QUIET HOURS IN

POETS' CORNER

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CHOBHAM BOOK OF ENGLISH PROSE

LETTERS TO MY GRANDSON ON THE HAPPY LIFE

LETTERS TO MY GRANDSON ON THE WORLD ABOUT HIM

LETTERS TO MY GRANDSON ON THE GLORY OF ENGLISH PROSE

LETTERS TO MY GRANDSON ON THE GLORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

QUIET HOURS IN THE TEMPLE

POETS' CORNER

From a Drawing by M. HELSBY

QUIET HOURS IN POETS' CORNER

By the Hon.
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TO

ANTONY

MY UKLOVLU GRANDSON

" Captains and conquerors leave a little dust,
And kings a dubious legend of their reign ;
The swords of cæsars, they are less than rust:
The poet doth remain."

WILLIAM WATSON

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CHAPTER I

THE CHOIR OF THE IMMORTALS

No man of quick sensibilities can pass from the common traffic of the street into the silence of Westminster Abbey without feeling the hand of reverence laid upon his heart.

The eager rush of the busy highway, men hastening on their avocations and absorbed in their occasions, the ordered tumult of the great city, are all less than nothing within this solemn temple filled with the august memorials of the greatest race of men that the world has known.

The building itself in its dim glory is beautiful exceedingly.

> " They dreamt not of a perishable home
> Who thus could build I"

We who in our pride of knowledge look back upon those ages in which such edifices arose

with a vain self-satisfaction and condescension, we who have physically conquered the air, who speak from continent to continent and have measured the depths of space, have lost irrevocably something which our forefathers possessed, more precious than all the wonders of Science ; we have lost their adoration. There have been scenes enacted in Westminster Hall hard by, almost as splendid perhaps and as full of pomp and circumstance as the long sequence of the coronations of the Kings and Queens of England and the solemn burials of heroes, statesmen, and poets in the Abbey of Westminster.

But in the night, when only the moon spreads its quiet light through the windows of the Old Hall, nothing is left of all the pageant and splendour that again and again has filled it but two brass plates, dimly gleaming, inlaid among the flagstones; while in the Abbey a silent company of the graven images of the great stand round, and the moving light reveals here and there as it

steals along the written records of their noble deeds.

To trace the memorials of eight centuries that lie in crowded confusion throughout the edifice is an enterprise too vast for any unversed in the recondite recesses of history; but to one spot the footsteps of all, learned and unlearned, are drawn with an irresistible inclination, and to Poets' Corner come the English speaking peoples from the ends of the earth to stand uncovered in silent homage before the commingled dust of that glorious choir of immortals.

The poets of all ages have been supremely crowned above the conquerors, the builders, and the scribes. The verses of the poets outlive the conquests of great captains, the capital cities of vast empires, and the laborious writings of the deeply erudite; and we may be sure that the songs of those who now lie here in everlasting silence will survive even the splendid shrine that to-day encompasses them. The poets have been dowered with the gift of touching the deepest

emotions of mankind with the highest form of human expression, and therefore have they been hailed in all ages of the world as the true Kings of men.

Here in this corner of the Abbey they lie, a glorious company in splendid confraternity.

A quiet hour spent here will suppress vanity, comfort affliction, and sanctify resolve.

CHAPTER II

DR JOHNSON AND SOME OTHERS

THIS hallowed spot acquires its sanctity not from the single greatness but from the accumulated splendour of the noble company that lies here.

Far away over the hills and valleys of England the mortal remains of Shakespeare draw to Stratford-upon-Avon the reverent footsteps of a never-ending concourse of pilgrims from the ends of the earth.

The little churchyard in the lovely vale of Grasmere, deep among the mountains that inspired his song, is the fitting resting-place of Wordsworth.

Milton lies not here but in St Giles, Cripplegate. Shelley and Keats repose near to each other in that far-off flowery slope without the walls of Rome ; Gray in the churchyard that he hallowed for ever in his

Elegy ; Goldsmith beside the church in the precincts of the Temple wherein he lived and died ; Coleridge in a dismal desecrated graveyard on the summit of Highgate Hill.

But monuments and memorials are here to many that lie buried in distant plains and valleys, joining in effigy the congregated quire of those whose dust reposes beneath the pavement.

On the evening of the loth of October, 1924, I wandered to this sacred spot and watched the light slowly fading and the shadows deepening. As I sat alone on a bench between the bust of my inspired kinsman Coleridge and the tomb of my lost friend Irving, the desire came to me to pay my own poor tribute of homage in all humility and thankfulness to all those noble spirits whose mortal parts lie here enshrined, or whose effigiès proclaim them the great singers of their times. In the " dim religious light" of the Abbey on the autumn afternoon there glowed at my feet the golden letters of Johnson's name, than

whom no man ever deserved more to rest in the great Abbey. In the last prayer he composed he exclaimed, " Bless my friends : have mercy upon all men " ; gruff, tender, great-hearted old man, human embodiment of England, inimitable in any other land or race, lying at last beside his lifelong friend Garrick. Near upon two hundred years ago together they in their sanguine youth adventured up to London from Lichfield to seek their fortunes ; both attained immortal fame and now lie here together in death.

What an example has not Johnson given to his countrymen ! " How patiently," says Carlyle, " he converts his poor home into a Lazaretto, endures for long years the contradiction of the miserable and unreasonable, with him unconnected, save that they had no other to yield them refuge! Generous old man ! Worldly possessions he has little ; yet of this little he gives freely; from his own hard earned shilling, the half-pence for the poor that ' waited his coming out' are not withheld; the poor ' waited the

coming out' of one not quite so poor! " " Johnson has a rough voice ; but he finds the wretched Daughter of vice fallen down in the streets ; carries her home on his own shoulders, and like a good Samaritan gives help to the help-needing, worthy or unworthy." Then let us think of him standing for an hour bare-headed in the rain on the spot in Uttoxeter Market where old Michael Johnson's bookstall had once stood, thus doing penance for his graceless refusal fifty years before to serve the bookstall for his father. " In contrition I stood, and I hope the penance was expiatory."

No doubt in these days more people read Boswell's " Life " than the works of Johnson himself.

This is very natural, because most of us would rather be amused than instructed.

Novels that merely entertain have ten times the sale of works of enduring merit.

Splendid writing on serious subjects appeals only to the few with taste and scholarship. Sir William Watson's " Pencraft " has no

chance on the railway bookstalls against the diverting inventions of Mr Phillips Oppenheim.

In the case of Dr Johnson, though "he had ready for immediate use the quickest wit and the most magnificent vocabulary ever placed at the disposal of man," it is not his writings that have endeared him to us all so much as his character as revealed to us by Boswell.

Of his great dictionary Carlyle wrote:

> "Had Johnson left nothing but his dictionary, one might have traced there a great intellect, a genuine man. Looking to its clearness of definition, its general solidity, honesty, insight and successful method, it may be called the best of all dictionaries.
>
> "There is a kind of architectural nobleness: it stands there like a great solid square-built edifice, finished symmetrically complete; you judge that a true builder did it."

His name and fame can never now pass away till the English language, for whose purity he struggled through the long years of his life, has sunk into oblivion in the abyss of time.

CHAPTER III

DAVID GARRICK

DAVID GARRICK who here lies beside Dr Johnson was in every way a contrast to his old friend. He was half a Frenchman, for his grandfather, David Garric, was a French Huguenot who lived at La Bastide, a part of the city of Bordeaux, and his grandmother came from Pons, which lies about forty miles north of Bordeaux; and the great actor could speak French as fluently and correctly as his own language. He had fast friendships in France all his life.

Before his time, classical declamation ruled the stage, but Garrick spoke straight from the heart in tragedy ; and with infinite wit, spirit, and delicacy in comedy; he was transcendent in gesture and convincing in expression. Noverre says of him that he so transformed himself into the parts he

played that on the stage " he was often unrecognised by persons who habitually lived with him." His versatility was such that in a drawing-room in his ordinary clothes he would enact the dagger scene in Macbeth in so overwhelmingly convincing a manner as positively to terrify those who witnessed it, and then in a moment he would portray a gaping porter, who lets a tray fall from his head in the street, in so ludicrous a manner as irresistibly to compel laughter. Once, behind the scenes, Johnson in his brown old coat and worsted stockings encountered Garrick coming hurriedly from his dressing-room in gorgeous satin, silk stockings, lace ruffles, and jewelled sword. Putting on his horn-rimmed spectacles, the Doctor peered at his splendid friend and said, " and what are you to-night, Davey ? "

The most delightful glimpses of the great actor in his private life are to be found all through Fanny Burney's diary. One day he described to her how Johnson borrowed his beautifully bound " Petrarch. " David,

will you lend me Petraca" *(sic).* " Yes, Sir. " David, you sigh." ″ Sir, you shall have it." Accordingly, the book, finely bound, was sent; but scarce had he received it, when uttering a Latin ejaculation (which Mr Garrick repeated) in a fit of enthusiasm over his head goes poor Petrarch—Russia leather and all!

On another occasion she writes of Garrick in her diary :—

> " One morning he called at eight o'clock, and, unfortunately Sukey and I were not come down stairs. We hurried in vain ; for he discovered our laziness and made us monstrously ashamed by his raillery. ' I shall tell Mrs Garrick,' said he, ' that I found the Doctor reading Petrarch in flannels, like a young man—but where, says I, where were the young ladies ? Where do you think were my favourites ? why in bed!' When he went away he caught Charlotte in his arms, and ran with her down the steps, and to the corner

of the square, protesting he intended taking her off (as his own Reynold's Comedy, which she looks as if she had sat for, he says)."

This of course alludes to the picture of Garrick between tragedy and comedy now in the National Gallery. This was in 1773, when Fanny Burney was twenty and her sister Charlotte was a little girl.

This happy scene of the great actor carrying away the little child was in a manner repeated a hundred years later, when Henry Irving came down to stay with me on the 27th of August, 1882, at a house I had taken for the summer at Addlestone; we were all out on the River Wey boating when he arrived, and on our return we found Irving carrying my little son of three years old round the garden on his shoulder, prancing like a horse at the child's command! Now he too lies here side by side with Garrick.

The greatness of an actor who has passed away cannot be subjected to any appraise-

ment by the living who were not his contemporaries. He is gone from us even more utterly than some perished summer of long ago that may still linger in our memory.

We must accept modestly and with reverence the verdict of those who witnessed the genius of Garrick and sat entranced under his magic spell, and who with the acclaim of mankind laid him in this glorious company.

It is for us to revere the spot where this great interpreter lies whose accents when living moved the world.

As Johnson himself wrote :—" Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses, whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings."

An immense concourse lined the way of Garrick's funeral from the Adelphi Terrace to the Abbey, and his body was followed from the West door of the Abbey to Poets' Corner by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Burke, Dr Johnson, and Gibbon; and Richard

Cumberland, the dramatist, who was present, wrote : " I saw old Samuel Johnson standing at the foot of Shakespeare's monument, and bathed in tears." The old sage was soon to follow his lifelong friend and lie beside him.

The monument to Garrick high up on the West Wall of the transept near the nave represents him stepping out between curtains which he holds aside on each hand. Charles Lamb wandering in the Abbey animadverts on this piece of sculpture and condemns it as " affected" and calls it a " harlequin figure."

Garrick's true greatness would perhaps have been better conveyed by a commanding figure in repose. The simple stone over his dust with his name is enough for us.

Tradition places Garrick at the head of all the actors of England, never yet displaced from his supreme station, and here, therefore, in Poets' Corner where he lies, it behoves us to salute him as the King of Players.

CHAPTER IV

HENRY IRVING

OF Sir Henry Irving, who lies by the side of Garrick, it is difficult for me to write altogether dispassionately, for I was his friend for the last twenty-five years of his life.

He was born with a countenance and aspect that instantly compelled attention, and as he grew older his appearance became more and more impressive ; his crown of leonine grey hair, his extreme pallor, his deep-set eyes contributed to the sense of concentrated power which was felt by all who approached him.

With such a personality it would have been impossible for the man not to have achieved greatness wherever his walk of life had led him : and it was this commanding, personal force that was felt by the audience

and which brought him its unbounded support as much as, if not more than, his art as a player.

In private he was gentle, as are so many men with great power in repose, grave, rather silent, but with a quiet humour accompanied by a rare and winning smile. He was easeful, courteous, and in his friendships most faithful and sincere.

Of all the men in every walk of life that I have met in a long sojourn upon the earth, there have been two whose entry into a room full of people not lacking in distinction has instantly made every one but themselves seem of no importance. Henry Irving was one and Cardinal Newman was the other. Both possessed some indefinable personal power to which every one they encountered felt compelled to pay homage.

Irving's career on the stage is public property and needs no word from me.

At the height of his fame the question arose as to the adventure of a visit to America. No actor from England for many

years had crossed the Atlantic to appeal professionally in the United States. Many years before such an adventure had met with painful misfortune.

However, times had changed, asperities had died away and cordial sentiments had replaced them on both sides of the ocean. It was felt that the thing might at last be successfully attempted.

The event was so interesting that it became by general consent a fit occasion for a public demonstration of goodwill to the enterprise, and a farewell dinner was proposed in the great St James's Hall, that stood where now the Piccadilly Hotel spreads itself between Piccadilly and Regent Street, and my father, then Chief Justice of England, gladly responded to a request that he should occupy the chair.

It was a happy augury that Russell Lowell, the American Minister, attended the banquet and sat on the Chairman's left; and every branch of art, letters, and politics was represented, and thus in 1883 the friendly

interchange of players across the sea was inaugurated which has since become familiar to both peoples. I accompanied Irving in his ship from Liverpool as far as Queenstown, where I went ashore and watched his vessel " sink below the verge." Twenty-two years later, after many a noble endeavour and splendid achievement, he uttered his last words in this life in the part of Beckett, " Into Thy hands, 0 Lord, into Thy hands ! " and sinking down upon the stage the curtain of life descended upon him for ever. Never surely was a more magnificent exit made by any player from the stage of this world.

On the 20th of October, 1905, he was laid to rest here beside Garrick. A vast congregation filled the Abbey to the walls, and at noon Chopin's majestic funeral match welled out from the organ while trumpets and kettle-drums seemed to mark on the imagination the tramp of the bearers and reverberated among the aisles and chapels of the great building. Then there was a silence and

faintly in the distance came the sound of the choir singing through the cloisters before the body as it was borne, covered by a pall of laurel leaves, from the Chapel of St Faith to the door of the Abbey. As the singers reached the entrance their music began in a slow increase of strength to reach and linger among the sacred arches and aspiring roof, till

" From the arms of silence—list! oh list!
The music bursteth into second life ;
The notes luxuriate, every stone is kissed
By sound or ghost of sound, in mazy strife ;
Heart thrilling strains, that cast, before the eye
Of the devout, a veil of ecstasy ! "

and so with every circumstance that could make it beautiful the great actor of our time played in silence his last part and was laid beside his yet greater forerunner to await with him their last call.

There, below the flags he lies who was once so long my friend, his voice for ever silent, his heart now turned to dust.

The shadows deepen, the great bell in the

Quiet Hours in poets' Corner

Clock Tower booms out the hour with four solemn tolls—

" Twilight and evening bell
And after that the dark."

It is time to depart into the indifferent world without; one last look at the familiar name gold-glimmering in the dusk,

" And ' Ave, ave, ave ' said
Adieu, adieu for evermore."

CHAPTER V

SHERIDAN

ONCE more I return to Poets' Corner ; the vergers have stacked a number of long benches over Irving's grave—the name is now quite out of sight; but to the north of his flagstone and west of Johnson's lies Sheridan. His was a full life ; an elopement, duels, fame, a playwright's triumphs, an orator's glory, death in abject poverty, a burial in splendid pomp, and peace at last to the restless heart under the pavement of the Abbey.

Happy gallant youth, fighting duels for the honour of the lovely Eliza Linley, and carrying her off from her " grey tyrant father " to marry her in secret near Calais.

Sheridan was just twenty-one and the

beautiful girl only eighteen when they fled away together in the Paradise of each other's arms. The old father pursued and overtook them at Lille and dragged her back as a runaway apprentice bound to sing for him at his concerts at Bath. Neither her father nor anyone else suspected the marriage, the girl was said to be flying to a nunnery in France to avoid the assaults upon her virtue of the profligates of Bath, and young Sheridan was acting as her virtuous escort.

The old father brought them back together in the same post-chaise, and doubtless in the dark could not see the clasped hands of the young lovers. Arrived at Bath, Sheridan was forbidden to see the sweet little nightingale, who nightly sang out her heart to him, and to him alone, where he sat obscurely at the back in the crowded audience. Then she was often driven home by him disguised as a hackney coachman. Captain Matthews who pursued the pretty girl with his unwanted attentions had to fight young Sheridan on Claverton Down.

The duel was remarkable. Sheridan slipped up and both combatants broke their swords and fell together to the ground. Captain Matthews being on the top of Sheridan hacked at him with the remains of his sword and left him for dead. But the gallant youth survived, and lived to put his adversary into "The Rivals'" as "Bob Acres."

" Miss Linley," writes Fanny Burney in her diary, " is daughter to a musician of Bath, a very sour, ill-bred, severe, selfish man. She is believed to be very romantic ; the town has rung of no other name this month ; she has long been very celebrated for her singing, though never till within this month has she been in London. She has met with a variety of adventures, and has more lovers and admirers than any nymph of these times. She has been addressed by men of all ranks. I dare not say honourably, which is doubtful; but what is certain is, that whatever their designs she has rejected them all. She has long been attached to a Mr

Sheridan, a young man of great talents and very well spoken of, whom it is expected she will speedily marry."

When this was written they had in fact been married for over a year!

There followed many years of ascending fortune, successful plays, a seat in Parliament, displays of splendid eloquence, posts in the Government, the rank of Privy Councillor, then the tragic and swift decline, profuse extravagance, intemperance, debt, ill-health, hopeless decay, misery, and death.

Throughout all the vicissitudes of his chequered life he was well esteemed by the best men of his times, and Dr Johnson, when proposing Sheridan for the celebrated Club, of which he was the founder, said of him that "he who has written the two best comedies of his age is surely a considerable man."

When he was dying the *Morning Post* made a generous appeal for the unhappy man—telling the public that it was better

to minister to the wants of the dying than to adorn the hearse of the dead.

But it was too late, and he who has for ever added to our merriment died in wretchedness, and was buried in splendour.

The flat marble that covers his grave after recording his name and the dates of his birth and death, has upon it these words :—

> THIS MARBLE IS THE TRIBUTE OF
> HIS ATTACHED FRIEND
> PETER MOORE

This Peter Moore has now long been forgotten; he was Member of Parliament for Coventry and was a city merchant who unhappily lost all his money and died in poverty abroad.

To the generous and magnanimous, posthumous fame has always been preferred to present celebrity. To Richard Brinsley Sheridan both were vouchsafed in full

measure, and the later years of his decadence and decay may now be left in oblivion. He lies where he would have wished, beside the greatest man of letters of his age.

CHAPTER VI

MACAULAY

A LITTLE space away from Sheridan to the North and West lies Lord Macaulay.

Across the Abbey, in the opposite transept, beside the door through which a thousand thousand visitors pass year after year and will pass while England is still England and our race still a race, is reared the splendid monument which Macaulay has for ever immortalised in his majestic prose :—

> " High over those venerable graves," he wrote, " towers the stately monument of Chatham, and from above, his effigy graven by a cunning hand, seems still with eagle face and outstretched arm, to bid England be of good cheer, and to hurl defiance at her foes."

Singularly fortunate have been the great

family of Pitt in their monuments in the Abbey, for the statue of the younger Pitt over the West door is a noble work. Dean Stanley said of it:—

> " Pitt stands in his robes of Chancellor of the Exchequer, over the West door of the Abbey, trampling on the French Revolution, in the attitude so well known by his contemporaries, drawing up his haughty head, stretching out his arm with commanding gesture, and pouring forth the lofty language of inextinguishable hope."

No man, with the exception of James Anthony Froude, has contributed more glory to the history of England than Macaulay. Of those strange persons in the present age who, bearing English names, insidiously support every enemy of England and deliver rebuffs to her every friend, Macaulay was spared the knowledge.

Many of them, if their origin were faithfully traced and revealed, would prove to

be of foreign blood and Semitic extraction, and the bitterness of others of them might be assigned to their misfortune in being born out of lawful wedlock.

Those who come to Poets' Corner and stand before the grave of Macaulay may rejoice that the written word of the great historian, glowing in many a resounding passage with noble patriotism, will outlive the peevish detractions of these products of a later time who love every country but that in which they live, and yet elect to remain here and enjoy the protection of that very greatness which they endeavour to destroy.

Macaulay was one day standing in the Abbey before the memorial of Warren Hastings and was joined by Milman, the poet, before he was made Dean of St Paul's, and Milman then suggested to Macaulay that he should with his pen perpetuate the fame of the great Pro-Consul. Fired with the splendid subject Macaulay went home and wrote the wonderful essay which, while

celebrating the fame of Warren Hastings, enhanced his own.

> " In that great Temple of silence and reconciliation/' he wrote, " where the enmities of twenty generations lie buried, in the great Abbey which has during many ages afforded a quiet resting-place to those whose minds and bodies have been shattered by the contentions of the Great Hall, the dust of the illustrious accused should have mingled with the dust of the illustrious accusers."

Warren Hastings lived long enough to see his work in India vindicated by the applause of his country, and was buried where he was born at Churchhill in Worcestershire.

Just above Macaulay's grave is the monument to Addison which was erected in 1808, nearly a hundred years after his death, and writing of this rather belated tribute Macaulay says:—

> " Such a mark of national respect was

due to the unsullied statesman, to the accomplished scholar, to the master of pure English eloquence, to the consummate painter of life and manners. It was due above all to the great satirist, who alone knew how to use ridicule without abusing it; who without inflicting a wound effected a great social reform, and who reconciled wit and virtue after a long and disastrous separation, during which wit had been led astray by profligacy, and virtue by fanaticism,"

Addison was the son of the Dean of Lichfield, was educated at Charterhouse and became a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford. He was born and bred a gentleman and scholar. At Charterhouse he formed a friendship with Steele which led to their collaboration in the papers of the *Toiler* and the *Spectator,* and of the effect upon the world of these papers Macaulay, as above quoted, has but repeated what was already said by Johnson in his life of Addison.

> " No greater felicity," wrote the great Doctor, " can genius attain than that of having purified intellectual pleasure, separated mirth from indecency, and wit from licentiousness ; of having taught a succession of writers to bring elegance and gaiety to the aid of goodness: and, if I may use expressions yet more awful, of having turned many to righteousness."

With the quarrel between Addison and Pope we need not at this distant date trouble ourselves. Each in his own work was supreme, and perhaps each wished to be accepted as the arbiter of Letters of their times. The acerbities of the literary and political world in England have often risen to ridiculous and fantastic heights. Voltaire writing of England as he found it, said, " So violent did I find parties in London, that I was assured by several that the Duke of Marlborough was a coward, and Mr Pope a fool." Only curiosity is entertained by recording these fruitless and barren squabbles.

The better part is to forget them and study only the accepted works of the combatants.

Addison in one age, and Macaulay in another, equally upheld the beauty and purity of English prose, which often rose in the hands of the latter to lofty and sustained eloquence.

It is most fitting that the latter, who in passages of elevated splendour has recorded the deeds of so many great men who lie scattered around in this " great Temple of Silence," should himself have come at last to lie among those whose glory he so nobly commemorated.

CHAPTER VII

HANDEL AND JENNY LIND

IN the South-west corner of this precinct of the poets lie the mortal remains of Handel, who, though a native of Saxony, lived for fifty years in this country.

Of Music as an art I am myself entirely ignorant, but in common with other ordinary folk am conscious of its strange and compelling influence upon the mind, of those " yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence "; of those " outpourings of eternal harmony in the medium of created sound." No one knows, and I suppose no one will ever know, how it comes about that complicated vibrations or undulations of the air we breathe arriving separately yet contemporaneously upon something in the ear of man, specially constructed to receive them, and, in some

unexplained manner, convey them to the brain, should have power deeply to stir the emotions, which likewise are a condition of the brain of which we know nothing, and lift what we call ourselves up into visions of ennobling ecstasy!

The phenomena become still more mysterious to those unversed in Science when we learn that the length of the vibrations or undulations of the air appropriate to each note decreases as the notes ascend and increases as the notes descend in the scale and that, nevertheless, those undulations all travel through the air at precisely the same velocity.

But to enquire too curiously into the gifts of God always leads us downwards; and to degrade the rapture of music into oscillations of atmosphere is as disastrous to the soul of man as is the application of the laws of light, as revealed by the spectroscope, to a masterpiece of art.

Music as unfolded to us by the great composers is indeed and in truth man's loftiest means of expressing adoration.

' There are seven notes in the scale; make them fourteen: yet what a slender outfit for so vast an enterprise ! "

In the hands of Handel the vast enterprise that he achieved was to raise visions of Paradise in the heart of man with the choirs of angels ascending and descending the steps before the throne.

Since the Hallelujah Chorus was first heard in 1743 every audience in England has risen to its feet with its first chord and remained standing to its close.

Tradition proclaims that when the strains of this overwhelming outpouring of praise first struck the ear of King George the Second he rose up in his emotion and remained standing to its end, and the audience perforce rising with him, this reverent and becoming attitude has been followed now for nearly two hundred years.

A man who could so lift up the heart of mankind and turn sound to so sublima a purpose is fitly laid here among the poets, though an alien born who never wrote a verse.

Handel and Jenny Lind

I do not know how Handel is esteemed by the musicians of to-day, though the Handel festivals are sufficient testimony to the influence his music still enjoys with the great mass of the people, but it is on record that Beethoven declared, " I would uncover my head and kneel at his tomb."

Near his monument will be seen a medallion of Jenny Lind, another foreigner who made England her home, and whose fame as a singer was for many years supreme. To a wonderful voice she added a power of declamatory passion and of profound emotion which carried her swiftly to the summit of her art.

When I was a young man I was privileged to hear her sing " Auld Robin Gray a after a large dinner party in my father's house at i Sussex Square, and though she had then long retired from public performance, and the splendour of her voice was dimmed by advancing years, yet such was her dramatic and emotional power that I am sure no one present could ever have forgotten the scene as we all stood round spell-bound.

On her monument as on that of Handel are inscribed the words, " I know that my Redeemer livethh," and if there be music in heaven they will both be participators therein.

The art of the singer confers upon us who listen an immediate and compelling pleasure, and in the conferring it the singer possesses also an immediate and tangible enjoyment, but to those who listen there is nothing left but a memory ; and to posterity—nothing !

CHAPTER VIII

BYRON AND COLERIDGE

I BELIEVE the admission to the Abbey of the bodies, and the erection therein of the monuments, of the great is a matter belonging entirely to the authority and discretion of the Dean of Westminster whoever he may be at any time when such admission is in question.

The exclusion of a monument to Byron has frequently been made the subject of reproach to such Deans as have from time to time refused to sanction its admission.

No doubt consistency is impossible in these matters through centuries of time and generations of Deans, and it is therefore idle to cite the existence of a monument to Congreve, a vile corrupter of English literature and a man of licentious life, as an argument for the inclusion of a monument to Byron.

There are arguments of weight that can be propounded on either side of the question, and the dispute at least has benefited Trinity College, Cambridge, in whose library the fine statue of Byron by Thorwaldsen destined originally for the Abbey has found an honoured resting-place.

Henry Crabb Robinson in 1837 visited Thorwaldsen's studio in Rome and there saw the Byron statue, and says in his diary :—

> " I am told it has been denied admittance into Westminster Abbey. It is too late to be particular on such an occasion. Surely a memorial to so anti-religious a poet as Byron may be admitted where the inscription is allowed to stand,—
>
> " Life is a jest, and all things show it,
> I thought so once, and now I know it."

If the Christian religion is to be admitted into the discussion apart from the morality of a man's works and life, nothing stranger was ever known than the sanction vouchsafed by the Dean for the burial of Darwin

in the Abbey. Presuming that it must be admitted that the Christian religion reposes upon the elemental foundation of the doctrine of the Atonement, it is manifestly beyond the wit of man to reconcile that doctrine with the theory of the origin of species, the survival of the fittest, and the descent of man first from an ape of arboreal habits, and ultimately from a common ancestor with snakes, elephants, midges, owls, and jelly-fish.

Byron and Congreve may have been naughty in their lives and licentious with their pens, but neither of them set about to destroy the faith of Christ and reduce the Abbey itself into an austere monument of a vain superstition.

It is therefore manifestly impossible for any Dean to avoid falling under the censure of a portion of mankind in his admission and rejection of memorials in the Abbey on occasions where an admittedly great man has lived a life or held opinions or written works which some of his countrymen conscientiously condemn.

Though many would now wish to see a bust of Byron in Poets' Corner they must recognise the difficulty under which any Dean labours in coming to an assenting decision.

From some lines written by an obscure rhymer in 1633 it would seem that it was expected by some that Shakespeare's body would be brought to the Abbey, but eventually the greatest of all poets was laid to rest at Stratford, and thus many another great poet suffers no detraction from sharing a like absence from the National Mortuary. The monument to Shakespeare was not erected here in Poets' Corner until 1740, but since then it has dominated the memorials below and around it.

That many of our greatest poets lie buried away from the Abbey has often been regarded as no misfortune either to them or their countrymen.

It is beautiful to find Gray's grave at Stoke Poges and Wordsworth's at Grasmere, and it may be better in many ways that

Byron lies at Newstead, which is associated so closely with his name and fame.

Byron's immense force seems to have blunted his sensibilities and marred his manners. He abused the poets who were his contemporaries with a coarseness that could hurt only himself. He called Wordsworth a " blockhead," he called Southey an " incarnate lie," and wrote of Coleridge as " drunk." That Coleridge was only amused by this onslaught there can be no doubt :—

" *4th September,* 1819.

" *To the* LORD BYRON,
c/o John Murray, Esq.,
Albemarle Street, London.

" MY LORD,

"That I should be selected by you to share such immortality as Time may confer upon your Don Juan demands my acknowledgement, the quality of which is enlarged by the charge of inebriety you prefer against me.

" Had you adorned me with indolence

and irresolution the commendation had been just, but the more elegant acquirement of intemperance it were flattery to attribute to me.

" This example of your Lordship's taste and knowledge would embolden me to esteem you as among the first of our great writers if you would condescend first to avoid a too servile flattery of your contemporaries, and next to obtain correct information on the habits of those you celebrate.

" The sobriety of this letter is the unhappy proof of the extravagance of your praise.

"I am

your Lordship's obedient sober servant,

"S. T. COLERIDGE."

Coleridge was not really indolent, but his irresolution hampered him all his life. His extraordinary gift of inspired speech led him often to pour out upon a select circle of friends what was never again thereafter recaptured for the benefit of the world, but

perished immediately with its utterance, leaving nothing behind it but the dumb-founded amazement of the few who heard it. When he took up his pen to write prose nothing of the astonishing eloquence of his speech appeared. It is not for me to praise his poetry. His place among the English poets has long been established and confirmed.

The bust of Coleridge, by Hamo Thorneycroft, which stands against the East wall of this part of Poets' Corner, was erected in 1885, forty-one years after his death. His body lies at Highgate in a churchyard over which has been built a house or school supported on iron pillars, and the visitor has to crouch about under the squalid erection to find the grave. But it matters little where he lies, his inspired verse still lives :—

> " Weave a circle round him thrice
> And close your eyes in holy dread,
> For he on honeydew hath fed
> And drunk the milk of Paradise."

CHAPTER IX

PASTOR MORITZ, WHO VISITED POETS' CORNER IN 1782, AND BETTERTON

IN the year 1782 a young German Pastor came over to England with but little in his purse, " Paradise Lost" in his pocket, a heart full of kindliness, and a pen of truth, which last he used to write his experiences to a friend in his native land.

Some good fortune has preserved these letters, which give a very vivid picture of the England of that time. Pastor Moritz walked by stages to Oxford by way of Henley and Nettlebed. At Nuneham, having been treated with great discourtesy by the innkeeper of that place, he " bounced from this rude inn " and was about to sleep under a tree when he fell in with an Oxford professor, and with him he continued his walk to the University while they discoursed together in Latin.

But the impression made upon him by

Poets' Corner is the matter that concerns us in this book.

" On a very gloomy dismal day," he wrote to his friend in Germany, " just such a one as it ought to be, I went to see Westminster Abbey.

"1 entered at a small door, which brought me immediately to the Poets' Corner.

" Not far from the door, immediately on my entrance I perceived the statue of Shakespeare, as large as life ; with a band, etc., in the dress usual in his time.

"A passage out of one of Shakespeare's own plays (The Tempest) in which he describes in the most solemn and affecting manner, the end, or the dissolution of all things,[1] is here with great propriety,

[1] " The cloud capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a wrack behind."

The inscription on the monument gives " wreck " instead of " wrack " The first folio gives the word as " racke." Milton writes: " a world devote to universal wrack." I

put as his epitaph; as though none but Shakespeare could do justice to Shakespeare.

" At no great distance I saw the bust of that amiable writer, Goldsmith ; to whom, as well as to Butler, whose monument is in a distant part of the Abbey, though they had scarcely necessary bread to eat during their lifetime, handsome monuments are now raised.

" Our Handel has also a monument here, where he is represented as large as life.

"An actress Pritchard, and Booth an actor have also very distinguished monuments erected here to their memories.

" As I passed along the side walls of Westminster Abbey I hardly saw anything but

think " wrack " is better than " wreck." We have the phrase " wrack and ruin."

Above the statue of Shakespeare is a brass plate, black with age, upon which when the sun is in the west may with difficulty be deciphered the following words :

GULIELMO SHAKESPEARE
ANNO POST MORTEM CXXIV
AMOR PUBLICUS POSUIT

marble monuments of great admirals, but which were all too much loaded with finery and ornaments, to make on me at least the intended impression.

" I always returned with most pleasure to the Poets' Corner, where the most sensible, most able, and most learned men, of the different ages were assembled ; and particularly where the elegant simplicity of the monuments made an elevated, and affecting impression on the mind, while a perfect recollection of some favourite passage of a Shakespeare, or Milton recurred to my idea, and seemed for a moment to reanimate and bring back the spirits of those truly great men."

It is very pleasant to find that this simple foreigner when he visits the Abbey always returns " with most pleasure to Poets[1] Corner." It is strange that he does not mention Garrick, and we must conclude either the good Pastor did not look on the ground, or that perhaps Garrick's name had

not in 1782 been inlaid in the pavement. Hannah Pritchard has been long forgotten but in her day she was a great Lady Macbeth.

Barton Booth was the next considerable actor to succeed Betterton, and his bust was erected by his wife, who was also an actress. Barton Street close by was named after him and traverses what was once his property. He was the direct ancestor of the Booth who assassinated President Lincoln. Betterton lies, not in Poets' Corner, but in the cloister hard by, and Steele, who was his intimate friend, attended his funeral there, and his reflections as he paced the precincts awaiting the arrival of the coffin are worth recording :—

> " The gloom of the place, and faint lights before the ceremony appeared contributed to the melancholy disposition I was in; and I began to be extremely afflicted that Brutus and Cassius had any difference, that Hotspur's gallantry was

so unfortunate, and that the mirth and good humour of Falstaff could not exempt him from the grave.

" Nay, this occasion in me, who look upon the distinctions amongst men to be merely scenical, raised reflections upon the emptiness of all human perfection and greatness in general; and I could not but regret that the sacred heads which lie buried in the neighbourhood of this little portion of the earth in which my poor old friend is deposited, are returned to dust as well as he, and that there is no difference in the grave between the imaginary and the real monarch."

This was in 1710, and so year by year for over two hundred years the great actors have had their memorials gathered together round the monument to Shakespeare whose characters it has ever been their highest ambition adequately to portray.

CHAPTER X

POPE AND GOLDSMITH

IN Goldsmith's "Citizen of the World," his delightful and ingenuous traveller from Cathay goes to Westminster Abbey and there meets the " man in black," who conducted him round the building :—

> "As we walked along to a particular part of the Temple, ' There,' says the gentleman, pointing with his finger, ' that is the Poets' Corner; there you see the monuments of Shakespeare, and Milton, and Prior, and Drayton '—
>
> " ' Drayton !' I replied ; ' I never heard of him before ; but I have been told of one Pope—is he there ? '
>
> " ' It is time enough,' replied my guide, ' these hundred years ; he is not long dead, people have not done hating him yet.'

" ' Strange,'.'cried I, ' can any be found to hate a man whose life was wholly spent in entertaining and instructing his fellow-creatures ?'"

That Pope was indeed buried in the nave of the Church at Twickenham and not in the Abbey was in fulfilment of his own earnest request. His bodily presence was perhaps unfitting for any kind of effigy or portrait in marble, but a memorial tablet might by this time have found a place in Poets' Corner to the greatest poet of his age.

Voltaire in a letter to Thieriot said of Pope :—

" I look upon his poem called the [1] Essay on Criticism' as superior to the [1] Art of Poetry ' of Horace, and his ' Rape of the Lock' is, in my opinion, above the Lutrin of Despreaux. I never saw so amiable an imagination, so gentle graces, so great variety, so much wit, and so refined knowledge of the world, as in this little performance."

Pope so early discovered a love of poetry that before he was twelve years old he persuaded some one to take him to Will's coffee-house where Dryden was to be seen in order that he might gaze at the great man.

The saddest sentence in Johnson's life of Pope has always seemed to me to be :—" by no merriment, either of others or his own was he ever seen excited to laughter."

Animals share our capacity to groan, but to us alone is given the divine gift of laughter.

Goldsmith's line in the " Deserted Village "-

" And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind "—

has been responsible for the dreary dictum that laughter is a sign of folly. His use of the word " vacant " was surely in the sense of " free" or " unencumbered," and thus it is that Locke uses it when he says " a very little of our life is so vacant from uneasiness as to leave us free to the attraction of remoter good."

Anyway Goldsmith himself could laugh heartily, and his was no foolish mind.

Never was a more romantic life than his among celebrated poets. He wanders on foot all over Flanders, France, Italy and Germany, with nothing but a flute with which to earn his daily bread and a roof to cover him at night. He drifts back to London, where he nearly starves and is saved from arrest for debt by the sale of the MSS. of the "Vicar of Wakefield," arranged for him by kindly old Dr Johnson, for a beggarly sixty pounds, of which book there have been more than a hundred editions printed since 1766, when he sold it! He produces two immortal poems, the " Deserted Village " and " The Traveller," and a play, " She Stoops to Conquer," which still holds the stage. He is welcomed as a member of the celebrated literary club and becomes the friend of all the splendid circle of scholars, artists, and writers who revolved round Johnson ; he lives in utter improvidence, dies in penury, is buried obscurely in

the Temple, in a spot not exactly known, and finally has a monument erected in Poets' Corner by his literary friends.

Dr Johnson and Goldsmith were one day wandering round the Abbey together and coming to Poets' Corner Johnson said to his companion, " Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur istis." Afterwards walking home together they came to Temple Bar, and Johnson says :—" Goldsmith stopped me, pointed to the heads of rebels upon it and slily whispered me ' Forsitan et nostrum nomen miscebitur *istis.'"*

The spot where Goldsmith's tablet is placed in Poets' Corner was selected by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the epitaph was written by Johnson in sonorous Latin, he having been in vain importuned to compose it in English. Boswell, however, has recorded Johnson's measured spoken judgment on Goldsmith's powers as a writer :—

" Whatever he wrote, he did it better than any other man could do. He de-

served a place in Westminster Abbey, and every year he lived would have deserved it better."

Goldsmith met the fate of many brilliant men of letters in England ; the great public, for whose perpetual happiness they labour, contemn them in life, let them starve, care nothing where their bodies are interred, and leave it to a small circle of poets, painters, and writers to erect monuments to their memory; then when they are beyond the reach of human praise or earthly reward, that same public exalts their fame to the stars and buys a hundred editions of their works.

CHAPTER XI

JAMES THOMSON, THOMAS CAMPBELL, AND DICKENS

BY the side of Shakespeare's monument is a memorial tablet to James Thomson, who wrote "The Seasons," with a somewhat confused inscription upon it. He was buried in Richmond Church. In his poem "Liberty" there are many passages describing his travels in Europe, some of which may well challenge a comparison with "Childe Harold." He was the first English poet to break away from the artificial style then regarded as indispensable in poetry, and was the father of the simple and direct appeal which was soon to be paramount in the great revival of poetry at the end of the eighteenth century.

He was the author of "Rule Britannia," and never stained his page with a coarse

word or a licentious phrase. Lord Lyttleton said of his verse that it contained—

" No line which dying he could wish to blot."

He was a man of innocent life, liberal, affectionate, beloved by his friends. His poems led mankind to see the beauty of the world, and to reverence the Power that maintains it in eternal loveliness.

Under the floor of this Western portion of Poets' Corner lie the remains of Thomas Campbell who wrote—

" Ye mariners of England
That guard our native seas."

Campbell published " The Pleasures of Hope " within seven months of " The Lyrical Ballads" which contained " The Ancient Mariner" and the " Lines above Tintern Abbey " by Coleridge and Wordsworth.

The former publication was received by the critics and the public with every mark of appreciation and esteem, while for the Lyrical Ballads the world had nothing but ridicule and scorn.

Time has somewhat readjusted these early estimates, but nevertheless Campbell did give promise of greatness which somehow he failed to achieve. A few manly patriotic songs still live, but his longer efforts have not escaped the inevitable doom of everything that is not first-rate.

Really fine work has to stand successfully the test of a hundred years ; many a book with the seeds of ultimate decay in it has been acclaimed for a passing year or two with almost universal praise and has soon after disappeared into ineluctable oblivion.

There is a fashion in books as in clothes and streets. Martin Tupper and the crinoline blazed in glory together when the Cromwell Road was built, and now the first is a pompous absurdity, the second a monstrous deformity, and the last a congeries of boarding-houses.

With the resting-place of Dickens we reach the end of those more famous men who lie in this portion of Poets' Corner.

There is a bust of Thackeray, but he lies in Kensal Green.

In the domain of literature, as to the poets is assigned the highest place, so it would seem that the novelist must be contented with a place next below the great historians and essayists.

To weave stories for the entertainment of mankind is one of the oldest arts of the world, and most of us look to the story-teller not for instruction, but for pleasure.

Each of us must have a taste of our own in these matters, and for myself such a novelist as Marion Crawford fulfils all that I desire or expect from this branch of Letters.

He tells stories of the lives and fortunes of refined and cultivated people, which interest and entertain the reader, and make him for the time forget himself and his own surroundings—often a priceless boon. Personally, the moment I suspect a novelist of writing with another object than pleasing I begin to feel uneasy. I do not want a

" message " conveyed to me in the garb of a novel.

If a man feels that he has a " message " to project upon mankind, he should clothe it in an essay, or a pamphlet, or a sermon, or a letter to *The Times,* then we can all read it or not according as our interest is engaged or not engaged in the subject.

Individually I have the same feeling about plays; I go to the theatre to be entertained, and for that I pay, I do not want a " message " conveyed to me by a playwright. His opinions on all manner of subjects are indifferent to me, as why should they not be ? I feel a certain resentment at having been inveigled into a playhouse on false pretences, as one who should be bidden to a bridge party and behold! it was a spiritualist " session " !

But if a novelist throughout his work leads us to share with him a detestation of cruelty and a contempt for meanness, to perceive with him the sordidness of avarice, the nobleness of magnanimity, and the stain-

less beauty of true and faithful love, then he is not enforcing upon us some message of his own, but building up in our hearts as we read the everlasting truths of right and wrong that are the unchanging foundations of life and death in this world since it began, and this is the splendid aim to which Dickens devoted himself in all his works.

For this reason the English people all the world over have recognised his right to be laid here among the noble dead.

CHAPTER XII

CARY, CAREY, BURNS, AND SOUTHEY

IN the pavement in the central gangway of the aisle will be seen the stone that marks the tomb of Henry Francis Gary, the translator of Dante, a worthy scholar and clergyman whose conscientious labour has enabled those of us who do not know the language to obtain some faintly approximate sense of the poem of the great Italian.

But it may serve another purpose to a few who have pursued their studies of English singers deeply enough to have become acquainted with and be reminded of another Carey, also Henry, but with his surname spelt with an e. His works for some unaccountable reason have been quite neglected among the kindly re-publishers of the poets of the past. He was the author of many of the popular ballads that are still sung at concerts. For

a time he was credited with both the words and the music of "God Save the King," but I believe that achievement belongs to Dr John Bull, who composed it for a banquet at the Merchant Taylors' Company in 1607.

But there is no question that Carey wrote " Sally in our Alley," which possesses superlative merit as an entirely English ballad, breathing a spirit that could not be found in any other country. " Being young and obscure," Carey wrote, " I was very much ridiculed for this performance, which, nevertheless, made its way into the polite world, and amply recompensed me by the applause of the divine Addison, who was pleased, more than once, to mention it with approbation."

When his songs were being sung at every convivial meeting poor Carey in utter poverty and despair killed himself, and when his body was discovered there was only a halfpenny in his pocket.

Before we leave this part of Poets' Corner, if we look up in the dim light over Shakespeare's monument to the right we shall

descry the bust of Burns. He sang his songs in the native dialect of the Scotch peasant, and though to us of the South a full understanding of them requires a glossary, yet the lilt and passion of them appeals to our hearts with a sort of unexplained magic. There is a loveliness in his poems of the heart that proves that the divine breath of inspiration welled up in his soul under the influence of the pangs of passion, and the lyrics that came to him thus are immortal.

We need not enquire too curiously into the life and conduct of poets. To do so often deprives us of deriving the full pleasure from their songs. With Burns it is better to draw a veil over his infidelities, and desertions of the successive objects of his verses, and to forget his intemperate potations.

The great world is concerned only with the songs he left us, and for those we can indeed be grateful.

Successive biographers have seemed to imagine that his songs will suffer in public estimation if his personal faults are not

concealed or extenuated; as well might we doubt the wisdom and penetration of Bacon's writings because, as a judge, he was venal. There stand the works of great and inspired men ; and they can neither be appreciated or depreciated by the personal conduct of those who wrote them.

Near the bust of Burns will be noticed that of Southey, and, if an author's life and conduct are to be considered in estimating his writings, he would indeed be worthy of an exalted station. His enormous poems have long been forgotten, and his contribution to verse that remains of any value is contained in a few simple ballads. His prose has largely survived his poetry, and his " Life of Nelson " remains one of the best biographies of the nineteenth century.

A remark of Coleridge recorded in Crabb Robinson's diary illustrates the general difference of tone in the reviews of those days and these. Robinson writes :—

" Southey's severity (in criticism) he

attributed to the habit of reviewing. Southey had said of Coleridge's poetry that he was a Dutch imitator of the Germans. Coleridge quoted this, not to express any displeasure at it, but to show in what way Southey could speak of him." (They were brothers-in-law.)

The devastating ferocity of the Reviewers early in the nineteenth century made it a formidable adventure for anyone to publish a poem. To-day the newest violator of all the laws of prosody is hailed with Hallelujahs that reverberate down Fleet Street.

Southey's library at Keswick, where he lived and worked, had a window commanding a magnificent prospect of mountains and valleys which afforded him a perpetual delight. Once when Crabb Robinson was visiting him there, he looked at his books, and, as Robinson tells us, said with great feeling that he sometimes regarded them with pain, thinking what might hereafter become of them.

Alas! this feeling comes to all of us who collect the books we love and rank them round us in the shelves that are so familiar and so dear to us. Are not books the material caskets in which lie embalmed all the beauty and wisdom and wonder of the minds and hearts of men ? Should not a library therefore be entered with reverent feet as a place consecrated to the glory of God as made manifest in the noblest works and aspirations of man ?

The illustrious company of my books have dwelt together in silent harmony for so long that to cast them abroad to wander the world of bookshops, parted most likely for ever, seems like the disruption of an ancient home and the irremediable breaking up of a splendid and august family. George Gissing has beautifully described how, having put out his lamp, and moved to the door, he looks back into his beloved library and by the fire-light sees his books waiting for his departure to commune in whispers with each other; then "with a sigh,"

he says, "I go forth and shut the door softly."

Who has not felt the conscious influence of the peace of a library ? When the rain is on the roof, and the glowing embers sink upon the hearth and I leave my books in the flickering light, I know that they listen all night to the solemn ticking of the old grandfather clock in the corner which murmurs to them :—

" For ever—never!
Never,—for ever! "

CHAPTER XIII

COWLEY AND DENHAM

RETURNING to the Abbey after an absence of a few days, I turned away from the little corner where of late I had so often sat, and wandered into the larger portion of the transept where round the tomb of Chaucer there has gathered a second concourse of noble poets.

A large flagstone has upon it the name " Abraham Couleius H.S.E. 1667." Cowley's fame as a poet in the seventeenth century was greater than subsequent judgment has endorsed. He wrote with too much regard to the passing interests and opinions of the time to command the praise of posterity.

Cowley may claim to have possessed wit, if that quality consists mainly in felicity of diction. But his poetry never touches the heart with moving images nor uplifts it

with visions of the sublime; and therefore has not survived the touch of time.

At his death he was praised in the hyperbolic manner of the day by the solemn suggestion that the approaching interment of his illustrious remains in the Abbey sufficed to preserve that structure the year before from the flames of the great fire of London.

Charles II., when he heard of his death exclaimed:—" that Mr Cowley had not left a better man behind him in England,"

Pepys seems to have been strangely ignorant of the fame of Cowley, for on the loth of August, 1667, he writes in his diary on meeting Sir John Denham :—

> " Cowly, he tells me, is dead; who it seems, was a mighty civil, serious man; which I did not know before."

And two days later he writes :—

> " To my bookseller's, and did buy Scott's Discourse of Witches: and do hear Mr

Cowly mightily lamented (his death) by Dr Ward, the Bishop of Winchester, and Dr Bates, who were standing there, as the best poet of our nation and as good a man."

But John Evelyn being a man of letters not only appreciated his works but counted him among his closest friends; he writes thus :—

" i Aug. I received the sad newes of Abraham Cowley's death, that incomparable poet and virtuous man, my very deare friend and was greately deplored.[1]

"3. Went to Mr Cowley's funerall whose corps lay at Wallingford House, and was thence conveyed to Westminster Abbey in a hearse with 6 horses and all funeral decency, neere an hundred coaches of noblemen and persons of qualitie following ; among these all the witts of the towne, divers bishops and cleargymen. He was interred next Geoffrey Chaucer and neere

[1] See " The Chobham Book of English Prose," p. 86.

Spenser. A goodly monument is since erected to his memorie."

That John Evelyn should have stood here and watched his friend Cowley laid to rest adds very much to the interest of the spot to all those who share with me a love and reverence for the author of the most beautiful diary of those days and times. In every line of that diary he reveals himself as the perfect type of cultivated Englishman ; and to him may justly be attributed the qualities so happily assembled in a single phrase by old Sir Thomas Browne :—" Bright thoughts, clear deeds, constancy, fidelity, bounty, and generous honesty are the gems of noble minds; wherein, to derogate from none, the true heroick English gentleman hath no peer."

And Cowley himself was worthy to be Evelyn's friend, for, as Dr Johnson says of him, " He is represented by Dr Sprat as the most amiable of mankind; and this posthumous praise may be safely credited,

as it has never been contradicted by envy or by faction,"

Like Cowley, Sir John Denham, who lies buried beside him, was attached to the Royalist cause in the civil wars and was bound also to Cowley by the ties of a close personal friendship. Denham wrote what Johnson describes as "an excellent poem on the death of Cowley whom he was not long to survive."

In his day Denham enjoyed a high reputation as a poet, but inexorable time has placed him among those whose names are remembered but not their works.

He was a wild and reckless gamester in his youth, but after the Restoration he learned prudence, saved money, and died a Knight of the Bath.

CHAPTER XIV

DRYDEN AND PRIOR

THE exact spot where reposes the dust of Dryden is now not ascertainable. His name is one only of seven which are inscribed on the large stone headed—" Near this stone lie buried,"

His is still a great name though its present acceptance as such is based, I should surmise, more upon tradition than study. All history would instruct us not to accept without question the judgments of contemporary writers upon each other.

The difficulty that presents itself to those who now study Dryden is that the subjects of his poems were almost always occasional; and with the burial of the occasion in the mists of history no very lively interest remains.

His " Alexander's Feast," however, places

him inexpugnably among the great poets of England; it is generally acclaimed as the finest poem of its kind in the language. It is better to remember him by his greater works than by those inspired by forgotten occasions.

He would have been a wiser man had he[1] shown magnanimity instead of jealousy towards his contemporaries. In his anger at the passing success of a play by the now forgotten Settle he was reduced to rage and terror. " Rage," says Johnson, " with little provocation, and terrour with little danger. To see the highest minds thus levelled with the meanest may produce some solace to the consciousness of weakness, and some mortification to the pride of wisdom."

The continual petty pin-pricks of his contemporaries disturbed him more than they need have done, and his whole life was rendered distressful from poverty, which seems so often to be the common fate of genius in England; in a letter dwelling on his neglected and indigent condition, written

to Lord Rochester, he says :—" It is enough for one age to have neglected Cowley and starved Butler."

The elder Disraeli says of Dryden that " he was no master of the pathetic, yet never were compositions more pathetic than the Prefaces this great man has transmitted to posterity! Opening all the feelings of his heart, we live among his domestic sorrows."

After all, every one who ventures into print should remember the pregnant remark of Bentley that " no author was ever written down but by himself." Time will ultimately establish an author's fame or consign him to oblivion, and upon this final judgment contemporary criticism has no influence whatever.

Dryden's personal character has suffered somewhat from his having changed his religious beliefs at a commodious time, and become a Roman Catholic when James II. became king. The genuine quality of a conversion that synchronises fortunately with

chances of preferment will always be suspected. But if to interest rather than conviction his adhesion to Rome is to be attributed, the rewards were short-lived, for with the flight of James and the establishment of the Protestant succession, the laureateship, which he held, was naturally taken from him, and to his infinite chagrin conferred upon Shadwell, his old enemy.

He was, however, we are assured by Congreve, "of a nature exceedingly humane and compassionate, ready to forgive injuries and capable of a sincere reconciliation with those who had offended him. His friendship, where he professed it, went beyond his professions. He was of a very easy, of very pleasing access, but somewhat slow, and, as it were, diffident in his advances to others."

At Will's coffee-house an arm-chair was always kept for his exclusive use, which was placed by the fire in winter and on the balcony in summer, and here he delivered judgment on any literary dispute that was

brought to him to determine. In a dedication written by Congreve at the beginning of an edition of Dryden's works addressed to the then Duke of Newcastle, the former expresses his gratitude to that nobleman for his promise to erect a monument in the Abbey to Dryden ; but the Duke forgot to perform what he had undertaken, and some time elapsed before another Duke, his Grace of Buckinghamshire, defrayed the cost of the monument that now celebrates the poet's memory with the one word " Dryden."

There is a fantastical story of a disturbance made at Dryden's funeral by a son of the infamous Jeffries. Johnson quotes it from Congreve's life of Dryden in the first edition of his own life of the poet, but when he came to write the preface to his collected " Lives of the Poets," 1781, he concludes that the story " wants credit."

Possibly some slight interruption by the young Jeffries, in process of time came to be related with enlargements and embellishments till it assumed all the magnitude of

a riot. Those who recollect the reputed passage of a Russian army through England at the beginning of the Great War will appreciate the facility with which a baseless rumour grows into accepted truth by the operose efforts of loquacious donkeys.

The name of Matthew Prior is the last on the stone recording the burial-place of Dryden and others. He wrote some excellent songs, but was a poet only as it were secondarily, his chief occupation being service of the State, he was Minister Plenipotentiary to the French Court in 1711, and made himself personally agreeable to Louis XlVth. He had the sagacity, displayed by but few poets, never to imagine that he could derive an income sufficient to live upon, from the writing of verses. " Poetry," he says, " which by the bent of my mind might have become the business of my life, was, by the happiness of my education, only the amusement of it." He had no desire or intention of becoming one of that melancholy band of writers of verse who live in

continual distress and die in starving poverty. His verses may have gained something from his familiarity with the French, as they are gay, picturesque, polished and gracefully easy. He was on terms of friendship with Swift who, in his " Journal to Stella," wrote:—

> " The days are now long enough to walk in the park after dinner, and so I do whenever it is fair. This walking is a strange remedy. Mr Prior walks to make himself fat, and I to bring myself down. He has generally a cough, which he only calls a cold. We often walk round the park together,"

One recorded saying of Prior surely gives him a claim to our sincere regard. " I had rather," he wrote, " be thought a good Englishman, than the best poet, or greatest scholar, that ever wrote."

He penned some imaginary conversations between famous personages, as between Locke and Montaigne, and between Sir

Thomas More and the Vicar of Bray, which may possibly have given Walter Savage Landor the original suggestion for his wonderful volume of such conversations.

A monument has been raised to Prior's memory here in Poets' Corner, with an inscription verbose enough to bury any reputation !

CHAPTER XV

SPENSER AND BEN JONSON

IN the South-east corner of the larger portion of the South transept will be found a monument to the memory of Edmund Spenser. The inscription upon it is short and apposite:—

> " Heare lyes (expecting the second comminge of our Saviour Christ Jesus) the body of Edmond Spencer The Prince of Poets in his tyme whose Divine Spirrit needs noe othir witnesse than the works he left behinde him.
>
> He was born in London in
> the yeare 1553 and died in the yeare
> 1598."

It can hardly be expected in these crowded days that the general public will be familiar with " The Faerie Queene," written as it is in archaic English and extending to over seven hundred pages with four stanzas in each page.

Tradition reports that Sir Walter Raleigh brought Spenser to Court and that the poet read portions of the interminable poem to Queen Elizabeth. Probably those portions of the work that inordinately praised the Royal Lady were judiciously selected by the prostrate bard, for it is on record that at the conclusion of the recital a pension of fifty pounds a year rewarded the obsequious author.

Queen Elizabeth was penurious in her benefactions, and this bounty, equal to about £250 a year of our present money, is a fit measure of her appreciation of the author's poetical adulation.

A taste for Spenser when once acquired, like a taste for heraldry, will afford the student much pleasure, but to the general public time and opportunity is wanting for a study of either.

The exact spot that contains the remains of the poet is not now known, but old Camden says:—

" Edmund Spenser, born at London, and

a student at Cambridge, had so happy a genius for poetry that he outwent all the poets before him, not excepting his fellow-Londoner Chaucer himself, but through a fate common to that fraternity he was always poor, though he had been Secretary to the Lord Grey, Lord Deputy of Ireland. For he had scarce fixed himself in his new retirement, and got a little leisure to pursue his studies, but the rebels rifled and threw him out of his house and home, so that he returned to England in a bare condition, where he died not long after, and was interred in Westminster, not far from Chaucer, at the Earl of Essex's charge. His hearse was attended by the gentlemen of his faculty, who cast into his tomb some funeral elegies, and the pens they were wrote with."

Somewhere under the pavement those pens and elegies must still repose. " The gentlemen of his faculty" may possibly, and

even probably, have included Ben Jonson, Michael Drayton, and Shakespeare; nevertheless let us hope that no busybodies will ever disturb the dust under these hallowed stones to look for Shakespeare's pen.

As to Spenser's Irish adventure, it was no place or employment for a "Prince of Poets." The history of Ireland in Elizabeth's reign is a sickening record, leaving an awful stain on England that we have elected to forget; the Irish then had a righteous justification for throwing Englishmen out of house and home if they could do it.

Spenser, like almost every great poet born in this country whose youth was spent at a university, was at Cambridge. Those who were not at Cambridge were for the most part not at any university. The poets who were at Cambridge include Spenser, Herrick, Ben Jonson, Dryden, Prior, Milton, Cowley, Gray, Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Tennyson. Shelley was at Oxford, but that University ejected him. No poet coming from Oxford lies in Poets' Corner, nor is

there any monument there to a poet from that University except the one to Philips, who was at Christ Church.

Ben Jonson, whose monument is in this part of Poets' Corner, was not buried here, but away in the side aisle to the north of the nave. A little square stone marks the spot and bears upon it the world-famous exclamation:—" O rare Ben Johnson," This original stone was taken up in 1821 when that part of the Abbey was re-paved, and was put against the North Wall, but a fresh stone was put down to mark the place of interment with the same inscription upon it. Both the stones spell the name " Johnson," as also does the monument. Tradition, possibly founded on the small size of the stone, asserts that Ben Jonson was buried upright by his own request in order that he should be found ready at any moment for the final resurrection. He was to have had a monument to his memory, but the outbreak of the civil war rendered the intention abortive. The monument now to

be found in Poets' Corner was put there in the eighteenth century by a " person of quality " whose name by his own request has never been divulged. The celebrated inscription in four words on his grave, it is said, were cut in the original stone at the instance of a Sir John Young, who, happening to be in the Abbey when the grave was being covered with the square stone, gave the mason eighteen pence to engrave the words upon it.

Canon Westlake has told me that in the old documents of the Abbey there is a note concerning a payment by the Dean and Chapter of five pounds to Ben Jonson "in his sickness and want/' a gracious and beneficent act which should not go unrecorded.

CHAPTER XVI

MILTON AND GRAY

To Milton, whose body lies in St Giles's, Cripplegate, a monument was tardily erected in Poets' Corner some sixty years after his death. We owe the erection of this memorial to a gentleman of no rank or fortune of the name of Benson, at whose sole cost it was executed in 1737. Unfortunately, Milton had not confined his energies to the pursuit of the muses, but had been a trenchant pamphleteer. He had "lent his breath to blow the flames of contention," he had attacked the episcopacy, he had written of Charles I. as "this filthy rascally fool," he had defended the Regicides, he had been Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth, none of which activities was likely to ingratiate his memory with successive Royalist Deans of Westminster, whose acquiescence

was necessary for the erection of his monument.

Before the civil war Milton travelled widely over Europe, and spent some time in Italy. It is to be regretted that he left no written record of his conversation with Galileo, whom he visited on his travels in 1639, when the latter was languishing as a prisoner of the Inquisition because he asserted that the earth revolved on its axis, and that the sun did not go round the earth. Milton was probably of opinion that it was of no moment whatever in human affairs whether of the two motions produced the phenomena that are daily observed.

As to his great Epic, it may with confidence be asserted that the unlettered public of to-day consider it respectable to praise " Paradise Lost" without looking at it, for to read a poem between ten and eleven thousand lines in length is a formidable undertaking even for the earnest student, and for others it remains entirely unattempted. His " Allegro" and

" Penseroso " are better within the reach of the general reader, and have long achieved an universal popularity. Moreover, to the modern mind much of " Paradise Lost" is unacceptable. We cannot regard Milton's picture of the Deity as helping persons to-day to a just view of the Creator. Our conception of the Divine Mind precludes the idea of argument. Omniscience does not argue to arrive at truth, and when examination leads to the conclusion that the reasoning employed in the argument is not very good, or accurate, or just, the reader experiences a distressful sense of discomfort.

There is also something pitiful in the enormous power of Satan being let loose upon the simple infantine intelligences of Adam and Eve, naked and helpless in all senses before the terrific force and superhuman knowledge of the august Lord of Hell.

All this may have seemed unexceptionable in the seventeenth century, but to-day it does not altogether please.

The vastness of the work depresses even the most heroic reader. Dr Johnson said of it with his grave humour, that it was one of the books which no one wished longer.

The marked superiority assigned to Adam over Eve by Milton may not improbably have found its inspiration in the poet's somewhat discordant relations with his first wife. After a month of marriage with the rather grim bard she returned to her father's house in the country. Thereupon he published a mordacious essay on divorce, the effect of which was that, after an interval, she returned, on her knees begging for forgiveness, which was not very graciously granted her.

The history of the sale and subsequent publications of " Paradise Lost" furnish a bitter commentary on the division of benefits between the author and his publisher. Milton assigned the poem to the elder Tonson for £10 and his widow received, as a settlement of all claims relating to it, another £8.

Tonson and all his family " rode in their

carriages with the profits of the Epic," and ultimately Tonson and his nephew died worth " two hundred thousand pounds.'"

Many years ago, when visiting Deal with a party of friends, I heard a publisher of the poems of a famous writer then living complain that out of two shillings profit on his volume the poet insisted on taking fifteen pence for himself, and Henry Irving thereupon drily remarked, " Ah ! that explains how it is that authors are all rich and publishers all poor ! " " Quite so," replied the publisher, upon whom the irony of the actor was entirely lost.

After all Milton did not write " Paradise Lost" for £10 but for the immortal fame which he acquired, and is it not better to have a name for ever glorious than to have sacks of money and oblivion ?

Dr Johnson's life of Milton was, unfortunately, written under the full force of furious political prejudice, and, when we have discovered that he describes the magnificent " Samson Agonistes " as "a tragedy

which ignorance has admired and bigotry applauded " we need read no further, except for the diversion of discovering how his own bigotry could seal up his perceptive faculties and render him blind to what every one else with any pretension to taste in letters perceives with delight.

Before the Restoration Milton had become totally blind, and it is impossible not to be moved by the pathetic figure he then presented. He was arrested, but suffered no very great hardship, and was allowed to go quietly into retirement, and while the Court proceeded to present to the world a spectacle of unbridled licentiousness, the poet, in poverty, obscurity, and total eclipse, composed his " Paradise Lost."

In his fine sonnet Wordsworth says of Milton:—

" Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea :
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free."

Like nearly all great poets Milton was a

master of magnificent prose, and his " Areopagitica " will live as long as his " Paradise Lost."

The bust on the monument in the Abbey suggests something of the aloof greatness of this austere and noble man.

Below Milton's monument there is a memorial to Gray, another of the poets whose body was not laid to rest here. And four lines are engraved in the " tumid lapidary style " of the eighteenth century upon the marble :—

> " No more the Grecian Muse unrivaTd reigns :
> To Britain let the nations homage pay :
> She felt a Homer's fire in Milton's strains,
> A Pindar's rapture in the lyre of Gray."

The one quality that is totally absent from the poems of Gray is "rapture." His " Elegy," by which he is known throughout the English-speaking world, is a work of continuous and loving care, the object of alteration and emendation during a Jong time, and only given to the world after the most elaborate polishing and perfecting.

Obviously a work so produced must be entirely without " rapture," which is a quality inseparable from the gift of sudden vision and inspiration.

This is not to detract from the superlative merit of the " Elegy," which is of such a kind that every word is perfect and could not be altered now without immediate injury to the verse.

This extreme care led Johnson to call him "a mechanical poet." It is not recorded that Gray thought much of Johnson's verses.

The composition of poetry was only one small part of Gray's mental activities, he was in his time one of the most learned men in all Europe. His reading in all then known branches of Knowledge was immense and profound. He was an authority on such widely diverse subjects as botany and heraldry, architecture and painting, sculpture and music, ornithology and metaphysics, and he had read " all the original historians of England, France and Italy." He was a

shy man and a lonely, living in a cloistered seclusion at Peterhouse, Cambridge, where in 1768 he became Professor of Modern History. He died in 1770, and was buried beside his mother in Stoke Poges churchyard.

CHAPTER XVII

DRAYTON AND GRANVILLE SHARP

ON the East wall of the transept above the tomb of Chaucer and a little to the South of it, there is a monument to Michael Drayton, whom it is safe to say is now a forgotten poet, though the name of his chief poem, " Polyolbion," recalls something faintly reminiscent to the minds of some of us. The poem is of vast proportions and is described by himself as an account of " tracts, rivers, mountaines, forests and other parts of this renowned Isle of Great Britaine with intermixture of the most remarquable stories, antiquities, wonders, rarityes, pleasures, and commodities of the same; digested in a Poem." Like many another author he seems to have had a misliking for booksellers, for he writes to " my dear sweet Drummond " and says of them, " they are a

company of base knaves, whom I scorn and kick at."

The bust with which the monument is surmounted gives an agreeable impression of a refined and handsome countenance. The inscription is excellent in its force and brevity:

MICHAEL DRAITON, ESQ[r].

A memorable poet of the age. Exchanged his laurell for a crowne of glorye. A.D. 1631.

This monument was erected by Ann Clifford, Countess of Dorset.

That Drayton had a great reputation in his time in spite of his booksellers, may be deduced from a remark of old Fuller who, speaking of Chaucer's tomb in the Abbey, wrote:—"he hath now got the company of Spenser and Drayton, a pair of royal poets enough to make passengers' feet to move metrically, who go over the place where so much poetical dust is interred."

Opposite to the monument to Drayton, on the dividing wall between the two parts of Poets' Corner, will be found the memorial to Granville Sharp, who spent his life fighting no

against negro slavery. Though, as far as I am aware, he never wrote a line of poetry, I do not think anyone will grudge his intrusion into this sacred aisle. He it was who by means of a writ of *habeas corpus* procured the production of the slave Somerset in the High Court of Justice after he had been seized and put on a ship bound for Jamaica. Lord Mansfield thereupon delivered the famous judgment ending with the words :—

" I declare that the air of England has long been too pure for a slave, and every man who breathes it is free.

" Let the negro be discharged."

This crowned the devoted efforts of Granville Sharp and his band of fellow-strivers in the great cause of personal freedom, and the inscription upon his monument is worthy to be reproduced in full:—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
GRANVILLE SHARP

Grandson of the Archbishop of York and ninth son of Dr Thomas Sharp, Prebendary of the

Cathedrals and Collegiate Churches of York, Durham, and Southall; born and educated in the bosom of the Church of England he ever cherished for her institutions the most unshaken regard while his whole soul was in harmony with the sacred strain "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men" on which his life presented one beautiful comment of glowing piety and unwearied beneficence. Freed by competence from the necessity and by content from the desire of lucrative occupation, he was incessant in his labours to improve the condition of mankind. Founding public happiness in public virtue, he aimed to rescue his native country from the guilt and inconsistency of employing the arm of freedom to rivet the fetters of bondage, and established for the negro race in the person of Somerset the long disputed right of human nature, having in this glorious cause triumphed over the combined resistance of interest, prejudice, and pride, he took the post among the foremost of the honourable band associated to deliver Africa from the rapacity of Europe by the abolition of the slave trade.

Nor was death permitted to interrupt his career of usefulness till he had witnessed that Act of the British Parliament by which the abolition was decreed. In his private relations he was equally exemplary and having exhibited throughout life a model of disinterested virtue he resigned his pious spirit into the hands of his Creator in

exercise of charity faith and hope on the 6th day of July, A.D. 1813 in the 78th year of his age.

READER

If in perusing this tribute to a private individual thou should'st be disposed to suspect it as partial or to censure it as diffuse, know that it is not panegyric but history.

Erected by the African Institution of London
A.D. 1816.

England is full of those who are " freed by competence from the necessity, and by content from the desire, of lucrative employment," but most of them, no doubt quite innocently, pursue nothing but their amusements and pastimes from the cradle to the grave. Only a few will deliberately shoulder a great burden, and in the face of obloquy, misrepresentation, and social contempt, fight a great fight for what they believe to be right, and endure for years the dust and tumult of a fierce combat against some biting evil entrenched behind vast interests, illustrious patronage, and implacable passions.

As we look at the slender, refined countenance of Granville SKarp in the medallion on the monument, we realise how a gentle aspect may adorn an indomitable spirit, and how a simple Englishman by devotion and faith can help to change the face of the civilised world.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUTLER, PHILIPS, AND LONGFELLOW

I DO not suppose that Butler's " Hudibras " has many readers in these days.

It was written to cover the Roundheads with contempt and derision, and except for the wit of the poet does not very much interest the present-day readers. Charles II. was expected to reward this gay ridicule of his enemies, but, unfortunately, the Monarch's largesse was more apt to flow into the lap of mistresses than the pockets of poets, and the great lampooner of the Commonwealth Saints was left to languish. Contradictory accounts of his circumstances and condition when he died render it difficult to be sure whether he really died in poverty or in comfortable ease. He was not buried in the Abbey but at St Paul's, Covent Garden ; the monument here in Westminster was

erected to his memory by Mr Barber, who was a printer and a Lord Mayor of London.

Among Samuel Wesley's poems may be found the following verses :—

" While Butler, needy wretch, was yet alive
No generous patron would a dinner give;
See him when starved to death and turned to dust
Presented with a monumental bust.
The Poet's fate is here in emblem shewn
He asked for bread, and he received a stone."

Sir John Denham, who had retired abroad with Charles II. when he was in exile, had better luck and received a lucrative post and a knighthood after the Restoration.

Whether this caused Butler chagrin cannot now be decided, but he wrote what he called a Panegyric of Denham which is in truth a very bitter attack upon him. When men of genius employ their gifts for the purpose of traducing their literary contemporaries they inflict less harm than they receive.

Pope did himself no good in the opinion of posterity by attacking Addison.

One of the causes of the neglect of " Hudi-

bras " at the present day is probably its lack of variety. As Johnson says, "it is much more easy to form dialogues than to contrive adventures" ; the dialogues in the poem are interminable, and, though always illumined with wit and informed with scholarship, they are aimed at the sour dullness of the Puritans of which we now know little and care less.

Poems which are designed for immortality must find their inspiration in the universal passions of mankind and the everlasting mysteries of life and death, not in the praise or censure of a passing fashion or custom of a day. A poem at the present time designed to pour ridicule and contempt upon spirit photographs and the banal credulity of those who think to communicate with the dead might very likely have an immense success while such absurdities flourish, but with their inevitable disappearance before the fundamental common sense of the English people such a poem would inevitably share the fate of " Hudibras."

There is a monument to Philips in Poets' Corner, and in the memory of the public he faintly survives as the author of " the splendid shilling! "

The fun of that poem lies in the treating of a frivolous and trifling subject in a majestic style. He, with great dexterity, seems to be addressing the ear in the sonorous and elevated manner of Milton, while the actual subject is ludicrously inappropriate to the grand style. The little incidents of common life are described with portentous grandeur, and no one can fail to be diverted by the absurdity of the whole performance.

Philips was buried in Hereford Cathedral, but he is here in the Abbey submerged beneath an interminable Latin epitaph.

He lived in poverty, which he bore without complaining, and died when only thirty-two in the year 1708 of consumption.

At the corner of the aisle at the base of the column where St Benedict's chapel lies, to the East of Poets' Corner, there has been

placed a bust to Longfellow, It stands between the memorials to Chaucer and Dryden.

It is one of the regrets of my life that when I was in America in 1880 I was obliged by pressure of time to refuse an invitation from him to visit him at his home.

Longfellow's appearance here in the Abbey, and the erection of the statues of Lincoln and Washington, the former just outside the building and the latter in Trafalgar Square, are monumental testimonies to the unity of race surmounting the barrier of a separate Government.

The American people as a race have a common interest with us all in every historical memorial in the Abbey and in London, that existed before the War of Independence; and without any reference to dates and constitutions the men of letters of both countries employ the same language and make their appeal as much to one country as to the other. Longfellow was read and appreciated very widely in

England in his day, and we are happy to believe that the American citizen who visits the Abbey feels a pride in finding his countryman honoured here by us among the poets of England.

CHAPTER XIX

BROWNING AND TENNYSON

BROWNING and Tennyson were lifelong contemporaries, coming into the world and leaving it within three years of each other, and they lie here together side by side, the last of England's poets to be buried in the Abbey. They each wrote in a style so entirely different from the other that they challenged no comparison before the public.

Browning's writings are cheerful, psychological, philosophical, and sometimes obscure ; only on a few rare occasions did it occur to him that poetry should be harmonious and fall with music and with rhythm upon the ear. He observed a formal and contemptuous obligation to the rules of prosody; and a derisive obligation to the rules of rhyme. No conjunction of vowel sounds was too fantastic for his service. He rhymed

Pacchiarotto with " Pint pot oh," and .that without the intention of being funny. To the large number of persons who are born, like the colour blind, without a sense of harmony in sound, Browning's writings make their appeal by their penetrating thought, though sometimes concealed by obscurity of expression. Societies were formed to elucidate his mysteries and illuminate his opacities. He was frequently a guest in my father's house, but I do not remember that he was a brilliant talker.

As the first writer[1] who, of set purpose, turned his back on harmony of sound and lilt of metre as the essential concomitants of true poetry, he may be regarded as the father of the modern writers of what is called " free verse," who print prose down the middle of the page in lines of no particular length, which do not rhyme, and entitle the work " Poetry " on the back and cover.

What Browning has to say is often so

[1] Byron was sometimes in " Don Juan " deliberately grotesque in his rhymes, but it was not his constant habit.

interesting, and indeed profound, that it can give very great satisfaction and pleasure if we can forpet that it is proffered to us as poetry.

And he could, if he would, write lovely lyrics full of music and the glory of vision, lyrics to brace the mind and lift up the heart. But after enriching the world with a dozen or so he turned away down the dim road of inharmonious concatenation of stubborn phrases, pregnant with thought, but discordant to the ear.

Browning was brought to the Abbey in 1889, and Tennyson followed him in 1892,

It was on the I2th of October of that year that this last of the great Poet Laureates was laid in the consecrated aisle, near to Chaucer and so many of his great forerunners. It was a memorable and august spectacle, of which it was my privilege to be a witness. As the procession wended its way up the nave the slow movement from Beethoven's " Eroica" came from the organ. The coffin was draped with a

Union Jack presented by Lord Methuen, then in command of the Home district.

Only such an occasion could bring together so remarkable a company of great men, distinguished in all fields of human effort, as were then to be seen as the pall-bearers on either side of the coffin.

Lord Selborne, Lord Salisbury, Lord Kelvin, The Master of Trinity, Cambridge, Lecky the historian, the eighth Duke of Argyll, Lord Dufferin, Mr White, the United States Minister, Sir James Paget, Dr Jowett, The Master of Balliol, and James Anthony Froude.

Two illustrious names, those of Gladstone and G. F. Watts, would have been among those thus paying their last tribute to the poet, but that unavoidable circumstances prevented it.

All these famous men have now passed away, but the nave was lined on either side by a hundred boys from the Gordon Boys' Home, and they were commanded by General Sir George Wentworth Alexander Higginson, K.C.B., who still survives, though born in

1826, a very splendid old soldier of whom the army is proud, and who still attends the annual parade of the Gordon Boys, by whom he is revered and beloved.

After " Crossing the Bar " had been sung, the choir gave a beautiful setting of " The Silent Voices," and as the coffin was brought to the grave-side in Poets' Corner Chopin's march was played on the organ.

Then came the final most moving scene.

At the head of the grave was a magnificent wreath of laurels with the one word " Immortality " embroidered upon it in white flowers, but no other word attached to it. Upon the coffin was placed a small chaplet of bay leaves from Virgil's tomb, with Tennyson's verse fastened to it.

> " I salute thee Mantovano
> I that loved thee since my day began
> Wielder of the stateliest measure
> Ever moulded by the lips of man."

Mr Alfred Austin placed upon it a branch of bay given him in 1881 by the Greek priest of Delphi. Near at hand among those

around the grave could be seen Sir Frederick Leighton, Coventry Patmore, Lewis Morris and the pale countenance of the great actor who was hereafter to die with the poet's words upon his lips, and to be brought to lie hard by in the same hallowed earth.

The world moves on " down the ringing groves of change," and it seems unlikely that so illustrious a gathering will ever come together again in the Abbey to render the last tribute to so immortal a poet.

Immediately upon these splendid obsequies there appeared the " Lacrymae Musarun," by William Watson, which has taken its place among the elegies of the world.

There is a bust of Tennyson by Woolner against the pillar that divides the two portions of Poets' Corner, and it is to be observed with satisfaction that when the work was executed in 1857, at a time when the poet was at his supreme power, the fine features had not been concealed and disfigured with a beard. The description of the last hours of this great poet's life has been given us

by his son. He tells us in simple words, which are the more moving for that simplicity, of the full moon flooding the room where the poet lay dying, and the great landscape that he loved lighted up without by its still beams. The poet's hand lay upon his Shakespeare, opened at Cymbeline, which he tried to read but failed, and he said, " I have opened it." The Cymbeline was placed with him in the coffin and his hand will rest upon it through the ages till all is dust.

As we gaze upon the illustrious name in the pavement let us not mourn, but think rather of the life of high and splendid purpose fulfilled to the end; and take away with us his own noble exhortation :—

" Call me not so often back
Silent voices of the dead,
Toward the lowland ways behind me,
And the sunlight that is gone!
Call me rather, silent voices
Forward to the starry track
Glimmering up the heights beyond me,
On, and always on !"

CHAPTER XX

" THIS PRECIOUS STONE SET IN THE SILVER SEA "

As the years pass on this sacred corner of the most hallowed building in the world becomes yet more and more precious, yet more and more blessed to all who love their country. We see in the mind's vision the splendid obsequies of the immortal dead filling again and again the stately Abbey. One by one the Kings of verse are brought here to lie together in congregated glory. We see his brother poets casting their pens into Spenser's grave ; we see the beloved John Evelyn watching his lifelong friend Cowley lowered into the tomb; we see rugged old Johnson gazing down upon the coffin of Garrick with his eyes full of tears; and we see the last of the deathless Quire laid here to rest among his peers, while the

music of his last adieu wanders among the aisles and arches,—

" For though from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar."

With these memories and thoughts of the august and immortal dead, whose bodies and memorials are gathered together in this most sacred place, let us, before we leave the marvellous building, where only the vulgar can speak above a murmur, sit apart for a while and be thankful in humble pride for all those here who have added to the loveliness and splendour and dearness of

" This precious stone set in the silver sea," . . .
" This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England! "

Thrice happy were they who lived and sang and laboured for the honour and for the love of their country and their race when no cloud, even the size of a man's hand, was visible above the horizon. They knew nothing of these present times, dark and full of menace from the awful instruments

of colossal destruction designed to sink us all into final chaos and universal death.

True it is that all loveliness and glory must ultimately pass away ! for where is Solomon's Temple ? Where are the hanging gardens of Babylon ? Where is Carthage ? where is Palmyra ? and why should Westminster Abbey escape the common doom ? We can but each of us pray that we shall be spared the spectacle of its roaring ruin crushed down to heaps of dust by vast explosives rained on it from the sky.

Here in Poets' Corner we can, for a quiet hour, dream that what we see around us has indeed the quality of permanence; here we can praise God for what has been, and forget for a little while the implacable future. None that lie in this sanctuary of peace and beauty recked much of the sinister possibilities of modern science, and anyway their fame is beyond its reach.

It is the fate of all but a few who greatly pursue the art of letters to carry on their noble work in solitude, neglect, sorrow and

poverty. What they have given to us has often been at the cost of their very lives. Wordsworth's line rises to the mind as we look around:—

"And mighty poets in their misery dead."

Then let us at least have the grace to yield them our enduring gratitude, for the splendour they have conferred upon our country.

Here, where only a dim rumble of the great city penetrates to the Abbey's cavernous recesses, here let us receive the blessed influence which this hallowed spot has power to confer upon those whose hearts are fit to receive it; and as we rise and depart let us strive to carry away with us into the turbulent world without, a reverence for all that is good and beautiful and great, and a love, profound and imperishable, for the glorious land of our fathers.