

favourite in every nursery, and this to her would be the sweetest praise.

Even in a first visit Mrs Gilchrist noticed this characteristic. After speaking of her sweetness, gentleness, and simplicity, she winds up with the climax which we may be sure was in her motherly mind all along— "so kind to the children."

It is in 'Sing-Song' that the words occur which she inscribed in the copy of Verses which was her last gift to her faithful biographer and friend, Mr Mackenzie Bell—

"Faith is like a lily lifted high and white";

and in these words we find a touching and subtle connection with the beautiful lines of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in his sonnet for the picture of "The girlhood of Mary the Virgin," for which Christina sat as his model in her youthful days—

"Thus held she through her girlhood: as it were
An angel watered lily, that near God
Grows and is quiet."

It was to this sublime faith that she owed all the fortitude and patience with which she endured the sufferings of her later life, and went down into the Valley of the Shadow of Death as one who was "glad of the opportunity to depart."

When invited to meet Tennyson, she was glad that "a previous engagement" enabled her to evade the ordeal, so retiring and diffident was her

disposition; but in the home-circle she was adored, and her friendships, though few, were devoted and enduring.

Books do not seem to have made any great feature in her life. She wrote her poems very much as did Emily Bronte, out of her own inner vision, with a spontaneous insight into nature that would seem wellnigh miraculous, did we not remember the infinite capability of one human heart. She had no special "sanctum," but wrote most of her poems in a back-bedroom or in the drawing-room. We are told that she used to shut her eyes and "see" the things which she described so minutely. We are not aware of any one poem which is entirely written under the influence of this literary clairvoyance; but it is remarkable that Lord Lytton, than whom there are few more imaginative writers, should state as a fact beyond dispute that "it is no rare phenomenon for a poet to see through other organs than his eyes. In no single instance could I ever find, after the most rigid scrutiny, that the *clairvoyance of imagination* had deceived me. I am not sure, indeed, that I could not describe the things I imagine more exactly than the things I habitually see."

We are told by a writer in the 'Contemporary Review,' in his interesting article on Mrs Browning, that rhymes can be divided into two classes — perfect and imperfect (or allowable) rhymes— and

that the English poet who has most boldly and defiantly outraged the rules of the latter is Mrs Browning. This may be so,— far be it from us to impugn such an authority, — but we venture to think that at any rate Miss Rossetti runs her very close in this respect. Read her exquisite poems carefully and you will often find "rhymes" which can only be regarded as *impossible*— poetic freedom in the use of word-sounds which exceeds even what is popularly known as poetic licence. Not only are some of the rhymes distinctly "imperfect" beyond all bounds of "allowableness," but many of the lines are absolutely unscannable.

Yet *what matters it*, when the result is so matchless? "Wood, hay, stubble" are pressed into her service with "gold, silver, and precious stones," and her genius has built for itself a "house beautiful" wherein thoughts are enshrined that are for the help and healing of us all. Her poems are like the bells of old, of which tradition tells us that they owe their sweetness to the variety of metals thrown into the crucible,— but who thinks of the amalgam, when "through the balmy air of night the bells ring out their delight from the molten-golden notes"?

The very ruggedness of some of her poetry has its peculiar charm, because it is so self-evident that the words came straight from her heart to

her finger-tips. She set the "essence of poetry above the form," and knew but little of the labour of correcting and revising, such as, for instance, characterised Pope — though her brother William tells us that "she was quite conscious that a poem demands to be good in execution as well as genuine in impulse."

Of self-criticism she was singularly devoid, and it seems as if at times she were obsessed by other forces than her own— writing now, as Bunyan wrote centuries ago, "as if joy did make him write," and anon, as if the sorrows of life had tuned every heart-string to a minor key.

Her love for animals is apparent throughout her works. Here is a poetic comment upon the words, "These all wait upon Thee"—

"Innocent eyes not ours
Are made to look on flowers,
Eyes of small birds and insects small
Morn after summer morn
The sweet rose one her thorn
Opens her bosom to them all
The least and last of things
That soar on quivering wings,
Or crawl among the grass-blades out of sight,
Have just as clear a right
To their appointed portion of delight
As Queens or Kings."

Could dainty thought be more daintily expressed?
And within it, too, is contained the germ of that
humiliating truth which acknowledges the whole

world to be, in the eyes of God, but as one ant in a universe.

The infinitely little, no less than the infinitely great, has possibilities which we mortals are but unfitted, perhaps unworthy, to estimate, and yet which, in our petty pride, we are apt deliberately both to overlook and to underrate.

In writing this paper our attention has been inevitably directed to Mr Watts Dunton's admirable essays upon her life and work. He writes, as such a man could not fail to write, with warm appreciation and keen insight, as well as with a delicate and careful analysis of her character that only a personal friend could rightfully express; but there is one statement in the 'Athenaeum' of 1896 to which we would, very humbly, beg to take exception.

He speaks of the Christian idea as "essentially feminine." What does he mean? Is self-sacrifice and devotion to an ideal "essentially feminine"? Are the men "of whom the world was not worthy" only abnormal specimens? If it be true that the greater includes the less, then the ideal must include the characteristics which go to make up that ideal, and the Christ must be greater than the Christian idea which He originated. Does Mr Watts Dunton leave it to be inferred that all the highest attributes of human nature—faith, mercy, purity, truth—belong exclusively to

femininity? If it be so, then surely the meekest of her sex may take courage, for it must follow, as the night the day, that at some time or other woman will come into her kingdom. The only thing to wait for is the day when a sufficient number of the male creation can be brought to agree with his dogmatic but enigmatic assertion.

From the earliest times woman has always been more keenly alive than man to the beauty of holiness, whether in the abstract or the concrete, but we deny that Christianity is "essentially feminine," for to do so would be to admit that it is unmanly; and the Christ of the Bible is a very manly Christ, as well as a Godlike man.

We have wondered often at the strange fatuousness which seems to descend upon preachers the moment they take a sermon in hand. There is something almost humorous in the way that they have of gloating over certain passages, regardless, apparently, of ordinary common-sense; and of viewing a subject from a totally different standpoint from that in which they would look at it if quite uninfluenced by their own external surroundings.

"And He answered him to never a word," has over and over again formed a basis for a long dissertation upon humility and submission. It does not strike us in that way at all; we undertake to say that it did not strike Pilate or Herod in that way; and it will not strike you in that way

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either, if for one moment you consider the matter honestly.

Could *anything* have been more disconcerting, not to say humiliating?

A prisoner given the opportunity of pleading in His own behalf, of even answering questions which of themselves were something of a condescension under the circumstances which *apparently* existed— and yet "He answered to never a word."

It seems to us one of the most absolutely strong, masterful incidents that could have been recorded — indicative not of submission or humility, but of Kingly indifference to His sentence, and a sublime unspoken scorn of an unjust judge. Nothing but this subtle silence could have conveyed so much, but there is nothing "feminine" here.

It is very remarkable that the one doctrine in Romanism which most revolted Christina Rossetti was Mariolatry; whereas her brother Dante— whose love of symbolism exceeded her own, but who, even less than his sister, had no leanings whatever towards the adoption of the Roman Church — considered that the weak point of Anglicanism was its rejection of the womanly element from its creed, which this doctrine necessarily involves. What to her devout convictions was a "cardinal error," was to his merely "opining temperament" an attraction— a dogma the adoption of which,

he considered, would be a distinct advantage to the Church of England

Probably many a Protestant mother, at the risk of direst spiritual penalties hereafter, has bowed low before Mary as the incarnation of motherhood, who knew so many things, and who seemed so much more accessible to the cry of a mother's heart than could Jesus the Son of God. It is not orthodox— but let us hope that adequate allowance will be made hereafter for the offences of mothers in this respect, when love alone has prompted the offence. By the wildest stretch of imagination He could no more put Himself into a mother's place than, in all reverence be it spoken, He could square a circle. There are some things that are impossible even to Omnipotence, and this is one of them.

It is the more remarkable that Dante Gabriel and his sister should have been at variance on this point, because we are told that in him alone was to be noticed any trace of the English blood which, from their mother's maternal ancestry, they alike inherited. Much had they both to suffer, much to do, before both, as we hope, "by different ways," reached Home at last.

Terrible indeed were the sufferings which she had to bear during the latter part of her life, but through them all, with but one brief interval, her faith in the goodness of God stood firm and steadfast.