

FREDERICK LOCKER.



FREDERICK LOCKER. [FROM A PEN-AND-INK DRAWING BY GEORGE DU MAURIER.]

"PATRICIAN rhymes" is the apt phrase Mr. Stedman coined to characterize that kind of *vers de société*, nameless in English, which is more than mere society verse. It describes Mr. Locker's poetry more accurately than Mr. Austin Dobson's, for example, or Mr. Calverley's, since, as a rule, he confines himself more strictly within the circle of "good society," of Mayfair, and of fashion. Mr. Locker is the du Maurier of song, and his "London Lyrics" are as entertaining and as instructive to the student of Victorian manners as Mr. du Maurier's "Pictures of English Society." Mr. Locker has succeeded Præd as the laureate of the world, and he ignores the

flesh, and is ignorant of the devil, just as Præd did, and just as society itself endeavors to do. But Mr. Locker's range is wider than Præd's, whose success lay almost altogether in his songs of society; Præd was out of place when he ventured outside of Mayfair and beyond the sound of St. George's in Hanover Square; while Mr. Locker's Pegasus pauses at the mouth of Cité Fadette as gracefully as it treads the gravel of Rotten Row. The later poet has wider sympathies than the elder, who, indeed, may be said to have had but one note. The "Vicar" is a beautiful bit of verse, but its touch of tenderness sets it apart from all Præd's other work,



MR. LOCKER. [FROM AN ETCHING BY JOHN E. MILLAIS, R. A., PUBLISHED BY E. MOXON & CO.]

which is brilliant with a hard and metallic brilliancy. Præd dazzles almost to weariness; his lines stand out sharply like fireworks at midnight. More brilliant than Præd no poet well could be. More pleasing Mr. Locker is, and gives a higher pleasure. He has wit like Præd, but far more humor; and the soft radiance of humor never tires the eye like the quick flashes of wit. With broader humor, he has a broader humanity, and a finer individuality. In short, the difference between the two may be summed up in favor of the younger man, by saying that Mr. Locker can write Prædesque poems,—compare “The Belle of the Ball-room,” for instance, and “A *Nice Correspondent*,”—while it may well be doubted whether Præd could have emulated Mr. Locker’s “To My Mistress” and “At Her Window.”

Of course, it is easy to say that Mr. Locker continues the tradition of Prior and Præd; it is easy also to see that, in two respects, at least, the progression shows the progress of the age. One improvement is in the form used by the poet; the other in the feeling, the temper of the poet himself. Præd contented himself with putting his best work into the eight-line stanza, now a little worn from overwork:

“Our love was like most other loves;
A little glow, a little shiver,
A rosebud and a pair of gloves,
And ‘Fly not yet’—upon the river;
Some jealousy of some one’s heir,
Some hopes of dying broken-hearted,
A miniature, a lock of hair,
The usual vows—and then we parted.”

In this meter, Mr. Locker and Mr. Austin Dobson, in England, and Mr. Saxe, in America, have written verses that Præd might not

disown; but though the metal was theirs, the mold was Præd’s. Mr. Locker’s best work has not gone into any one form; he has wisely varied his meter; he has invented of his own, and he has borrowed from his neighbor. “A *Nice Correspondent*” is Swinburnian in its rhythm, and “To My Grandmother” repeats the measures of Holmes’s “Last Leaf,” a delightful meter, lending itself easily to intricate harmonies, and not to be attempted now by meaner hands:

“This Relative of mine,
Was she seventy-and-nine
When she died?
By the canvas may be seen
How she looked at seventeen,
As a Bride.

“Beneath a summer tree
Her maiden reverie
Has a charm:
Her ringlets are in taste;
What an arm! . . . what a waist
For an arm!”

Is not this the perfection of daintiness and delicacy? Is it not delightful—this mingling of sly fun and playful banter? And this brings us to the second quality, in which Mr. Locker and Mr. Dobson are plainly superior to Prior and Præd—in their treatment of woman. Prior thought of women with little feeling, and he wrote of them with little respect; however much he might pretend to worship a dame or a damsel, he kept a keen and unkind eye on her failings. At all times his tone toward women is one of good-natured contempt, often ill-concealed. With Præd, a complete change had come in the attitude; he is avowedly a friendly critic, and yet his verse catches no tinge of warmth from his friendliness. Though he may have felt deeply, he lets his skepticism



TAIL-PIECE TO THE PRIVATELY PRINTED EDITION OF “LONDON LYRICS.” [DRAWN BY KATE GREENAWAY.]



MR. THACKERAY READING "THE ROSE AND THE RING" TO MISS STORY. [DRAWN ON WOOD BY RICHARD DOYLE.]

and his wit hide his feeling until we are well-nigh forced to doubt whether he had any feeling to hide. The lively beauties who figure in Præd's glittering verse are far more true to life than the French fictions of Prior, but the ladies of Mr. Locker and Mr. Dobson are quite as charming and indubitably more natural. They are true women, too, not mere figments of the fancy; they are the result of later and deeper observation; and they have far more variety from the given prototype. Prior wrote of women at large, and Præd rang the changes on the "Belle of the Ball-room." Now, Mr. Locker has a gallery of girls, all fresh and ingenuous young maidens. Prior did not respect women; Præd admired them coldly; Mr. Locker has a warm regard for them, and a manly respect, and, also a demure humor which sees into their wiles and their weaknesses quite as sharply as did Prior or Præd.

Having set forth thus some of the things which Mr. Locker, the poet, is and is not, it may be well to give a few facts about Mr. Locker, the man. He was born in 1821. His father, Edward Hawke Locker, was in the public service, and took a warm interest in literature and art. His grandfather, Captain W. Locker, R. N., was an old friend of Lord Nelson's; and both Collingwood and Nelson served under him. Mr. Locker composed little until late in life, or at least, until he was thirty; and he found great difficulty, so he wrote to a friend, "in persuading editors to have anything to say to my verses; but Thackeray believed in me, and used to say: 'Never mind, Locker, our verse *may* be small beer, but at any rate it is the right tap.'" Thus encouraged, Mr. Locker wrote

on, and in time editors began to relent. In 1857, he gathered his scattered poems and put them forth in a single volume as "London Lyrics." As edition followed edition, he has added the few poems he has written of late years, and has dropped those of his earlier poems that he thought unworthy. The latest published edition—the eighth, I think it is—is scarcely any heavier than the first. Later than this, however, is a little book, beautifully printed and beautifully bound, which Mr. Locker has recently given to his friends, and which contains a special selection of his very best work, made by Mr. Austin Dobson, who has prefixed this friendly little sextain:

"Apollo made, one April day,
A new thing in the rhyming way;
Its turn was neat, its wit was clear,
It wavered 'twixt a smile and tear;
Then Momus gave a touch satiric,
And it became a 'London Lyric.'"

Besides putting his own *vers de société* into a book, Mr. Locker made a collection, under the title of "Lyra Elegantiarum," of the best specimens in English of the *vers de société* and *vers d'occasion* of poets no longer living. Of this a new and revised edition was published in 1867; it is a model of what such a selection should be; and it was ushered in by an essay of the editor's—all too brief—on the art of writing *vers de société*. In 1879, Mr. Locker published a most amusing little volume of "Patchwork," containing bits of rhyme and bits of talk, with here a jest and there a joke, excerpts from his commonplace book, and enlivened with a few of the anecdotes he is wont to tell so effectively. For the lyrist of London is no recluse; he is a man of the world, even more than he is a

man of letters. His little breakfasts recall those of Rogers, whose kindness to young authors Mr. Locker also shows. He is connected by marriage with the Poet Laureate, and with the late Dean of Westminster; and he knows most of the celebrities of to-day as he knew those of yesterday. It is a pleasure to hear him tell of Rogers, of Luttrell, and of Thackeray. In life as in literature he has both humor and good humor. Although satiric by nature, he is thoroughly sympathetic and generous. Well-to-do in the world, he has been able to indulge his liking for the little things in art which make life worth living. His collections of china, of drawings, of engravings, are all excellent; and his literary curiosities, first editions of great books and precious autographs of great men, make a poor American wickedly envious. He is a connoisseur of the best type, never buying trash or bargain-hunting, knowing what he wants, and why he wants it, and what it is worth; and his treasures are freely opened to any literary brother who is seeking after truth.

In studying Mr. Locker's pictures of English society, we cannot but feel that the poet has drawn his lines with the living model before him. It is in the distinctively London-town lyrics—in "The Pilgrims of Pall Mall," in "The Rotten Row," in "At Hurlingham," in "St. James' Street," and in "Piccadilly,"

"Piccadilly! Shops, palaces, bustle and breeze,
The whirring of wheels and the murmur of trees,
By night or by day, whether noisy or stilly,
Whatever my mood is, I love Piccadilly."

—it is in these that Mr. Locker most shows the influence of Præd, which is decidedly less apparent in the less local poems,—in "A Garden Lyric," in "On an Old Muff," in "Geraldine," and in the sportive and bright-some lines on "A Human Skull."

"A human Skull, I bought it passing cheap;
No doubt 'twas dearer to its first employer!
I thought mortality did well to keep
Some mute memento of the Old Destroyer.

"Time was, some may have prized its blooming skin;
Here lips were woo'd, perhaps, in transport tender;
Some may have chuck'd what was a dimpled chin,
And never had my doubt about its gender.
* * * * *

"It may have held (to shoot some random shots)
Thy brains, Eliza Fry! or Baron Byron's;
The wits of Nelly Gwynne, or Doctor Watts—
Two quoted bards. Two philanthropic sirens.

"But this, I trust, is clearly understood,
If man or woman, if adored or hated—
Whoever own'd this Skull was not so good,
Nor quite so bad as many may have stated."

Besides the playful humor of these poems, two things especially are to be noted in them—individuality and directness of expression.

Whatever influence you may think you see here of some other poet, Horace, or Béranger, or Gautier, or Thackeray—and the very variety of these names shows the poet's versatility—you cannot doubt that these poems are of a truth Mr. Locker's own, stamped with his seal, marked with his image and superscription. Here plainly is a man with a character of his own, looking at life through his own eyes, now laughing with hearty gayety, again smiling a sad smile.

"'I still can laugh' is still my boast,
But mirth has sounded gayer;
And which provokes my laughter most
The preacher or the player?
Alack, I cannot laugh at what
Once made us laugh so freely;
For Nestroy and Grassot are not,
And where is Mr. Keeley?"

Quite as noteworthy as the individuality of the poet is his studied clearness. There is never an inversion or an involution; the verse is as straightforward as prose, and as easy to be "understood of the people." The rhythm flows freely; the rhymes are neat and novel, and never forced; and the manner never intrudes itself to the injury of the matter. But Mr. Locker is not like Théophile Gautier, that Benvenuto Cellini of verse, nor like the cunning artificers of Gautier's school,—poets who polish a poor little idea until they can see themselves in it. That he is ever going over his work with the file, any one can see who will compare the first stanzas of "Geraldine and I" and of "A Garden Lyric," but he never overweights his verse with a gorgeous setting, from selfish delight in the skill of his workmanship. Indeed, Mr. Locker sometimes has carried his search for simplicity of statement almost too far. But so many poets nowadays are as hard to understand as a Greek chorus, that we ought to be thankful to one who takes pains to be clear, and direct, and unaffected.

Affectation, indeed, is always a stumbling block in the path of the maker of *vers de société*; but in "London Lyrics" there are no traces of any slip. The poems are as simple and honest as the verse is direct and clear. Nowhere is affectation more easy than in addressing childhood; and, with the exception of Victor Hugo and Longfellow, perhaps, no poet of our day has written of children as often as Mr. Locker. He has made a "Rhyme of One," and "Little Dinky," a rhyme of less than one (she is twelve weeks old). He has written "To Lina Oswald" (aged five years), and to "Geraldine" (who is fifteen); and "Gertrude's Necklace" belonged to a maiden not much older. And all these poems to the young reveal the subdued humor and



MR. LOCKER'S BOOK-PLATE, DESIGNED BY H. STACY MARKS, A. R. A.

the worldly wit we have seen in the others written for their elders and betters, their pastors and masters, and they have even more of delicate tenderness and of true sentiment tainted by no trace of sentimentality. Thackeray, too, was fond of the young, and when he was in Rome, in 1854, he used to read the newly written chapters of "The Rose and the Ring" to an invalid daughter of Mr. W. W. Story. When the book was published he sent a copy to this young lady with an odd little sketch. This is the incident Mr. Locker versified and Mr. Doyle illustrated:

"And when it was printed, and gaining
Renown with all lovers of glee,
He sent her this copy containing
His comical little *croquis*;
A sketch of a rather droll couple,
She's pretty, he's quite t'other thing!
He begs (with a spine vastly supple)
She will study *The Rose and the Ring*."

One of Mr. Locker's songs has a lyric grace and an evanescent sweetness, recalling Herrick or Suckling:

AT HER WINDOW.

Beating Heart! we come again
Where my Love reposes;
This is Mabel's window-pane;
These are Mabel's roses.

Is she nested? Does she kneel
In the twilight stilly,
Lily-clad from throat to heel,
She, my Virgin Lily?

Soon the wan, the wistful stars,
Fading, will forsake her;
Elves of light, on beamy bars,
Whisper then, and wake her.

Let this friendly pebble plead
At the flowery grating;

If she hear me, will she heed?
Mabel, I am waiting.

Mabel will be deck'd anon,
Zoned in bride's apparel;
Happy zone! oh, hark to yon
Passion-shaken carol.

Sing thy song, thou tranced thrush,
Pipe thy best, thy clearest;
Hush, her lattice moves, O hush—
Dearest Mabel!—dearest.

Is not this a marvel of refinement and restraint? It is as purely a lyric as the song of the thrush itself. Especially in poems like this is it that Mr. Locker is wholly other than Praed, with whom people persist in linking him. He has at once a finer vein of poetry and a broader vein of humor. Perhaps, after all, humor is Mr. Locker's chief characteristic,—a gentle humor always under control, and never boisterous or burly, yet frank and free and full of mischief,—the humor of a keen observer, who is at once a gentleman and a poet. What, for example, can be more comic in conception, or more clear-cut in execution than this?—

A TERRIBLE INFANT.

I recollect a nurse call'd Ann,
Who carried me about the grass,
And one fine day a fine young man
Came up and kissed the pretty lass.
She did not make the least objection!
Thinks I—"Aha!"
When I can talk I'll tell mamma!"
And that 's my earliest recollection.

It is in this quality of humor mainly, and in the fact that his verse is more individual than impersonal, that Mr. Locker's gifts differ from those of Mr. Austin Dobson, who is like Dr. Holmes in many things, and especially in that he dares not "write as funny as he can." At least he so impresses me. A comparison of Mr. Locker's work with Mr. Dobson's would, however, lead me too far afield, and, at best, comparisons are futile. Criticism is nowadays the tenth muse, and I am sure that Mrs. Malaprop would say that comparisons do not become that young woman. Suffice it to state that Mr. Frederick Locker and Mr. Austin Dobson stand each on his own ground, at the head of the poets who sing of English society as it is. Mr. Locker is the elder, and it was to him that Mr. Dobson dedicated his "Proverbs in Porcelain," in these lines:

Is it to kindest friend I send
This nosegay gathered new?
Or is it more to critic sure,
To singer clear and true?
I know not which, indeed, nor need:
All three I found—in you.

J. Brander Matthews.