English writer. Mr. Cust had, indeed, a comparatively clear field. Though a considerable literature has gathered around Van Dyck on the Continent, and though we have the magnificent work of M. Guiffrey, published at Paris in 1882, the English translation of the latter work need hardly be considered as a rival to the present publication. Mr. Cust has examined all the authorities, and he has had, of course,

Rubens was strengthening every day a position already of commanding importance. In those days it was the most natural thing in the world for a young man to embrace the artistic career, and Van Dyck, turning to that career at an early age, was certain, with his gifts, to win fame and fortune. Mr. Cust observes that his hero "was never in any way a pupil or apprentice of Rubens," but he was unquestionably employed by the master to make reduced copies of his paintings for the engraver to work from, and to draw out great cartoons from his sketches. The situation would seem to have amounted to a kind of liberal acceptance by Rubens of Van Dyck as a young man whose assistance was worth having, and whose artistic character was, in fact, so promising that it was worth while for even the busiest of painters to do what he could to develop it. It was a case of one man of genius recognizing his duty toward another, much his junior. Later they became rivals, and there are passages in the biography of Van Dyck to show that he was restless under the pre-eminence of Rubens. But they never quarrelled, and there is no substantial reason for thinking that it was jealousy which caused the elder man to divert the younger from his ambition to paint big compositions, and to encourage him to paint portraits. We find, rather, in this incident, a testimony to the insight of Rubens, who saw in what direction Van Dyck was destined to do his best work, and, with almost paternal kindness, endeavored to set him upon the right path. With very human foolishness, Van Dyck remained all his life long persuaded that he could triumph in the painting of religious and mythological compositions. He could do interesting things in both fields, but it was in portraiture that he excelled. The temperament of the man explains the weakness of the artist in not abandoning early in his career those themes in the treatment of which he was least successful. Basing his conclusion on a careful study of the painter's life and of the numerous portraits that he painted of himself, Mr. Cust says that Van Dyck betrays a "nervous and obstinate disposition." He is "indolent and luxurious"; he is "proud and sensitive"; he is "quick to feel a slight or take offence, and careless of giving offence to others." He had, in short, some very feminine traits; he lacked the mental vigor and the depth of character which would have enabled him to sacrifice—with some chagrin, but without repining—the taste out of which he was not qualified to develop pictures of the first class. Just as he was disposed to accept too many commissions because he had not always the strength of mind to say no, so he had not the courage to deny his own impulses. A suggestive picture of him is drawn by Mr. Cust in his account of Van Dyck's visit to Rome as a young man. There were many painters from the Netherlands there, and they cultivated in the Eternal City the rather coarse and jovial habits of their native land. Touching upon their reception of their countryman, Mr. Cust says:

Van Dyck, as a Fleming, was welcomed as a new boon companion, but when they found that the elegant and languid young man, still beardless, with his fine clothes, a curled feather in his velvet cap, a gold chain around his neck, two or three servants in his train, looked down upon them as vulgar roisterers and shunned the tavern for the palace, and the society of his compatriot artists for that of cardinals and princes, they turned on him, and, partly from jealousy of his undoubted skill as a painter, partly from the undisguised contempt which this superior young man showed for their society, they determined to make life as unpleasant for him at Rome as possible, and succeeded in their object.

They were all wrong, of course, when they sneered at him for "an elegant young popinjay," when they declared that he could neither draw nor paint. But his personality, as it comes out in this episode, helps us to come to closer quarters with his work, and to understand the curious interweaving of its strength and weakness. A delicate taste ruled him, as the passage just quoted indicates in pointed fashion. We know that although, as we have recently had occasion to remark, he never quite rid himself of the drop of materialism in his Flemish blood, he could never, either, be less than a gentleman in his art, as in his life. Mr. Cust brings this out well whenever he speaks of Van Dyck's treatment of the nude. It is in the strongest contrast to that with which we are familiar in the work of Rubens. The latter candidly rejoiced in the flesh and never painted the undraped figure without communicating to it a certain coarseness. Van Dyck was reticent if he was not spiritual, and though there is just enough of earth in his paintings of sacred subjects to make them unacceptable to the modern imagination, he is indubitably far more refined than his great contemporary. Rubens was a more powerful painter in the strictest technical sense of the term, and a designer of greater force and originality; but he had not Van Dyck's impulse toward the transfiguration of a gross model into an image breathing purer air, even though it still had feet of clay. So much goes to the credit side in the consideration of Van Dyck; by so much are we justified in reading only a desirable meaning into the story of the painter's withdrawal from tavern bouts into the distinguished society of Rome. But there is another side to the picture. The very traits which seem at one moment to fit him for high tasks are closely allied to an Epicurean complacency which kept him from seeing that those traits were not, of themselves, sufficient for the realization of the ambitions he cherished. His refinement did not go deep enough; he had a soul above the commonplace, but it was not a



ANTHONY VAN DYCK.
(From the portrait by himself.)

tended to please, not to create surprise or wonder." The sentence is a happy one. Merely to turn these pages and to glance over the numerous photogravures with which they are illustrated is to realize how accurately Mr. Cust has expressed the matter. If we eliminate a few of the religious compositions reproduced, it is scarcely too much to say that there is no plate which is not, first and last, pleasing. As Mr. Cust says, with Van Dyck "everything unpleasant, ugly or distorted is avoided." One

peculiar advantage; England contains many superb Van Dycks, and we gather that he has had access to most of them, as has the photographer employed in the making of this book.

Van Dyck was born in 1599, which is to say in a lucky moment. In Antwerp, his native city, the arts were generously honored. The Austrian and Spanish Governors who came to the Low Countries were wealthy men, and their money flowed freely through artistic channels.



"ST. MARTIN DIVIDING HIS CLOAK."
(From the painting by Van Dyck.)