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CERTAIN TENDENCIES IN CURRENT LITERATURE.

I.

The somewhat desultory conflict which is now being waged in the literary field between "realism" and "idealism" is a most doubtful and subtle one; for there are few realists who have no ideality, and few idealists, few romanticists, who do not make use of the real. Shakspeare was somewhat of a romanticist; somewhat of an idealist; and yet what realist of our day cuts deeper into the actual than he? In what realist of to-day can we find, for instance, a closer piece of observation than his where he speaks of the sleep that weighs down the eye-lids of the woman who nurses a child? And yet Shakspeare gives this exquisite touch of reality lightly, as a simile. Cleopatra has placed the deadly aspick to her breast and is sinking into the oblivion of death:

" Peace, peace !
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep ? "

Where, likewise, in all literature is there a more sublime and constant idealist, a more remorseless realist, than the great Tuscan poet-politician?

The fact is that all art is a selection. There is no *real* real in literature; and the world will have its own opinion of the taste and art of a writer who is swamped by the commonplace, or who betrays an engrossing love for the unlovely. Every writer must draw the

THE VICISSITUDES OF A PALACE.

IN the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and thirty-two, when Dickens was a short-hand reporter in the House of Commons, and Thackeray an art student seeking employment for his pencil or his pen; when Scott was vainly nerving his paralyzed hand to grasp the wizard's wand once more, and Lamb was writing his *Last Essays of Elia*; when Coleridge was uttering his oracles in the garden at Highgate, and Carlyle was wrestling with poverty and the devil at Craigenputtock; when Macaulay and Jeffrey were in Parliament, Landor in Italy, holding imaginary conversations with the spirits of the mighty dead, and Wordsworth at Rydal Mount, reclining upon the dry laurels of his Ecclesiastical Sonnets; when Leigh Hunt's poems had been collected and published by private subscription, and "Barry Cornwall's" songs had reached their second edition—in this somewhat barren and uncertain interval of English literature, the poetical reputation of Mr. Alfred Tennyson, undergraduate of the University of Cambridge, was trembling in the balance of Criticism.

Criticism with a large C, you will please to observe; for the day of their mighty Highnesses, the Reviewers, was not yet past. Seated upon their lofty thrones in London and Edinburgh, they weighed the pretensions of all new-comers into their realms with severity if not with impartiality, and measured out praise and blame with a royal hand. Nowadays the aspiring author receives a sort of homœopathic treatment, small doses and much diluted, in many "book notices"—little things which, if they are unfavorable, hardly hurt more than pin-pricks, and if they are favorable, hardly help more than gentle pats upon the head. But in those ruder times it was either the accolade or decapitation. Few years had passed since one young poet had been literally slain by a review article, and though the terrible Gifford had done his last book, there were other men, like Wilson and Croker and Lockhart, who understood the art of speedy despatch. *Blackwood* and the *Quarterly* still clothed themselves with Olympian thunder,

"And that two-handed engine at their door,
Stood ready to smite once and smite no more."

Against their tyrannical sway some few daring spirits ventured to set up standards of revolt; the *Westminster Review*, Leigh Hunt's *Tatler*, the *Athenæum*, and the short-lived *Englishman's Magazine*, these and others were organs of the new school, and at their hands the writer who had endured scorn and buffeting from the conservatives might hope to receive a warm defence. Between these two hostile forces Mr. Alfred Tennyson had made his appearance in 1830 with a slim volume of *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*. The *Westminster* hailed him with discretion as a true poet. Leigh Hunt praised the longest of the poems as one which "Crashaw might have written in a moment of scepticism had he possessed vigor enough." Arthur Hallam—bright, prophetic soul—presented his friend to the world as "one of the faithful Islâm, a poet in the truest and highest sense." Then came the counterblast. "Christopher North," hardest of all hard hitters, took up the new poet in *Blackwood*, and administered severe castigation. Mingling a little condescending encouragement with his blame, and holding out the hope that if "Alfred" would only reform his style and get rid of his Cockney admirers he might some day accomplish something, the stern magister sets to work in the mean time to demolish the dainty lyrics. Drivel, and more dismal drivel, and even more dismal drivel, is what he calls them; and in concluding his remarks upon "The Owl" he says: "Alfred is the greatest owl; all he wants is to be shot, stuffed, and stuck in a glass case, to be made immortal in a museum."

Boom! said the cannon. Off with his head! Or, at least, let him keep it out of sight until he has changed the cut of his hair and put himself into a shape which is acceptable to the authorities. He has failed in his first attempt; but something is to be forgiven to his youth. Now he is on trial. Alfred, beware!

Six months after this, in December, 1832, Mr. Tennyson put forth his second volume. One hundred and sixty-three pages, thirty poems. I hold the rare little book in my hand now, with Barry Cornwall's autograph on the title-page and his pencil marks running all along the margins.

It was evident at once that the poet had not changed his tune at the command of the reviewer. Deeper and stronger were his notes, more manly and of a wider range; but there were still the same delicacy of imagination, the same lyrical freedom, the same exquisite and unconventional choice of words, and the same peculiar blending of the classic and the romantic, which have become

so familiar that we can hardly realize how fresh and strange they must have seemed to the readers of half a century ago. It was clear that this young man was moving along the same path in which Keats had begun to tread, and might go beyond him, might become to a certain extent the founder of a new school of English poetry. He must be dealt with mildly but firmly. And this time it was not "rusty Christopher," but a more dangerous critic, who undertook the task. Lockhart, the editor of the *Quarterly*, sometimes called the "scorpion," because of a certain peculiarity in the latter end of his articles, has generally been credited with the authorship of the review of Tennyson's poems which was published in July, 1833.

It is conceived in a spirit of ironical praise. The reviewer begins with an apology for never having seen Mr. Tennyson's first volume, and proposes to repair his unintentional neglect by introducing to the admiration of sequestered readers "a new prodigy of genius, another and a brighter star of that galaxy or *milky way* of poetry of which the lamented Keats was the harbinger." He proceeds to offer what he calls "a tribute of unmingled approbation," and, selecting a few specimens of Mr. Tennyson's singular genius, "to point out now and then the peculiar brilliancy of some of the gems that irradiate his poetical crown." This means, in plain words, to hold up the whole performance to ridicule by commending its weakest points in extravagant mock-laudation, and passing over its best points in silence. A method more exasperating and unfair can hardly be imagined; and the worst of it was that the critic's keenness led him to strike with almost unerring accuracy upon the real blemishes of the book. His "unmingled approbation" was a thousand times more severe than old Christopher's blunt and often clumsy condemnation. It was as if one had praised Pope for his amiable temper, or Wordsworth for the brilliancy of his wit.

The effect of this review upon the public we can only conjecture. But if the present scarcity of the volume is any indication, this edition of Tennyson's poems must have been a small one; and it was not until 1835 that John Stuart Mill, in the *Westminster Review*, attempted to create a better estimate of the real value of the book.

But upon the poet himself the effect was clearly marked. For ten years he was almost entirely silent, and when his next book appeared, in 1842, the force of Lockhart's criticisms was acknowledged in the most practical way. Five of the poems which had been most severely ridiculed were dropped altogether; and in the others almost

all of the blemishes which had been pointed out were removed. The miller's *mealy face*,

" Like the moon in an ivytod,"

the *water-rat* plunging into the stream, and the *gummy chestnut-buds* had vanished from the "Miller's Daughter." The grave accent over the *e*, in *charmèd* and similar words, was gone. And in the "Lady of Shalott," *tirra lirra* no longer did duty as a rhyme to *river*.

But the most numerous and the most important changes were made in "The Palace of Art," the longest and, in many respects, the most significant poem in the volume. And I cannot think of any more profitable way to study the development of Tennyson's genius and the growth of his distinctive style, than to trace the vicissitudes of this "Palace" as it appears in its earliest and its later forms.

The poem is an allegory—a vision of spiritual truth. Its meaning is clearly defined in the dedication to an unnamed friend. Its object is to exhibit a gifted but sinful soul, in its endeavors to live in selfish solitude and enjoy the most refined and consummate pleasures this earth can afford, without regard to the interests or the sufferings of the great world of mankind. The lesson which the poet desires to teach is that such a life must be a failure and carry its punishment within itself. It is an æsthetic protest against æstheticism. But it is worthy of notice that, while the dedication in the first edition was addressed to a member of the æsthetic class—

" You are an artist, and will understand
Its many lesser meanings,"—

in the second edition this line has disappeared. It is as if the poet desired to give a wider range to his lesson; as if he would say, "You are a man, and no matter what your occupation may be, you will feel the truth of this allegory."

This first alteration is characteristic. It shows us the change which had passed upon Tennyson's feelings and purposes during those eventful ten years of silence. He had grown broader and deeper. He was no longer content to write for a small and select circle of readers. His sympathies were larger and more humane. He began to feel that he had a country, and patriotism inspired him to write for England. He began to feel that the lives of common men and women are full of material for poetry, and philanthropy inspired him to speak as a man to his fellow men. This change, coming somewhere in the years when he was feeling the

effects of his first great personal sorrow, the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, transformed Tennyson from the poet of a coterie into a true poet of the people. "The Palace of Art," even in its first form, was a prophecy of this change; but in its subsequent alterations we can trace the power of this broader and more humane spirit to mould the very form of the poet's work and make it more perfect.

The Palace which the poet built for his soul is described as standing on a lofty table-land, secure and inaccessible, for the first object sought was to dwell apart from the world. Then follows, in the original edition, a description of its long-sounding corridors,

"Roofed with thick plates of green and orange glass,
Ending in stately rooms."

In the second edition the architect's good taste has discarded this conservatory effect and these curiously assorted colors. He inserts instead a plan of the surroundings of the Palace, with its four great courts and its foaming fountains, its smooth lawns and branching cloisters. He draws a gilded parapet around the roof, and shows the distant prospect of the landscape. In following this order he has given reality and dignity to his structure, made it seem less like a picture-gallery, and more like a royal mansion.

Then he leads the soul through the different rooms, and describes the tapestries on the walls. As the poem stood at first these included the Madonna, Venus Anadyomene, St. Cecily, Arthur in the valley of Avilion, Kriemhilt pouring the Nibelungen gold into the Rhine, Europa, with her hand grasping the golden horn of the bull, and Ganymede borne upward by the eagle, together with landscapes of forest and pasture, sea-coast, mountain-glen, and woodlands, interspersed with gardens and vineyards. When the Palace was changed, Venus and Kriemhilt disappeared, and Europa occupied a smaller place. Pictures of Numa and his wise wood-nymphs, Indian Cama seated on his summer throne, and the porch of Mohammed's Paradise thronged with houris, were added. And among the landscapes there were two new scenes, one of cattle feeding by a river, and another of reapers at their sultry toil.

The soul pauses here, in the first edition, and indulges in a little rhapsody on the evolution of the intellect. This disappears in the second edition, and we pass directly from the chambers hung with arras into the great hall, the central apartment of the Palace. Here the architect had gathered, at first, a collection of portraits

of great men which was so catholic in its taste as to be almost motley. Lockhart laughed most derisively when he saw the group. "Milton, Shakspeare, Dante, Homer, Michael Angelo, Martin Luther, Francis Bacon, Cervantes, Calderon, King David, the Halicarnassean (quære, which of them?), Alfred himself (presumably not the poet),

" ' Isaiah with fierce Ezekiel,
Swarth Moses by the Coptic sea,
Plato, Petrarca, Livy, and Raphaël,
And eastern Confutzee.' "

This reminds the critic of a verse in that Doric poem, "The Groves of Blarney," and he wonders whether Mr. Tennyson was not thinking of the Blarney collection—

" Statues growing that noble place in
Of heathen goddesses most rare ;
Homer, Plutarch, and Nebuchadnezzar,
All standing naked in the open air."

But in the revised Palace all these have been left out, except the first four, and the architect has added a great

" mosaic choicely plann'd
With cycles of the human tale
Of this wide world, the times of every land
So wrought, they will not fail.

" The people here, a beast of burden slow,
Toil'd onward, prick'd with goads and stings ;
Here play'd a tiger, rolling to and fro
The heads and crowns of kings ;

" Here rose an athlete, strong to break or bind
All force in bonds that might endure,
And here once more like some sick man declin'd
And trusted any cure."

This mosaic covered the floor, and over these symbols of struggling humanity the vainglorious soul trod proudly as she went up to take her throne between the shining windows on which the faces of Plato and Verulam were blazoned. In the first edition there was a gorgeous description of the banquet with which she regaled herself ; piles of flavorful fruits, musk-scented blooms, ambrosial pulps and juices, graceful chalices of curious wine, and a service of costly jars and bossed salvers. Thus she feasted in solitary state, and

" ere young night divine
Crowned dying day with stars,

“ Making sweet close of his delicious toils,
 She lit white streams of dazzling gas,
 And soft and fragrant flames of precious oils
 In moons of purple glass.”

This was written when the use of gas for illuminating purposes was new, and not considered unromantic. When the Palace was remodelled the gas was turned off, and the supper was omitted. The soul was lifted above mere sensual pleasures, and sat listening to her own song and rejoicing in her royal seclusion.

From this point onward, through the swift verses which describe the blight of loneliness and self-loathing which fell upon the mistress of the Palace, her repentance, and her retreat to a cottage in the vale, where she might weep and pray and purge her guilt, there are but few alterations in the poem. But there is one which is very significant. I mean the late addition of those verses (of which there is no trace either in 1833 or in 1842) which describe the contempt and hatred of the soul toward the common people, and her complete separation from all their interests:

“ O God-like isolation which art mine,
 I can but count thee perfect gain,
 What time I watch the darkening droves of swine
 That range on yonder plain.

“ In filthy sloughs they roll a prurient skin,
 They graze and wallow, breed and sleep ;
 And oft some brainless devil enters in,
 And drives them to the deep.”

These lines are most essential to the understanding of the poem. They touch the very heart of the sin which defiled the Palace and destroyed the soul's happiness. It was not merely that she loved music and beauty and fragrance ; but that in her love for these she lost her moral sense, denied her human duties, and scorned, instead of pitying and helping, those who lived on the plain below her.

Selfish pride is the mother of the worst kind of pessimism, a pessimism which despairs because it despises. This is the unpardonable sin which makes its own hell. And this is the lesson which Tennyson, in the maturity of his powers has wished to emphasize by adding these verses to “The Palace of Art.”

There are a great many minor alterations scattered through the

poem, which I have not time to notice. Some of them are mere changes of spelling, like Avilion, which becomes Avalon; and Cecily, which is changed to Cicely in 1842, and back again to Cecily in later editions; and sweet Europa's mantle, which at first "blew unclasped," and then lost its motion and got a touch of color, becoming "blue, unclasped," and finally returned to its original form. (Some one has said that a painter would not have been forced to choose between color and motion, for he could have made the mantle at once blue and blowing.) Corrections and re-corrections such as these show how carefully Mr. Tennyson seeks the perfection of language.

But the most interesting change yet to be noted is directly due to Lockhart's sharp criticism; at least, it was he who first pointed out the propriety of it, in his usual sarcastic way. "In this poem," said he, "we first observed a stroke of art which we think very ingenious. No one who has ever written verses but must have felt the pain of erasing some happy line, some striking phrase, which, however excellent in itself, did not exactly suit the place for which it was destined. How curiously does an author mould and remould the plastic verse in order to fit in the favorite thought; and when he finds that he cannot introduce it, as Corporal Trim says, *any how*, with what reluctance does he at last reject the intractable, but still cherished, offspring of his brain. Mr. Tennyson manages this delicate matter in a new and better way. He says, with great candor and simplicity, 'If this poem were not already too long *I should have added the following stanzas,*' and then *he adds them*; or, 'I intended to have added something on statuary, but I found it very difficult; but I have finished the statues of Elijah and Olympias; judge whether I have succeeded;' and then *we have those two statues*. This is certainly the most ingenious device that has ever come under our observation for reconciling the rigor of criticism with the indulgence of parental partiality."

The passages to which Mr. Lockhart alludes in this delicious paragraph are the notes appended to pages 73 and 83 of the original edition. The former of these contains four stanzas on sculptures; the latter gives a description of one of the favorite occupations of the self-indulgent soul, which is too fine to be left unquoted. Above the palace a massive tower was built:

"Hither, when all the deep unsounded skies
 Were shuddering with silent stars, she clomb,
 And, as with optic glasses, her keen eyes
 Pierced thro' the mystic dome,

“Regions of lucid matter taking forms,
Brushes of fire, hazy gleams,
Clusters and beds of worlds, and bee-like swarms
Of suns, and starry streams.

“She saw the snowy poles of moonless Mars,
That marvellous round of milky light
Below Orion, and those double stars
Whereof the one more bright

“Is circled by the other.”

But, however admirable these lines may seem, and however much we may regret their loss, there can be no doubt that the manner of their introduction was incongruous and absurd. It was like saying, “This Palace is not to have a hall of statues, but I will simply put on a small wing as a sample of what is not to be done. And there is no room for an observatory, but I will construct one in order that you may see what it would have been like.” The poet himself seems to have recognized that the device was too “ingenious” to be dignified: and in 1842 he restored the symmetry of the Palace by omitting the annex-buildings entirely.

And now let us sum up the changes which have been made in the Palace since it was first constructed. For this purpose it will be better to take Macmillan’s edition of 1884 (which probably represents the poet’s final revision) and lay it beside the edition of 1833.

In 1833 the poem, including the notes, contained eighty-three stanzas; in 1884 it has only seventy-five. Of the original number thirty-one have been entirely omitted—in other words, more than a third of the structure has been pulled down; and, in place of these, twenty-two new stanzas have been added, making a change of fifty-three stanzas. The fifty-two that remain have almost all been re-touched and altered, so that very few stand to-day in the same shape which they had at the beginning. I suppose there is no other poem in the language, not even among the writings of Tennyson, which has passed through such vicissitudes as this.

But, after all, it remains the same poem; its plan and purpose are unchanged. And the general result of the alteration is twofold: first, the omission of unnecessary decoration, which is a good rule for the architect: second, the increased clearness and force of the lesson, which is a profitable example for the moralist. The omissions may deprive us of many rich and polished details, beautiful as the carved capitals of Corinthian pillars; but they leave the Palace stand-

ing more plainly and solidly before the inward eye. The additions, almost without exception, are chosen with a wondrous skill, to reveal and intensify the meaning of the allegory. Touch after touch brings out the picture of the self-centred soul: the indifference that hardens into cruel contempt, the pride that verges swiftly toward insanity, the insatiate lust of pleasure that devours all the world can give and then turns to feed upon itself, the empty darkness of the life without love. It seems as if the poet had felt that he must spare no pains to make the picture clear and strong. And indeed, the age has need of it. For the chosen few are saying to their disciples that the world is a failure, humanity a mass of wretchedness, religion an ancient dream—the only refuge for the elect of wealth and culture is in art. Retreat into your places of pleasure. Leave the Philistines. Delight your eyes and ears with all things fair and sweet. So shall it be well with you and your soul shall rejoice itself in fatness.

This is the new gospel of pessimism—nay, its old gospel. Nebuchadnezzar tried it in Babylon, Hadrian tried it in Rome, Solomon tried it in Jerusalem, and from all its palaces of art comes the same voice: *vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas*.

It is not until the soul has learned a better wisdom, learned that the human race is one, and that none can truly rise by treading on his fellow men, learned that art is not the servant of luxury, but the helper of humanity, learned that happiness is born not of the lust to possess and to enjoy, but of the desire to give and to bless—then, and not until then, when she brings others with her, can the soul find true rest in her Palace.

There are signs, not a few, that the light of this lesson is beginning to dawn upon the minds of men as our too-selfish century draws near its end. The growing desire that every human habitation should have its touch of grace and delight, the movement to adorn our public places and redeem the city-Saharas from the curse of desolation, the effort to make our churches more beautiful and more attractive, as the houses of prayer for all people, the splendid gifts which private generosity has bestowed upon our metropolitan galleries—all these are tokens of a better day. They encourage us to hope that art is to be emancipated and humanized, and thus to receive a new inspiration.

HENRY VAN DYKE.