DOROTHY.*

ON p. 277 of our last volume appeared an account of a new poem of rural life published anonymously in England, a copy of which had found its way to Mr. Browning; which had given him great delight, and which his artist son had pronounced "a perfect picture-gallery." Roberts Brothers have now reprinted it, with the dainty embellishment of red initial letters. The nameless author, who is however understood to be a Mr. A. J. Munby, has certainly achieved success in a somewhat difficult task. The snare into which the poet of rural life is only too likely to fall is that of mistaking mere baldness of style for true simplicity, and, in the attempt to be natural, of sinking to the level of pure commonplace. In short poems the dangers upon this point are of course more easily avoided, but a poem of two or three thousand lines, like this of

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Dorothy. A Country Story. Roberts Brothers. $1.25.

Dorothy, must be, it seems to us, a bad failure or an unmistakable success. It is pretty good proof of merit that we can read this one through at a sitting without making any discovery in it of tediousness. The diction is of an appropriate and unostentatious simplicity, and the tale is told with straightforward ease, is free from diffuseness, and is unencumbered with superfluous reflection or description. Indeed, we come upon purely descriptive passages less frequently than we should expect to in a poem of the kind, and we think the author might fairly have allowed himself more space for such. Those which do occur are noticeable for their avoidance of elaborate "word-painting" or even of minute detail of natural objects or landscape effect, and for suggesting rather the total impression of a scene or moment. As an instance of this take the following:

No! through the latticed panes of the diamonded dormer-window
Dorothy looks on a world free and familiar and fair:
Looks on the fair farmyard, where the poultry and cattle she lives with
Bellow and cackle and low—music delightful to her:
Looks on the fragrant fields, with cloud-shadows flying above them,
Singing of birds in the air, woodlands and waters around.
She in those fragrant meads has wrought every year of her girlhood;
Over those purple lands she, too, has followed the plough;
And, like a heifer afield, or a lamb that is yean'd in the meadows,
She, to herself and to us, seems like a part of it all.

As this country tale has nothing in common with the affected simplicities of the "pastorals" of earlier English poets, so there is no likeness between their dainty rustics and this handsome but hard-handed Dorothy.

Brown grew her handsome face, her bare arms brown as the chestnut;
She too, a labourer still, wrought in the sweat of her brow;
But, with her hair tied up in a handkerchief under her bonnet,
And with her lilac frock kilted up gaily behind,
She was a pleasure to see; and there was not a man of her fellows
Would not have snatch'd, if he dared, Dorothy's hard-working hand.

The strong toil-marks on these hands of Dolly's are emphasized continually as the unmistakable sign and symbol of her low condition, and there is something humorous in the effects produced upon every one by the sight or touch of the "gray, hard palms, bright with the polish of toil." They are the revelation of her hopelessly degraded way of life.

'Look at her moggany face,' said Tabitha Smith to Jemima,
'Shining with 'eat I declare—ay, she is wipin' it now!
'Wipin' 'er face, did ye see, with the hend of 'er large white hapron;
'My! what a hignorant thing—isn't she vulgar, oh no!'
'Yes,' said Jemima, 'to think of 'er 'avin' a hapron to dance in!
'Them sort o' girls never knows *what* a young lady should wear:
'Look at 'er great coarse 'ands—why a 'edger's gloves wouldn't fit 'em—
'Spread on 'er knees like paws: sure she might 'ide 'em for once!'
So spake the two Misses Smith; fastidious, fine-spoken damsels,
Proudly aware that their Pa baked the best bread for the 'All.' . . . . . .

But our author insists upon it that his Dorothy shall not be pitied. And certainly there is neither disgrace nor degradation in Dolly's labors in themselves considered; moreover, as our poet wishes us to feel, although her unremitting physical labors left much of her mind quite undeveloped, they did not blunt but rather helped to sharpen her practical intelligence, and so far forth made her the superior of hundreds of girls of higher condition, whose minds are as wholly unfurnished with all higher culture as was Dolly's, and also empty of the useful knowledge which partly compensated for her deficiency. Yet, though we sympathize with the author's dislike of the waste of sentimental pity upon his heroine, we nevertheless please ourselves with the touch of pathos suggested by the description of Dolly's bed-chamber and the meager list of her possessions, which points to its own contrast with the thousand and one private belongings of a young lady's apartment.

Dorothy happily falls into the keeping of a good man who looks upon her poor hands as no insurmountable objection to herself. Reversing the order of things in polite society, he begins by the kissing of her cheek, and afterward of her horny hands, and lastly to the declaration of love:

Kisses, amongst ourselves, bless me, how much they imply!
Ere you can come to a kiss, you must scale the whole gamut of courtship—
Introduction first; pretty attentions and words;
Tentative looks; and at length, perhaps the touch of a finger;
Then the confession; and then (if she allow it) the kiss.
So that a kiss comes last—'tis the crown and the seal of the whole thing;
Passion avow'd by you, fondly accepted by her.
But in our Dorothy's class, a kiss only marks the beginning:
Comes me a light-hearted swain, thinking of nothing at all;
Flings his fustian sleeve round the ample waist of the maiden;
Kisses her cheek, and she—laughingly thrusts him away.
Why, 'tis a matter-of-course; every good-looking damsel expects it;
'Tis but the homage, she feels, paid to her beauty by men:
So, that, at *Kiss-in-the-Ring*—an innocent game and a good one—
Strangers in plenty may kiss: nay, she pursues, in her turn.
Not that our Dorothy did; though she went to the fair with her mistress:
She was too grave for that, too unaccustom'd to play;
But she stood by, with a smile, while the other girls fled from their partners,
And she approved in her heart, when they were captured and kiss'd.

Dorothy had two suitors, and of the two preferred Robert, the head game-keeper, who thus carries the day:

'Dolly, I've come to fetch *thee!* Didn't I say I would come?
'Dolly, thou knows very well I love thee and nobody else, lass—
'Hast thou forgotten that night, after our dance, at the farm?'
'No, Mr. Robert, Oh no!' she said in a tremulous whisper,
'Only, I thought you had found somebody better 'an me!'—
'*Somebody better 'an thee!* Ay, that *would* be a job, though, to find her!
'Give me thy hand—that's right—just let me feel it again'—
. . . . . .
Did she say Yes? Who knows? I don't think any one heard it:
But he caress'd her unblamed—caught her, and kiss'd her, and held:
She, the stout stalwart wench, with the ample waist, and the shoulders,
Lay on his heart for awhile, happy and still, like a child.
Where were her strong brown arms, all used to the farm and the cattle?
Ah, they were tenderly wreathed, just as a lady's might be:
Where was her sunburnt cheek, all roughen'd and bronzed by the rude winds!
Ah, it was glowing and soft; warm with ineffable joy:
Even her hands, that had grown to be implements merely of labour,
Thrill'd with a daintier sense, here in this dreamland of Love!

His heroine comfortably settled in her new home, the poet's tale has had its proper ending, but the author thinks fit to fill several additional pages with the overflowing of his scorn for female suffragists and "regulators of female employment." He lays the lash of his satire upon them vigorously, and no doubt relieves his own soul in so doing, but we think this finale might have been spared.

Dorothy recalls Clough's "Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich," and suggests comparison with it. Each has its own excellence, though Clough's poem is undoubtedly the superior in weight of substance and subtlety of sentiment. We share however with the author of *Dorothy* preference for the elegiac verse in which his poem is written over the more commonly used hexameter of which Clough made choice, the coupling of the shorter pentameter line with the hexameter preventing the effect of monotony which the latter has always had for us when employed singly. To our ear the lines of *Dorothy* flow with a gentle ease and smoothness more than common.