

A SONG OF LOW DEGREE.

BY MICHAEL FAIRLESS.

Lord, I am small, and yet so great,
The whole world stands to my estate,
And in Thine image I create.
The sea is mine; and the broad sky
Is mine in its immensity;
The river and the river's gold;
The earth's hid treasures manifold;
The love of creatures small and great,
Save where I reap a previous hate;
The noontide sun with hot caress,
The night with quiet loveliness,
The wind that bends the pliant trees,
The whisper of the summer breeze;
The kiss of snow and rain; the star
That shines a greeting from afar;
All, all are mine; and yet so small
Am I that lo, I needs must call,
Great King, upon the Babe in Thee,
And crave that Thou would'st give to me
The grace of Thy humility.

The New-York Tribune.

ILLUSTRATED SUPPLEMENT.

SUNDAY, MAY 28, 1905.

A Japanese critic has been talking about Western fiction to M. Gaston Donnet, and "The Academy" gives us part of the latter's report of the conversation. "Why," asked the Oriental man of letters, "is it so full of love, and of nothing else than love? . . . I wonder where your novelists and your dramatic authors go for their models in real life. It is not the drama of love, but the drama of money that is true to life." The Editor of "The Academy" is much impressed. "Decidedly," he says, "this is a new point of view." We do not see where the novelty comes in. Balzac's success in making other passions than the passion of love the pivots of many of his stories has set many of our latter day critics, and some of our novelists, to reflecting. Long ago, if we are not mistaken, Mr. Howells made a strenuous plea for the de-thronement of the love motive from its proud position as the only one considered sufficiently potential by the average romancer. He must be observing with peculiar interest the fruit his words have borne. The love motive is, of course, not excluded from our fiction, but again and again it has nowadays to share the honors with such elements as are brought in by the love of money or political power, by hatred, revenge and crime, and even by the scientific passion. Though the American Balzac is not anywhere in sight, the ambition which may some day produce him is unmistakably working in many quarters.

In that sprightly periodical, "The Reader Magazine," we find some satirical remarks on the recent movement looking to the condensation of the classics. The editor has observed the industry with which this preposterous campaign has gone forward, and waxes scornful over what is to be expected in the way of further violations of the integrity of the masters. "We have it on good authority," he says, "that huge cider-presses and cotton-gins are being installed in certain large publishing houses into which will be cast the old dramatic novels of Dickens and Thackeray, of George Eliot, of Meredith and Hardy, of Howells and James, of Washington Irving and Cooper, and out of which the masterpieces shall come neatly compressed into thin duodecimos, 'quick lunch' editions which may be read by the busiest men in one streetcar journey between their residences and their places of business." The picture is scarcely overdrawn. If we are to judge from what has already been done, there is no reason why we should not look forward to just such absurdities as those which are prophesied in the foregoing quotation. Still, we have some hope that the worst may be avoided. We like to believe that the public will, of its own motion, repudiate these monstrosities of "editing," and if this is too fond a dream, we may at any rate rely upon the publication of frequent protests from the critics. The remarks in "The Reader" offer a welcome sign of the fact that the condenser is not being allowed to pursue his deadly task unquestioned.

If there is one thing more than another which serves to revive recollection (with complete sympathy) of Lamb's desire to "feel the bumps" of the stupid official he met in Haydon's studio, it is the astounding manner in which some people talk about Thackeray. The other day a volume of "Critical Studies and Fragments" by the late S. Arthur Strong was published. It was legitimate to prepare this memorial, for though Mr. Strong was not a transcendently important person, he was a good scholar and did some excellent work in the field of art history. But it appears that he did not altogether approve of Thackeray. In his high and mighty opinion, the novelist "pointed the finger at precisely those things and people that do not matter." Now what, we wonder, were Mr. Strong's bumps like? What, in the name of all that is mysterious, is it that every now and then moves some apparently intelligent person to patronize Thackeray, of all people in the world? It is not a matter of taste. It is not a matter of opinion. To patronize Thackeray is like patronizing English literature in general. Sometimes we have thought that professional jealousy accounted for the phenomenon. Envy is capable of anything—it will even make a man act like a fool. But we give the thing up, give it up with bewilderment and with compassion.

SWINBURNE.

The First Complete Edition of His Works.

THE POEMS OF ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE. In six volumes. 8vo. pp. xxix, 314; ix, 329; viii, 383; 448; viii, 435; vii, 448. Harper & Bros.

It used to be a habit among reviewers of modern poetry to complain that no complete edition of Mr. Swinburne's works existed. An enterprising American publisher printed, in one fat volume, some years ago, most, if not all, of the poems which were then available, but that collection long since became too scarce to count. At last Mr. Swinburne decided to prepare the edition which lies before us. It is interesting because he put it together himself, and therefore gives us his work precisely as he would send it down to posterity, and because it contains a long dedicatory epistle disclosing the mood in



A. C. SWINBURNE.
(From the portrait by Watta.)

which he looks back over his long life of poetical activity. But the most important fact about these six well filled volumes is that they constitute a kind of challenge to the reader. Perhaps the latter was sealed of the tribe of Swinburne in his youth and is still faithful to his old allegiance. Perhaps the reader has always distrusted this rhapsodist of love and beauty. In either case, we fancy, the temptation to examine a little closely into the Swinburnian hypothesis could not but be strong.

By itself, and quite apart from all questions of merit or demerit, it is an extraordinary hypothesis. Swinburne began his literary career by scandalizing the oracles, but the rumpus raised by the first series of "Poems and Ballads" died down speedily enough for him to enjoy a really extended period of undisturbed repose as the pre-eminent poet of his day. Even while Tennyson and Arnold were still living there were not wanting critics ready to acclaim Swinburne as their superior, and that he has ruled unquestioned since their disappearance from the scene was shown by the adulation poured over him from many quarters when the present edition of his writings was brought out in England. It is because this fame of his is so difficult to explain that it is, we repeat, extraordinary. One thing that is certain is that, while he has lived in and for his poetry with a concentration of purpose unsurpassed in the history of letters, he has not survived by virtue of the power of poetry alone. No paradox is involved in this view of the matter. The truth would seem to be simply that this born singer was not a born poet, that the thing denied him at his birth was the accent which distinguishes the poet from all other created beings.

Nothing could be more futile than to attempt to define that accent, or, for that matter, to describe it. But nothing could be easier than to indicate where specimens of it may be found. Turn to a passage in Shakespeare or to a song of Herrick; turn to one of Milton's sonnets or to one of the odes of Keats; turn to one of Byron's finer things or to one of Landor's least ambitious gems, and you have the touchstone which will serve to expose Swinburne's lack of the divine fire. Is it the tense gravity of Milton that he wants, or is it the lyric rapture of Herrick? In saying that it is not either of these gifts we do not imply that he possesses them, but rather that he is without the central driving force of poetry which we recognize as breathing life into the prevailing note of Milton and into that of Herrick, and, as it were, ratifying both. We do not feel, in other words, that Swinburne has ever been wholly in the hands of an indwelling dæmon; that he has yielded himself up to a kind of sublime passion, allowing the spirit of poetry to speak through his lips. We would say that self-consciousness had been his bane, if we did not have the case of Byron to prove that a man may be profoundly self-conscious and yet write immortal verse. No, the trouble with Swinburne lies deeper, and, if we might hazard a guess, we would say that it is to be sought in the excessively literary character of his point of view.

It has been customary to assume, from his

amazing facility and especially from his command over the resources of rhythm, that Swinburne is one of those poets who sing because they cannot help themselves. Read him in bulk, so to say; saturate yourself in his characteristic mood and manner, and it is odds that you will find him, above all things, a craftsman; not a poet laboring in the throes of inspiration and flinging beauty from him as the swimmer flings phosphorescence from his shoulders as he cleaves the sea, but a consummate master of technique, a juggler playing with effects. The test of a work of literature is, after all, simplicity itself. Can a poem be read a second time, and reread, and reread again, with a sense of deep delight, like that of drinking cold water in the middle of the desert? Swinburne cannot even begin to stand this test. He charms, but the charm fades. There are moments when one is almost convinced that Swinburne is superb—almost, but not quite. He has such splendid assurance, his technique is so surpassingly brilliant, that it seems something like disrespect to take his verses lightly. But how otherwise are we to take the verses of a writer in whom the intellect and the senses are so ill balanced that words seem to act upon him like drugs, shaking his nerves and luring him to rhetorical excesses utterly inimical to the preservation of the original motive? If anything were needed to enforce the point we might find sufficient warrant for our opinion in the curious uniformity of the great mass of verse contained in these volumes—a uniformity impossible to a man possessing the principle of growth. Swinburne has tried many forms, he has written lyrics and he has written plays, but none of the fruits of his fondness for experimentation seem to express a state of soul so much as a state of mind; and Swinburne's mind, no matter how colored by the emotion of the moment, has always appeared to be the mind of a diabolically clever literary man, rejoicing in the exercise of his skill. In his dedicatory epistle, which, we regret to say, is a terribly inflated piece of prose, he remarks:

The half brained creature to whom books are other than living things may see with the eyes of a bat and draw with the fingers of a mole his dullard's distinction between books and life; those who live the fuller life of a higher animal than he know that books are to poets as much part of that life as pictures are to painters or as music is to musicians, dead matter though they may be to the spiritually stillborn children of dirt and dullness who find it possible and natural to live while dead in heart and brain. Marlowe and Shakespeare, Æschylus and Sappho, do not for us live only on the dusty shelves of libraries.

No, they are children of nature, these great ones, and to those who understand them at all, they are as much a part of life as the very air we breathe. But somehow it is not as a child of nature that Mr. Swinburne seems to have looked for inspiration at the feet of his glorious predecessors. He has written his poems, not lived them, and though he has written, sometimes, like an angel, our consciousness of his feet of clay will not down. Least of all will it leave us



ALEXANDRE D'ARBLAY.
(From a crayon drawing.)

when we consider him, as on the present occasion, at full length. As he says himself:

A month or twain to live on honeycomb
Is pleasant; but one tires of scented time,
Cold sweet recurrence of accepted rhyme.

In plain English, a little of Swinburne goes a long way. For a while the color and the movement of his verse carry us along, but then the languorous airs become suffocating, the sensuous sweetness cloy, and in the midst of all these heroic postpositives we sigh for one clear, piercing strain of noble passion. We remember again a sonnet of Milton's, and wonder once more at the durability of the Swinburnian hypothesis.

THE STUART KINGS.

From Notes and Queries.

The family name of the Stuarts was originally, as Mr. Bayley observes, Fitzalan. The original Walter Fitzalan (brother of the ancestor of the Dukes of Norfolk) was Lord High Steward of Scotland, and from this circumstance his branch of the family appears to have adopted the name of Stewart. When the change began is not certain, but it was probably not later than the time of Alexander, the great-grandson of Walter Fitzalan, for both his sons—James (the grandfather of Robert II and all the Scottish Stewart kings) and John (the ancestor of Lord Darnley)—appear to have borne the name of Stewart.

FANNY BURNEY.

The Novelist at Court and at Home.

DIARY AND LETTERS OF MADAME D'ARBLAY. (1778-1840.) As Edited by Her Niece, Charlotte Barrett. With Preface and Notes by Austin Dobson. Vol. IV., pp. 510; Vol. V., pp. 524. The Macmillan Company.

These volumes of Fanny Burney's inimitable diary carry the author of "Evelina" through the greater part of her service as Queen Charlotte's "reader" and through the record of her courtship and of the earlier years of her married life. Surely no other attendant at court was ever at once so frank and so discreet in narrative as this clever Fanny. George III and his family live in these pages—one can almost hear the piteous babble of the King in his sudden insanity calling out and protesting all night long among his bewildered courtiers, and see the pale, dishevelled Queen in the next room, listening in silent misery. Whatever the situation, Fanny paints it with the hand of a woman of taste, conscience and impregnable loyalty. If some of her phrases are rather too obsequious, it must be admitted that it was the fashion of her time. One of her most amusing stories is that of the way in which a stout little republican girl is converted into a monarchist by a passing notice on the terrace from the "good King" and the "sweet Queen." Fanny's too flowery phrases may be forgiven for the sake of their strain of genuine awe and genuine affection.

She would have been hard hearted indeed if she had not responded to the kindness with which she was treated. On the part of the King it was a kindness almost touching in its anxiety to be instant and appropriate. To make sure that Miss Burney was comfortable, to inquire after those who were dearest to her, to question her endlessly about her novel and the interesting circumstances connected with it—it is in this considerate attitude that George III is made to appear most amiable by his wife's attendant. If Charlotte seems less so, it is because she was bred up in theories of etiquette of a Teutonic severity, and was conscious of no reason why her ladies should not undergo racking fatigues in her service. She was, on the whole, a gentle and benignant friend to her novelist, and it is, perhaps, a testimony, in a certain sense, to her goodness of heart that she failed to see the tyranny with which her faithful old German attendant, Mrs. Schwellenberg, made wretched Fanny's life at court. This formality and blindness aside, she was a lovable woman, and did many pleasant things for her reader. We see her in the diary as a person of some literary taste. She apparently kept up with all the new books, encouraged her daughters to read, and liked to discuss authors and their works. There is not much evidence that little Fanny enjoyed the sermons which the Queen recommended to her—otherwise she dutifully played her part as the chief literary element in the royal existence.

We could so ill spare the diary that we may conclude it was worth the sacrifice of her time and strength during the years when she might have written an even better book than "Evelina." Most of her friends lamented the position into which the ambition of Papa Burney had driven her; they thought it a cruel waste of capacities which should have been given to literature. But we are inclined to think that as a novelist Fanny had shot her bolt, and that the badness of her subsequent imaginative writings was not due either to her distractions and fatigues as a Bedchamber woman or to her after absorption in domestic life. At any rate the diary is more valuable as a transcript of Georgian life than another "Evelina" could be. It is an inexhaustible storehouse of shrewd and humorous characterization.

Of Fanny's romance with her handsome French emigré it is always pleasant to read. General d'Arblay was a good man as well as a charming one, a modest and true hearted gentleman, and Fanny was a fortunate spouse. Those were happy years in the rustic cottage when big Alexander dug and planted their garden, when little Alexander's perfections filled the rest of the horizon, and the wife and mother toiled at her writing table for the wherewithal to maintain this mild prosperity. The best title to remembrance which "Camilla" possesses is that it brought to the little ménage the sum of £4,000. That was something remarkable in those days, and was largely due to the fact that the sale was by subscription, the books for signatures being in the charge of women of eminent standing. Most of the praises of "Camilla" were forced or perfunctory, and nobody will now dispute Walpole's severe judgment. He does not care to say how little he likes it he writes in a letter to Hannah More. "This author knew the world and penetrated characters before she had stepped over the threshold; and now she has seen so much of it, she has little or no insight at all." Fanny's diary and letters show that in the real world her insight was as keen as ever, but her creative instinct had failed.

VICTORS.

Speak, History! Who are life's victors? Unroll thy long annals and say
Are they those whom the world called the victors,
Who won the success of a day?
The Martyrs or Nero? The Spartans who fell
at Thermopylae's trust,
Or the Persians and Xerxes? His judges or
Socrates, Pilate or Christ?