

“Mr. Austin’s respectable and somewhat labored books of verse”—these words of Mr. Stedman characterize, with perfect accuracy, the poetical work of Mr. Alfred Austin, now being reprinted in uniform volumes, two of which are before us. That the work is labored appears on every page; his lyrical sentiment

* **LYRICAL POEMS.** By Alfred Austin. New York: Macmillan & Co.

THE HUMAN TRAGEDY. By Alfred Austin. New York: Macmillan & Co.

RENAISSANCE: A Book of Verse. By Walter Crane. Illustrated. New York: Macmillan & Co.

POEMS GRAVE AND GAY. By Albert E. S. Smythe. Toronto: Inrie & Graham.

DRAMATIC SKETCHES AND POEMS. By Louis J. Block. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co.

THE SISTERS’ TRAGEDY: With Other Poems, Lyrical and Dramatic. By Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

THE WITCH OF EN-DOR, and Other Poems. By Francis S. Saltus. Buffalo: Charles Wells Moulton.

ORBERAMMERGAU, 1890. By William Allen Butler. New York: Harper & Brothers.

IN THE GODS’ SHADOW; The Background of Mystery; and Other Verses. By George MacDonald Major. New York: Published by the Author.

LETTER AND SPIRIT. By A. M. Richards. Boston: J. G. Cupples Co.

ETCHINGS IN VERSE. By Charles Lemuel Thompson. New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co.

WINONA: A Dakota Legend, and Other Poems. By Captain E. L. Huggins, U.S.A. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons.

EDWARD THE BLACK PRINCE: An Epic Drama.—A Poetry of Exiles.—Australian Lyrics.—The Spanish Armada: A Ballad of 1588. By Douglas Sladen. New York: Cassell Publishing Co.

YOUNGER AMERICAN POETS: 1830-90. Edited by Douglas Sladen, B.A. With an Appendix of Younger Canadian Poets, edited by Goodridge Bliss Roberts. New York: Cassell Publishing Co.

CHANSONS POPULAIRES DE LA FRANCE. Edited by Thomas Frederick Crane, A.M. New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons.

and his patriotism are alike painfully artificial. It is likewise eminently respectable, for the famous couplet about Mehemet Ali is not fairly representative, and the respectability is notably enhanced by the dignified and beautiful mechanical execution of this collective edition. An excellent illustration of the labored quality of Mr. Austin's verse is afforded by the sonnet written to protest against the Channel Tunnel. "Can it be," queries the writer,

"That men who learned to lisp at English knees
Of English fame, to pamper womanish ease
And swell the surfeits of voracious trade,
Shall the impregnable breakers undermine,
Take ocean in reverse, and, basely bold,
Burrow beneath the bastions of the brine?"

Mr. Austin swells the surfeits of his verse with a great deal of this sort of mouthing, and the result is anything but poetical. Now and then, as in the sonnet, "Love's Wisdom," there is a note of genuine passion; but in this case at least, it is only an echo. The verses—

"Now on the summit of Love's topmost peak
Kiss we and part; no farther can we go:
And better death than we from high to low
Should dwindle, or decline from strong to weak"

are too curiously suggestive of that marvellous sonnet ascribed to Drayton, beginning—

"Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part!
Nay, I have done. You get no more of me."

As an example of Mr. Austin's best verse and of his most nearly spontaneous patriotism, we may take a stanza from "Is Life Worth Living?"

"Not care to live while English homes
Nestle in English trees,
And England's Trident-Sceptre roams
Her territorial seas!
Not live while English songs are sung
Wherever blows the wind,
And England's laws and England's tongue
Enfranchise half mankind!
So long as in Pacific main,
Or on Atlantic strand,
Our kin transmit the parent strain,
And love the Mother-Land;
So long as in this Ocean-Realm,
Victoria and her Line
Retain the heritage of the helm
By loyalty divine;
So long as flashes English steel
And English trumpets shrill,
He is dead already who doth not feel
Life is worth living still."

This spirited and ringing lyric goes far to redeem the pages of turgid and infelicitous expression in which it is embedded. Of "The Human Tragedy," we can do nothing better than quote Mr. Stedman's description.

"The whole requires ten thousand lines, cast in *ottava rima* and other standard forms. The Georgian measures are here, but not their force and glow. The movement is of the slowest, the philosophy prudish, and

the story hard to follow: lovers are kept from marriage by religious zeal; they don the Red Cross, travel and talk interminably, and finally are shot, and die in each other's arms to the great comfort of the reader."

To the art of the designer, rather than that of the poet, we must credit the charm of Mr. Walter Crane's "Renaissance." Upon the title-page and the two score head and tail pieces, simple but exquisite in decorative effect, eye and thought are likely long to linger. Upon the verses they will linger not so long, for Mr. Crane has not the inspiration of the true singer. In fact, his work is more pleasing for its ideals than for its form. In both, it is closely akin to the work of Mr. William Morris, although distinctly inferior to that work in technical qualities. Mr. Crane is, like his friend and master, a socialist, and sings of a coming Kingdom of Man with the fervor, although not with the eloquence, of Shelley. He thus invokes the spirit of the man to be:

"Arise, and take thy throne,
Upbuilt in ages long by stone on stone—
The human spirit's still aspiring stair
Whose marble feet were laid in toil and care,
And washed with tears, and worn in eager quest
Of false and fleeting phantoms, seeking rest.
But now thy feet are fledged and would aspire
To climb the summit of thy hope's desire,
High where in sculptured walls and towers rise
Her architecture, white in azure skies,
Tinged with the fire of dawn above thy head—
Ah! there, fair soul, thy marriage feast is spread."

This is a fair illustration of Mr. Crane's workmanship, which nowhere can be said to rise above mediocrity. His diction is simple, largely Saxon in vocabulary, and marked by a touch of the pre-Raphaelite affectation. The most important of his pieces is the allegorical poem of "The Sirens Three"—

"No More, and golden Now, and dark To be,
Whose vocal harps are love, and hope, and grief,"—

which has been published by itself in book form. Mr. Crane's ideal of a future Golden Age, in which Art shall walk hand in hand with Toil, and life pass for all unclouded from sunrise to sunset, is very attractive, no doubt, but we fear that it is still as much a dream as it was in Shelley's time, and we doubt if its latest singer has any suggestions of practical value to offer for its realization. To the clearest vision of our age it seems farther from realization than it did sixty years ago.

The "Poems Grave and Gay" of Mr. Albert E. S. Smythe afford fresh evidence of the talent of the younger group of Canadian writers. Mr. Smythe is a facile versifier, and his work is nearly always pleasing. The poem to "Eva," which he indicates as the first of his

efforts to appear in print, is as pretty as any-
thing in the volume, and will do to quote.

"High, high in the westerly sky
Lingers the day as I linger by thee;
Slow, slow from the darkness below
Creeps the night over the brim of the sea.

"Soft, soft to the seabirds aloft,
Whisper the waters that toss on the shore;
Rare, rare, from the mermaid's hair,
Scattered and sparkling, the jewels they wore.

"Far, far, there is shining a star
Pure as the beacon a seraph would burn,
Clear, clear, that poor wanderers here,
Seeing it lead them, a pathway might learn.

"Soon, soon, will the silvery moon
Glow through a glory of luminous mist,
Pale, pale, in her vaporous veil,
Down on the flowers that look up to be kissed.

"Then, then, when the children of men
Seal up their souls with a slumbering spell,
Sweet, sweet—and till morn when we meet
Angels will guard thee and comfort thee well."

Mr. Smythe has also penned a considerable
number of sonnets, some of which are of ex-
ceptional strength. We select that inscribed
"To Her Whom It May Concern."

"Canst leave the spoil of Eden on vintage morns
To see the waste with toil and hardship quelled;
Canst thou go forth as one who had rebelled,
Still innocent, and meet the bitter scorn;
Canst take with me that journey through the thorns
And thistle-fields, undriven—self-compelled;
Can Love be thy flame-swordsman, unbeheld,
With sterner head than his who visibly warns?
God's consecrated curse be on us, then;
We shall fare forth unanxious, hand in hand,
To labor, prospering as our days increase,
Redeeming deserts for the world of men;
Spring shall be with us in a winter-land;
Grief we shall know, but also love and peace."

The unrest of the modern spirit, expressed
in verse that reveals a somewhat mystical strain
of thought, is the chief characteristic of Mr.
Block's "Dramatic Sketches and Poems." In
this, except for the mysticism, the author
seems more closely allied to Clough than to
any other modern singer. "The Inlet," an
excellent example of Mr. Block's work, appears
to us to bear out this suggestion.

"I watch the many-colored crowd,
Passing me on the busy street,
And marvel at the faces proud,
Or sullen with low-browed defeat.

"The blue skies smile upon the earth,
The winds are with the clouds at play,
And happiness had surely birth
With sundawn of the perfect day.

"I dream of all the secrets hid
By placid brow or gloomy eye,
As in some rock-built pyramid
An unknown king or slave may lie.

"I feel the beat of every heart,
And shed the tears tired eyes let fall,
And thrill to know myself a part
Of griefs that weary, hopes that thrall.

"Oh, can it be that my weak soul
Is but an inlet of the sea,
And knows the outer sweep and roll
Of tides that forerun Destiny?"

"If this be dreaming, let me hold
The dear delusion to my breast;
Let me grow fearless, overbold,
And dare the noblest and the best.

"Children of one sweet mother, heirs
Of all the hopes that thrill all hearts,
And owners of the mystic wares
That shine within the spirit's marts,

"Masters of space and lords of time,
Wearers of robes that History wove
In far-off looms of every clime,
In snow-clad wood or olive-grove,

"Each soul instinct with all and each,
We rise at last unto the height,
Foretold in strange prophetic speech,
Whence every darkness melts in light!"

It will be seen that even this simple and ex-
quisite poem is not without its touch of the
mysticism that pervades Mr. Block's work.
We fancy that Emerson has done something
to give this cast to his verse, but the influence
of Plato, or rather of the neo-Platonists, is
mainly responsible for it. Mr. Block has evi-
dently read, not only his Plato, but his Ploti-
nus and his Vaughan also, and the influence
of these studies is both implicitly and openly
avowed—in "A Platonic Hymn," for example,
and in the beautiful "Dedication" at the end
of the volume. Did space permit, we would
gladly do justice to other aspects of Mr. Block's
thoughtful and sincere verse, to his ethical
interpretation of the myths of Tantalus and
Pygmalion, to his lyrics of nature, and to the
more subjective utterance of certain of the
sonnets that close the collection. As for his
faults, they are to be found in occasional un-
musical lines, in the use of words and phrases
that are unpoetical if not pedantic, in a certain
diffuseness, and in that vagueness of expres-
sion that accompanies mysticism and that is
its inevitable penalty.

Mr. Aldrich very justly remarks, in the
"Petition" placed at the close of his new vol-
ume of poems:

"To spring belongs the violet, and the blown
Spice of the roses let the summer own."

But in adding

"Grant me this favor, muse—all else withhold—
That I may not write verse when I am old,"

he seems to be forgetful that the "season of
mists and mellow fruitfulness" has its glories
also, has its aster and its gentian, vying with
the fairest blossoms of midsummer or of spring.
And, whatever the calendar may say, we shall
not admit that Mr. Aldrich is old as long as

he is capable of producing verse as exquisite in quality as that of this latest collection. Indeed, we fancy that the true poet never grows old in the sense in which age means faded perceptions and imagination that has forgotten how to soar. Was not the sublime choral ending of "Faust" the work of four-score, and are not the divinest songs of Tennyson those of his very latest years? Mr. Aldrich certainly knows his Tennyson, for he pays to him as graceful a tribute as it is often given a poet to receive.

"Shakespeare and Milton—what third blazoned name
 Shall lips of after-ages link to these?
 His who, beside the wild encircling seas,
 Was England's voice, her voice with one acclaim,
 For threescore years; whose word of praise was fame,
 Whose scorn gave pause to man's iniquities."

And even if the author of these lines be but a "minor poet"—when such names are invoked—we can at least apply to him his own words, and say that

"We can poorly spare
 Even his slight perfection in an age
 Of limping triplets and tame rondeaux."

Most of the poems in this volume are of that faultless workmanship which Mr. Aldrich has led us to expect from his pen. "The Sister's Tragedy" and "Pauline Pavlovna" are dramatic idyls of more than common strength. The poem inscribed to "The Last Cæsar," to

"The sphinx that puzzled Europe for awhile,"

impales the memory of Louis Napoleon as effectively as does the more wordy scorn of Hugo or of Swinburne. And the delicate trifles that close the volume are examples of *vers de société* deserving to rank with the best in their kind. Few of our poets practice the virtue of restraint as does Mr. Aldrich, and how that virtue brings its own reward everyone may see who reads.

When we reviewed the "Shadows and Ideals" of Mr. F. S. Saltus, we little knew of what it was the precursor. It seems that the manuscripts left by the writer at his death include sufficient verse to fill a score of volumes, and that the entire mass is to be published. We will frankly say that if "The Witch of En-dor, and Other Poems" fairly represents the character of this verse, the rest of it had much better be left unprinted. There were erotic suggestions in the earlier volume, but there was also much expression of thought upon worthy themes; in the present collection there is little but eroticism of a very repulsive sort. The writer seems to have delighted in bestiality for its own sake, and his poetic gifts

were too slender to afford any sort of warrant for this intrusion upon the public of his unclean imaginings.

Mr. William Allen Butler has written, in monotonous rhymed couplets, a poem entitled "Oberammergau, 1890," descriptive of the recent performance of the Bavarian Passion Play. As verse, the volume has no particular merit, but it is attractive in mechanical execution, having very pretty covers, and being illustrated with reproductions of scenes and characters from the play. And it affords, in its introduction and notes, a certain amount of useful information concerning the history and meaning of the rite which it describes.

Two prettily-printed little volumes of verse, the work of Dr. George Macdonald Major, are published in a limited edition for private circulation. "In the Gods' Shadow" is a story of the persecution of the Christians in Rome, cast in the form of a Greek tragedy. The inspiration of Mr. Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon" is obvious, as the following choral passage will illustrate:

"With man is the planting of seed,
 But the gods all the harvesting send;
 With man the intent and the deed,
 With the gods the result and the end;
 With man is the bow and the string,
 And the arrow that darts from the bow,
 But the gods guard the power of its wing
 And give it direction to go.
 For good or for ill it may be,
 For a crown or deserving of rods,
 But the fate every mortal will see
 Is foreknown and foredoomed of the gods.
 And Pain is the shadow of Pleasure,
 And Sorrow the spectre of Joy,
 And Shame but a different measure
 Of the Glory the gods would destroy."

"The Background of Mystery" is a poem in Spenserian stanza having for its theme the promise of the Christian religion as visioned in a soul inclined to doubt, but taking faith as an ultimate refuge. The following is a favorable example of Dr. Major's use of the stanza which he has chosen:

"The savage sword of bloody War was sheathed,
 And the first time in many weary years
 O'er the precarious throne of Cæsar breathed
 The benison of rest from strife and fears.
 The youthful bride was wed no more with tears,
 The trembling children bade their sorrows cease,
 For Janus' gates were closed—like summer mares
 The states of Rome slept in the glad release,
 And all the world reposed in universal peace."

It would be easy to pick flaws in these verses, which are of the author's best, but we rather wish to give credit to the sincerity of his purpose. In a prefatory note, he acts as his own critic, saying that the works seem to him "lack-

ing in unity of construction or possibly are essentially unpoetical." We fear that the latter of these counts must be admitted as true. His verses are lacking in the essential qualities of poetic form, both because they are roughly finished, and because their writer does not seem to have a sense of the distinction between the phrase that is felicitous and the phrase that is not. He also takes verbal licenses, such as using "tempt" as a substantive and "rape" as an active verb, that are inadmissible. And his best notes are but echoes of the strains of others, of Owen Meredith, of Swinburne, of Omar Khayyám, or of Tennyson. The following verses are good, but only because they suggest "In Memoriam."

"But be this moral to my song:
I hold by faith, though not by sight,
That men must ever be the wrong,
And God must ever be the right—

"Right when he smites the hardest blow,
Right when he veils himself in might,
Right when our tears of sorrow flow
And vainly still we peer for light.

"I know not the result of things,
But still will hope in all distress
That out of human failure springs
The harvest of divine success;

"That no malignant lust to curse,
That not a pang of needless pain,
Obtains in God's vast universe,
But all works some eternal gain."

The cry of a passionate soul for light, of a soul oppressed with a sense of the mystery of things, yet feeling that somewhere there is peace, is the burden of the sonnet-sequence entitled "Letter and Spirit." Its lesson is of faith and of stern fulfilment of present duty. Exquisite in form, and freighted with solemn meaning, these half-hundred sonnets make a peculiar appeal to the soul in that period of storm and stress which every strong soul lives out at one time or another. They are of such even workmanship that we may select from them almost at random. The following is a representative example:

"God speaketh and saith: I do remember thee
When thou wast after Me in the wilderness;
No desert could withhold thee, no distress
Of drought or fire, no peril of land or sea
Could come between thy burning love and Me;
Where art thou now?—Ah, Lord, Thy world did press
With love that seemed more dear to save and bless,
With life more near than Thine eternity.

"But now, my Father, if it be Thy will,
Would that I might return to Thee before
The night, that even now is gathering cold,—
Return! I will have mercy on thee still
With everlasting kindness; but no more
Canst thou draw near with that same love of old.

The pathos of this is the pathos of Arnold's

"Obermann," and how beautifully is it expressed! To "come with aspect marr'd" to the faith so easily acceptable when the world was young is all that is left for us moderns, upon whom the newer and better faith of the future has yet hardly dawned.

Mr. Charles Lemuel Thompson, being conveniently ignorant (or neglectful) of both syntax and accent (in proper names), reaches effects from which more plodding versifiers are debarred. He says:

"The hungry lions wait their prey;
And, Caesar, thou—the judgment day."

We fear that reviewers, whose raptorial instincts are well known, will make short work of such prey as is afforded by these "Etchings in Verse." Mr. Thompson sings of many themes, of Paganini, who "shambled awkward on the stage," of an unfinished telescope, with a "glance that could rive the Pleiads," and of the "avalanchine voice" of the Jungfrau, and unfailingly extracts a moral from each.

The volume of verse bearing the name of Captain E. L. Huggins includes the titular poem "Winona," a few miscellaneous and memorial pieces, a collection of sonnets, and a large number of exceptionally good translations, mostly from the French and Spanish. It takes a bold man to attempt an English version of Gautier's "L'Art," in view of Mr. Dobson's existing translation or paraphrase, but Captain Huggins has been that venturesome, and has done the work well.

"Even the gods wax old and pass
From high Olympus; verse alone
Stronger than brass
Preserves to fallen Zeus his throne."

This stanza indicates how closely the spirit and form of the original have been reproduced. Probably no one could really translate the poem; the additional foot in each verse is absolutely necessary to give adequate flexibility to the thought. Another poem of Gautier's, "Shadows," is particularly well translated also, and gives as good an example of *terza rima* as is often seen in English. Here are some verses:

"Poet, alas! and lover, brethren are;
Twins of the soul, each hath his cherished dream,
Some saint ideal, worshipped from afar;

"Some fount of youth, some pure Pactolian stream,
Some orb that beams with strange unearthly ray,
Some flaming vision potent to redeem.

"The fount is dry, the vision fades away;
The mystic light that led them through the night
Dies in a marsh, and leaves them far astray.

"O God, to tread but once by morning light
The alabaster palace of our dream,
Counting its colonnades with waking sight;

"To greet the lovely images that gleam
Athwart the gardens of our reverie,
And drink the waters of its mystic stream ;

"To make the plunge, piercing triumphantly
The crystal vault, bring back the golden vase
Long buried with the treasures of the sea."

Mr. Douglas B. W. Sladen, best known as a collector and writer of Australian verse, appears as the author of several paper-covered volumes of varying thickness. "Edward the Black Prince" is the thickest, and examination shows it to be a historical drama—Froissart done into dreary blank verse after the fashion of the old English chronicle play. "The Spanish Armada" is a ballad in two versions, the first having been abandoned (although here published) on account of a wholly unnecessary fear that it was too much like the "Revenge" of Lord Tennyson. "Australian Lyrics" is a volume of miscellaneous verse, and "A Poetry of Exiles" another of similar character, the license of the title being its most striking characteristic. We find nothing that is not commonplace, both in sentiment and expression, in any of these books.

Mr. Sladen also appears as editor of an anthology of "Younger American Poets," Canadian writers being included. "America Niagarized the world," remarks the editor, and so he introduces the volume with a sonnet to the great cataract. Mr. Sladen's plan does not include the greater stars in our galaxy of singers, because "it would have been very impertinent to have included them without an exhaustive study of their works, in order to contribute something fresh about them—not to mention the dog-in-the-mangering about copyrights." We offer this as an example of Mr. Sladen's style when he forsakes verse for prose. Had he chosen to take up Longfellow and Lowell there can be no doubt that he would have contributed "something fresh about them," although not in the sense in which he uses the phrase. Mr. Sladen has a high appreciation of Lanier, and his volume contains two appendices by President Merrill E. Gates and Mrs. Laurence Turnbull, respectively, "giving the cult of the Lanierophant," as he somewhat originally puts it. Mr. Sladen's introductory essay is so full of striking phrases that we linger over it. He tells us that Mr. Stedman lost a fortune "by no fault of his own, but by one in whom he placed implicit confidence." Few writers would venture upon so daring a personification as this. We hope that Mr. Stedman has now ceased to place implicit confidence in other people's faults. Mr.

Aldrich, we are told, "has achieved something very like perfection within the limitations, which he would seem deliberately to have laid down for himself—except in 'Wyndham Towers.'" The dark mystery of this statement we confess ourselves unable to fathom. Of Chicago we read with some amusement that "there is quite a literary movement there now, at the head of which stands that charming writer Eugene Field." We wonder if Mr. Field ever fancied that he was at the head of "quite a literary movement." John Eliot Bowen's translations of "Carmen Sylva" "proved him a true poet as well as a true man." We have no doubt that Dr. Bowen was a true man, but are a little puzzled to understand the nature of the demonstration alluded to. Turning from this foolish introduction to the anthology itself, we find an excellent selection of work from over a hundred American poets, nearly one-fourth of the number being Canadians. Good taste characterizes the selection throughout, although copyright has in a few cases interfered with the editor's wishes. We are particularly grateful for some of the Canadian poems—for "The Isles, An Ode" of Professor Roberts, and for the "Death in April" of Mr. Bliss Carman. We are almost willing to say that the latter poem is the most beautiful in the entire volume. We also learn that the author of the remarkable poem "Monadnoc," published anonymously about three years ago, is Mr. James E. Nesmith.

A very different sort of anthology is the "Chansons Populaires de la France," edited by Professor Thomas Frederick Crane for the series known as "Knickerbocker Nuggets." The contents of this collection are real folk-songs, not literary ballads like those of Beranger, their composition dates from the unknown past, and they are anonymous, as all true popular poetry must be. For some reason or other, it was not until well along in the present century that attention was attracted to these songs, and it has been commonly supposed that France was lacking in a kind of poetry that has long had a recognized and important place in English, German, and Scandinavian literature. One has but to glance over the present volume to see how erroneous was that supposition. Professor Crane supplies the volume with a scholarly introduction, upon which we have but one criticism to make. "So far as I know," he says, "there is not a trace in the writings of the French romantic school of any

appreciation of the popular literature of the country. . . . One has but to glance over the so-called 'ballads' of Hugo to see this." To us, a glance at these "ballads"—"Gastibelza," for example—shows a good deal of such appreciation, and the editor himself speaks of George Sand as calling marked attention to the beauties of French popular poetry.

WILLIAM MORTON PAYNE.

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