
EUROPE AND EUROPEAN BOOKS.

THE American Academy, the Historical Society, and Harvard University, would do well to make the Cunard steamers the subject of examination in regard to their literary and ethical influence. These rapid sailers must be arraigned as the conspicuous agents in the immense and increasing intercourse between the old and the new continents. We go to school to Europe. We imbibe an European taste. Our education, so called, — our drilling at college, and our reading since, — has been European, and we write on the English culture and to an English public, in America and in Europe. This powerful star, it is thought, will soon culminate and descend, and the impending reduction of the transatlantic excess of influence on the American education is already a matter of easy and frequent computation. Our eyes will be turned westward,

and a new and stronger tone in literature will be the result. The Kentucky stump-oratory, the exploits of Boon and David Crockett, the journals of western pioneers, agriculturalists, and socialists, and the letters of Jack Downing, are genuine growths, which are sought with avidity in Europe, where our European-like books are of no value. It is easy to see that soon the centre of population and property of the English race, which long ago began its travels, and which is still on the eastern shore, will shortly hover midway over the Atlantic main, and then as certainly fall within the American coast, so that the writers of the English tongue shall write to the American and not to the island public, and then will the great Yankee be born.

But at present we have our culture from Europe and Europeans. Let us be content and thankful for these good gifts for a while yet. The collections of art, at Dresden, Paris, Rome, and the British Museum and libraries offer their splendid hospitalities to the American. And beyond this, amid the dense population of that continent, lifts itself ever and anon some eminent head, a prophet to his own people, and their interpreter to the people of other countries. The attraction of these individuals is not to be resisted by theoretic statements. It is true there is always something deceptive, self-deceptive, in our travel. We go to France, to Germany, to see men, and find but what we carry. A man is a man, one as good as another, many doors to one open court, and that open court as entirely accessible from our private door, or through John or Peter, as through Humboldt or Laplace. But we cannot speak to ourselves. We brood on our riches but remain dumb; that makes us unhappy; and we take ship and go man-hunting in order to place ourselves *en rapport*, according to laws of personal magnetism, to acquire speech or expression. Seeing Herschel or Schelling, or Swede or Dane, satisfies the conditions, and we can express ourselves happily.

But Europe has lost weight lately. Our young men go thither in every ship, but not as in the golden days, when the same tour would show the traveler the noble heads of Scott, of Mackintosh, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Goethe, Cuvier, and Humboldt. We remember when arriving in Paris, we crossed the river on a brilliant morning, and at

the bookshop of Papinot, in the Rue de Sorbonne, at the gates of the University, purchased for two sous a Programme, which announced that every Monday we might attend the lecture of Dumas on Chemistry at noon; at a half hour later either Villemain or Ampère on French literature; at other hours, Guizot on Modern History; Cousin on the Philosophy of Ancient History; Fauriel on Foreign Literature; Prevost on Geology; Lacroix on the Differential Calculus; Jouffroy on the History of Modern Philosophy; Lacretelle on Ancient History; Desfontaines or Mirbel on Botany.

Hard by, at the Place du Panthéon, Dégérando, Royer Collard, and their colleagues were giving courses on Law, on the law of nations, the Pandects and commercial equity. For two magical sous more, we bought the Programme of the College Royal de France, on which we still read with admiring memory, that every Monday, Silvestre de Sacy lectures on the Persian language; at other hours, Lacroix on the Integral Mathematics; Jouffroy on Greek Philosophy; Biot on Physics; Lermnier on the History of Legislation; Elie de Beaumont on Natural History; Magendie on Medicine; Thénard on Chemistry; Binet on Astronomy; and so on, to the end of the week. On the same wonderful ticket, as if royal munificence had not yet sufficed, we learned that at the Museum of Natural History, at the Garden of Plants, three days in the week, Brongniart would teach Vegetable Physiology, and Gay-Lussac Chemistry, and Flourent Anatomy. With joy we read these splendid news in the Café Procope, and straightway joined the troop of students of all nations, kindreds, and tongues, whom this great institution drew together to listen to the first *savans* of the world without fee or reward. The professors are changed, but the liberal doors still stand open at this hour. This royal liberality, which seems to atone for so many possible abuses of power, could not exist without important consequences to the student on his return home.

The University of Gottingen has sunk from its high place by the loss of its brightest stars. The last was Heeren, whose learning was really useful, and who has made ingenious attempts at the solution of ancient historical problems. Ethiopia, Assyria, Carthage, and the Theban Desert

are still revealing secrets, latent for three millenniums, under the powerful night glass of the Teutonic scholars, who make astronomy, geology, chemistry, trade, statistics, medals, tributary to their inquiries. In the last year also died Sismondi, who by his History of the Italian Republics reminded mankind of the prodigious wealth of life and event, which Time, devouring his children as fast as they are born, is giving to oblivion in Italy, the piazza and forum of History, and for a time made Italian subjects of the middle age popular for poets, and romancers, and by his kindling chronicles of Milan and Lombardy perhaps awoke the great genius of Manzoni. That history is full of events, yet, as Ottilia writes in Goethe's novel, that she never can bring away from history anything but a few anecdotes, so the "Italian Republics" lies in the memory like a confused *melée*, a confused noise of slaughter, and rapine, and garments rolled in blood. The method, if method there be, is so slight and artificial, that it is quite overlaid and lost in the unvaried details of treachery and violence. Hallam's sketches of the same history were greatly more luminous, and memorable, partly from the advantage of his design, and which compelled him to draw outlines, and not bury the grand lines of destiny in municipal details. Italy furnished in that age no man of genius to its political arena, though many of talent, and this want degrades the history. We still remember with great pleasure, Mr. Hallam's fine sketch of the external history of the rise and establishment of the Papacy, which Mr. Ranke's voluminous researches, though they have great value for their individual portraits, have not superseded.

It was a brighter day than we have often known in our literary calendar, when within the twelvemonth a single London advertisement announced a new volume of poems by Wordsworth, poems by Tennyson, and a play by Henry Taylor. Wordsworth's nature or character has had all the time it needed, in order to make its mark, and supply the want of talent. We have learned how to read him. We have ceased to expect that which he cannot give. He has the merit of just moral perception, but not that of deft poetic execution. How would Milton curl his lip at such slipshod newspaper style! Many of his poems, as, for example, the Rylstone Doe, might be all improvised. Noth-

ing of Milton, nothing of Marvell, of Herbert, of Dryden, could be. These are such verses as in a just state of culture should be *vers de Société*, such as every gentleman could write, but none would think of printing or of claiming the poet's laurel on their merit. The Pindar, the Shakspeare, the Dante, whilst they have the just and open soul, have also the eye to see the dimmest star that glimmers in the Milky Way, the serratures of every leaf, the test objects of the microscope, and then the tongue to utter the same things in words that engrave them on all the ears of mankind. The poet demands all gifts and not one or two only.

The poet, like the electric rod, must reach from a point nearer to the sky than all surrounding objects down to the earth, and down to the dark wet soil, or neither is of use. The poet must not only converse with pure thought, but he must demonstrate it almost to the senses. His words must be pictures, his verses must be spheres and cubes, to be seen, and smelled and handled. His fable must be a good story, and its meaning must hold as pure truth. In the debates on the Copyright Bill, in the English Parliament, Mr. Sergeant Wakley, the coroner, quoted Wordsworth's poetry in derision, and asked the roaring House of Commons, what that meant, and whether a man should have a public reward for writing such stuff. Homer, Horace, Milton, and Chaucer would defy the coroner. Whilst they have wisdom to the wise, he would see, that to the external, they have external meaning. Coleridge excellently said of poetry, that poetry must first be good sense, as a palace might well be magnificent, but first it must be a house.

Wordsworth is open to ridicule of this kind. And yet Wordsworth, though satisfied if he can suggest to a sympathetic mind his own mood, and though setting a private and exaggerated value on his compositions, though confounding his accidental with the universal consciousness, and taking the public to task for not admiring his poetry, — is really a superior master of the English language, and his poems evince a power of diction that is no more rivalled by his contemporaries, than is his poetic insight. But the capital merit of Wordsworth is, that he has done more for the sanity of this generation than any other writer. Early in life, at a crisis, it is said, in his private affairs, he made

his election between assuming and defending some legal rights with the chances of wealth and a position in the world — and the inward promptings of his heavenly genius; he took his part; he accepted the call to be a poet, and sat down, far from cities, with coarse clothing and plain fare to obey the heavenly vision. The choice he had made in his will, manifested itself in every line to be real. We have poets who write the poetry of society, of the patrician and conventional Europe, as Scott and Moore, and others who, like Byron or Bulwer, write the poetry of vice and disease. But Wordsworth threw himself into his place, made no reserves or stipulations; man and writer were not to be divided. He sat at the foot of Helvellyn and on the margin of Winandermere, and took their lustrous mornings and their sublime midnights for his theme, and not Marlow, nor Massinger, nor Horace, nor Milton, nor Dante. He once for all forsook the styles, and standards, and modes of thinking of London and Paris, and the books read there, and the aims pursued, and wrote Helvellyn and Winandermere, and the dim spirits which these haunts harbored. There was not the least attempt to reconcile these with the spirit of fashion and selfishness, nor to show with great deference to the superior judgment of dukes and earls, that although London was the home for men of great parts, yet Westmoreland had these consolations for such as fate had condemned to the country life; but with a complete satisfaction, he pitied and rebuked their false lives, and celebrated his own with the religion of a true priest. Hence the antagonism which was immediately felt between his poetry and the spirit of the age, that here not only criticism but conscience and will were parties; the spirit of literature, and the modes of living, and the conventional theories of the conduct of life were called in question on wholly new grounds, not from Platonism, nor from Christianity, but from the lessons which the country muse taught a stout pedestrian climbing a mountain, and in following a river from its parent rill down to the sea. The Cannings and Jeffreys of the capital, the Court Journals and Literary Gazettes were not well pleased, and voted the poet a bore. But that which rose in him so high as to the lips, rose in many others as high as to the heart. What he said, they were prepared to hear and confirm. The influence was in

the air, and was wafted up and down into lone and into populous places, resisting the popular taste, modifying opinions which it did not change, and soon came to be felt in poetry, in criticism, in plans of life, and at last in legislation. In this country, it very early found a strong hold, and its effect may be traced on all the poetry both of England and America.

But notwithstanding all Wordsworth's grand merits, it was a great pleasure to know that Alfred Tennyson's two volumes were coming out in the same ship; it was a great pleasure to receive them. The elegance, the wit, and subtlety of this writer, his rich fancy, his power of language, his metrical skill, his independence on any living masters, his peculiar topics, his taste for the costly and gorgeous, discriminate the musky poet of gardens and conservatories of parks and palaces. Perhaps we felt the popular objection that he wants rude truth, he is too fine. In these boudoirs of damask and alabaster, one is farther off from stern nature and human life than in Lallah Rookh and "the Loves of the Angels." Amid swinging censers and perfumed lamps, amidst velvet and glory we long for rain and frost. Otto of roses is good, but wild air is better. A critical friend of ours affirms that the vice, which bereaved modern painters of their power, is the ambition to begin where their fathers ended; to equal the masters in their exquisite finish, instead of in their religious purpose. The painters are not willing to paint ill enough: they will not paint for their times, agitated by the spirit which agitates their country; so should their picture picture us and draw all men after them; but they copy the technics of their predecessors, and paint for their predecessors' public. It seems as if the same vice had worked in poetry. Tennyson's compositions are not so much poems as studies in poetry, or sketches after the styles of sundry old masters. He is not the husband who builds the homestead after his own necessity, from foundation stone to chimney-top and turret, but a tasteful bachelor who collects quaint stair cases and groined ceilings. We have no right to such superfineness. We must not make our bread of pure sugar. These delicacies and splendors are then legitimate when they are the excess of substantial and necessary expenditure. The best songs in English poetry are by that heavy, hard, pedantic poet, Ben Jonson.

Jonson is rude, and only on rare occasions gay. Tennyson is always fine; but Jonson's beauty is more grateful than Tennyson's. It is a natural manly grace of a robust workman. Ben's flowers are not in pots, at a city florist's ranged on a flower stand, but he is a countryman at a harvest-home, attending his ox-cart from the fields, loaded with potatoes and apples, with grapes and plums, with nuts and berries, and stuck with boughs of hemlock and sweet briar, with ferns and pond lilies which the children have gathered. But let us not quarrel with our benefactors. Perhaps Tennyson is too quaint and elegant. What then? It is long since we have as good a lyrist; it will be long before we have his superior. "Godiva" is a noble poem that will tell the legend a thousand years. The poem of all the poetry of the present age, for which we predict the longest term, is "Abou ben Adhem" of Leigh Hunt. Fortune will still have her part in every victory, and it is strange that one of the best poems should be written by a man who has hardly written any other. And "Godiva" is a parable which belongs to the same gospel. "Locksley Hall" and "the Two Voices" are meditative poems, which were slowly written to be slowly read. "The Talking Oak," though a little hurt by its wit and ingenuity, is beautiful, and the most poetic of the volume. "Ulysses" belongs to a high class of poetry, destined to be the highest, and to be more cultivated in the next generation. "Ænone" was a sketch of the same kind. One of the best specimens we have of the class is Wordsworth's "Laodamia," of which no special merit it can possess equals the total merit of having selected such a subject in such a spirit.

Next to the poetry the novels, which come to us in every ship from England, have an importance increased by the immense extension of their circulation through the new cheap press, which sends them to so many willing thousands. So much novel reading ought not to leave the readers quite unaffected, and undoubtedly gives some tinge of romance to the daily life of young merchants and maidens. We have heard it alleged, with some evidence, that the prominence given to intellectual power in Bulwer's romances had proved a main stimulus to mental culture in thousands of young men in England and America. The effect

on manners cannot be less sensible, and we can easily believe that the behavior of the ball room, and of the hotel has not failed to draw some addition of dignity and grace from the fair ideals, with which the imagination of a novelist has filled the heads of the most imitative class.

We are not very well versed in these books, yet we have read Mr. Bulwer enough to see that the story is rapid and interesting; he has really seen London society, and does not draw ignorant caricatures. He is not a genius, but his novels are marked with great energy, and with a courage of experiment which in each instance had its degree of success. The story of Zanoni was one of those world-fables which is so agreeable to the human imagination, that it is found in some form in the language of every country, and is always reappearing in literature. Many of the details of this novel preserve a poetic truth. We read Zanoni with pleasure, because magic is natural. It is implied in all superior culture that a complete man would need no auxiliaries to his personal presence. The eye and the word are certainly subtler and stronger weapons than either money or knives. Whoever looked on the hero, would consent to his will, being certified that his aims were universal, not selfish; and he would be obeyed as naturally as the rain and the sunshine are. For this reason, children delight in fairy tales. Nature is described in them as the servant of man, which they feel ought to be true. But Zanoni pains us, and the author loses our respect, because he speedily betrays that he does not see the true limitations of the charm; because the power with which his hero is armed, is a toy, inasmuch as the power does not flow from its legitimate fountains in the mind; is a power for London; a divine power converted into a burglar's false key or a highwayman's pistol to rob and kill with.

But Mr. Bulwer's recent stories have given us, who do not read novels, occasion to think of this department of literature, supposed to be the natural fruit and expression of the age. We conceive that the obvious division of modern romance is into two kinds; first, the novels of *costume* or of *circumstance*, which is the old style, and vastly the most numerous. In this class, the hero, without any particular character, is in a very particular circumstance; he is greatly in want of a fortune or of a wife, and usually of both, and

the business of the piece is to provide him suitably. This is the problem to be solved in thousands of English romances, including the Porter novels and the more splendid examples of the Edgeworth and Scott romances.

It is curious how sleepy and foolish we are, that these tales will so take us. Again and again we have been caught in that old foolish trap;—then, as before, to feel indignant to have been duped and dragged after a foolish boy and girl, to see them at last married and portioned, and the reader instantly turned out of doors, like a beggar that has followed a gay procession into a castle. Had one noble thought opening the chambers of the intellect, one sentiment from the heart of God been spoken by them, the reader had been made a participator of their triumph; he too had been an invited and eternal guest; but this reward granted them is property, all-excluding property, a little cake baked for them to eat and for none other, nay, a preference and cossetting which is rude and insulting to all but the minion.

Excepting in the stories of Edgeworth and Scott, whose talent knew how to give to the book a thousand adventitious graces, the novels of costume are all one, and there is but one standard English novel, like the one orthodox sermon, which with slight variation is repeated every Sunday from so many pulpits.

But the other novel, of which Wilhelm Meister is the best specimen, the novel of *character*, treats the reader with more respect; a castle and a wife are not the indispensable conclusion, but the development of character being the problem, the reader is made a partaker of the whole prosperity. Every thing good in such a story remains with the reader, when the book is closed.

A noble book was Wilhelm Meister. It gave the hint of a cultivated society which we found nowhere else. It was founded on power to do what was necessary, each person finding it an indispensable qualification of membership, that he could do something useful, as in mechanics or agriculture or other indispensable art; then a probity, a justice, was to be its element, symbolized by the insisting that each property should be cleared of privilege, and should pay its full tax to the State. Then, a perception of beauty was the equally indispensable element of the association, by which

each was so dignified and all were so dignified; then each was to obey his genius to the length of abandonment. They watched each candidate vigilantly, without his knowing that he was observed, and when he had given proof that he was a faithful man, then all doors, all houses, all relations were open to him; high behavior fraternized with high behavior, without question of heraldry and the only power recognised is the force of character.

The novels of Fashion of D'Israeli, Mrs. Gore, Mr. Ward, belong to the class of novels of costume, because the aim is a purely external success.

Of the tales of fashionable life, by far the most agreeable and the most efficient, was Vivian Grey. Young men were and still are the readers and victims. Byron ruled for a time, but Vivian, with no tittle of Byron's genius, rules longer. One can distinguish at sight the Vivians in all companies. They would quiz their father, and mother, and lover, and friend. They discuss sun and planets, liberty and fate, love and death, over the soup. They never sleep, go nowhere, stay nowhere, eat nothing, and know nobody, but are up to anything, though it were the Genesis of nature, or the last Cataclasm,—Festus-like, Faust-like, Jove-like; and could write an Iliad any rainy morning, if fame were not such a bore. Men, women, though the greatest and fairest, are stupid things; but a rifle, and a mild pleasant gunpowder, a spaniel, and a cheroot, are themes for Olympus. I fear it was in part the influence of such pictures on living society, which made the style of manners, of which we have so many pictures, as for example, in the following account of the English fashionist. "His highest triumph is to appear with the most wooden manners, as little polished as will suffice to avoid castigation, nay, to contrive even his civilities, so that they may appear as near as may be to affronts; instead of a noble high-bred ease, to have the courage to offend against every restraint of decorum, to invert the relation in which our sex stand to women, so that they appear the attacking, and he the passive or defensive party."

We must here check our gossip in mid volley, and adjourn the rest of our critical chapter to a more convenient season.