

THE MODERN DRAMA.¹

A TRAGEDY in five acts! — what student of poetry, — (for, admire O Posterity, the strange fact, these days of book-craft produce not only inspired singers, and enchanted listeners, but students of poetry,) — what student in this strange sort, I say, had not felt his eye rivetted to this title, as if it were written in letter of fire? has not heard it whispered on his secret breast? — In this form alone, canst thou express thy thought in the liveliness of life, this success alone should satisfy thy ambition!

Were all these ardors caught from a genuine fire, such as, in favoring eras, led the master geniuses by their successive efforts to perfect this form, till it afforded the greatest advantages in the smallest space, we should be glad to warm and cheer us at a very small blaze. But it is not so. The drama, at least the English drama of our day, shows a reflected light, not a spreading fire. It is not because the touch of genius has roused genius to production, but because the admiration of genius has made talent ambitious, that the harvest is still so abundant.

This is not an observation to which there are no exceptions, some we shall proceed to specify, but those who have, with any care, watched this ambition in their own minds, or analyzed its results in the works of others, cannot but feel, that the drama is not a growth native to this age, and that the numerous grafts produce little fruit, worthy the toil they cost.

'Tis, indeed, hard to believe that the drama, once invented, should cease to be a habitual and healthy expression of the mind. It satisfies so fully the wants both of sense and soul, supplying both deep and light excitements, simple, comprehensive, and various, adapted either to great national and religious subjects or to the private woes of any human breast. The space and time occupied, the vehicle of expression fit it equally for the entertainment of an evening, or the closet theme of meditative years. *Ædipus*, *Macbeth*, *Wallenstein*, chain us for the hour lead us through the age.

Who would not covet this mirror, which, like that of the old wizards, not only reflects, but reproduces the whole range of forms, this key, which unlocks the realms of speculation at the hour when the lights are boldest and the shadows most suggestive, this goblet, whose single sparkling draught is locked from common air by walls of glittering ice? An artful wild, where nature finds no bound to her fertility, while art steadily draws to a whole its linked chain.

Were it in man's power by choosing the best, to attain the best in any particular kind, we would not blame the young poet, if he always chose the drama.

But by the same law of faery which ordains that wishes shall be granted unavailingly to the wisher, no form of art will succeed with him with whom it is the object of deliberate choice. It must grow from his nature in a certain position, as it first did from the general mind in a certain position, and be no garment taken from the shining store to be worn at a banquet, but a real body gradually woven and assimilated from the earth and sky which environed the poet in his youthful years. He may learn from the old Greek or Hindoo, but he must speak in his mother-tongue.

It was a melancholy praise bestowed on the German *Iphigenia*, that it was an echo of the Greek mind. O give us something rather than Greece more Grecian, so new, so universal, so individual!

An “After Muse,” an appendix period must come to every kind of greatness. It is the criticism of the grandchild upon the inheritance bequeathed by his ancestors. It writes madrigals and sonnets, it makes Brutus wigs, and covers old chairs with damask patch-work, yet happy those who have no affection towards such virtu and entertain their friends with a pipe cut from their own grove, rather than display an ivory lute handed down from the old time, whose sweetness we want the skill to draw forth.

The drama cannot die out: it is too naturally born of certain periods of national development. It is a stream that will sink in one place, only to rise to light in another. As it has appeared successively in Hindoostan, Greece, (Rome we cannot count,) England, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, so has it yet to appear in New Holland, New Zealand, and among ourselves, when we too shall be made new by a sunrise of our own, when our population shall have settled into a homogeneous, national life, and we have attained vigor to walk in our own way, make our own world, and leave off copying Europe.

At present our attempts are, for the most part, feebler than those of the British “After Muse,” for our playwrights are not from youth so fancy-fed by the crumbs that fell from the tables of the lords of literature, and having no relish for the berries of our own woods, the roots of our own fields, they are meagre, and their works bodiless; yet, as they are pupils of the British school, their works need not be classed apart, and I shall mention one or two of the most noteworthy by-and-by.

England boasts one Shakspeare — ah! that alone was more than the share of any one kingdom, — such a king! There Apollo himself tended sheep, and there is not a blade of the field but glows with a peculiar light. At times we are tempted to think him the only genius earth has ever known, so beyond compare is he, when looked at as the myriad-minded; then he seems to sit at the head of the stream of thought, a lone god beside his urn; the minds of others, lower down, feed the current to a greater width, but they come not near him. Happily, in the constructive power, in sweep of soul, others may be named beside him: he is not always all alone.

Historically, such isolation was not possible. Such a being implies a long ancestry, a longer posterity. We discern immortal vigor in the stem that rose to this height.

Bu his children should not hope to walk in his steps. Prospero gave Miranda a scepter, not his wand. His genius is too great for his followers, they dwindle in its shadow. They see objects so early with his eyes, they can hardly learn to use their own. “they seek to produce from themselves, but they only reproduce him.”

He is the cause why so much of England’s intellect tends towards the drama, a cause why it so often fails. His works being despair to genius, they are the bait and the snare of talent.

The impetus he has given, the lustre with which he dazzles, are a chief cause of the dramatic efforts, one cause of failure, but not the only one, for it seems probably that European life tends to new languages, and for a while neglecting this form of representation, would explore the realms of sound and sight, to make itself other organs, which must for a time supersede the drama.

There is, perhaps, a correspondence between the successions of literary vegetation with those of the earth’s surface, where if you burn or cut down an ancient wood, the next offering of the soil will not be in the same kind, but raspberries and purple flowers will succeed the oak,

poplars the pine. Thus, beneath the roots of the drama, lay seeds of the historic novel, the romantic epic, which were to take its place to the reader, and for the scene, the oratorios, the opera, and the ballet.

Music is the great art of the time. Its dominion is constantly widening, its powers are more profoundly recognized. In the forms it is already evolved, it is equal to representing any subject, can address the entire range of thoughts and emotions. These forms have not yet attained their completeness, and already we discern many others hovering in the vast distances of the Tone-world.

The opera is in this inferior to the drama, that it produces its effects by the double method of dialogue and song. So easy seems it to excite a feeling, and by the orchestral accompaniments to sustain it to the end, that we have not the intellectual exhilaration which accompanies a severer enjoyment. For the same reasons, nothing can surpass the mere luxury for a fine opera.

The oratorio, so great, so perfect in itself, is limited in its subjects; and these, though they must be of the graver class, do not properly admit of tragedy. Minds cannot dwell on special griefs and seeming partial fates, when circling the universe on the wings of the great chorus, sharing the will of the divine, catching the sense of humanity.

Thus, much as he has given, we demand from the music yet another method, simpler and more comprehensive than these. In instrumental music, this is given by the symphony, but we want another that shall admit the voice, too, and permit the association of the spectacle.

The ballet seems capable of an infinite perfection. There is no boundary here to the powers of design and expression, if only fit artists can be formed mentally and practically. What could not a vigorous imagination do, if it had delicate Ariels to enact its plans, with that facility and completeness which pantomime permits. There is reason to think we shall see the language of the eye, of gesture and attitude carried to a perfection, body made pliant to the inspirations of the spirit, as it can hardly be where spoken words are admitted to eke out deficiencies. From our America we hope some form entirely new, not yet to be predicted, while, though the desire for dramatic representation exists, as it always must where there is any vigorous life, the habit of borrowing is so pervasive, that in the lately peopled prairies of the West, where civilization is but five years old, we find the young people acting plays, indeed, and “on successive nights to overflowing audiences, “ — but what? Some drama, ready made to hand the fortunes of Boon, or the defeats of Black Hawk? Not at all, but — Tamerlane and the like — Bombastes Furioso, and King Cambyses vein to the “storekeepers” and laborers of republican America.

In this connection let me mention the drama of *Metamora*, a favorite on the broads in our cities, which, if it have no other merit, yields something that belongs to this region, Forrest having studied for this part the Indian gait and expression with some success. He is naturally adapted to the part by the strength and dignity of his person and outline.

To return to Britain.

The stage was full of life, after the drama began to decline, and the actors, whom Shakspeare should have had to represent his parts, were born after his departure from the dignity given to the profession by the existence of such occasion for it. And again, out of the existence of such actors rose hosts of playwrights, who wrote not to embody the spirit of life, in forms, shifting and interwoven in the space of a spectacle, but to give room for display of the powers of such an such actors. A little higher stood those, who excelled in invention of plots, pregnant

crises, or brilliant point of dialogue, but both degraded the drama, Sheridan scarcely less than Cibber; and Garrick and the Kembles, while they lighted up the edifice, left slow fire for its destruction.

A partial stigma rests, as it has always rested, on the profession of the actor. At first flash, we marvel why. Why do not men bow in reverence before those, who hold the mirror up to nature, and not to common nature, but to her most exalted, profound, and impassioned hours?

Some have imputed this to an association with the trickeries and course illusions of the scene, with pasteboard swords and crowns, mock-thunder and tinfoil moonshine. But in what profession are not mummeries practiced, and ludicrous accessories interposed? Are the big wig of the barrister, the pen behind the ear of the merchant so reverend in our eyes?

Some say that it is because we pay the actor for amusing us; but we pay other men for all kinds of service, without feeling them degraded thereby. And is he, who has administered an exhilarating draught to my mind, in less pleasing association there, than he who has administered a febrifuge to the body?

Again, that the strong excitements of the scene and its motely life dispose to low and sensual habits.

But the instances, where all such temptations have been resisted, are so many, compared with the number engaged, that every one must feel that here, as elsewhere, the temptation is determined by the man.

Why is it then that to the profession, which numbers in its ranks Shakspeare and Moliere, which is dignified by such figures as Siddons, Talma, and Macready, respect is less willingly conceded than applause? Is it the same thing to act the "Lady in Comus," and the Lady in "She stoops to Conquer," Hamlet, prince of Denmark, and Sir Lucius O'Trigger? Is it not the actor, according to his sphere, a great artist or a poor buffoon, just as a lawyer may become a chancellor of the three kingdoms, or a base pettifogger!

Prejudice on this score, must be the remnant of a barbarism which saw minstrels the pensioned guests at barons' tables, and murdered Correggio beneath a sack of copper. As man better understand that his positive existence is only effigy of the ideal, and that nothing is useful or honorable which does not advance the reign of Beauty, Art and Artists rank constantly higher, as one with Religion. Let Artists also know their calling, let the Actor live and die a Roman Actor², more than Raphael shall be elected Cardinals, and of a purer church; and it shall be ere long remembered as dream and fable, that the representative of "*my Cid*" could not rest in consecrated ground.

In Germany these questions have already been fairly weighed, and those who read the sketches of her great actors, as given by Tieck, know that there, at least, they took with the best minds of their age and country their proper place.

And who, that reads Joanna Baillie's address to Mrs. Siddons, but feel that the fate, which placed his birth in another age from her, has robbed him of full sense of a kind of greatness whose absence none other can entirely supply.

* * * * *

The impassioned changes of thy beauteous face,
Thy arms impetuous tost, thy robe's wide flow,

And the dark tempest gathered on thy brow,
 What time thy flashing eye and lip of scorn
 Down to the dust thy mimic foes have born;
 Remorseful musings sunk to deep dejection,
 The fixed and yearning looks of strong affection;
 The actioned turmoil of a bosom rending,
 Where pity, love, and honor are contending;

* * * * *

Thy varied accents, rapid, fitful, slow,
 Loud rage, and fear's snatch'd whisper, quick and low,
 The burst of stifled love, the wail of grief,
 And tones of high command, full, solemn, brief;
 The change of voice and emphasis that threw
 Light on obscurity, and brought to view
 Distinctions nice, when grace or comic mood,
 Or mingled humors, terse and new, elude
 Common perception, as earth's smallest things
 To size and form the vesting hoar frost brings.

* * * * *

* * * Thy light * * * * *
 * from the mental world can never fade,
 Till all, who've seen thee, in the grave are laid.
 Thy graceful form still moves in nightly dreams,
 And what thou wert to the rapt sleeper seems,
 While feverish fancy oft doth fondly trace
 Within her curtained couch thy wondrous face;
 Yea, and to many wight, bereft and lone,
 In musing hours, though all to thee unknown,
 Soothing his earthly course of good and ill,
 With all thy potent charm thou actest still.

Perhaps the effect produced by Mrs. Siddons is still more vividly shown in the character of Jane de Montfort, which seems modelled from her. We have no such lotus cup to drink. Mademoiselle Rachel indeed seems to possess as much electric force as Mrs. Siddons, but not the same imposing individuality. The Kembles and Talma were cast in the royal mint to commemorate the victories of genius. That Mrs. Siddons even added somewhat of congenial glory to Shakspeare's own conceptions, those who compare the engravings of her in lady Macbeth and Catharine of Aragon, with the picture drawn in their own minds from acquaintance with these beings in the original, cannot doubt; the sun is reflected with new glory in the majestic river.

Yet, under all these disadvantages there have risen up often, in England, and even in our own country, actors who gave a reason for the continued existence of the theatre, who sustained the ill-educated, flimsy troop, which commonly fill it, and provoked both the poet and the playwright to turn their powers in that direction.

The plays written for them, though no genuine dramas, are not without value as spectacle, and the opportunity, however lame, gives freer play to the actor's powers, than would the simple

recitation, by which some have thought any attempt at acting whole plays should be superseded. And under the starring system it is certainly less painful, on the whole, to see a play of Knowles's than one of Shakspeare's; for the former, with its frigid diction, unnatural dialogue, and academic figures, affords scope for the actor to produce striking effects, and to show a knowledge of the passions, while all the various beauties of Shakspeare are traduced by the puppets who should repeat them, and being closer to nature, brings no one figure into such bold relief as is desirable when there is only one actor. *Virginius*, *the Hunchback*, *Metamora*, are plays quite good enough for the stage at present; and they are such as those who attend the representations of plays will be very likely to write.

Another class of dramas are those written by the scholars and thinkers, whose tastes have been formed, and whose ambition kindled, by acquaintance with the genuine English dramatists. These again may be divided into two sorts. One, those who have some idea to bring out, which craves a form more lively than the essay, more compact than the narrative, and who therefore adopt (if Hibernicism may be permitted) the dialogued monologue to very good purpose. Such are *Festus*, *Paracelsus*, Coleridge's *Remorse*, Shelley's *Cenci*; Miss Baillie's plays, though meant for action, and with studied attempts to vary them by the lighter shades of common nature, which, from her want of lively power, have no effect, except to break up the interest, and Byron's are of the same class; they have no present life, no action, no slight natural touches, no delicate lines, as of one who paints his portrait from the fact; their interest is poetic, nature apprehended in her spirit; philosophic, actions traced back to their causes; but not dramatic, nature reproduced in actual presence. This, as a form for the closet, is a very good one, and well fitted to the genius of our time. Whenever the writers of such fail, it is because they have the stage in view, instead of considering the *dramatis personæ* merely as names for the classes of thoughts. Somewhere betwixt these and the mere acting plays stand such as Maturin's *Bertram* Talfourd's *Ion*, and (now before me) Longfellow's *Spanish Student*. *Bertram* is a good acting play, that is, it gives a good opportunity to one actor, and its painting, though coarse, is effective. *Ion*, also, can be acted, though its principle merit is in the nobleness of design, and in details it is too elaborate for the scene. Still it does move and melt, and it is honorable to us that a piece constructed on so high a *motive*, whose tragedy is so much nobler than the customary forms of passion, can act on audiences long unfamiliar with such religion. The *Spanish Student* might also be acted, though with no great effect, for there is little movement in the piece, or development of character; its chief merit is in the graceful expression of single thoughts or fancies; as here,

All the means of action
The shapeless masses, the materials,
Lie every where about us. What we need
Is the celestial fire to change the flint
Into transparent crystal, bright and clear.
That fire is genius! The rude peasant sits
At evening in his smoky cot, and draws
With charcoal uncouth figures on the wall.
The son of genius comes, foot-sore with travel,
And begs a shelter from the inclement night.
He takes the charcoal from the peasant's hand,

And, by the magic of his touch at once
 Transfigured, all its hidden virtues shine,
 And in the eyes of the astonished clown,
 It gleams a diamond. Even thus transformed,
 Rude popular traditions and old tales
 Shine as immortal poems, at the touch
 Of some poor houseless, homeless, wandering bard,
 Who had but a night's lodging for his pains.
 But there are brighter dreams than those of fame,
 Which are the dreams of love! Out of the heart
 Rises the bright ideal of these dreams,
 As from some woodland fount a spirit rises
 And sinks again into its silent deeps,
 Ere the enamored knight can touch her robe!
 'Tis this ideal, that the soul of man,
 Like the enamored knight beside the fountain,
 Waits for upon the margin of life's stream;
 Waits to behold her ride from the dark waters
 Clad in a mortal shape! Alas! how many
 Must wait in vain! The stream flows evermore,
 But from its silent deeps no spirit rises.

Or here,

I will forget her! All dear recollections
 Pressed in my heart, like flowers within a book,
 Shall be torn out, and scattered to the winds;
 I will forget her! But perhaps hereafter,
 When she shall learn how heartless is the world,
 A voice within her will repeat my name,
 And she will say, 'He was indeed my friend.'

Passages like these would give great pleasure in the chaste and carefully-shaded recitation of Macready or Miss Tree. The style of the play is, throughout, elegant and simple. Neither the plot nor characters can boast any originality, but the one is woven with skill and taste, the others very well drawn, for so slight handling.

We had purposed in this place to notice some of the modern French plays, which hold about the same relation to the true drama, but this task must wait a more convenient season.

One of the plays at the head of this notice also comes in here, *The Patrician's Daughter*, which, though a failure as a tragedy, from an improbability in the plot, and a want of power to touch the secret springs of passion, yet has the merits of genteel comedy in the unstrained and flowing dialogue, and dignity in the conception of character. A piece like this pleases, if only by the atmosphere of intellect and refinement it breathes.

But a third class, of higher interest, is the historical, such as may well have been suggested to one whose youth was familiar with Shakspeare's *Julius Cæsar*, and *Kings of*

England. Who what wears in his breast an English heart, and has feeling to appreciate the capabilities of the historic drama, but must burn with desire to use the occasions offered in profusion by the chronicles of England and kindred nations, to adorn the inherited halls with one tapestry more. It is difficult to say why such an attempt should fail, yet it does fail, and each effort in this kind shows plainly that the historic novel, not the historic drama, is the form appropriate to the genius of our day. Yet these failures come so near success, the spent arrows show so bold and strong a hand in the marksman, that we would not, for much, be without them.

First and highest in this list comes Philip Van Artevelde, of which we can say that it bears new fruit on the twentieth reading. At first it fell rather coldly on the mind, coming as it did, not as the flower of full flushed being, but with the air of an experiment made to verify a theory. It came with wrinkled critic's brow, consciously antagonistic to a tendency of the age, and we looked on it with cold critic's eye, unapt to weep or glow at its bidding. But, on closer acquaintance, we see that this way of looking, though induced by the author, is quite unjust. It is really a noble work that teaches us, a genuine growth that makes us grow, a reflex of nature from the calm depths of a large soul. The grave and comprehensive character of the ripened man, of him whom fire, and light, and earth have tempered to an intelligent delegate of humanity, has never been more justly felt, rarely more life-like painted, than by this author. The Flemish blood and the fiery soul are both understood. Philip stands among his compatriots the man mature, not premature or alien. He is what they should be, his life the reconciling word of his age and nation, the thinking head of an unintelligent and easily distempered body, a true king. The accessories are all in keeping, sapling of the same wood. The eating, drinking, quarrelling citizens, the petulant sister, the pure and lovely bride, the sorrowful and stained, but deep-souled mistress, the monk, much a priest, but more a man, all belong to him and all require him. We cannot think of any part of this piece without its centre, and this fact proclaims it a great work of art. It is great, the conception of the swelling tide of fortune, on which this figure is upborne serenely eminent, of the sinking of that tide with the same face rising from the depths, veiled with the same cloud as the heavens, in its sadness calmer yet. Too wise and rich a nature he, too intelligent of the teachings of earth and heaven to be a stoic, but too comprehensive, too poetic, to be swayed, though he might be moved, by chance or by passion. Some one called him Philip the Imperturbable, but his greatness is, that he is *not* imperturbable, only, as the author announces, "not passion's slave." The gods would not be gods, if they were ignorant, or impassive; they must be able to see all that men see, only from a higher point of view.

Such pictures make us willing to live in the widest sense, to bear all that may be borne, for we see that virgin gold may be fit to adorn scabbard, but the good blade is made of tempered steel.

Justice has not been done by the critics to the admirable conduct of the Second Part, because our imaginations were at first so struck by the full length picture of the hero in the conquering days of the First Part, and it was painful to see its majesty veiled with crepe, its towering strength sink to ruins in the second. Then there are more grand and full passages in the First which can be detached and recollected; as,

We have not time to mourn; the worse for us,
He that lacks time to mourn lacks time to mend;

Eternity mourns that. 'Tis an ill sure
 For life's worst ills, to have no time to feel them.
 Where sorrow's held intrusive and turned out,
 There wisdom will not enter, nor true power,
 Nor aught that dignifies humanity.

That beginning,

To bring a cloud upon the summer day.

or this famous one,

Nor do I now despond, &c.

Or the fine scene between Clara, Van Artevelde, and Father John, where she describes the death scene at Sessenheim's; beginning,

Must hast thou merited, my sister dear.

The second part must be taken as a whole, the dark cloud widening and blackening as it advances, while ghastly flashes of presage come more and more frequent as the daylight diminished. But there is far more fervor of genius than in the First, showing a mind less possessing, more possessed by, the subject, and finer touches of nature. Van Artevelde's dignity overpowers us more, as he himself feels it less; as in the acceptance of Father John's reproof.

VAN ARTEVELDE.

Father John!

Though peradventure fallen in your esteem,
 I humbly ask your blessing, as a man,
 That having passed for more in your repute
 Than he could justify, should be content,
 Not with his state, but with the judgment true
 That to the lowly level of his state
 Brings down his reputation.

FATHER JOHN.

Oh my son!

High as you stand, I will not strain my eyes
 To see how higher still you stood before.
 God's blessing be upon you. Fare you well.
 [Exit.

ARTEVELDE.

The old man weeps.

But he reverts at once on the topic of his thought,

Should England play me false, &c.

as he always does, for a mind so great, so high, that it cannot fail to look over and around any one object, any especial emotion, returns to its habitual mood with an ease of which shallow and excitable natures cannot conceive. Thus his reflection, after he has wooed Elena, is not that of heartlessness, but of a deep heart.

How little flattering is a woman's love!

And is in keeping with

I know my course,
And be it armies, cities, people, priests,
That quarrel with my love, wise men or fools,
Friends, foes, or factions, they may swear their oaths,
And make their murmur; rave, and fret, and fear,
Suspect, admonish; they but waste their rage,
Their wits, their words, their counsel; here I stand
Upon the deep foundations of my faith,
To this fair outcast plighted; and the storm
That princes from their palaces shakes me out,
Though it should turn and head me, should not strain
The seeming silken texture of this tie.

And not less with

Pain and grief
Are transitory things no less than joy;
And though they leave us not the men we were,
Yet they do leave us.

With the admirable passages that follow.

The delicate touches, with which Elena is made to depict her own character, move us more than Artevelde's most beautiful description of Adriana.

I have been much unfortunate, my lord,
I would not love again.

Shakspeare could not mend the collection of those words.

When he is absent I am full of thought,
And fruitful in expression inwardly,
And fresh, and free, and cordial, is the flow
Of my ideal and unheard discourse,
Calling him in my heart endearing names,

Familiarly fearless. But alas!
 No sooner is he present than my thoughts
 Are breathless and bewitched, and stunted so
 In force and freedom, that I ask myself
 Whether I think at all, or feel, or live,
 So senseless am I.

Would that I were merry!
 Mirth have I valued not before; but now
 What would I give to be the laughing front
 Of gay imaginations ever bright,
 And sparkling fantasies! Oh, all I have,
 Which is not nothing, though I prize it not;
 My understanding soul, my brooding sense,
 My passionate fancy, and the gift of gifts
 Dearest to woman, which deflowering Time,
 Slow ravisher, from clenchedest fingers wring,
 My corporal beauty would I barter now
 For such an antic and exulting spirit
 As lives in lively women.

for

Your grave, and wise,
 And melancholy men, if they have souls,
 As commonly they have, susceptible
 Of all impressions, lavish most their love
 Upon the blithe and sportive, and on such
 As yield their want, and chase their sad excess,
 With jocund salutations, nimble talk,
 And buoyant bearing.

All herself is in the line,

Which is as nothing, though I prize it not.

And in her song,

Down lay in a nook my lady's brach.

This song I have heard quoted, and applied in such a way as to show that the profound meaning, so simple expressed, has sometimes been understood.

See with what a strain of reflection Van Artevelde greets the news that makes sure his overthrow.

It is strange, yet true,
 That doubtful knowledge travels with a speed

Miraculous, which certain cannot match;
 I know not why, when this or that has chanced,
 The smoke should come before the flash; yet 'tis so.

The creative power of a soul of genius, is shown by bringing out the poetic sweetness of Van Artevelde, more and more, as the scene penetrates the heart more and more up to the close.

The gibbous moon was in a wan decline,
 And all was silent as a sick man's chamber,
 Mixing its small beginnings with the dregs
 Of the pale moonshine, and a few faint stars,
 The cold uncomfortable daylight dawned;
 And the white tents, topping a low ground-fog,
 Showed like a fleet becalmed.

At the close of the vision:

And midmost in the eddy and the whirl,
 My own face saw I, which was pale and calm
 As death could make it, — then the vision passed,
 And I perceived the river and the bridge,
 The mottled sky, and horizontal moon,
 The distant camp and all things as they were.
 * * * * *
 Elena, think not that I stand in need
 Of false encouragement; I have my strength,
 Which, though it lie not in the sanguine mood,
 Will answer my occasions. To yourself,
 Though to none other, I at time present
 The gloomiest thoughts that gloomy truths inspire,
 Because I love you. but I need no prop!
 Nor could I find it in a tinsel show
 Of prosperous surmise. Before the world
 I wear a cheerful aspect, not so false
 As for your lover's solace you put on;
 Nor in my closet does the oil run low,
 Or the light flicker.

ELENA.

Lo, now! you are angry
 Because I try to cheer you.

VAN ARTEVELDE.

No, my love,
 Not angry; that I never was with you;

But as I deal not falsely with my own,
 So would I wish the heart of her I love,
 To be both true and brave; nor self-beguiled,
 Nor putting on disguises for my sake,
 As though I faltered. I have anxious hours;
 As who in like extremities has not?
 But I have something stable here within,
 Which bears their weight.

In the last scenes:

CECILE.

She will be better soon, my lord.

VAN ARTEVELDE.

Say worse;

'Tis better for her to be thus bereft.
 One other kiss on that bewitching brow,
 Pale hemisphere of charms. Unhappy girl!
 The curse of beauty was upon thy birth,
 Nor love bestowed a blessing. Fare thee well!

How clear his voice sounds at the very last.

The rumor ran that I was hurt to death,
 And then they staggered. Lo! we're flying all!
 Mount, mount, old man; at least let one be saved!
 Roosdyk! Vauclaire! the gallant and the kind!
 Who shall inscribe your merits on young tomb!
 May mine tell nothing to the world but this:
 That never did that prince or leader live,
 Who had more loyal or more loving friends!
 Let it be written that fidelity
 Could go no farther. Mount, old friend, and fly!

VAN RYK.

With you, my lord, not else. A fear-struck throng,
 Comes rushing from Mount Dorre. Sir, cross the bridge.

ARTEVELDE.

The bridge! my soul abhors — but cross it thou;
 And take this token to my Love, Van Ryk;
 Fly, for my sake in hers, and take her hence!
 It is my last command. See her conveyed
 To Ghent by Olsen, or what safer road
 Thy prudence shall descry. This do, Van Ryk.
 Lo! now they pour upon us like a flood! —

Thou that didst never disobey me yet —
 This last good office render me. Begone!
 Fly whilst the way is free.

What commanding sweetness in the utterance of the name, Van Ryk, and what a weight of tragedy in the broken sentence which speaks of the fatal bridge. These are the tings that actors rarely give us, the very passages to which it would be their vocation to do justice; saying out those tones we divine from the order of the words.

Yet Talma's *Pas encore* set itself to music in the mind of the hearer; and *Zara, you weep*, was so spoken as to melt the whole French nation into that one moment.

Elena's sob of anguish:

Arouse yourself, sweet lady; fly with me,
 I pray you hear; it was his last command
 That I should take you hence to Ghent by Olsen.

ELENA.

I cannot go on foot.

VAN RYK.

No, lady, no,
 You shall not need; horses are close at hand
 Let me take you hence. I pray you come.

ELENA.

Take *him* then too.

VAN RYK.

The enemy is near,
 In hot pursuit; we cannot take the body.

ELENA.

The body! Oh!

In this place Miss Kemble alone would have had force of passion to represent her, who

Flung that long funereal note
 Into the upper sky?

Though her acting was not refined enough by intellect and culture for more delicate lineaments of the character. She also would have given its expression to the unintelligent, broken-hearted,
 I cannot go on foot.

The body — yes, that temple could be so deserted by its god, that men could call it so! That form so instinct with rich gifts, that baseness and sloth seemed mere names in its atmosphere, could lie on the earth as unable to vindicate its rights, as any other clod. The exclamation of Elena,

better bespoke the tragedy of this fact, than any eulogium of a common observer, through that of Burgundy us fitly worded.

Dire rebel though he was,
 Yet with a noble nature and great gifts
 Was he endowed: courage, discretion, wit,
 An equal temper and an ample soul,
 Rock-bound and fortified against assaults
 Of transitory passion, but below
 Built on a surging subterraneous fire,
 That stirred and lifted him to high attempts,
 So prompt and capable, and yet so calm;
 He nothing lacked in sovereignty but the right,
 Nothing in soldiership except good fortune.

That *was* the grandeur of the character, that its calmness had nothing to do with slowness of blood, but was “built on a surging subterranean fire.”

Its magnanimity is shown with a fine simplicity. To blame one’s self is easy, to condemn one’s own changes and declensions of character and life painful, but inevitable to a deep mind. But to bear well the blame of a lesser nature, unequal to seeing what the fault grows from, is not easy; to take blame as Van Artevelde does, so quietly, indifferent from whence truth comes, so it be truth, is a trait seen in the greatest only.

ELENA.

Too anxious, Artevelde,
 And too impatient are you grown of late;
 You used to be so calm and even-minded,
 That nothing ruffled you.

ARTEVELDE.

I stand reprov’d;
 ’Tis time and circumstance, that trues us all;
 And they that temperately take their start,
 And keep their souls indifferently sedate,
 Through much of good and evil, at last,
 May find the weakness of their hearts thus tried.
 My cause appears more precious than it did
 In its triumphant days.

I have ventured to be more lavish of extracts that, although the publication of Philip Van Artevelde at once placed Mr. Taylor in the second rank of English poets, a high meed of glory, when we remember who compose the first, we seldom now here the poem mentioned, or a line quoted from it, though it is a work which might, from all considerations, well make a part of habitual reading, and habitual thought. Mr. Taylor has since published another dramatic poem, “Edwin the Fair,” whose excellencies, though considerable, are not of the same commanding

character with those of its predecessor. He was less fortunate in his subject. There is no great and noble figure in the foreground on which to concentrate the interest, from which to distribute the lights. Neither is the spirit of an ere seized with the same power. The figures are modern English under Saxon names, and affect us like a Boston face, tricked out in the appurtenances of Goethe's Faust. Such a character as Dustan's should be subordinated in a drama; its interest is that of intellectual analysis, mere feelings it revolts. The main character of the piece should attract the feelings, and we should be led to analysis, to understand, not to excuse its life.

There are, however, fine passages, as profound, refined, and expressed with the same unstrained force and purity, as those in Philip Van Artevelde.

Athelwold, another of the tragedies at the head of this notice, takes up some of the same characters a few years later. Without poetic depth, or boldness of conception, it yet boasts many beauties from the free talent, and noble feelings of the author. Athelwold is the best sketch in it, and the chief interest consists in his obstinate rejection of Elfrida, whose tardy penitence could no way cancel the wrong, her baseness of nature did his faith. This is worked up with the more art, that there is justice in her plea, but love, shocked from its infinity, could not stop short of despair. Here deep feeling rises to poetry.

Dunstan and Edgar are well drawn sketches, but show not the subtle touches of a life-like treatment.

This, we should think, as well as the Patrician's daughter, might be a good acting play.

We come now to the work which afford the most interesting theme for this notice, from its novelty, it merits, and its subject, which is taken from that portion of English history with which we are most closely bound, the time preceding the Commonwealth.

Its author, Mr. Sterling, has many admirers among us, drawn to him by his productions, both in prose and verse, which for a time enriched the pages of Blackwood. Some of these have been collected into a small volume, which has been republished in this country.

These smaller pieces are of very unequal merit; but the best among them are distinguished by vigor of conception and touch, by manliness and modesty of feeling, by depth of experience, rare in these days of babbling criticism and speculation. His verse does not flow or soar with the highest lyrical inspiration, neither does he enrich us by a large stock of original images, but for grasp and picturesque presentation of his subject, for frequent bold and forceful passages, and the constantly fresh breath of character, we know few that could be named with him. The Sexton's Daughter is the longest and best known, but not the best of the minor poems. It has, however, in a high degree, the merits we have mentioned. The tale is told in too many words, the homely verse becomes garrulous, but the strong, pure feeling of natural relations endears them all.

His Aphrodite is fitly painted, and we should have dreamed it so from all his verse.

* * * * * *

The high immortal queen from heaven,
 The calm Olympian face;
 Eyes pure from human tear or smile,
 Yet ruling all on earth,
 And limbs whose garb of golden air
 Was Dawn's primeval birth.

With tones like music of a lyre,

Continuous, piercing, low,
 The sovran lips began to speak,
 Spoke on in liquid flow,
 It seemed the distant ocean's voice,
 Brought near and shaped to speech,
 But breathing with a sense beyond
 What words of man may reach.

Weak child! Not I the puny power
 Thy wish would have me be,
 A roseleaf floating with the wind
 Upon a summer sea.
 If such thou need'st, go range the fields,
 And hunt the gilded fly,
 And when it mounts above thy head,
 Then lay thee down and die.

The spells which rule in earth and stars,
 Each mightiest though that lives,
 Are stronger than the kiss a child
 In sudden fancy gives.
 They cannot change, or fail, or fade,
 Nor deign o'er aught and to strive,
 Too weak to suffer and to strive,
 And tired while still 'tis day.

And thou with better wisdom learn
 The ancient lore to scan,
 Which tells that first in Ocean's breast
 They rule o'er all began;
 And know that not in breathless noon
 Upon the glassy main,
 The power was born that taught the world
 To hail her endless reign.

The winds were loud, the waves were high,
 In dear eclipse the sun
 Was crouched within the caves of heaven,
 And light has scarce begun;
 The Earth's green front lay drowned below,
 And Death and Chaos fought
 O'er all the tumult vast of things
 Not yet to severance brought.

'Twas then that spoke that fateful voice,
 And 'mid the huge uproar,
 Above the dark I sprang to life,

A good unhoped before.
 My tresses waved along the sky,
 And stars leapt out around,
 And earth beneath my feet arose,
 And his the pale profound.

A lamp amid the night, a feast
 That ends the strife of war,
 To wearied mariners a port,
 To fainting limbs a car,
 To exiled men the friendly roof,
 To mourning hearts the lay,
 To him who long has roamed by night
 The sudden dawn of day.

All these are mine, and mine the bliss
 That visits breasts in woe,
 And fills with wine the cup that once
 With tears was made to flow.
 Nor question thou the help that comes
 From Aphrodite's hand;
 For madness dogs the bard who doubts
 Whate'er the gods command.

Alfred the Harper has the same strong picture and noble beat of wing. One line we have heard to repeated by a voice, that could give it its full meaning, that we should be very grateful to the poet for that alone.

Still live the song though Regnar dies.

Dædalus we must quote.

DÆDALUS.

1.

Wail for Dædalus all that is fairest!
 All that is tuneful in air or wave!
 Shapes, whose beauty is truest and rarest,
 Haunt with your lamps and spells his grave!

2.

Statues, bend your heads in sorrow,
 Ye that glance 'mid ruins old,
 That know not a past, nor expect a morrow,
 On many a moonlight Grecian wold!

3.

By sculptured cave and speaking river,
 Thee, Dædalus, oft the Nymphs recall;

The leaves with a sound of winter quiver,
Murmur thy name, and withering fall.

4.

Yet are they visions in soul the grandest
Of all that crowd on the tear-dimmed eye,
Though, Dædalus, thou no more commandest
New stars to that ever-widening sky.

5.

Ever thy phantoms arise before us,
Our loftier brothers, but one in blood;
By bed and table they lord it o'er us,
With looks of beauty and words of Good.

6.

Calmly they show us mankind victorious
O'er all that's aimless, blind, and base;
Their presence has made our nature glorious,
Unveiling our night's illumined face.

7.

Thy toil has won them a god-like quiet,
Thou hast wrought their path to a lovely sphere;
Their eyes to peace rebuke our riot,
And shape us a home of refuge here.

8.

For Dædalus breathed in them his spirit;
In them their sire his beauty sees;
We too, a younger brood, inherit
The gifts and blessing bestowed on these.

9.

But ah! their wise and graceful seeming
Recalls the more that the sage is gone;
Weeping we wake from deceitful dreaming,
And find our voiceless chamber lone.

10.

Dædalus, thou from the twilight fleest,
Which thou with visions hast made so bright;
And when no more those shapes thou seest,
Wanting thine eye they lose their light.

11.

E'en in the noblest of Man's creations,
Those fresh worlds round this old of ours,
When the seer is gone, the orphaned nations
See but the tombs of perished powers.

12.

Wail for Dædalus, Earth and Ocean!
Stars and Sun, lament for him!

Ages, quake in strange commotion!
 All ye realms of life, be dim!

13.

Wail for Dædalus, awful voices,
 From earth's deep centre Mankind appall!
 Seldom ye sound, and then Death rejoices,
 For he knows that then the mightiest fall.

Also the following, those measure seems borrow from Goethe, and is worthy of its source. We insert a part of it.

THE WOODED MOUNTAINS.

Woodland Mountains, in your leafy walks,
 Shadows of the Past and Future blend;
 'Mid your verdant windings flits or stalks
 Many a loved and disembodied friend.

With your oaks and pine-trees, ancient brood,
 Spirits rise above the wizard soil,
 And with these I rove amid the wood;
 Man may dream on earth no less than toil.

Shapes that seem my kindred meet the ken;
 Gods and heroes glimmer through the shade;
 Ages long gone by from haunts of men
 Meet me here in rocky dell and glade.

There the Muses, touched with gleams of light,
 Warble yet from yonder hill of trees,
 And upon the huge and mist-clad height
 Fancy sage a clear Olympus sees.

'Mis yon utmost peaks the elder powers
 Still unshaken hold their fixed abode,
 Fates primeval thrones in airy towers,
 That with morning sunshine never glowed.

Deep below, amid a hell of rocks,
 Lies the Cyclops, and the Dragon coils,
 Heaving with the torrent's weary shocks,
 That round the untrodden region boils.

But more near to where our thought may climb,
 In a mossy, leaf-clad, Druid ring,
 Three gray shapes, prophetic Lords of Time,
 Homer, Dante, Shakspeare, sit and sing.

Each in his turn his descant frames aloud,
 Mingling new and old in ceaseless birth,
 While the Destinies hear amid their clod,
 And accordant mould the flux of earth.

Oh! ye trees that wave and glisten round,
 Oh! ye waters gurgling down the dell,
 Pulses throb in every sight and sound,
 Living Nature's more than magic spell.

Soon amid the vista still and dim,
 Knights, whom youth's high heart forgetteth not,
 Each with scars and shadowy helmet grim,
 Amadis, Orlando, Launcelot.

Stern they pass along the twilight green,
 While within the tangled wood's recess
 Some lorn damsel sits, lamenting keen,
 With a voice of tuneful amorousness.

Clad in purple weed, with pearly crown,
 And with golden hairs that waving play,
 Fairest earthly sight for King and Clown,
 Oriana or Angelica.

But in sadder nooks of deeper shade,
 Forms more subtle lurk from human eye,
 Each cold Nymph, the rock or fountain's main,
 Crowned with leaves that sunbeams never dry.

And while on and on I wander, still
 Passed the plashing streamlet's glance and foam,
 Hearing oft the wild-bird pipe at will,
 Still new openings lure me still to roam.

In this hollow smooth by May-tree walled,
 White and breathing now with fragrant flower,
 Lo! the fairy tribes to revel called,
 Start in view as fades the evening hour.

Decked in rainbow roof of gossamer,
 And with many a sparkling jewel bright,
 Rose-leaf faces, dew-drop eyes are there,
 Each with gesture fine of gentle sprite.

Gay they woo, and dance, and feast, and sing,

Elfin chants and laughter fill the dell,
 As if every leaf around should ring
 With its own aerial emerald bell.

But for man 'tis ever sad to see
 Joys like his that he must not partake,
 'Mid a separate world, a people's glee,
 In whose hearts his heart no joy could wake.

Fare ye well, ye tiny race of elves;
 May the moon-beam ne'er behold your tomb;
 Ye are happiest childhood's other selves,
 Bright to you be always evening's gloom.

And thou, mountain-realm of ancient wood,
 Where my feet and thoughts have strayed so long,
 Now thy old gigantic brotherhood
 With a ghostlier vastness round me throng.

Mound, and cliff, and crag, that none may scale
 With your serried trunks and wrestling boughs,
 Like one living presence ye prevail,
 And o'erhang me with Titanian brows.

In your Being's might depth of Power,
 Mine is lost, and melted all away.
 In your forms involved I seem to tower,
 And with you am spread in twilight grey.

In this knotted stem wheron I lean,
 And the dome above of countless leaves,
 Twists and swells, and frowns a life unseen,
 That my life with it resistless weaves.

Yet, O nature, less is all of thine
 Than why borrowing from our human breast;
 Thou, O God, hast made thy child divine,
 And from him this world thou hallowest.

The Rode and the Gauntlet we much admire as a ballad, and the tale is told in fewest words, and by a single picture; but we have not room for it here. In Lady Jane Grey, though this again is too garrulous, the picture of the princess at the beginning is fine, as she sits in the antique casement of the rich old room.

The lights through the painted glass

Fall with fondest brightness o'er the form

Of her who sits, the chamber's lovely dame,
 And her pale forehead in the light looks warm,
 And all these colors round her whiteness flame.

Young is she, scarcely passed from childhood's years,
 With grave, soft face, where thoughts and smiles may play,
 And unalarmed by guilty aims or fears,
 Serene as meadow flowers may meet the day.

No guilty pang she knows, though many a dread
 Hangs threatening o'er her in the conscious air,
 And 'mid the beams from that bright casement shut,
 A twinkling crown foreshows a near despair.

The quaint consciousness of this last line pleases me.
 He always speaks in marble words of Greece. But I must make no more quotations.
 Some part of his poem on Shakspeare is no unfit prelude to a few remarks on his own late
 work. With such a a sense of greatness none could wholly fail.

With meaning won from him for ever glows
 Each air that England feels, and star it knows;
 And gleams from spheres he first conjoined to earth
 Are blent with rays of each new morning's birth,
 Amid the sights and tales of common things,
 Leaf, flower, and bird, and wars, and deaths of kings,
 Of shore, and sea, and nature's daily round
 Of life that tills, and tombs that load the ground,
 His visions mingle, swell, command, pass by,
 And haunt with living presence heart and eye,
 And tones from him, by other bosoms caught,
 Awaken flush and stir of mounting thought,
 And the long sigh, and deep, impassioned thrill,
 Rouse custom's trance, and spur the faltering will.
 Above the goodly land, more his than ours,
 He sits supreme enthroned in skyey towers,
 And sees the heroic brood of his creation
 Teach larger life to his ennobled nation.
 O! shaping brain! O! flashing fancy's hues!
 O! boundless heart kept fresh by pity's dews!
 O! wit humane and blythe! O! sense sublime
 For each dim oracle of mantled Time!
 Transcendant form of man! in whom we read
 Mankind's whole tale of Impulse, Thought and Deed.

Such is his ideal of the great dramatic poet. It would not be fair to measure him, or any
 man, but his own ideal; that affords a standard of spiritual and intellectual progress, with which

the executive powers may not correspond. A clear eye may be associated with a feeble hand or the reverse. The mode of measurement proposed by the great thinker of our time is not inapplicable. First, show me what aim a man proposes to himself; next, with what degree of earnestness he strives to attain it. In both regards we can look at Mr. Sterling's work with pleasure and admiration. He exhibits to us a great crisis, with noble figures to represent its moving springs. His work is not merely the pleas for a principle, or the exposition of a thought, but an exhibition of both a work in life. He opens the instrument and lets us see the machinery without stopping the music. The progress of interest in the piece is imperative, the principle character well brought out, the style clear and energetic, the tone throughout is of a manly dignity, worthy great times. Yet its merit is of a dramatic sketch, rather than a drama. The forms want the roundness, the fulness of life, the thousand charms of spontaneous expression. In this last particular Sterling is as far inferior to Taylor, who in this respect is the only contemporary dramatist on whom we can look with complacency. Taylor's characters really meet, really bear upon one another. In contempt and hatred, or esteem, reverence, and melting tenderness, they challenge, bend, and transfuse one another.

Strafford never alters, never is kindled by or kindles the life of any other being, never breathes the breath of the moment. Before us, throughout the play, is the view of his greatness taken by the mind of the author; we are not really made to feel it by those around him; it is echoed from their lips, not from their lives. Lady Carlisle is the only personage, except Strafford, that is brought out into much relief. Everard is only an accessory, and the king, queen, and parliamentary leaders, drawn with a few strokes to give them their historical positions. Scarcely more can be said of Hollis; some individual action is assigned him, but not so as to individualize his character. The idea of the relation at this ominous period between Strafford and Lady Carlisle is noble. In these stern times he has put behind him the flowers of tenderness, and the toys of passion.

Lady, believe me, that I loved you truly,
 Still think of you with wonder and delight,
 Own you the liveliest, noblest heart of woman
 This age, or any, knows; but for love ditties
 And amorous toys, and kisses ocean-deep,
 Strafford and this only Earth are all too sad.

But when the lady had a soul to understand the declaration, and show herself worthy his friendship, there is a hardness in his action towards her, a want of softness and grace, how different from Van Artevelde's:

My Adriana, victim that thou art.

The nice point indeed, of giving the hero manly firmness, and an even stern self-sufficiency, without robbing him of the beauty of gentle love, was touched with rare success in Van Artevelde. Common men may not be able to show firmness and persistency, without a certain hardness and glassiness of expression; but we expect of the hero, that he should combine the softness with the constancy of Hector.

This failure is the greater here, that we need a private tie to Strafford to give his fall the deeper tragic interest.

Lady Carlisle is painted with some skill and spirit. The name given her by St. John of “the handsome vixen,” and the willingness shown by her little page to die, rather than see her after failing to deliver her letter, joined with her own appearance, mark her very well. The following is a prose sketch of her as seen in common life.

SIR TOBY MATTHEW’S PORTRAIT OF LUCY PERCY, COUNTESS OF CARLISLE.

“She is of too high a mind and dignity, not only to seek, but almost to wish the friendship of any creature: they, whom she is pleased to choose, are such as are of the most eminent condition, both for power and employment; not with any design towards her own particular, either of advantage or curiosity, but her nature values fortunate persons as virtuous. She prefers the conversation of men to that of women; not but she can talk on the fashions with her female friends, but she is too soon sensible that she can set them as she will; that pre-eminence shortens all equality. She converses with those who are most distinguished for their conversational powers.

Of love freely will she discourse, listen to all its faults, and mark all its power. She cannot herself love in earnest, but she will play with love, and will take a deep interest for persons of condition and celebrity.” — *See Life of Pym; in Lardner’s Cabinet Cyclopædia*, Vol. xci., p. 213.

The noblest trait, given her in the play, is the justice she is able to do Charles, after his treachery has consigned Strafford to the Tower.

LADY CARLISLE.

And he betrayed you.

STRAFFORD.

He! it cannot be,
There’s not a minion in his court so vile,
Holland nor Jermyn, would deceive a trust
Like that I placed in him, nor would belie
So seeming heart felt words as those he spake.

LADY CARLISLE.

He’s not entirely vile, and yet he did it.

This, seen in unison with her out-pouring of contempt upon the king when present, makes out a character. As a whole, that given her by the poet is not only nobler than the one assigned her in history, but opposed to it in a vital point.

The play closes after Strafford has set forth for the scaffold with the ejaculation from her left in the Tower, where she has waited on his last moment,

“Alone, henceforth forever!”

While history makes her transfer her attachment to Pym, who must have been, in her eyes, Strafford’s murderer, on the score of her love of intellectual power, in which all other

considerations were merged. This is a character so odious, as in a woman, so unnatural, that we are tempted rather to suppose it was hatred of the king for his base and treacherous conduct towards Strafford, that induced her to betray Pym the counsels of the court, as the best means of revenge. Such a version of her motives would not be inconsistent with the character assigned her in the play. It would be making her the agent to execute her own curse, so eloquently spoken after she finds the king willing to save himself by the sacrifice of Strafford's life.

KING CHARLES.

The woman's mad; her passion braves the skies!

LADY CARLISLE.

I brave them not; I but invoke their justice
To rain hot curses on a tyrant's head;
Henceforth I set myself apart for mischief,
To find and prompt men capable of hate,
Until some dagger, steeled in Strafford's blood,
Knocks at the heart of Strafford's murdered.

KING CHARLES.

His murderer! O God! — no, no, — not that!
(Sinks back into a seat.)

LADY CARLISLE.

And here I call on the powers above us
To aid the deep damnation of my curse,
And make this treason to the noblest man,
That moves alive within our English seas,
Fatal to him and all his race, whose baseness
Destroys a worth it ne'er could understand.
Stars in your glory, vital air and sun,
And thou, dark earth, our cradle, nurse, and grave,
And more than all, free truth and penal justice,
Conspire with all your dreadful influence
Against his blood, whose crime ye now behold!
Make him a byword, and a name of woe,
A conquered warrior, and a throneless outcast,
To teach all kings the law of evil power,
Till by an end more friendless and abhorred
Than his great victim's, and with heavier pain,
Let him slink off to a detested grave!
And now I give your majesty leave to go,
And may you carry from my house away,
That fixed incurable ulcer of the heart,
Which I have helped your thoughts to fasten there.

If these burning words had as much power to kindle her own heart, as they must that of the hearer, we only realize our anticipations, when we find her sending to the five members the

news of the intention of Charles to arrest them, thus placing him in a position equally ridiculous and miserable, having incurred all the odium of this violent transaction to no purpose. That might well be a proud moment of gratified vengeance to he, when he stood amid the sullen and outraged parliament, baffled like a school-boy, loathed as a thief, exclaiming, “The birds are flown” and all owing to “the advices of the honorable Lady Carlisle.”

The play opens with Strafford’s return to London. He is made to return in rather a different temper from what he really did, not only trusting the king, but in his own greatness fearless of the popular hatred. The opening scenes are very good, compact, well wrought, and showing at the very beginning the probably fortunes of the scene, by making the characters the agents of their own destinies. A weight of tragedy is laid upon the heart, and at the same time we are inspired with deep interest as to *how* it shall be acted out.

Strafford appears before us as he does in history, as grand and melancholy figure, whose dignity lay in his energy of will, and large scope of action, not in his perception of principles, or virtue in carrying them out. For his faith in the need of absolute sway to control the herd, does not merit the name of a principle.

In my thought, the promise of success
Grows to the self-same stature as the need,
Which is gigantic. There’s a king to guide,
Three realms to save, a nation to control,
And by subduing to make blest beyond
Their sottish dreams of lawless liberty.
This to fulfil Strafford has pledged his soul
In the unfaltering hands of destiny.

Nor can we fail to believe, that the man of the world might sincerely take this view of his opponent.

No wonder they whose life is all deception,
A piety that, like a sheep-skin drum,
Is loud because ’tis hollow, — thus can move
Belief in others by their swollen pretences.
Why, man, it is their trade; they do not stick
To cozen themselves, and will they stop at you?

The court and council scenes are good. The materials are taken from history, with Shakspearean adherence to the record, but they are uttered in masculine cadences, sinewy English, worthy this great era in the life of England.

The king and queen and sycophants of the court are too carelessly drawn. Such unmitigated baseness and folly, are unbearable in poetry. The master invests his worst characters with redeeming traits, or at least, touches them with a human interest, that prevents their being objects of disgust rather than contempt or aversion. This is the poetic gift, to penetrate to the truth below the fact. We need to hear the excuses men make to themselves for their worthlessness.

The council of the parliamentary leaders is far better. Here the author speaks his natural language from the lips of grave enthusiastic men. Pym's advice to his daughter is finely worded, and contains truths, which, although they have been so often expressed, are not like to find so large reception, as to the dispense with new and manifold utterance.

The Lord had power
 To guard his own: Mary, pray to Him,
 Nor fear what man can do. A rule there is
 Above all circumstance, a current deep
 Beneath all fluctuations. This who knows,
 Though seeming weakest, firmly as the sun
 Walks in blind paths where earthly strongest fall,
 Reason is God's own voice to man, ordains
 All holy duties, and all truth inspires:
 And he who fails, errs not by trusting it,
 But deafening to the sound his ear, from dread
 Of the stern roar it speaks with. O my child,
 Pray still for guidance, and be sure't will come.
 Lift up your heart upon the knees of God;
 Losing yourself, your smallness, ad your darkness,
 In his great light, who fills and moves the world,
 Who hath alone the quiet of perfect motion —
 Sole quiet, not mere death.

The speech of Vane is nobly rendered.

The conversations of the populace are tolerably well done. Only the greatest succeed in these; nobody except Goethe in modern times. Here they give, not the character of the people, but the spirit of the time, playing in relation to the main action the part of chorus.

SECOND WOMAN.

There's Master St. John has a tongue
 That threshes like a flail.

THIRD WOMAN.

And Master Fiennes
 That's a true lamb! He'd roast alive the Bishop.

CITIZEN.

I was close by the coach, and with my nose
 Upon the door, I called out, Down with Strafford!
 And then just so he fixed his eyes on mine,
 And something seemed to choke me in the throat;
 In truth, I think it must have been the devil!

THIRD CITIZEN.

I saw him as he stept out of the House,
 And then his face was dark, but very quiet;
 It seemed like looking down the dusky mouth
 Of a great cannon.

Everard says with expressive bitterness as they shout “Down with Strafford,”

I’ve heard this noise so often, that it seems
As natural as the howling of the wind.

And again —

For forty years I’ve studied books and men,
But ne’er till these last days have known a jot
Of the true secret madness in mankind.
This morn the whispers leapt from each to each,
Like a petard alight, which every man
Feared might explode in his own hands, and therefore
Would haste to pass it onward to his friend.

Even in our piping times of peace, nullification and the Rhode Island difficulties have given us specimens of the process of fermentation, the more than Virgilian growth of Rumor.

The description of the fanatic preacher by Everard is very good. The poor secretary, not placed in the prominent rank to suffer, yet feeling all that passes, through his master, finds vent to his grief, not in mourning, but a strong causticity;

The sad fanatic preacher,
In whom one saw, by glancing through the eyes,
The last grey curdling dregs of human joy,
Dropped sudden sparks that kindled where they fell.

Strafford draws the line between his own religion and that of the puritan, as it seemed to him, with noble phrase in his last advices to his son.

Say it has ever been his father’s mind,
That perfect reason, justice, government,
Are the chief attributes of Him who made,
And who sustains the world, in whose full being,
Wisdom and power are one; and I, his creature,
Would fain have gained authority and rule,
To make the imagined order in my soul
Supreme o’er all, the proper good of man.
But Him to love who shaped us, and whose breast
Is the one home of all things, with a passion
Electing Him amid all other beings,
As if he were beside them, not their all.
This is the snug and dozing deliration
Of men, who flinch from woman what is worst,
And cannot see the good. Of Such beware.

This is the nobler tone of Strafford's spirit³. That ore habitual to him is heard in his presumptuous joy before entering the parliament, into which he went as a conqueror, and came out a prisoner. His confidence is not noble to us, it is not that of Brutus or Van Artevelde, who, knowing what is prescribed by the law of right within the breast, can take no other course but that, whatever the consequences; neither like the faith of Julius Cæsar, or Wallenstein in their star, which, though less pure, is not without religion; but it is the presumption of a strong character which, though its head towers above those of its companions when they are on the same level, yet has not taken a sufficiently high platform, to see what passes around or above it. Strafford's strength cannot redeem his infatuation, while he struggles; vanquished, not overwhelmed, he is a majestic figure, whose features⁴ are well marked in various passages.

Compared with him, whom I for eighteen years
Have seen familiar as my friend, all men
Seem but as chance-born flies, and only he
Great Nature's chosen and all-gifted son.

⁵Van Artevelde also bears testimony to the belief of the author, that familiarity breeds no contempt, but the reverse in the service of genuine nobility. A familiarity of eighteen years will not make any but a stage hero, other than a hero to his valet de chamber.

King Charles says,

To pass the bill, —
Under his eye, with that fixed quiet look
Of imperturbably and thoughtful greatness, I cannot do it.

Stafford himself says, on the final certainty of the king's desertion,

Dear Everard, peace! for there is nothing here
I have not weighed before, and made my own.

And this, no doubt, was true, in a sense. Historians, finding that Strafford expressed surprise, and even indignation, that the king had complied with Strafford's own letter releasing him from all obligation to save his life, have intimated that the letter was written out of policy. But this is a superficial view; it produces very different results from giving up all to another to see him take it; and, though Strafford must have known Charles's weakness too well to expect any thing good from him, yet the consummation must have produced fresh emotion, for a strong character cannot be prepared for the conduct of a weak one; there is always in dishonor somewhat unexpected and incredible to one incapable of it.

The speeches in parliament are well translated from the page of history. The poet, we think, has improved upon it in Strafford's mention of his children; it has not the theatrical tone of the common narrative, and is, probably, nearer truth, as it is more consistent with the rest of his deportment.

He has made good use of the fine anecdote of the effect produced on Pym by meeting Strafford's eye at the close of one of his most soaring passages.

PYM.

The King is King, but as he props the State,
 The State a legal and compacted bond,
 Tying us all in sweet fraternity,
 And that loosed off by fraudulent creeping hand,
 Or cut and torn by lawless violence,
 There is no King because the State is gone;
 And in the cannibal chaos that remains
 Each man is sovereign of himself alone.
 Shall then a drunken regicidal blow
 Be paid by forfeit of the driveller's head,
 And he go free, who, slaying Law itself,
 Murders all royalty and all subjection?
 He who, with all the radiant attributes
 That most, save goodness, can adorn a man,
 Would turn his kind to planless brutishness.
 His knavery soars, indeed, and strikes the stars,
 Yet is worse knavery than the meanest felon's
 (Strafford fixes his eyes on Pym, who hesitates.)
 Oh! no, my Lords, Oh! no,
(Aside to Hampden.) His eye confounds me; he⁶ was once my friend.
(Aloud.) Oh! no my Lords, the very selfsame rule, &c.

The eloquence of this period could not be improved upon; but it is much to select from and use its ebullitions with the fine effect we admire in this play. Whatever view be taken of Strafford, whether as condemnatory as the majority of writers popular among us, the descendants of the puritans, would promote, or that more lenient and discriminating, brought out in this play, for which abundant grounds may be discovered by those who will seek, we cannot view him at this period but with the interest of tragedy as of one suffering unjustly. For however noble the eloquence of the parliamentary leaders in appealing to a law above *the* law, to an eternal justice in the breast, which afforded sufficient sanction to the desired measure, it cannot but be seen, at this distance of time, that this reigned not purely in their own breasts, that his doom, though sought by them from patriotic, not interested motives, was, in itself, a measure of expediency. He was *the* victim, because the most dreaded foe, because they could not go on with confidence, while the only man lived, who could and would sustain Charles in his absurd and wicked policy. Thus, though he might deserve that the people on whom he trampled should rise up to crush him, that the laws he has broken down should rear new and higher walls to imprison him, though the shade of Eliot called for vengeance on the counsellor who alone had so long saved the tyrant from a speedier fall, and the victims of his own oppressions echoed with sullen murmur to the "silver trumpet" call⁷, *yet*, the greater the peculiar offences of this man, the more need that his punishment should have been awarded in an absolutely pure spirit. And this it was not; it may be respected as an act of just retribution, but not of pure justice.

Men who had such a cause to maintain, as his accusers had, should deserve the praise awarded by Wordsworth to him, who,

In a state where men are tempted still
 To evil for a guard against worse ill,
 And what in quality or act is best
 Doth seldom on a right foundation rest,
 Yet fixes good on good alone, and owes
 To virtue every triumph that he knows.

The heart swells against Strafford as we read the details of his policy. Even allowing that his native temper, prejudices of birth, and disbelief in mankind, really inclined him to a despotic government, as the best practicable, that his early espousal of the popular side was only a stratagem to terrify the court, and that he was thus, though a deceiver, no apostate, yet he *had* been led, from whatever motives, to look on that side; his great intellect was clear of sight, the front presented by better principles in that time commanding. We feel that he was willful in the course he took, and self-aggrandizement his principal, if not his only motive. We share the hatred of his time, as we see him so triumphant in his forceful, wrongful measures. But we would not have had him hunted down with such a hue and cry, that the tones of defence had really no chance to be heard. We would not have had papers stolen, and by a son from a father who had entrusted him with a key, to condemn him. And what a man was this thief, one whose high enthusiastic hope never paused to good, but ever rushed onward to the best.

Who would outbid the market of the world,
 And seek a holier than a common prize,
 And by the unworthy lever of to-day
 Ope the strange portals of a better morn.
 * * * * * *
Begin to-day, nor end till evil sink
 In its due grave; and if at once we may not
 Declare the greatness of the work we plan,
 Be sure, at least, that ever in our eyes
 It stand complete before us, as a dome
 Of light beyond this gloom; a house of stars,
 Encompassing these dusky tents; a thing
 Absolute, close to all, though seldom seen,
 Near as our hearts, and perfect as the heavens.
 Be this our aim and model, and our hands
 Shall not wax faint until the work is done.

He is not the first, who, by looking too much at the stars has lost the eye for severe fidelity to a private trust. He thought himself “obliged in conscience to impart the paper to Master Pym.” Who that looks at the case by the code of common rectitude can think it was ever his to impart?

What monstrous measures appear the arbitrary construction put on the one word in the minutes which decided the fate of Strafford, the freeing the lords of council from the oath of secrecy under whose protection he had spoken there, the conduct of the House towards Lord

Digby, when he declared himself not satisfied that the prisoner could with justice be declared guilty of treason; the burning his speech by the common hangman when he dared print it, to make known the reasons of his course to the world, when placarded as Straffordian, held up as a mark for popular rage for speaking it.⁸ Lord Digby was not a man of honor, but they did not know that, or if they did, it had nothing to do with his right of private judgment. What could Strafford, what could Charles do more high-handed? If they had violated the privileges of parliament, the more reason parliament should respect their privileges, above all the privilege of the prisoner, to be supposed innocent until proved guilty. The accusers, obliged to set aside rule, and appeal to the very foundations of equity, could only have sanctioned such a course by the religion and pure justice of their proceedings. Here the interest of the accusers made them not only demand, but insist upon, the condemnation; the cause was prejudged by the sentiment of the people, and the resentments of the jury, and the proceedings conducted, beside, with the most scandalous disregard to the sickness and other disadvantageous circumstances of Strafford. He was called on to answer “if he will come,” just at the time of a most dangerous attack from his cruel distemper, if he *will not come*, the cause is still to be pushed forward. He was denied the time and means he needed to collect his evidence. The aid to be given him by counsel, after being deprived of his chief witness “by a master stroke of policy,” was restricted within narrow limits. While he prepared his answers, in full court, for he was never allowed to retire, to the points of accusation, vital in their import, requiring the closet examination, those present talked, laughed, at, lounged about. None of this disturbed his magnanimous patience; his conduct indeed is so noble, through the whole period, that he and his opponents change places in our minds; at the time, he seems the princely deer, and they the savage hounds.⁹ Well, it is all the better for the tragedy, but as we read the sublime appeals of Pym to a higher state of being, we cannot but wish that all had been done in accordance with them. The art and zeal, with which the condemnation of Strafford was obtained, have had high praise as statesmanlike; we would have wished for them one so high as to preclude this.

No doubt great temporary good was effected for England by the death of Strafford, but the permanence of good it ever in proportion with the purity of the means used to obtain it. This act would have been great for Strafford, for it was altogether in accordance with his views. He met the parliament ready to do battle to the death, and might would have been right, had he made rules for the lists; but *they* proposed a different rule for their government, and by that we must judge them. Admit the story of Vane’s pilfering the papers not to be true, that the minutes were obtained some other way. This measure, on the supposition of its existence, is defended by those who defend the rest.

Strafford would certainly have come off with imprisonment and degradation from office, had the parliament deemed it safe to leave him alive. When we consider this, when we remember the threat of Pym, at the time of his deserting the popular party, “You have left us, but I will never leave you while your head is on your shoulders,” we see not, setting aside the great results of the act, and looking at it by its merits alone, that it differs from the administration of Lynch law in some regions of our own country. Lynch law, with us, has often punished the gamester and the robber, whom it was impossible to convict by the usual legal process; the evil in it is, that it cannot be depended upon, but, while with one hand it punished a villain, administers with the

other as summary judgement on the philanthropist, according as the moral sentiment or prejudice may be roused in the popular breast.

We have spoken disparagingly of the capacities of the drama for representing what is peculiar in our own day, but, for such a work as this, presenting a great crisis with so much clearness, force, and varied beauty, we can only be grateful, and ask for more acquaintance with the same mind, whether through the drama or in any other mode.

Copious extracts have been given, in the belief that thus, better than by any interpretation or praise of ours, attention would be attracted, and a wider perusal ensured to Mr. Sterling's works.

In his mind there is a combination of reverence for the Ideal, with a patient appreciation of its slow workings in the actual world, that is rare in our time. He looks religiously, he speaks philosophically, nor these alone, but with that other faculty which he himself so well describes.

You bear a brain
Discursive, open, generally wise,
But missing ever that excepted point
That gives each thing and hour a special oneness.
The little keyhole of the infrangible door,
The instant on which hangs eternity,
And not in the dim past and empty future,
Waste fields for abstract notions.

Such is the demonology of man of the world. It may rule in accordance with the law of right, but where it does not, the strongest man may lose the battle, and so it was with Strafford.

Author's Notes:

1. The Patrician's Daughter, a tragedy, in five acts, by J. Westland Marston; London; C. Mitchel, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, 1841.

Athelwold, a tragedy in five acts, by W. Smith, Esq.; William Blackwood and Sons. London and Edinburgh, 1842.

Strafford, a tragedy, by John Sterling. London; Edward Moxon, Dover Street, 1843.

2. We may be permitted to copy, in this connection, the fine plea of Massinger's "Roman Actor."

PARIS. If desire of honor was the base
On which the building of the Roman empire
Was raised up to this height; if, to inflame
The noble youth, with an ambitious heat,
To endure the posts of danger, nay, of death,
To be thought worthy the triumphal wreath,
By glorious undertakings, may deserve
Reward, or favor from the commonwealth;
Actors may put in for as large a share,

As all the sects of the philosophers:
 They with cold precepts (perhaps seldom read)
 Deliver what an honorable thing
 The active virtue is: but does that fire
 The blood, or swell the veins with emulation,
 To be both good and great, equal to that
 Which is presented on our theatres?
 Let a good actor, in a lofty scene,
 Show great Alcides, honored in the sweat
 Of his twelve labors; or a bold Camillus,
 Forbidding Rome to be redeemed with gold
 From the insulting Gauls, or Scipio,
 After his victories, imposing tribute
 On conquered Carthage; if done to the life,
 As if they saw their dangers, and their glories,
 And did partake with them in their rewards,
 All that have any spark of Roman in them,
 The slothful arts lad by, contend to be
 Like those they see presented.

SECOND SENATOR. He has put
 The consuls to their whisper.

PARIS. But 'tis urged
 That we corrupt youth, and traduce superiors.
 When so we bring a vice upon the stage,
 That does go off unpunished? Do we teach,
 By the success of wicked undertakings,
 Others to tread in their forbidden steps?
 We show no arts of Lydian panderism,
 Corinthian poisons, Persian flatteries,
 But mulcted so in the conclusion, that
 Even those speculators, that were so inclined
 Go home changed men. And for traducing such
 That are above us, publishing to the world
 Their secret crimes, we are as innocent
 As such as are born dumb. When we present
 An heir, that does conspire against the life
 Of his dear parent, numbering every hour
 He lives, as tedious to him; if there be
 Among the auditors one, whose conscience tells him
 He is of the same mould, — WE CANNOT HELP IT.
 Or, bringing on the stage a loose adulteress,

That does maintain the riotous expense
 Of her licentious paramour, yet suffers
 The lawful pledges of a former bed
 To starve the while for hunger; if a matron,
 However great in fortune, birth, or titles,
 Cry out, 'Tis writ for me! — WE CANNOT HELP IT.
 Or, when a covetous man's expressed, whose wealth
 Arithmetic cannot number, and whose lordships
 A falcon in one day cannot fly over;
 Yet he so sordid in his mind, so griping
 As not to afford himself the necessaries
 To maintain life, is a patrician,
 (Though honored with a consulship) find himself
 Touched to the quick in this, — WE CANNOT HELP IT.
 Or, when we show a judge that is corrupt,
 And will give up his sentence, as he favors
 The person, not the cause; saving the guilty
 If of his faction, and as oft condemning
 The innocent, out of particular spleen;
 If any in this reverend assembly,
 Nay, even yourself, my lord, that are the image
 Of absent Cæsar, feel something in your bosom
 That puts you in remembrance of things past,
 Or things intended, — 'TIS NOT IN US TO HELP IT.
 I have said, my lord, and now, as you find cause,
 Or censure us, or free us with applause.

3. His late biographer says well in regard to the magnanimity of his later days, of so much nobler a tone than his general character would lead us to expect. "It is a mean as well as a hasty judgment, which would attribute this to any unworthy compromise with his real nature. It is probably a juster and more profound view of it, to say that, into a few of the later weeks in his life, new knowledge had penetrated from the midst of the breaking of his fortunes. It was well and beautifully said by a then living poet,

'The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
 Lets in new light through chinks that time have made.'"

Forster's Life of Strafford, Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopædia.

4. "A poet, who was present, exclaimed,
 On thy brow
 State terror mixed with wisdom, and at once
 Saturn and Hermes in thy countenance."

Life of Strafford, p. 388.

Certainly there could not be a more pointed and pregnant account given of the man than is suggested by this last line.

5. That with familiarity respect
Doth slacken, is a word of common use;
I never found it so.

Philips Van Artevelde, 2d Part, p. 29.

6. Through the whole of the speech Strafford is described to have been closely and earnestly watching Pym, when the latter suddenly turning, met the fixed and faded eyes and haggard features of his early associate, and a rush of feelings from the other days, so fearfully contrasting the youth and friendship of the past with the love-poisoned hate of the present, and the mortal agony impending in the future, for a moment deprived the patriot of self-possession “His papers he looked on,” says Baillie, “but they could not help him, so he behoved to pass them.” For a moment only; suddenly recovering his dignity and self-command, he told the court, c. — *Life of Pym, Cabinet Cyclopædia*.

7. “I will not repeat, Sirs, what you have heard from that silver trumpet.” One of the parliament speaking of Rudyard.

8. See Parliamentary History, Vol. IX.

9. Who can avoid a profound feeling, not only of compassion, but sympathy, when he reads of Strafford obliged to kneel in Westminster Hall. True, he would, if possible, have brought others as low; but there is a deep pathos in the contrast of his then, and his former state, best shown by the symbol of such an act. Just so we read of Bonaparte’s green coat being turned at St. Helena, after it had faded on the right side. He who had overturned the world, to end with having his old coat turned! There is something affecting, Belisarius-like, in the picture. When Warren Hastings knelt in Westminster Hall, the chattering but pleasant Miss Burney tells us, Wyndham, for a moment struck, half shrunk from the business of prosecuting him. At such a sight, whispers in every breast the monition, Had I been similarly tempted, had I not fallen as low, or lower?

Source: *The Dial*, Vol. IV, No. III. January 1844, pp. 307-349