

Tennyson's Last Poems.

The numerous appreciations of Tennyson that have appeared during the last month or so, nothing in the work of the late Laureate has been so much remarked as the variety of its contents—a variety specially notable in the case of so finished an artist. The small volume which has just been issued, seems to present in little a curiously faithful image of the whole work of which it is the epitome as well as the epitome. The Death of (Enone) is one of those classic monologues (a form originally invented by Landor in the 'Hellenics') of which the exquisite 'Enone' of 1832 is perhaps the most famous, as it is certainly one of the most beautiful. 'St. Telemachus' and 'Akbar's Dream' might be compared, after a fashion, with such pieces as 'St. Simeon Stylites' and 'Lucretius', in which the monologue and short narrative poem deal with graver themes of religion and philosophy. 'The Bandit's Death' and 'Charity', in their different ways, belong to the series of little ballad tragedies of which 'Rizpah' is the supreme example. 'The Churchwarden and the Curate' is a dialect poem after the manner of 'The Northern Farmer.' 'The Dawn' and 'The Making of Man' have something in common with both the temper and the form of some of the fiercer parts of 'Maud' and the more prophetic parts of 'Locksley Hall.' A voice spake out of the skies' recalls the earlier lilt, 'Flower in the crannied wall'; there is a dedication to the Master of Balliol, which reminds one of the lines to the Rev. F. D. Maurice; there is, finally, one of the official pieces in a brief lament on the death of the Duke of Clarence. Such variety in the work of a poet past eighty is itself enough to give extraordinary interest to a volume bolder such 'infinite riches in a little room.' That any of the work published now can seriously compete with the earlier verse which it recalls is not to be expected. Much of it gives the effect of a careful tracing rather than of an original design. But the pattern chosen is generally a beautiful one, and the tracing is done with admirable art.

The poem on (Enone) is dedicated to the Master of Balliol in some graceful stanzas:

Dear Master in our classic town,
You, loved by all the younger gown
There at Balliol,
Lay your Plato for one minute down,
And read a Grecian tale re-told,
Which cast in later Grecian mould,
Quintus Calaber
Somewhat lazily handled of old;
And on this white midwinter day—
For have the far-off hymns of May,
All her melodies,
All her harmonies echo'd away?—
To-day, before you turn again
To thoughts that lift the soul of men,
Hear my cataract's
Downward thunder in hollow and gen,
Till, led by dream and vague desire,
The woman, gliding toward the pyre,
Find her warrior
Stark and dark in his funeral fire.

The story of (Enone's death follows, in the main, the version 'somewhat lazily handled' by Quintus Smyrnaeus in the tenth book of his tithreome epic. To (Enone, dreaming of the Paris once 'beauteous as a god,' comes Paris, 'lame, crooked, reeling, livid,' and prays her to heal the poisoned wound of which he is dying. She bids him die;

he goes from her, a shadow sinking into the mist; and out of the vague terror of a dream she awakens beneath the stars.

What star could burn so low? not Ilion yet,
What light was there? She rose and slowly down,
By the long torrent's ever-deepen'd roar,
Paced, following, as in trance, the silent cry.
She waked a bird of prey that scream'd and pass'd;
She roused a snake that hissing writhed away;
A panther sprang across her path, she heard
The shriek of some lost life among the pines.
But when she gain'd the border vale, and saw
The ring of faces redened by the flames,
Enfolding that dark body which had lain
Of old in her embrace, paused, and then ask'd
Falteringly, 'Who lies on yonder pyre?
But every man was mute for reverence.
Then moving quickly forward till the heat
Smote on her brow, she lifted up a voice
Of shrill command, 'Who burns upon the pyre?
Whereon their oldest and their boldest said,
'He, whom thou wouldst not heal!' and all at once
The morning light of happy marriage broke
Thru' all the riotous years of widowhood,
And muffling up her comely head and crying
'Husband!' she leapt upon the funeral pile,
And mixed herself with him and past in fire.

In 'St. Telemachus' we have the story of the hermit through whose death—a voluntary martyrdom—the gladiatorial fights were put an end to at Rome. The story is told briefly, pointedly, with admirable art, yet, after all, coldly, without a thrill. It has beautiful passages—this, for instance, telling of the anchorite in his desert, and of the call to Rome:—

And once a flight of shadowy fighters croak
The disk, and once, he thought, a shape with wings
Came sweeping by him, and pointed to the West,
And at his ear he heard a whisper 'Rome.'
And in his heart he cried, 'The call of God!
And call'd arose, and slowly plunging down
Thru' that disastrous glory, set his face
By waste and field and town of alien tongue,
Following a hundred sunsets, and the sphere
Of westward-wheeling stars; and every dawn
Struck from him his own shadow on to Rome.

The decorative qualities of the poem have much of the old beauty; but it lacks humanity, the touch of nature. 'Akbar's Dream' is a monologue spoken by the great Mogul Emperor, 'whose tolerance of religion and abhorrence of religious persecution put our Tudors to shame'—to quote from the eight pages of notes which accompany the fourteen pages of verse. The poem is somewhat after the model of Browning; but it has not that mastery of material, that skill in grouping, which we find in all Browning's monologues. It is not really interesting, and it requires the eight pages of notes. Does any really successful poem require notes? The style, too, is somewhat rugged and uneven; as in this curious passage, for instance:—

If every single star
Should shriek its chime, 'I only am in heaven,'
Why that were such sphere music as the Greek
Had hardly dreamt of. There is light in all,
And light with more or less of shade, in all
ways-modes of worship; but our Ilumna,
Who 'sitting on green sofas contemplate
The torment of the damn'd' already, these
Are like wild brutes new-caged: the narrower
The cage, the more their fury.

In 'The Bandit's Death' and 'Charity' we get some of the human feeling which we have noted as lacking in 'St. Telemachus.' Both are written in the metre of 'Rizpah,' that fine flexible long line which Tennyson has fashioned to such wonderfully expressive uses. 'The Bandit's Wife' is

a version of a story told by Scott in his last journal, and it is dedicated to Scott in four rather bad lines, historically interesting, no doubt, as a record of literary sympathy. 'Charity' is a striking episode of modern life. A woman tells to a man, who is offering her 'dresses and laces and jewels, and never a ring for the bride, the story of her love for another, how he deceived her, how he married an heiress, and how after his death in a railway collision the widow came to her:—

She watch'd me, she nursed me, she fed me, she sat day and night
By my bed,
Till the joyous birthday came of a boy born happily dead.
And her name? what was it? I ask'd her. She said with a sudden
glow
On her patient face 'My dear, I will tell you before I go.'
And I, when I learnt it at last, I shriek'd, I sprang from my seat,
I wept, and I kiss'd her hand, I flung myself down at her feet.
And we pray'd together for him, for him who had given her the
name,
She has left me enough to live on. I need no wages of shame.
She died of a fever caught when a nurse in a hospital ward,
She is high in the Heaven of Heaven, she is face to face with her
Lord.
And he sees not her like anywhere in this pitiless world of ours!
I have told you my tale. Get you gone, I am dressing her grave
with flowers.

In 'Kapiolani' and the pieces which immediately follow it, we find ourselves in quite another atmosphere. 'Kapiolani' (the name of a chieftainess who won the cause of Christianity in the Sandwich Islands) by openly defying the priests of the terrible goddess Pele is a curious metrical study—extremely long and extremely short dactylic lines, rhymeless except for the somewhat hazardous rhyme of 'Hawa-tee.' Hazardous also is the third line in the opening stanza of a very fervent piece called 'The Dawn':—

Red of the Dawn!
Screams of a babe in the red-hot palms of a Moloch of Tyre,
Man with his brotherless dinner on man in the tropical wood,
Priests in the name of the Lord passing souls thru' fire to the fire,
Hired-hunters and boats of Dahomey that float upon human
blood!

These experiments on rhyme, or rhythm, and on the directions of poetical style are somewhat frequent in Lord Tennyson's new volume. They do not seem to us to be uniformly successful, and there are, occasionally, lines which are very hard to scan. No fewer than three poems, it is curious to note, are written in the form of Omar Khayyam's quatrains, but in long lines. It is only occasionally that we get a really simple metre; but, as it happens, one of the most charming and original poems in the volume, the haunting little lyric 'The Wanderer,' is written in the simplest of all measures:—

The gleam of household sun-shine ends,
And here no longer can I rest;
Farewell!—You will not speak, my friends,
Unfriendly of your parted guest.
O well for him that finds a friend,
Or makes a friend wherever he come,
And loves the world from end to end,
And wanders on from home to home!
O happy he, and fit to live,
On whom a happy home has power
To make him trust his life, and strive
His fealty to the halcyon hour!
I count you kind, I hold you true;
But what may follow, who can tell?
Give me a hand, and you—and you—
And deem me grateful, and farewell!

So confidently, with such happy assurance, could Tennyson speak of life. How confidently he looked forward to death, let this poem—which might well be the epilogue of a life—assure us:—

Will my tiny spark of being wholly
vanish in your deeps and heights?
Must my day be dark by reason, O ye
Heavens, of your boundless nights,
Rush of Sun, and roll of systems, and
your fiery clash of meteorites?

'Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the
limit of thy human state,
Fear not thou the hidden purpose of
that power which alone is great,
Nor the myriad world, its shadow, nor
the silent opener of the Gate.'

[The volume contains nothing in this kind quite so striking as the 'Crossing the Bar' requiem; but it includes the beautiful 'Silent Voices,' which is likely to be almost as popular.

'The Death of (Enone, Akbar's Dream, and other Poems' by Alfred Lord Tennyson. (London Macmillan and Co. 1892.)

CARRYING OUT THE WILL.

'I HEAR that rich uncle of yours is dead and buried, Terence?'
'He is, Miles.'
'And what sort of a will was that he made? The idea of leaving instructions to have £7,000 buried with him! And you were the executor?'
'Faith, that I was.'
'And did you follow out the provisions of the will?'
'I did that.'
'And was it gold you put in the coffin?'
'It was not.'
'Silver?'
'Devil a haporth.'
'Paper money?'
'Not a whit.'
'And what then?'
'Sure I signed a cheque payable for the amount, and stuck it in his fat when they closed the lid.'



Standish and Preece.

CHRISTCHURCH EN FETA.
(Cathedral Square on a holiday.)

photo, Christchurch.