

it while the victim was still alive. But Sir John Macdonald, who was certainly a very clever man, was too quick for Mr. Biggar. He died before that book of anecdotes was ready for the press, and escaped his admirer. Mr. Biggar did not choose the "anecdotal" form of biography without consulting good models. "The chief charms of *Plutarch's Lives*," he says, "and of the biographical writings of Xenophon and Herodotus, consist, to my mind, in the little incidents and anecdotes with which they are interspersed, and which throw so many distinct beams of light upon the motives and impulses of the characters under review." We cannot say that we are reminded by any part of Mr. Biggar's *Anecdotal Life* of the "biographical writings of Xenophon and Herodotus." The subject, perhaps, made it very hard for him to attain to the high standard at which he aimed. We will candidly acknowledge that Sir John Macdonald made it difficult for his biographer to be quite honest, and yet to avoid touching on things which it jars on us to see mentioned. One fairly inoffensive sentence of Mr. Biggar's may be quoted for the purpose of indicating what it is that we mean:—"His parents were both kind-hearted and hospitable people; and a feature of this hospitality was the custom of partaking of alcoholic liquor with friends." To suppress this "feature" would, considering the notoriety of certain facts and, we may add, the amazing candour of Sir John himself, have been truly difficult for a biographer. Still, if Mr. Biggar had been inspired more fully by Plutarch, Xenophon, and Herodotus, he would, we cannot but think, have been content to insist less, and be more reticent. It is to be feared that his real models have rather been the "anecdotal lives" popular on the wrong side of Niagara, where the biographer never knows what to leave in his ink-bottle.

When the death of his hero surprised him, Mr. Biggar decided to alter his plan, and to prefix a narrative to the anecdotes. We do not know that he was well advised to make the change. Whatever merits Mr. Biggar may possess as a compiler of anecdotes, he has not the biographer's faculty. His biography also is anecdote. Here, again, Mr. Biggar shows a grievous want of power of discrimination. The stories he tells do not uniformly, or even often, "throw so many distinct beams of light upon the motives and impulses of the character under review." John A., as Mr. Biggar is for ever calling him, is not much, if at all, better known to us when we are told that at a certain period of his life he is described "as wearing a long-tailed coat and baggy trousers, with a loose necktie somewhat of the Byronic style." Long-tailed coats, baggy trousers, and Byronic neckties were worn by many men in the forties. If Mr. Biggar wished to be thorough, he should have hunted up details about the colours of the trousers and the tie, together with the names of the tailor and the haberdasher. A more intimate knowledge of the natural history of the chestnut would have saved Mr. Biggar from repeating some old friends as original. Here, for instance, is an anecdote which was told long before Sir John Macdonald was born. A certain person said to him, "I shall support you whenever I think you are right." "That is no satisfaction," retorted Sir John, with a twinkle; "anybody may support me when I am right. What I want is a man that will support me when I am wrong!" The wit and originality of these stories too frequently escape us, as in this case:—

As samples of the grotesque phrases he sometimes invented the following are given:—

As Mr. Macdonald (then in Opposition) rose, it was observed by some that the Premier was asleep. Mr. Holt, alluding to the remarks of the last speaker, said "He don't feel it."

Mr. Macdonald said, "If anything was calculated to arouse a man of honour, and the leader of a Government, it was the charges which had this evening been preferred against the Hon. Minister of Militia. If he did not 'feel it,' as had just been said, he must be devoid of all feeling of honour, and morally have a skin as thick as that of a hippopotamus" (laughter and cheers).

In a debate on the question of representation by population, he said the hon. member for South Oxford (Mr. George Brown, its advocate) knew that representation by population was as dead as Julius Cæsar.

It must be very easy to be witty and original in Canada. Here is another exquisite witticism:—

Mr. McCarthy.—"Has the hon. gentleman forgotten that three half-pints are afterwards defined to be five quarter-pints, so that we are fighting over one-quarter of a pint?"

Sir John.—"A small p'int that."

Of such material has Mr. Biggar composed the greater part of his book, than which we do not remember to have seen any collection of stories more uniformly pointless. On this side of the water, at least, we shall not hold Sir John Macdonald responsible for the odds and ends of nonsense which his biographer has collected. He was, as we know, a very clever man, and when he had to speak to Biggars adapted his words to their level. To them doubtless was addressed the portentous observation made when "certain Conservatives" were urging him in 1881 to come over and succeed Lord Beaconsfield, that in Canada "he was building up a new Empire," and that "there was more glory in having a guiding hand in that than striving to preserve from ossification the frame of an old nation." The invitation doubtless seems credible, and the renunciation magnificent, in circles which accept Mr. Biggar as the successor of Plutarch, Xenophon, and the biographer Herodotus.

M. PAUL VERLAINE.*

THE young ladies who were wont to twitter about Dr. Ibsen now babble about M. Paul Verlaine. For some reason M. Verlaine is "in," like football, and tip-cat, and other games which appear and disappear in their due mysterious time. M. Verlaine has been "interviewed" by English devotees, as we understand; but we confess that a distaste for interviews has prevented us from perusing his confessions, if he made any, and from making ourselves acquainted with his personal history, if that is recorded. It has seemed better to purchase all of his works which chanced to be accessible on a certain stall. For the sum of one pound sterling, or twenty-five francs, we have been able to secure six examples of M. Verlaine, in poetry and in prose. Of the slim volumes, where very trifling rivulets of verse irrigate considerable meadows of paper, *Poèmes Saturniens* bears date 1867, reprinted in 1890; *Les Fêtes Galantes* is of 1869 (1886); *Romances sans Paroles* is of 1874 (1891); and of 1891 is *Bonheur*, while *Poètes Maudits*, a work of criticism in prose, is dated 1884 (1888). *Louise Leclercq*, a brief novel in prose, is of 1888, and contains a few short additional sketches. From this list, five volumes of verse are omitted, and one book of prose, *Mémoires d'un Veuf*. These are *lacuna valde defenda*, but enough remains to give an anxious inquirer some inkling of M. Verlaine's manner and talent. On the whole, he reminds one a little of Baudelaire, without Baudelaire's vigour, and to the English reader some of his pieces recall the more successful verses of Miss Amy Levy.

M. Verlaine's poetics may be gathered from his work styled *Poètes Maudits*. This volume of criticism opens with a portrait of the author, and it would be difficult to allege that the portrait is prepossessing. However, it may not be a good likeness, and we have to do with poetry, not with physiognomy. M. Verlaine informs the world that his *poètes maudits* should more properly be called *poètes absolus*—poets and no mistake. The title *Poètes Maudits*, however, expresses M. Verlaine's hatred of the common herd of readers of taste, who, he avers, detest him and the objects of his admiration. As members of the odious throng we cannot say that we hate M. Verlaine and his heroes any more than we hate Mr. Jerome K. Jerome. But we do not feel strangely drawn to read their works. First comes M. Tristan Corbière, who "disdained Success and Glory" by a wise economy of Destiny. This distinguished man is among *les Grands*, such as Homer, Goethe, and Shakespeare. Like them he is "not impeccable." He is the author of *Amours Jaunes*, "œuvre aujourd'hui introuvable ou presque," which we have recently seen in a catalogue for the insignificant ransom of some six shillings and fourpence. On the whole, the public prefers *Amours* of a tint less bilious than the saffron.

M. Arthur Rimbaud is another absolute poet, who appears to have hidden his light under a bushel. He has written a sonnet on Vowels; an epic on consonants would afford more room for his genius. The sonnet is not at all borrowed from—

A was an archer and shot at a frog,
B was a butcher who kept a big dog.

"A is black, E white, I red, U green, O blue," heaven only knows why or wherefore. As to his personal tastes, M. Rimbaud informs us that he occasionally drinks thirty or forty tumblers of beer at a sitting, which beer cannot be Bass. Painful memories of Gyp's disagreeable novel, *Un Raté*, occur here to the vulgar throng of readers. M. Rimbaud possesses "supreme gifts, of a character, in these cowardly days of internationalism, peculiarly French." It appears that M. Rimbaud has forsaken the society of the Muse and, we may add, of others.

Concerning M. Stéphane Mallarmé readers of the old *Parnasse* are not ignorant. A poem by this author on the tomb of Edgar Poe is quoted with approval. After reading it several times, we seem dimly to gather that M. Mallarmé is an admirer of Poe's, and unfriendly to his enemies. But the sonnet is nearly as like *Hitite à French*, and, perhaps, it means something different. It is obvious that M. Mallarmé cannot too assiduously peruse the advice which Mr. Yellowplush bequeathed to poets. There are three other singers in M. Verlaine's list, all of them are uncommonly absolute.

Of M. Verlaine's own verses, *Poèmes Saturniens* (1867) seem to be the earliest. The author explains, modestly, that persons unfortunate enough to be born under the influence of Saturn have a bilious habit, a restless and feeble imagination, and no discourse of reason worth mentioning. In these sad circumstances it is, perhaps, a pity that they should drop into poetry at all. The prologue speaks handsomely of the *Ramayana*, *Aicæus*, Homer, the Song of Roland, the *Kithare*, and other matters not unfamiliar to students of M. Leconte de l'Isle. M. Verlaine celebrates *les Oaristys*, as is natural, and remarks to an impetuous young woman:—

Mais dans ton cher cœur d'or, mon enfant, me dis-tu,
La fauve passion va sonnant l'oliphant!
Laisse-la trompeter à son aise, la geuse!
Mets ton front sur mon front, et ta main dans ma main,
Et fais moi des serments que tu rompras demain,
Et pleurons jusqu'au jour, ô petite fougeuse!

Perhaps the lady, like a celebrated heroine, "preferred to be loved in a more human sort of way." An invitation to "a good

* *Poèmes Saturniens—Fêtes Galantes—Bonheur—Les Poètes Maudits—Romances sans Paroles—Louise Leclercq*. Par Paul Verlaine. Paris: Vauier. 1867-1891.

cry" is not exhilarating. However, M. Verlaine's poems are intelligible and harmonious; and, fortunately, as little "absolute" as may be. His *Eaux Fortes*, dedicated to M. Coppée, are somewhat like effects of *Gaspard de la Nuit* done into rhyme. We have nocturnal "impressions," Gothic towers, spires, gibbets, dead persons, whose feet are devoured by wolves while ravens peck out their eyne, and many fine old properties of 1830.

Et je m'en vais
Au vent mauvais
Qui m'enporte
Deçà, delà,
Paréil à la
Feuille morte.

La Chanson des Ingénus is agreeable:—

Nous sommes les Ingénus
Aux bandeaux plats, à l'œil bleu,
Qui vivons, presque innocens,
Dans les romans qu'on lit peu.

Then come reminiscences of the Mahabharata—*qu'on lit peu*, alas!—and a poem on the Seine—a *morne* river, the poet says, and he does not share M. Anatole France's enthusiasm for the *quais*. A number of other rivers are lauded, and then—

Toi, Seine, tu n'as rien. Deux quais et voilà tout,
Deux quais crasseux, semés de l'un à l'autre bout,
D'affreux bouquins, moisés, et d'une foule insignie
Qui fait dans l'eau des ronds et qui pêche à la ligne.

This is carrying pessimism too far, and M. Verlaine is here too Saturnian. The *quais* are cheery places, the book-boxes keep Hope at the bottom, and gudgeon-fishing is better than no fishing at all. The sad banks of Seine are made melodious for the poet by a hurdy-gurdy; he is very sensitive to the pathos of a barrel-organ. And, indeed, there is a charm—a dusty urban charm—in the faint and far-off notes of these uncultivated instruments:—

Il brame un de ces airs, romances ou polkas,
Qu'étaient nos tapotons sur nos harmonicas
Et qui font, leuts ou vifs, réjouissants ou tristes,
Vibrent l'âme aux proscrits, aux femmes, aux artistes.

This poem is perhaps the most notable and readable in *Poèmes Saturniens*. But we own that we should have as soon expected to see, let us say, M. Boulmier revived as M. Verlaine out of the dust of 1867; not that M. Boulmier is unworthy of revival. But chance or fashion makes odd selections.

No light is thrown on the refreshed vogue of M. Verlaine by *Fêtes Galantes* (1867), clever little pieces after Watteau. There is nothing especially worthy of quotation in this pamphlet of fifty-six pages. *Romances sans Paroles* (1874) is a trifle more robust and "important." But a wilderness of

Je ne me suis consolé,
Bien que mon cœur s'en soit allé,
Et mon cœur, mon cœur trop sensible
Dit à mon âme: Est-il possible?

would not make a poet of much merit. There follow some slight etchings in verse, from towns in Belgium, nay, from London streets, and a reminiscence of the Canal in Paddington. The Seine is a livelier river. The stoutest volume, *Bonheur*, is a neo-Christian performance. The poet, who certainly, as far as we have read him, seems a harmless poet enough, is converted, and writes "Noble Numbers" like Herrick:—

Et puisque je pardonne,
Mon Dieu, pardonnez-moi,
Ornant l'âme enfin bonne
D'espérance et de foi.

The poet (in 1888) tells us that he is in a hospital—
C'est un lieu comme un autre, on en prend l'habitude.

He adds,

Puisse un prêtre être là, Jésus, quand je mourrai.

All this is very familiar in the history of French poets. In short, unless M. Verlaine's other poems are very unlike those which lie before us, we are at a loss to understand whence comes his present vogue among the refined. It is not that he is a bad poet; but France has assuredly many more as good of whom we hear little enough in the conversations of Culture. There are such tides in the affairs of literary men; nor can we tell why they admire M. Verlaine so much who know not, for example, Glatigny. Mystery of "Booms"! It is not as if Mr. Gladstone had written a letter to M. Verlaine, which M. Verlaine sent round to the *Boomer* and other periodicals. The world has simply come to him, for some unfathomable reason; for many such poets—not at all bad poets—are born to rhyme unheard and unreviewed.

The reasons for his popularity might, no doubt, be given—partly from his other works. But the above account is submitted as a careful "tasting" by an impartial taster. Its results will not, we think, be gainsaid by most omnivorous readers with some taste.

TALES OF MYSTERY.

"ROMANCES," says Moncada to young Melmoth, "have made your country, sir, familiar with tales of subterranean passages and supernatural horrors." When Maturin wrote

Tales of Mystery. Mrs. Radcliffe—Lewis—Maturin. Edited by George Saintsbury. London: Percival & Co. 1891.

this there was not the slightest chance that any of his readers, English, French, or German, should overlook the allusion to the works of the ingenious Mrs. Radcliffe, the undisputed chief of the large and prolific school of Gothic romancers whose influence extended through France, Germany, and Italy, even unto America. But it is not reasonable to suppose that the present generation can grasp the full significance of the observation of "the appalling Spaniard," as Mr. Saintsbury calls the entertaining yet prolix Moncada. For some fifty years the fame of Mrs. Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin, the three writers "selected" by Mr. Saintsbury in the first volume of Messrs. Percival's new "Pocket Library," has lingered but as a shadowy tradition with English readers. Yet, one and all, they once enjoyed a prodigious popularity in England and on the Continent. Their writings were frequently translated—very "freely" it must be admitted—and provoked countless imitations, most of which have long since, and deservedly, no doubt, passed into limbo. Even now in Italy Mrs. Radcliffe is not forgotten, new versions of the *Sicilian Romance* and *Udolpho* having appeared within the last ten years. With regard to translation, *The Monk* and Maturin's tragedy *Bertram* are the only two works of these authors that may be said to owe their foreign renderings to other than purely literary merits. In French, certainly, the very title of Lewis's story, in more than one example, is sufficiently indicative of something less legitimate. Notoriety, rather than fame, is the right word to use in this matter. With this slight reservation, the reputation of all three authors, great as it was, must be considered as firmly established by their achievements, and in perfect agreement with their influence on English fiction. There is nothing, in short, in the popularity of their works that is in any sense unaccountable. Sir Walter Scott was naturally a sympathetic critic of this kind of fiction. It did not require, we may be sure, any serious importunity on the part of Lewis to induce Scott to have a hand in "Tales of Terror"; and Scott was the first, though not the only one, of her great contemporaries to acknowledge the genius of Mrs. Radcliffe. Peacock, again, was a warm admirer of the Radcliffian romance. We doubt very much if more than one reader in ten, at the present day, is fully conscious of all the bearings of Miss Austen's pleasant satire in *Northanger Abbey*, which Mr. Saintsbury cites as evidence of the fashionable rage for Mrs. Radcliffe. They must be reared in tender youth in the atmosphere of Gothic romance who would rightly enjoy the delicacy of Miss Austen's humorous presentment. Of course, with the plague of imitators a strong reaction set in, and the errors of those who exceeded the worst extravagance of Lewis were most unjustly visited upon the blameless Mrs. Radcliffe. Still, we shall not be at all surprised to find that this pocket volume of selections should interest and fascinate many readers—just as Ludovico, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, was charmed with the Provençal legend—"by inventions that captivated the careless imagination in every rank of society in a former age."

Mrs. Radcliffe's share in Mr. Saintsbury's selections amounts to rather more than half the volume; Maturin's being equivalent to one-half, and Lewis's to a trifle over one-fourth of Mrs. Radcliffe's allotment. These proportions very accurately correspond with the literary position of each writer and the respective merits of their works. Mrs. Radcliffe is represented by extracts from all four of her famous romances; Lewis by *The Monk*, with the popular episode of the "Bleeding Nun of Lindenberg"; and Maturin by passages from *Melmoth the Wanderer*. In his sketch of these authors and their writings, Mr. Saintsbury deals with their chief characteristics, the nature of the influence they exercised, and the common source of their inspiration in *The Castle of Otranto*. That Horace Walpole was the father of the large and by no means reputable family of Gothic tales is incontestable, though Mrs. Radcliffe so far improved upon her model as to create in *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* an entirely new and very superior type of romance. Miss Clara Reeve, indeed, on behalf of her best-known story, *The Old English Baron*, expressly claims the paternity, besides adopting the very happy description "a Gothic tale," generally accepted by the critics of the day. There is little ground, we think, for supposing that the Germans furnished models. Lewis, to be sure, adopted somewhat from them; but Maturin owed very little to German romance, and Mrs. Radcliffe nothing at all. It is not a little strange, as Mr. Saintsbury remarks, that "Horace Walpole, who, while a man of great talent, could hardly be called by any one a man of genius, should have fathered an offspring so prevailing." But so it is. Of the other examples he cites of the class, or nearly allied to it, *Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon*, and Beckford's *Vathek*, must be considered master-works in romance. Shelley's *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*, of which we think less ill than Mr. Saintsbury does, are very sincere Lewisian imitations; the first, and better of the two, being not more crude or extravagant than considerable portions of *The Monk*, and in its impressive opening scene scarcely inferior to Lewis at his best. There are, by the way, one or two matters that appear to need correction in the text of Mr. Saintsbury's opening essay. "Novronihar" is, of course, a misprint for Beckford's charming creation Nouronihar. And there is an obvious slip in printing the title of Mrs. Radcliffe's interesting quarto of travels as *Travels on the Rhine in the English Lake Country*. In this book, as in the romances published subsequently to the year 1794, the influence of what may be called the "landscape sentiment" of Gilpin is clearly perceptible, not less than the influence of Gray and Rousseau—which Mr. Saintsbury notes. The