

KIND ROBIN LO'ES ME.

BY LADY NAIRNE.

Robin is my ain gudeman,  
Now match him, carlins, gin ye can,  
For ilk ane whitest thinks her swan,  
But kind Robin lo'es me.  
To mak' my boast I'll e'en be bauld,  
For Robin lo'ed me young and auld,  
In simmer's heat, and winter's cauld,  
My kind Robin lo'es me.

Robin he comes hame at e'en,  
Wi' pleasure glancin' in his een;  
He tells me a' he's heard and seen,  
And syne how he lo'es me.  
There's some ha'e land, and some ha'e gowd,  
Mair wad ha'e them gin they cou'd,  
But a' I wish o' world's gude  
Is Robin aye to lo'e me.

The New-York Tribune.

SUNDAY, MAY 30, 1909.

There is a rare streak of affection running through the anecdotes of George Meredith which are finding their way into print. Plainly he was a man to be loved, a genius with few if any irritabilities. His friends record that his light hearted gaiety was irrepressible, and he is quoted as saying to a visitor, in his seventy-fourth year, "I do not feel to be growing old either in heart or mind. I still look on life with a young man's eye." He hoped that he would keep his intellect and his warm sympathies unweakened down to the end, and it is good to know that his wish was granted. One who knew him for many years, humorously noting that he had described her as "the most conventional woman he ever met," sends to the London "Times" these impressions:

He was exceedingly fond of fun, and to tease people in a friendly, good natured way was to him a keen source of delight. He often used to say that he could not tolerate those who had no sense of humor, and after a merry bout with a friend he would exclaim, "He's all right; he can take a joke." One youth, I remember, who posed as a pessimist and often talked about "vanitas vanitatem" and "dust and ashes," exceedingly amused Mr. Meredith, and, like everyone else he liked, was soon accorded the honor of a pet name. . . . To music, especially that of Mozart and Beethoven, he was devoted. . . . Of the novelist's art he repeatedly used to say that characters should be evolved out of the inner consciousness, and of those who in contemporary novels were drawn from life he would speak with contempt. . . . He talked of his characters as if they were live people, and would often emphasize a point by quoting some of their remarks, and adding "As the Admiral would say" and so on.

There has already been much critical writing about Meredith's work. Like Browning, he has had his devoted interpreters, several of whom have published books on their idol. In these and in recent summaries of his career stress is rightly laid upon the spiritual and philosophic foundations on which he rested his art. It is interesting also to reflect upon the diversity of his experiences. He was never a merely bookish man of letters. He had an instinct for public affairs which made him in his time a journalist of authority. The London "Times" reveals, by the way, the fact that back in the sixties negotiations were set on foot for his appointment as correspondent of that paper either in Vienna or in Paris. We may not regret that nothing came of the project, which, if successful, would perhaps have lessened the number of his novels. Yet it touches the imagination to think of George Meredith in the place of Blowitz. One lingers, too, on the idea of what long years in the French capital might have done to influence his style. The intimate friend quoted above recalls that "French art, literature, especially Rabelais, and cooking he praised with great enthusiasm." Paris might have transformed him in some important particulars, leaving his inspiration unchanged but purifying and strengthening him in matters of form. It is a pleasing though idle speculation.

The difficulties of the novelist who would turn playwright form an old story. He must learn a new technique, and in acquiring it he is hampered as well as helped by the old one. He faces the task, however, without prejudice, seeing no reason why he should not have two strings to his bow. In curious contrast to this attitude is the one held by some writers in Paris not so many years ago, and lately described by M. Paul Bourget in the following letter:

At the time when I was entering upon a literary life, we all adopted a regular cult for the art of the novel, which was only equalled by our disdain for the art of the theatre; and we had no difficulty in showing what differences there were between the paintings of a Balzac, a Flaubert, a Goncourt, and those of their dramatic rivals. Our immediate successors, Zola, Daudet and Ferdinand Fabre, thought as we did, and about 1880 all the youthful French exponents of literature seemed to be novelists exclusively. The wind has turned since then, and there has been an extraordinary growth of dramatic works, which shows how foolish was our former disdain of the dialogue form. And, judging from signs, it seems to be the other form—the narrative—against which the injustice of the newcomers is being levelled.

The current craze for the writing of plays is not, of course, necessarily inimical to the existence of a "regular cult for the art of the novel." There will always be writers of fiction happily content with the practice, and rewards, of their work. Nevertheless, the reaction of the stage upon the novel, which is every day growing more noticeable, is not by any means invariably a source of gratification to the fastidious reader.

YORICK.

A Charming Drawn Portrait of Laurence Sterne.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF LAURENCE STERNE. By Wilbur Cross. Illustrated. 8vo, pp. xv, 555. The Macmillan Company.

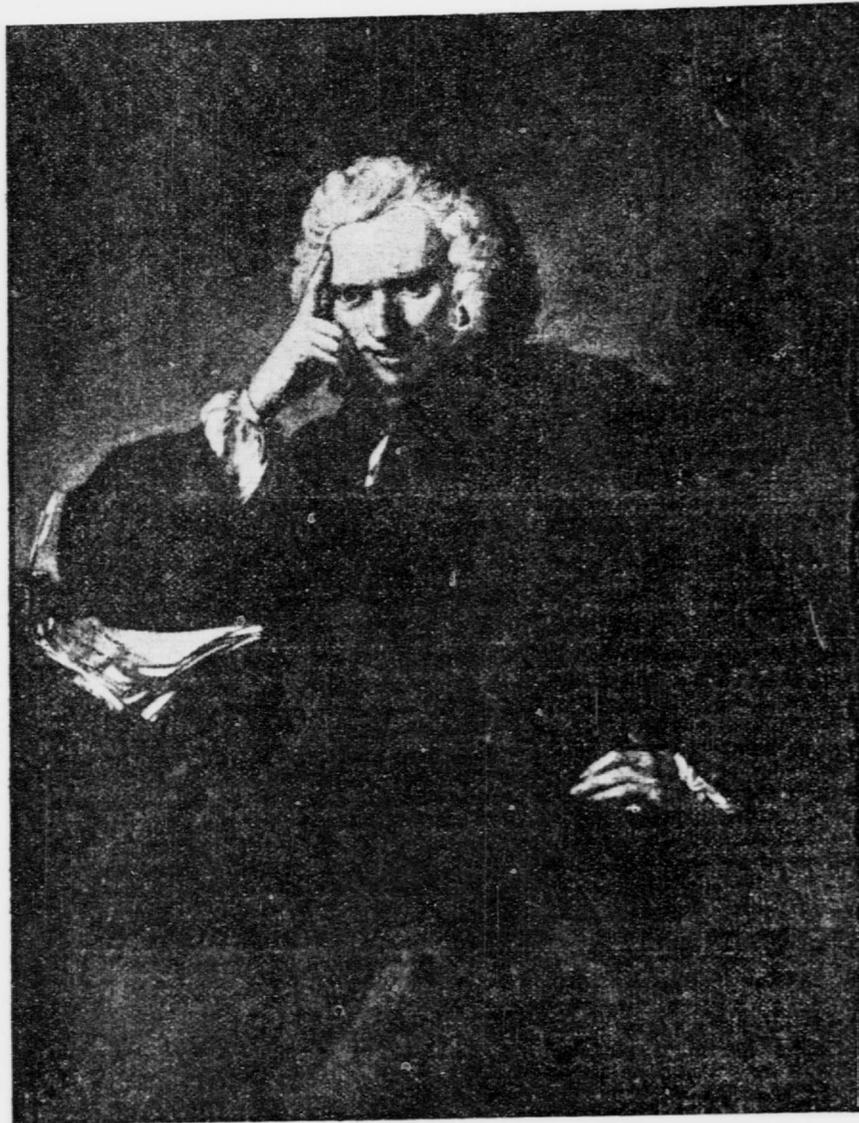
When Laurence Sterne came up to London to enjoy the triumph of "Tristram Shandy" one of the journalistic gossips of the day undertook to make him known to those circles not fortunate enough to be visited by the new celebrity himself. "I think," said this chronicler, "he is the only man of whom many speak well and of whom nobody speaks ill. . . . Everybody is curious to see the author, and when they see him everybody loves the man." Sterne, in short, was nothing if not a personality, a vivid, engaging figure, a creature of originality. It is in his constant recognition of this fact that Professor Cross most clearly shows his authority as Sterne's biographer. He has got under his hero's skin. This is, indeed, a book making for

living." Elsewhere he notes that "human nature among all classes intensely interested him." There you have the key to Laurence Sterne, a man eagerly inquisitive about his fellows, vying with emotion at contact with them and impelled by his "daemon" to develop his reflections on their traits in wild gusts of humor. He had in him the *flair* of the witty plagiarist, and you may easily enough trace the thoughts of other men here and there in his writings. But the essential Sterne, the immortal spark in him, you cannot trace to any other classic, not even to the Rabelais by whom he was so obviously influenced. Read him pedantically, and you may become deeply interested in his literary origins. Read him in the light of this book, and you will think only of his individual essence.

Professor Cross is admirably illuminating in his sketch of Sterne's youth, his early marriage and his settlement as a country parson. His resources were pitifully slender, yet the burden on his shoulders was eased by his whimsical turn of mind. Repairing his modest home, he drew up an account of the expenditures involved and closed the document in this droll fashion: "Spent in Shaping the Rooms, Plas-

tram Shandy, the dregs of nonsense, have universally met the contempt they deserve: genius may be exhausted;—I see that folly's invention may be so, too." But by the time the forces of disparagement were to come into play Sterne had been steeled against them by the applause of a host of new friends. Against the ill will of Walpole or Dr. Johnson he could always cite the praise of other judges not by any means to be despised. Garrick took him to his heart. Reynolds insisted upon painting his portrait, and would take no fee. There was nothing in the smallest degree naive about Sterne, yet one discerns a sort of childlike glee in his exclamations over the petting he got in London society. Writing to Miss Fourmantelle, he says, "From Morning to night my Lodgings, which, by the by, are the genteelst in Town, are full of the greatest Company," and a list of those who entertained him would make a calendar of the distinguished figures of his time. How did he carry himself in all this brilliant company? He gained a mixed repute. As his experience widened he became more and more the clever man of the world, but he was ever a wit, and his not infrequent fantasticality in that role would seem to have caused some of his contemporaries to think of him, a little slightly, as just a chartered jester. What would one not give to observe at first hand such jesting!

It is put forward sufficiently in this book, but one reason why Professor Cross is especially to be commended is that he contrives, without at all forcing the point, to exhibit the unconscious pathos of Sterne's history. The very superabundance of humor in "Tristram Shandy," its raciness and its freedom, which did so much to win the author partisans, contributed also to inflame the dullards, and they found plenty of bitter things to say about the parson who could indulge in such literary vivacities. His marriage, too, had proved a failure, and to make matters worse Sterne was a notably frail consumptive, battling with ill health all his life long. He needed those quick spirits of his to carry him through periods of suffering and depression. In his domestic relations he was, perhaps, a facile sentimentalist rather than a man of profound and tenacious feeling. He was altogether too susceptible to the charms of the ladies, and his various flirtations are no doubt to be regretted. Decidedly Sterne was not a model of what a parson should have been, even in his easy-going age. Nevertheless, as Professor Cross remarks, "it would be unjust to charge Sterne with gross immoralities, for there was nothing of the beast about the sublimated Yorick." He seems a lightly irresponsible but never a corrupt type. In his least engaging levities he excites compassion rather than scorn, and mostly his behavior, as he goes feverishly up and down the world, seems harmless enough. When fate sent him into the Church he did his duty there according to his lights. It was not his fault if fate had stumbled, if he was actually intended to write "Tristram Shandy" and "A Sentimental Journey," and to make himself agreeable among the kindred spirits of London and Paris. Though it is impossible to take him in any large heroic sense, though you cannot think of him as a "great" man, he was gallant and indomitable, after his fashion, faulty but somehow not unlovable. Professor Cross neither extenuates Sterne's shortcomings nor places undue emphasis on his better traits. He seeks, rather, to give his portrait a just balance. In accomplishing this he has made a serviceable as well as a charming book. The reader who wishes to apprehend a famous sentimentalist without sentimentality will find in these pages precisely the aid that he seeks.



LAURENCE STERNE.  
(From the portrait by Reynolds.)

NOVELS IN ENGLAND.

From The London Nation.

The six-shilling novel, which has weathered a number of storms during the last few years, is at last in serious danger. Two movements in the publishing world threaten its existence. We understand that one enterprising firm of publishers is about to issue new novels at two shillings or half a crown. It is difficult to see how this price can give a profit to both author and publisher, but, if the policy succeeds, the six-shilling novel will certainly be driven out of the market. On the other hand, a movement energetically led by Mr. Eveleigh Nash seeks to raise the price of novels to half a guinea. Mr. Nash's plan is meeting with a good deal of support, and is likely to have a far reaching effect on literary production. The trouble, of course, with novels is that too many of them are published, so that works of real merit are drowned in the flood of inferior stuff. This has long been recognized both by publishers and authors, but of late the trouble has been so acute that the present system cannot continue. Mr. Nash points out that the old three-volume novel was an excellent sifter. The more expensive form made publishers more critical in deciding about a manuscript, and a novel which failed in a small library edition was not reprinted. The same function would be performed if novels were issued in the first place at half a guinea, and then in cheaper form if there was a sufficient demand. In the mean time several publishers are declining all contracts until the matter is settled.

A QUEER STATEMENT.

From Notes and Queries.

Things modern are becoming more and more bewildering to an Early Victorian. Of a lady who is now giving a performance in dream-dancing at the Palace Theatre "The Morning Post" of April 9 remarks: "Brought up as a Calvinist, she early suffered from headaches, and developed a very poor and polysyllabic state of health."

I did not know that any connection had been traced between headaches and Calvinism; or that the use of long words connoted any particular physical condition. One imagines that "purfly" Dr. Johnson, his antetype Holofernes, and many another must have felt what this implies. Of a certain dignitary I heard it remarked that he never used a word of five syllables when he could find one of six.

a better understanding of its subject. That "bundle of sensations" which was Sterne, full of contradictions and presenting the gravest difficulties to the student, cannot withstand the present author's searching but always sympathetic analysis. Quietly, steadily and with a delightful poise, a delightful freedom from the foibles of the latter-day compiler of memoirs, Professor Cross discloses the characteristics and the incidents which make his hero attractive and that hero's career singularly picturesque and interesting. American scholarship sometimes has a way of taking itself too seriously, sacrificing to science what is meant for art. Professor Cross has plenty of scholarship, but he writes first and last as a man of letters. He has produced a portrait of Sterne no less artistic than veracious.

It shows, to begin with, a right instinct for the man, and with this a sure command over perspective. If Sterne is here painted for his own sake he is also studied with reference to his surroundings. The background is filled in with uncommon good judgment. We see Sterne more intimately through seeing him among his friends. We breathe the air of the eighteenth century and are helped to perceive its reaction upon the temperament of one of the most impressionable of human beings. Best of all, we are made to feel the central genuineness of poor Yorick, the curious sincerity underlying that volatile and freakish nature. Sterne himself attributed his originality "to one of those delicate organizations in which predominates the sacred informing principle of the soul, that immortal flame which nourishes life and devours it at the same time, and which exalts and varies, in sudden and unexpected ways, all sensations." Professor Cross goes to the root of the matter in fewer words when he says simply that "no man ever possessed so keen a zest for

ting. Underdrawing & Jobbery—God knows what," leaving a long space for the figures to be placed against this entry. That was very like Sterne. He could smile over most of the troubles of life. Imaginative as he was, too, he could, in his haphazard way, pay due attention to practical things. He tried his fortunes as a farmer, and Professor Cross alludes to divers purchases of land, all undertaken with a profitable end in view. Of course, he never really achieved anything like solid prosperity. Time brought its revenges. The success of "Tristram Shandy" secured him money and advancement. But he was the last man in the world to smooth his own path by the exercise of common sense, prudence or any of the humdrum virtues. What he gained he gained chiefly by flashes of genius. He never organized his talents or his affairs. He had a desultory habit. We read of his dabbling in the painter's art, in the intervals of his work as priest or farmer; we know that he was a keen reader and that he was something of a sportsman. But more particularly we conceive of him as a connoisseur of sensations, presently gathering up the threads of his life and exploiting them in pages composed not so much out of a constructive purpose as from an overpowering impulse toward self-expression. Professor Cross very aptly and skillfully brings fragments of "Tristram Shandy" into his narrative. The process is readily justified. Sterne's book is autobiographical in a spiritual sense, even when it does not rest in matter of fact fashion upon episodes in his personal experience.

It warms the heart to read the familiar story of his triumph. "I wrote," he said, "not to be fed but to be famous," and his reception in London when the first instalment of his book was out must have satisfied his most sanguine longings. There was much antagonism before him. Horace Walpole was by and by to write that "the second and third volumes of 'Tris-