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therefore, as a corollary, that all obnoxious elements will cease to be; and we think that any diagnosis of the entire question which fails to reckon with that sublime purpose, must ever be incompetent. This purpose we conclude involves the salvation of "all who possess the virtue to repent, and the energy to atone."

W. J. ACOMB.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE POETS.

IN a recent issue of the *English Academy*, there appeared an article entitled, "The Twilight of the Poets," in which the writer upheld clearness of utterance as opposed to obscurity.

"It is a common fallacy to suppose," says the writer, "that what is clearly expressed must necessarily be lacking in depth; and, on the other hand, that what is unintelligible, must as necessarily be profound. Poets have often deliberately played upon this erroneous notion, and by a studied obscurity of utterance have won reputation for depth of thought."

After a brief review of the so-called obscure writers of the different centuries, he concludes the summary with the great names of Robert Browning, and George Meredith, and the modern Symbolists.

Now it may be that there have been, and are, writers, who, "by a studied obscurity of utterance, have won reputation for depth of thought," but even if this is so, we should hesitate to name in the same breath with them Robert Browning and George Meredith, who, by their lives, are exonerated from the charge of "seeking a reputation for depth of thought!"

Too often men accuse others of a fault which originates in themselves. There are certain eminent minds which have never complained of the obscurity of Browning, Meredith, and the Symbolists. This being so, we who find them ambiguous, must see to it that the light of our understanding is not dim, or else give credit to others for a larger insight. To proclaim in a loud voice that Browning and Meredith are often hopelessly obscure, is to slam the door of the poets in the face of the people, who are easily discouraged.

In this paper I shall endeavour to account briefly for the charge of obscurity brought so often against Browning, Meredith, and the Symbolists, and shall try to show that although their meaning may be grasped sufficiently by those who are capable of giving them adequate study, yet the appreciation of the fulness of their meaning is dependent, not so much upon intellectual acumen, as upon a quality of the soul, either natural or won through initiation into certain experiences.

Let us take, first, Browning and Meredith. Why are these writers so often called obscure? Swinburne and Arthur Symonds, in accounting for the charge of obscurity brought so often against Robert Browning, found that a satisfactory answer to such a question might be found by an examination of his method; and we, too, may clear some ground in the case of both Browning and Meredith by adopting the same fair plan.

To begin with, these writers deal most often with complex situations and complex characters. Into their poetry and prose enter philosophical concepts, psychological subtleties, and a wealth of allusion which must often tax the knowledge of the average reader. It is a fallacy to imagine that every subject can be treated in a manner which shall render it as intelligible to those who have given it no previous study, as to those who have. Certain subjects require rather more than a facile reading. We have Max Müller advising us to read Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason," over and over again, before hoping to grasp its full meaning, and Ruskin saying the same of Milton, and of all great writers. Ruskin, in his "Sesame and Lilies," speaks of the "cruel reticence in the breasts of great men which makes them always hide their deeper thought," so that it can often be reached only as the reward of patient delving. In other words, we appreciate what we fit ourselves to appreciate, and to imagine that the subtle wit, humour, and learning of a great writer can be perfectly clear to the average reader, without some preparation on his part, is folly. Yet the easy understanding of a book is often made the test of its merit by critics who speak vaguely of "the universal appeal."

The whole question may even resolve itself into one of intellectual capacity. To write always with the intelligence of the average man in view, would be to introduce the levelling influence of democracy into literature. The fact is that there are men who delight in sharpening their wits through contact with ideas beyond the ken of mediocrity.

"You cannot see in another man any more than you have in yourself; and your own intelligence strictly determines the extent to which he comes within its grasp," says Schopenhauer.

Browning, we know, said: "I never pretended to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar or a game of dominoes to an idle man." He deals largely with the inner life—with the mainsprings of action—not so much with action itself, and of him we may say in his own words:

"To the motive, the endeavour, the heart's self
His quick sense looks; he crowns and calls aright
The soul o' the purpose, ere 'tis shaped as act,
Takes flesh i' the world and clothes itself a king."

The object of both Browning and Meredith being so often to penetrate through the action to the underlying motive, they do not waste time over the obvious. We have our Dickens and Trollope to delight us with the inimitable descriptions of what we have all seen and thought, and experienced a hundred times over; but now we have two writers who open up to us realms of the soul less adapted to elaborate description than the subjects of the authors just mentioned, but none the less real. To reach their goal, Browning and Meredith condense. So much of the road over which we travel with weary feet has been well worn by them, that they convey their experiences by the way in a word or phrase, which is easily comprehended by those who travel with a velocity which approaches their own, but is often unintelligible to the many whose steps are slower. The multitude, unfortunately, has always lagged far behind the vanguard, and progress has only been possible through the misunderstood.

The scope of the art of Browning and Meredith has no limits but "the soul's limits, and the last reaches of life." To light up for us those dim regions of the "Soul's limits," no elaborate description can be used. It is through the flash-light instrumentality of metaphor that these writers most often make us familiar with the vague and "obscure" regions of our souls. They seize on evanescent moods, as well as more lasting ones, and embody them in art. The appreciation of many of their metaphors depends on the sympathy of the reader. If he is sympathetic, the metaphor will, in all probability, awaken within him an answering gleam of consciousness, or he will await patiently the mood which shall reveal to him its significance. How often it happens that what is incomprehensible to us in a certain mood flashes upon us with its full meaning through the insight born of an illuminating experience! It is so that many men have been known to come into possession of some life-saving biblical truth. The sympathetic reader is always humble in the hands of a master.

In the subject matter of Browning and Meredith, in their choice of complex situations and complex characters, in their wealth of allusion, in their impatience of the obvious, we find much which accounts for the charge of obscurity brought so often against them.

Now, I have spoken of those vague and obscure regions of the soul which can be reached very often only through suggestion. These regions belong to a part of man's soul which seems to have faculties for communion with the Infinite. The grossest materialist has had his gleams of mystic light, his momentary realization that "things are not always what they seem," and the records of the mystics of all times bear witness to the existence of these secret

regions of the soul; but because the whispers from these twilight domains are often transitory and cannot easily be defined, the average man ignores them. The artist who seeks to interpret as much of life as possible cannot ignore them. He realizes that their very mystery and obscurity invest them with a certain terror, for while it is possible to gauge the influence of what is known, how can one set limits to the powers of what is not fully comprehended; and how fearful and wonderful those powers may be! The art of Browning and Meredith opens up to us vistas of life into which we have all had glimpses. We may call them "obscure," and the artist who strives to convey them "obscure," but such obscurity is a part of life. Here we see "through a glass darkly," and are enfolded and shrouded in mystery. Are we to have among us no poets who convey this mystery? Twilight has its place in life as well as daylight. To those unaccustomed to that dim region, many of the symbols used in suggesting it will be unintelligible. Who shall define for us our twilight moods in their uncertain light, leading we know not through what night before a promise of dawn? Most of us are afraid of them, and hurry back into the daylight, but the artist who has become familiar with them strives to express them. To the many his words may have no meaning, because the many, albeit immersed in mystery, are not mystical. In the few, his words, like the wind caressing the strings of an Æolian harp, will awaken slumbering music.

We have in our midst to-day a school which is acquainted with mystery—the Symbolist School. Indeed, so far have those affiliated with the movement persisted on their "lone way," that many of their experiences have been translated into terms perfectly intelligible to the sympathetic, and these terms or symbols are to the initiated the "open sesame" into a world of enchantment.

The subjective once embodied in art, we know, becomes objective. Well, the Symbolists have put certain rare experiences of the soul into a form in which they are forever accessible to the elect. Such symbolism forms one more step upward on the frail ladder which sways into the Infinite. For it is possible to become familiar with mystery—to realise how brief is the life of man, which is as a "sparrow's flight," on a dark night through a lighted hall—to value those moods which lift us somehow above the petty noise and strife of everyday life into communion with what, in its aloofness elevates and calms—into communion with the Infinite.

"It is only by the communications we have with the Infinite that we are to be distinguished from each other," says Maeterlinck, and he adds: "It lies within our power to increase these communications."

Blessed be the symbolists, then, who, with a word, a look, a sign, can open unto us, "the great road that leads from the seen to the unseen!"

"Is not perfect clearness," suggests Maeterlinck, "most often the sign of decrepitude in the idea?" Fortunately, we are not all in love with platitudes—or this world had never moved. The victories of science have been won through those who first saw and kept a firm grasp upon the proteanlike form of mystery. The realm of the spirit offers at least as rich a field for exploration as the realm of material things.

"After the world has starved its soul long enough in the contemplation and re-arrangement of material things," says Arthur Symons, "comes the turn of the soul."

Even now this realm of the spirit is yielding up some of its treasures—and largely through those who have been called mystics, fools and fanatics. Professor James, in his essay on "Psychical Research," says: "In psychology, physiology, and medicine, wherever a debate between the mystics and the scientifics has been once for all decided, it is the mystics who have usually proved to be right about the facts, while the scientifics have had the better of it in respect to the theories." The point is that the mystics supplied the facts through refusing to ignore the "unclassified residuum." Some time ago, Professor James delivered his lectures on "Varieties of Religious Experience." The facts in this case were supplied by all those who had experienced the sterility of material things in the face of the Infinite; and James was obliged to come to the conclusion that there is in man "more" than the powers employed in his normal consciousness—and this "more" he chose to call, with other psychologists, the "sub-conscious." An obscure region of the soul was recognized, and it has been admitted that this obscure region can be reached and influenced for useful purposes through "suggestion" and "auto-suggestion." As a result, we have the Emmanuel Church Movement, behind which are the Christian Scientists, the New Thought theorists, and every conceivable form of mysticism. The Society for Psychical Research is to-day investigating the data supplied by those who have had the courage to confess the existence of mystery.

Let us not ignore mystery, nor hastily condemn those who make us realize its presence. So much that we feel and think cannot be clearly described, and therefore so much of the understanding of an author who seeks to interpret as much of life as possible depends on our sympathy with him; that is, upon the attitude of mind with which we approach him. Not always, as I have said, will his meaning be immediately clear to us, but we can

well afford to wait on the mood which shall reveal to us its significance. And let us be glad that we cannot always discern at once the full meaning of our greatest writers, for it may be that in the days of our need, we shall find in the word which we passed by with indifference, an Angel of Consolation.

"Symbolism, implicit in all literature from the beginning, as it is implicit in the very words we use," says Arthur Symons, "comes to us now at last, quite conscious of itself, offering us the only escape from our many imprisonments."

HILTON RADLEY.

THE CURSE OF PHILANTHROPY.

THE proverb that good intentions pave the way to hell, implying that they result too often in evil deeds, contains like many another a large element of truth. No doubt the narrow way to Heaven must be partly paved with similar ballast, for we cannot suppose that all the good that is done in the world results incidentally, or is shaped by a kindly Providence to beneficial ends from rough-hewn purposes of evil. Good intentions sometimes at all events produce good works. But even if it does no more, at least the saying may serve to remind us of the utter fallibility of human motives. Though our intentions and resolutions are all for the good of ourselves or of others, yet so far are we from being sure of their success, that it is abundantly possible our efforts may end not merely in failure to do good, but even in the production of positive harm. Good intentions, says a minor poet, are the felon's plea:—

"When well-intentioned people plant
A dagger in your breast,
Your good is what they really want,
They did it 'for the best.'"

The good intentions do not, unfortunately, mitigate to the sufferer the pain or the damage of the evil done.

But though the truth is thus widely admitted, its implications are not recognised enough. That "the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley," when it is a question of selfish foresight in providing ourselves with a "wee bit housie" for shelter in the winter of life, is a commonplace; but we have yet to appreciate that the truth applies hardly less to those efforts for the good of others which pass under the names of charity and philanthropy. That every day in these names and with the very best intentions vast evils are perpetrated and perpetuated, is the belief of the present writer, which these pages are intended to illustrate and enforce.

The practice of giving money in the streets, though still far from extinct is in this country at least much reduced from what it used to be. Why? Here is a man, wet, cold, hungry and miserable, and another well-fed, comfortable, and warmly clad, whose