

EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN.



LANDOR is generally held to be the last of the Greek writers, but the race never dies out, if its distinction is admitted to reside not merely in its rhetorical habit, but in its spirit of alertness and vivacity. The combination in Landor of classic transparency and conciseness with such Elizabethan brawn as belongs to his "conversations" is itself a proof of the complex nature which the most Attic of writers may possess. Sainte-Beuve was a classic author, and so was Matthew Arnold, yet you have to reckon with an enormous fund of romantic sensitiveness in the former, and the English critic, for all his serenity and power of intellectual detachment, was one of the most modern of men. Hence it seems to me that a quick intelligence will perceive in Mr. Stedman not exclusively the classic temperament underlying his affection for the Greek anthology, nor the purely contemporaneous taste which inclines him to his present labors upon the new edition of Poe, but a happy blending of both impulses.

This meeting of the two lines of development is the more natural, perhaps, because there is really nothing more modern than the vein of feeling which we commonly associate with the greatest of past civilizations. The old conception of antique life as a statuesque affair of academic robes and frigid poses has disappeared before a closer acquaintance with the pictures of an entirely unaffected society which the old poets and prose-writers present. It is with the more confidence, then, that traits are ascribed to Mr. Stedman which would hardly be credited, on a superficial view, to a man of letters so thoroughly imbued, as he is known to be, with the multifarious colors of the present day. These observations might seem to refer only to his work. They are, however, in perfect agreement with the more or less personal consideration inspired by the portrait on the frontispiece page which these lines accompany. In and out of his books Mr. Stedman brings with him the same stimulating atmosphere—produced on one side by the precision and clarity of the older tradition to which I have referred, on the other, by his immediate response to the appeal of the moment.

The exact accent of that response is one of the most interesting points in Mr. Stedman's character. His sympathy is boundless, and he has flung the mantle of his critical cordiality over many writers whom a less genial judge

would leave to the doubtful shelter of their own thin diction. No one has been kinder to the minor poet on both sides of the Atlantic. But while he bends to do this, he never seems to sacrifice his equilibrium. His patience with the "stained-glass poets," as he named them, of the Victorian era has never diminished the value of his analysis of their betters. This is due to a very great extent to the classic strain in his temperament, to the impersonal animus of all his judgments. That is to say, there is no trace of time or of place in his dealings with the literary topics which have occupied so much of his time. He is cosmopolitan to the core.

As a literature grows it inevitably sheds many of its most national idiosyncrasies, its fiber belonging less to the nation as its makers belong more to the world at large, through recognizing its standards and paying heed to its opinions. There is no such mellowness, there is no such indigenous flavor, in Tennyson or in Arnold as go to weave the spell of Spenser or of Herrick. There is no such deep-throated laughter in Balzac as there is in the Rabelais whom he uselessly sought to echo, and no polished *boulevardier* of the day, no matter how great his gift, could hope to catch the rich Gaulish note of Brantôme's gossip. The transition sometimes implies a gain, more often not, but it always involves a difference which has its distinct significance while leaving comparisons harmless and even gracious. For example, in a great deal that has contributed to the establishment of American letters it is obvious that the delightful streaks of humor by which it is rendered peculiar are as racy, as local, as the hills and woods from which our authors have drawn some of their most potent inspiration. Mr. Stedman's vivacity is essentially that of a citizen of the world; without being especially caustic, he is yet incisive, compact, beyond the usual measure of American wit, and his whole air is of a culture thoroughly independent of geographical conditions. He has done a great deal to modernize American literature, to purge it of Americanisms, and to express in it the tacit knowledge of laws formulated by neither one school nor the other, which is one of the surest tests of scholarship. This has not resulted in any cooling of his emotions, as witness his "Alice of Monmouth," or any of his war poems, and the gusto of the delightful ballad which was one of his earliest poetic successes. Nor has it modified his Americanism, and by that is signified not the stress of some

moving episode, like the civil war, but a changeless, spontaneous intuition for American figures and for the American character. The charming "Huntington House," which appeared in these pages recently, illustrates the quality very aptly. The ladies Huntington themselves hardly could have brought home to the imagination a more convincing touch of the sentiment and environment of their village and time than is conveyed in that spirited poem.

For spirited Mr. Stedman always is, regardless of his theme. His vitality is inexhaustible, and he is animating, whether he is musing over the quaint sedateness of old New England gentility, whether he is breathing the sweet, still air of a Greek eclogue, or is turning the leaves of a singer as *macabre* as Poe. The critical address on poetry which forms his latest published volume might not unfairly be classed as a treatise, yet where, in a production of that scientific nature, will you find an equally diversified and epigrammatic stream of eloquence, an elucidation of the poetic ministrations handling those sacred mysteries with so much felicity of imagery and phrase, with so much deftness and point? Mr. Stedman's faculty has ever taken this free and entertaining direction. He has a poet's insight into the beauties of poetry. He has also the poet's gift of irony, of banter, a circumstance which materially extends the scope of his art as a critic; for along with such metaphors of grace and tact as he has invented in his tributes to the genius of Shelley and Keats, he is capable also of such a sentence as that in which he summed up, once for all, some years ago, the afternoon-tea movement in English poetry. "Five thousand socialists are bawling around St. Paul's, and English poets are writing triplets." Despite his sincere regard for the younger poets of England and America, Mr. Stedman is never averse to giving them the good-humored rap on the knuckles which they need. He is interested in, and himself handles with facility, the mechanism upon which some of the daintiest of modern verse has been founded. He speaks of Gautier with warmth, and has not only a poet's admiration for Musset and Banville, but looks with a poetic curiosity upon all the ingenious experiments which have been made upon the midslopes of the French Parnassus. But it is only necessary to hear him defend what is defensible in Browning—a task which needs neither an enthusiast nor an *advocator diaboli*, but a critic of Mr. Stedman's loyalty and discrimination—to realize how keenly his ear is attuned to the deepest, purest, most elemental strains in poetry. He has always appreciated Whitman. He delights in Tennyson's almost Oriental delicacy of touch. He delights equally in the sledge-hammer strokes of Browning. This is not only a mat-

ter of taste, of acumen; it is a matter of temperament, and in reverting to Mr. Stedman's perception of the tumultuous ichor in Browning's poetic veins one comes back less to his criticism than to his instinctive love for whatever is strong and charged with human as well as poetic passion. His own disposition is never to give the motive too keen an edge, and if he ever essayed in his youth the drama which every poet is believed to have brought forth, it is more probable that it was a comedy than the regulation five-act play of horrors and despair. But youth is catholic in its admiration, and if it may be said, in all respect, of the eyes which look from the portrait herewith presented with so much of the steadiness and kindness of maturity, that they have unfailingly regarded the world with the light of youth, the impartiality with which they apprehend every phase of emotion will then be understood.

Mr. Stedman is always just a trifle in advance of the latest thing, and this makes it a little difficult to keep up with him. The most energetic of young men are not more ardent, more speedily aware of the new book, the new play, than the man who has seen the evolution of a whole generation of poets. The difference is that the discovery comes to the veteran without effort, and often, as has been said, in advance of the rest. Look into his works on the English and American poets of the century; look into the great anthology of American prose and verse in which he divides with another critic (Miss Ellen M. Hutchinson) the honor of marshaling for the first time in our history an adequate representation of our literature. The survey discloses many names which, until the publication of these volumes, were but slightly known, if known at all, to the readers who have since given them a wide reputation. It would be difficult to say how many of the newer poets of America have profited by Mr. Stedman's encouragement and advice. And their gratitude to him draws an added stimulus from the engaging way in which the advice is proffered. Authority goes with scholarship, and Mr. Stedman has both, but in spite of his emphasis it cannot be said of him that he is pedagogic. If he ever prints the translation from the Greek upon which I believe he has long been engaged, it is certain to prove the antithesis of a pedantic version. The passage from one of the pastorals which is included in his last volume shows how flexible his spirit and style are when working in a substance well-calculated to test a translator's poetic feeling as well as his accuracy. Mr. Stedman is never the professor, yet it is conceivable that he would occupy a chair of literature in some university with great satisfaction to his students. The easy play of his discursive method, enriching every stage of his discourse with the happiest

and most illustrative of allusions, makes him a model among poetic mentors.

If he has never worn the master's robes it has been due probably to his deep-rooted fondness for the habiliments of Bohemia. He wore them, metaphorically at least, in the early days of his life in New York, when Pfaff's was a literary shrine in which all the poets of that time gathered, and his "Diamond Wedding" was an appropriate offering to its muse. He wears them now in the same figurative sense when the revels of the Centurions and the Players require it, and at any time he has a ready reply to a salutation couched in one of Béranger's ringing lyrics, or a fragment from Murger's party-colored work.

But in seeking for a closing word on Mr. Stedman it is necessary to choose some loftier interpreter than either of these, for his significance is of a more serious character. One thinks

of him as the friend of new interests, of new thoughts, of new ideals. One thinks of him more often as the contemporary and intimate of the leaders whose work he has shared in the formation of American literature. Lowell and Longfellow were his friends. Of Whittier he has written more clearly and more justly than could have been possible for any one who had not grasped through companionship and kindred experiences the Quaker poet's point of view. His first years of literary craftsmanship brought him in contact with men like Bayard Taylor and Ripley, and for a long time he worked side by side with John R. G. Hassard, one of the finest critics of his period. Like all the members of this famous company, he stands for what is most admirable in American letters. That his influence will be felt in the development of the latter is one of the most gratifying thoughts that arise in the presence of his portrait.

Royal Cortissoz.

ECHOES OF THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS.

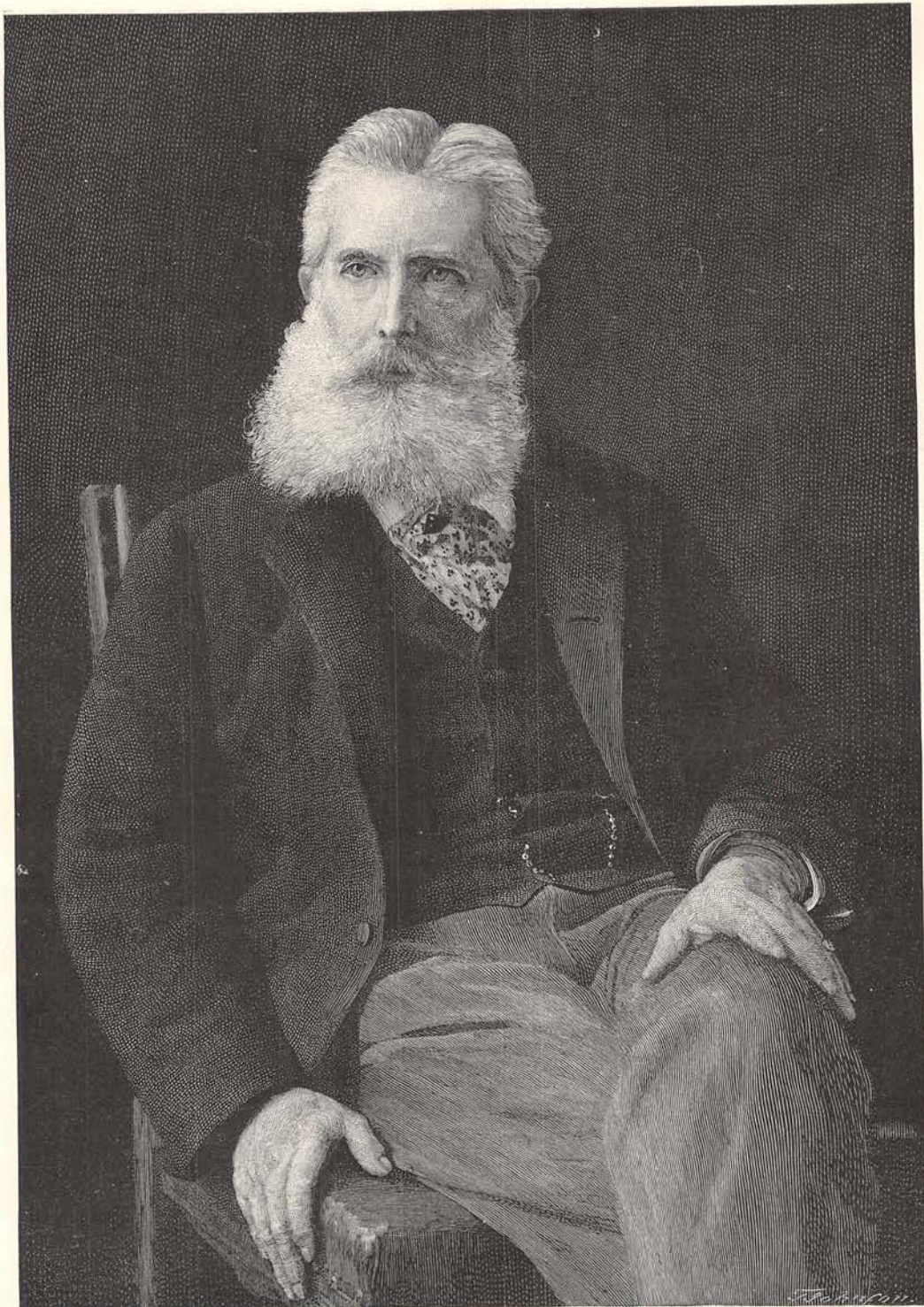


THE first lesson given to us by the Religious Congress was the consciousness of our Christian divisions. I must say that nowhere have I been so struck by the variety and apparent irreconcilability of these divisions as in this country. Not only the internal differences between doctrines divide people, and keep them apart from one another, but even the mere exterior fact of going to one church and not to another. The church, no longer as a spiritual congregation, but as a building, seems to make people feel that they are different from people who go to another building, and that they belong to a different class of human beings. How many seem to believe that they live in order to go to church, and not that they go to church in order to learn how to live! If people would only realize that they have to meet in life and not in church, how unimportant would be the fact that they come from different churches, compared with the fact of their meeting in the same life! Never has this been more beautifully demonstrated than at that memorable scene of the opening session of the Religious Congress on September 11, 1893. How low must have fallen the barriers which separated a Presbyterian from a Methodist when they saw sitting next to one another an archbishop of the Greek Church, a Buddhist from Ceylon, a Catholic bishop, a Confucianist from Japan! How small certain people must have felt with their little

sectarian flag in front of that wonderful platform overshadowed by the banner of brotherhood! These men need not have said a word: they were eloquent enough by their appearance; it was a silent proclamation of unity — not unity as an aim we have to strive for, but unity as an actual force, as an energy in the Greek sense of the word: a latent power which expects to be used, and which must be and will be used, for its possibilities are unlimited.

But they did not remain silent: they began to speak, these men of different nations, different religions, different churches, and all at once we saw that underlying their different forms of faith was one common feeling — that universal striving of man, the same man, toward one and the same divinity. People understood (and how many were astonished in doing so!) that the same faith and hope and love could be expressed through different religious forms, just as the same feelings and ideas can be expressed through different words of different tongues.

That was the second lesson we learned — the changelessness of certain fundamental qualities of human nature by which the equality of men is secured through all the varieties of their physical organization, in spite of all the differences of form in which their spiritual strivings express themselves. It became manifest that the bond which unites the human family is not religion, but religious feeling; for if we say "religion," we inevitably must ask "What religion?" and thousands of answers



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