

THE AUTHOR OF "SAUL."*

WE are not one of those who believe that the manifestation of any native, vigorous faculty of the mind is dependent upon circumstances. It is true that education, in its largest sense, modifies development; but it cannot, to any serious extent, add to, or take from, the power to be developed. In the lack of encouragement and contemporary appreciation, certain of the finer faculties may not give forth their full and perfect fragrance; but the rose is always seen to be a rose, though never a bud come to flower. The "mute, inglorious Milton" is a pleasant poetic fiction. Against the "hands that the rod of empire *might* have swayed" we have nothing to object, knowing to what sort of hands the said rod has so often been intrusted.

John Howard Payne once read to us — and it was something of an infliction — a long manuscript on "The Neglected Geniuses of America," — a work which only death, we suspect, prevented him from giving to the world. There was not one name in the list which had ever before reached our ears. Nicholas Blauvelt and William Phillips and a number of other utterly forgotten rhymesters were described and eulogized at length, the quoted specimens of their poetry proving all the while their admirable right to the oblivion which Mr. Payne deprecated. They were men of culture, some of them wealthy, and we could detect no lack of opportunity in the story of their lives. Had they been mechanics, they would have planed boards and laid bricks from youth to age. The Ayrshire ploughman and the Bedford tinker were made of other stuff. Our inference then was, and still

is, that unacknowledged (or at least unmanifested) genius is no genius at all, and that the lack of sympathy which many young authors so bitterly lament is a necessary test of their fitness for their assumed vocation.

Gerald Massey is one of the most recent instances of the certainty with which a poetic faculty by no means of the highest order will enforce its own development, under seemingly fatal discouragements. The author of "Saul" is a better illustration of the same fact; for, although, in our ignorance of the circumstances of his early life, we are unable to affirm what particular difficulties he had to encounter, we know how long he was obliged to wait for the first word of recognition, and to what heights he aspired in the course of many long and solitary years.

The existence of "Saul" was first made known to the world by an article in the "North British Review," in the year 1858, when the author had already attained his forty-second year. The fact that the work was published in Montreal called some attention to it on this side of the Atlantic, and a few critical notices appeared in our literary periodicals. It is still, however, comparatively unknown; and those into whose hands it may have fallen are, doubtless, ignorant of the author's name and history. An outline of the latter, so far as we have been able to ascertain its features, will help the reader to a more intelligent judgment, when we come to discuss the author's claim to a place in literature.

Charles Heavysege was born in Liverpool, England, in the year 1816. We know nothing in regard to his parents, except that they were poor, yet able to send their son to an ordinary school. His passion for reading, especially such poetry as fell into his hands, showed itself while he was yet a child. Milton seems to have been the first author who made a profound impression upon his

* *Saul*. A Drama, in Three Parts. Montreal: John Lovell. 1859.

Count Filippo; or, The Unequal Marriage. By the Author of "Saul." Montreal: Printed for the Author. 1860.

Jephthah's Daughter. By Charles Heavysege, Author of "Saul." Montreal: Dawson Brothers. 1865.

mind; but it is also reported that the schoolmaster once indignantly snatched Gray's "Elegy" from his hand, because he so frequently selected that poem for his reading-lesson. Somewhat later, he saw "Macbeth" performed, and was immediately seized with the ambition to become an actor,—a profession for which few persons could be less qualified. The impression produced by this tragedy, combined with the strict religious training which he appears to have received, undoubtedly fixed the character and manner of his subsequent literary efforts.

There are but few other facts of his life which we can state with certainty. His chances of education were evidently very scanty, for he must have left school while yet a boy, in order to learn his trade,—that of a machinist. He had thenceforth little time and less opportunity for literary culture. His reading was desultory, and the poetic faculty, expending itself on whatever subjects came to hand, produced great quantities of manuscripts, which were destroyed almost as soon as written. The idea of publishing them does not seem to have presented itself to his mind. Either his life must have been devoid of every form of intellectual sympathy, or there was some external impediment formidable enough to keep down that ambition which always co-exists with the creative power.

In the year 1843 he married, and in 1853 emigrated to Canada, and settled in Montreal. Even here his literary labor was at first performed in secrecy; he was nearly forty years old before a line from his pen appeared in type. He found employment in a machine-shop, and it was only very gradually—probably after much doubt and hesitation—that he came to the determination to subject his private creations to the ordeal of print. His first venture was a poem in blank verse, the title of which we have been unable to ascertain. A few copies were printed anonymously and distributed among personal friends. It was a premature birth, which never knew a moment's life, and the father of

it would now be the last person to attempt a resuscitation.

Soon afterwards appeared—anonymously—a little pamphlet, containing fifty "so-called" sonnets. They are, in reality, fragmentary poems of fourteen lines each, bound to no metre or order of rhyme. In spite of occasional crudities of expression, the ideas are always poetic and elevated, and there are many vigorous couplets and quatrains. They do not, however, furnish any evidence of sustained power, and the reader, who should peruse them as the only productions of the author, would be far from inferring the latter's possession of that lofty epical utterance which he exhibits in "Saul" and "Jephthah's Daughter."

We cannot learn that this second attempt to obtain a hearing was successful, so far as any public notice of the pamphlet is concerned; but it seems, at least, to have procured for Mr. Heavysege the first private recognition of his poetic abilities which he had ever received, and thereby given him courage for a more ambitious venture. "Saul," as an epical subject, must have haunted his mind for years. The greater portion of it, indeed, had been written before he had become familiar with the idea of publication; and even after the completion of the work, we can imagine the sacrifices which must have delayed its appearance in print. For a hard-working mechanic, in straitened circumstances, courage of another kind was required. It is no slight expense to produce an octavo volume of three hundred and thirty pages; there must have been much anxious self-consultation, a great call for patience, fortitude, and hope, with who may know what doubts and despondencies, before, in 1857 "Saul" was given to the world.

Nothing could have been more depressing than its reception, if, indeed, the term "reception" can be applied to complete indifference. A country like Canada, possessing no nationality, and looking across the Atlantic, not only for its political rule, but also (until very recently, at least) for its opinions, tastes,

and habits, is especially unfavorable to the growth of an independent literature. Although there are many men of learning and culture among the residents of Montreal, they do not form a class to whom a native author could look for encouragement or appreciation sufficient to stamp him as successful. The reading public there accept the decrees of England and the United States, and they did not detect the merits of "Saul," until the discovery had first been made in those countries.

Several months had elapsed since the publication of the volume; it seemed to be already forgotten, when the notice to which we have referred appeared in the "North British Review." The author had sent a copy to Mr. Hawthorne, then residing in Liverpool, and that gentleman, being on friendly terms with some of the writers for the "North British," procured the insertion of an appreciative review of the poem. Up to that time, we believe, no favorable notice of the work had appeared in Canada. The little circulation it obtained was chiefly among the American residents. A few copies found their way across the border, and some of our authors (among whom we may mention Mr. Emerson and Mr. Longfellow) were the first to recognize the genius of the poet. With this double indorsement, his fellow-townsmen hastened to make amends for their neglect. They could not be expected to give any very enthusiastic welcome, nor was their patronage extensive enough to confer more than moderate success; but the remaining copies of the first small edition were sold, and a second edition—which has not yet been exhausted—issued in 1859.

In February, 1860, we happened to visit Montreal. At that time we had never read the poem, and the bare fact of its existence had almost faded from memory, when it was recalled by an American resident, who was acquainted with Mr. Heavysege, and whose account of his patience, his quiet energy, and serene faith in his poetic calling strongly interested us. It was but a few hours

before our departure; there was a furious snow-storm; yet the gentleman ordered a sleigh, and we drove at once to a large machine-shop in the outskirts of the city. Here, amid the noise of hammers, saws, and rasps, in a great grimy hall smelling of oil and iron-dust, we found the poet at his work-bench. A small, slender man, with a thin, sensitive face, bright blonde hair, and eyes of that peculiar blue which burns warm, instead of cold, under excitement,—in the few minutes of our interview the picture was fixed, and remains so. His manner was quiet, natural, and unassuming: he received us with the simple good-breeding which a gentleman always possesses, whether we find him on a throne or beside an anvil. Not a man to assert his claim loudly, or to notice injustice or neglect by a single spoken word; but one to take quietly success or failure, in the serenity of a mood habitually untouched by either extreme.

In that one brief first and last interview, we discovered, at least, the simple, earnest sincerity of the man's nature,—a quality too rare, even among authors. When we took our seat in the train for Rouse's Point, we opened the volume of "Saul." The first part was finished as we approached St. Albans; the second at Vergennes; and twilight was falling as we closed the book between Bennington and Troy. Whatever crudities of expression, inaccuracies of rhythm, faults of arrangement, and violations of dramatic law met us from time to time, the earnest purpose of the writer carried us over them all. The book has a fine flavor of the Elizabethan age,—a sustained epic rather than dramatic character, an affluence of quaint, original images; yet the construction was frequently that of a school-boy. In opulence and maturity of ideas, and poverty of artistic skill, the work stands almost alone in literature. What little we have learned of the history of the author suggests an explanation of this peculiarity. Never was so much genuine power so long silent.

"Saul" is yet so little known, that a

descriptive outline of the poem will be a twice-told tale to very few readers of the "Atlantic." The author strictly follows the history of the renowned Hebrew king, as it is related in 1 Samuel, commencing with the tenth chapter, but divides the subject into three dramas, after the manner of Schiller's "Wallenstein." The first part embraces the history of Saul, from his anointing by Samuel at Ramah to David's exorcism of the evil spirit, (xvi. 23,) and contains five acts. The second part opens with David as a guest in the palace at Gibeah. The defeat of the Philistines at Elah, Saul's jealousy of David, and the latter's marriage with Michal form the staple of the *four* acts of this part. The third part consists of *six* acts of unusual length, (some of them have thirteen scenes,) and is devoted to the pursuits and escapes of David, the Witch of Endor, and the final battle, wherein the king and his three sons are slain. No liberties have been taken with the order of the Scripture narrative, although a few subordinate characters have here and there been introduced to complete the action. The author seems either to lack the inventive faculty, or to have feared modifying the sacred record for the purposes of Art. In fact, no considerable modification was necessary. The simple narrative fulfils almost all the requirements of dramatic writing, in its succession of striking situations, and its cumulative interest. From beginning to end, however, Mr. Heavysege makes no attempt to produce a dramatic effect. It is true that he has availed himself of the phrase "an evil spirit from the Lord," to introduce a demoniac element, but, singularly enough, the demons seem to appear and to act unwillingly, and manifest great relief when they are allowed to retire from the stage.

The work, therefore, cannot be measured by dramatic laws. It is an epic in dialogue; its chief charm lies in the march of the story and the detached individual monologues, rather than in contrast of characters or exciting situations. The sense of proportion — the

latest developed quality of the poetic mind — is dimly manifested. The structure of the verse, sometimes so stately and majestic, is frequently disfigured by the commonest faults; yet the breath of a lofty purpose has been breathed upon every page. The personality of the author never pierces through his theme. The language is fresh, racy, vigorous, and utterly free from the impress of modern masters: much of it might have been written by a contemporary of Shakspeare.

In the opening of the first part, Saul, recently anointed king, receives the messengers of Jabesh Gilead, and promises succor. A messenger says, —

"The winds of heaven
Behind thee blow; and on our enemies' eyes
May the sun smite to-morrow, and blind them for
thee!

But, O Saul, do not fail us.
"Saul. Fail ye
Let the morn fail to break; I will not break
My word. Haste, or I 'm there before you. Fail?
Let the morn fail the east; I 'll not fail you,
But, swift and silent as the streaming wind,
Unseen approach, then, gathering up my force
At dawning, sweep on Ammon, as Night's blast
Sweeps down from Carmel on the dusky sea."

This is a fine picture of Saul steeling his nature to cruelty, when he has reluctantly resolved to obey Samuel's command "to trample out the living fire of Amalek": —

"Now let me tighten every cruel sinew,
And gird the whole up in unfeeling hardness,
That my swollen heart, which bleeds within me
tears,
May choke itself to stillness. I am as
A shivering bather, that, upon the shore,
Looking and shrinking from the cold, black waves,
Quick starting from his reverie, with a rush
Abbreviates his horror."

And this of the satisfied lust of blood, uttered by a Hebrew soldier, after the slaughter: —

"When I was killing, such thoughts came to me,
like
The sound of cleft-dropped waters to the ear
Of the hot mower, who thereat stops the oftener
To whet his glittering scythe, and, while he smiles,
With the harsh, sharpening hone beats their fall's
time,
And dancing to it in his heart's straight chamber,
Forgets that he is weary."

After the execution of Agag by the hand of Samuel, the demons are introduced with more propriety than in the

opening of the poem. The following passage has a subtle, sombre grandeur of its own:—

"*First Demon.* Now let us down to hell: we've seen the last.

"*Second Demon.* Stay; for the road thereto is yet incumbered

With the descending spectres of the killed.

'T is said they choke hell's gates, and stretch from thence

Out like a tongue upon the silent gulf;

Wherein our spirits—even as terrestrial ships

That are detained by foul winds in an offing—

Linger perforce, and feel broad gusts of sighs

That swing them on the dark and billowless waste,

O'er which come sounds more dismal than the boom,

At midnight, of the salt flood's foaming surf,—

Even dead Amalek's moan and lamentation."

The reader will detect the rhythmical faults of the poem, even in these passages. But there is a vast difference between such blemishes of the unrhymed heroic measure as terminating a line with "and," "of," or "but," or inattention to the cæsural pauses, and that mathematical precision of foot and accent, which, after all, can scarcely be distinguished from prose. Whatever may be his shortcomings, Mr. Heavysege speaks in the dialect of poetry. Only rarely he drops into bald prose, as in these lines:—

"But let us go abroad, and in the twilight's
Cool, tranquillizing air discuss this matter."

We remember, however, that Wordsworth wrote, —

"A band of officers
Then stationed in the city were among the chief
Of my associates."

We had marked many other fine passages of "Saul" for quotation, but must be content with a few of those which are most readily separated from the context.

"Ha! ha! the foe,
Having taken from us our warlike tools, yet leave
us
The little scarlet tongue to scratch and sting with."

"Here 's lad's-love, and the flower which even death
Cannot unscent, the all-transcending rose."

"The loud bugle,
And the hard-rolling drum, and clashing cymbals,
Now reign the lords o' the air. These crises, David,
Bring with them their own music, as do storms
Their thunders."

"Ere the morn
Shall tint the orient with the soldier's color,
We must be at the camp."

"But come, I'll disappoint thee; for, remember,
Samuel will not be roused for thee, although
I knock with thunder at his resting-place."

The lyrical portions of the work—introduced in connection with the demoniac characters—are inferior to the rest. They have occasionally a quaint, antique flavor, suggesting the diction of the Elizabethan lyrists, but without their delicate, elusive richness of melody. Here most we perceive the absence of that highest, ripest intellectual culture which can be acquired only through contact and conflict with other minds. It is not good for a poet to be alone. Even where the constructive faculty is absent, its place may be supplied through the development of that artistic sense which files, weighs, and adjusts,—which reconciles the utmost freedom and force of thought with the mechanical symmetries of language,—and which, first a fetter to the impatient mind, becomes at length a pinion, holding it serenely poised in the highest ether. Only the rudiment of the sense is born with the poet, and few literary lives are fortunate enough, or of sufficiently varied experience, to mature it.

Nevertheless, before closing the volume, we must quote what we consider to be the author's best lyrical passage. Zaph, one of the attendants of Malzah, the "evil spirit from the Lord," sings as follows to one of his fellows:—

"Zepho, the sun's descended beam
Hath laid his rod on th' ocean stream,
And this o'erhanging wood-top nods
Like golden helms of drowsy gods.
Methinks that now I'll stretch for rest,
With eyelids sloping toward the west:
That, through their half transparencies,
The rosy radiance passed and strained,
Of mote and vapor duly drained,
I may believe, in hollow bliss,
My rest in the empyrean is.
Watch thou; and when up comes the moon,
Atowards her turn me; and then, boon,
Thyself compose, 'neath wavering leaves
That hang these branched, majestic eaves:
That so, with self-imposed deceit,
Both, in this halcyon retreat,
By trance possessed, imagine may
We couch in Heaven's night-argent ray."

In 1860 Mr. Heavysege published by subscription a drama entitled "Count Filippo; or, the Unequal Marriage."

This work, of which we have seen but one critical notice, added nothing to his reputation. His genius, as we have already remarked, is not dramatic; and there is, moreover, internal evidence that "Count Filippo" did not grow, like "Saul," from an idea which took forcible possession of the author's mind. The plot is not original, the action languid, and the very names of the *dramatis personæ* convey an impression of unreality. Though we know there never was a Duke of Pereza in Italy, this annoys us less than that he should bear such a fantastic name as "Tremohla"; nor does the feminine "Volina" inspire us with much respect for the heroine. The characters are intellectual abstractions, rather than creatures of flesh and blood; and their love, sorrow, and remorse fail to stir our sympathies. They have an incorrigible habit of speaking in conceits. As "Saul" is pervaded with the spirit of the Elizabethan writers, so "Count Filippo" suggests the artificial manner of the rivals of Dryden. It is the work of a poet, but of a poet working from a mechanical impulse. There are very fine single passages, but the general effect is marred by the constant recurrence of such forced metaphors as these:—

"Now shall the he-goat, black Adultery,
With the roused ram, Retaliation, twine
Their horns in one to butt at Filippo."

"As the salamander, cast in fire,
Exudes preserving mucus, so my mind,
Cased in thick satisfaction of success,
Shall be uninjured."

The work, nevertheless, appears to have had some share in improving its author's fortunes. From that time, he has received at least a partial recognition in Canada. Soon after its publication, he succeeded in procuring employment on the daily newspaper press of Montreal, which enabled him to give up his uncongenial labor at the work-bench. The Montreal Literary Club elected him one of its Fellows, and the short-lived literary periodicals of the Province no longer ignored his existence. In spite of a change of circum-

stances which must have given him greater leisure as well as better opportunities of culture, he has published but two poems in the last five years,—an Ode for the ter-centenary anniversary of Shakspeare's birth, and the sacred idyl of "Jephthah's Daughter." The former is a production the spirit of which is worthy of its occasion, although, in execution, it is weakened by an overplus of imagery and epithet. It contains between seven and eight hundred lines. The grand, ever-changing music of the Ode will not bear to be prolonged beyond a certain point, as all the great Masters of Song have discovered: the ear must not be allowed to become *quite* accustomed to the surprises of the varying rhythm, before the closing Alexandrine.

"Jephthah's Daughter" contains between thirteen and fourteen hundred lines. In careful finish, in sustained sweetness and grace, and solemn dignity of language, it is a marked advance upon any of the author's previous works. We notice, indeed, the same technical faults as in "Saul," but they occur less frequently, and may be altogether corrected in a later revision of the poem. Here, also, the Scriptural narrative is rigidly followed, and every temptation to adorn its rare simplicity resisted. Even that lament of the Hebrew girl, behind which there seems to lurk a romance, and which is so exquisitely paraphrased by Tennyson, in his "Dream of Fair Women,"—

"And I went mourning: 'No fair Hebrew boy
Shall smile away my maiden blame among
The Hebrew mothers,'"—

is barely mentioned in the words of the text. The passion of Jephthah, the horror, the piteous pleading of his wife and daughter, and the final submission of the latter to her doom, are elaborated with a careful and tender hand. From the opening to the closing line, the reader is lifted to the level of the tragic theme, and inspired, as in the Greek tragedy, with a pity which makes lovely the element of terror. The central sentiment of the poem, through all its touching and sorrowful changes, is that

of repose. Observe the grave harmony of the opening lines :—

"T was in the olden days of Israel,
When from her people rose up mighty men
To judge and to defend her; ere she knew,
Or clamored for, her coming line of kings,
A father, rashly vowing, sacrificed
His daughter on the altar of the Lord;—
'T was in those ancient days, coeval deemed
With the song-famous and heroic ones,
When Agamemnon, taught divinely, doomed
His daughter to expire at Dian's shrine, —
So doomed, to free the chivalry of Greece,
In Aulis lingering for a favoring wind
To waft them to the fated walls of Troy.
Two songs with but one burden, twin-like tales.
Sad tales ! but this the sadder of the twain, —
This song, a wail more desolately wild ;
More fraught this story with grim fate fulfilled."

The length to which this article has grown warns us to be sparing of quotations, but we all the more earnestly recommend those in whom we may have inspired some interest in the author to procure the poem for themselves. We have perused it several times, with increasing enjoyment of its solemn diction, its sad, monotonous music, and with the hope that the few repairing touches, which alone are wanting to make it a perfect work of its class, may yet be given. This passage, for example, where Jephthah prays to be absolved from his vow, would be faultlessly eloquent, but for the prosaic connection of the first and second lines :—

"Choose Tabor for thine altar : I will pile
It with the choice of Bashan's lusty herds,
And flocks of fatlings, and for fuel, thither
Will bring umbrageous Lebanon to burn."

"He said, and stood awaiting for the sign,
And heard, above the hoarse, bough-bending wind,
The hill-wolf howling on the neighboring height,
And bitter booming in the pool below.
Some drops of rain fell from the passing cloud
That sudden hides the wanly shining moon,
And from the scabbard instant dropped his sword,
And, with long, living leaps, and rock-struck clang,
From side to side, and slope to sounding slope,
In gleaming whirls swept down the dim ravine."

The finest portion of the poem is the description of that transition of feeling, through which the maiden, warm with young life and clinging to life for its own unfulfilled promise, becomes the

resigned and composed victim. No one but a true poet could have so conceived and represented the situation. The narrative flows in one unbroken current, detached parts whereof hint but imperfectly of the whole, as do goblets of water of the stream wherefrom they are dipped. We will only venture to present two brief passages. The daughter speaks :—

"Let me not need now disobey you, mother,
But give me leave to knock at Death's pale gate,
Whereat indeed I must, by duty drawn,
By Nature shown the sacred way to yield.
Behold, the coasting cloud obeys the breeze ;
The slanting smoke, the invisible sweet air ;
The towering tree its leafy limbs resigns
To the embraces of the wilful wind :
Shall I, then, wrong, resist the hand of Heaven ?
Take me, my father ! take, accept me, Heaven !
Slay me or save me, even as you will !"

Light, light, I leave thee !—yet am I a lamp,
Extinguished now, to be relit forever.
Life dies : but in its stead death lives."

In "Jephthah's Daughter," we think, Mr. Heavysege has found that form of poetic utterance for which his genius is naturally qualified. It is difficult to guess the future of a literary life so exceptional hitherto,—difficult to affirm, without a more intimate knowledge of the man's nature, whether he is capable of achieving that rhythmical perfection (in the higher sense wherein sound becomes the symmetrical garment of thought) which, in poets, marks the line between imperfect and complete success. What he most needs, of *external* culture, we have already indicated : if we might be allowed any further suggestion, he supplies it himself, in one of his fragmentary poems :—

"Open, my heart, thy ruddy valves, —
It is thy master calls :
Let me go down, and, curious, trace
Thy labyrinthine halls.
Open, O heart ! and let me view
The secrets of thy den :
Myself unto myself now show
With introspective ken.
Expose thyself, thou covered nest
Of passions, and be seen :
Stir up thy brood, that in unrest
Are ever piping keen :—
Ah ! what a motley multitude,
Magnanimous and mean !"