LORD BEACONSFIELD'S LYRE.

By WILFRID MEYNELL.

LORD BEACONSFIELD'S "lyre"—the phrase is characteristically his own. If his "Revolutionary Epick" were not well received, he would "hurl his lyre to Limbo." So he said, and so he did. What Limbo, with the tradition of Orpheus in the air, thought of the lyre flung from Bradenham House, Bucks, one does not conjecture. In more accessible circles very little has been said about Lord Beaconsfield as a verse-maker, and that little has generally been little to the point. One well-known critic, for instance, wrote in 1868: "The author must long since have repented the publication of the quarto volume entitled 'The Revolutionary Epick,' regarding it, as he infallibly must, as the ill-fated fruit of an unlucky hallucination." So far, however, from regretting the publication of this fragment in 1834, its author republished it thirty years later. He stood by his verse, in his own way, and for what it was worth. To be sure, he did not think it worth very much. He made no secret, when he entered Parliament, that he put aside his dream of writing a great "Epick," or even an epic, which somehow seems a less momentous affair. He had other fish to fry, for which he had keener appetite. Bradenham House, whence he dated the first edition of the "Epick," belonged formerly, if I remember right, to the family of a Poet Laureate. But Mr. Disraeli was bound for a career in which he might become much more than that—even a maker of Laureates.

A critic like Mr. Frederic Harrison, who lately published in a magazine an appreciation of the influence of Lord Beaconsfield's writings, could not well do otherwise than leave his verses on one side. Yet in another magazine, appearing simultaneously, these very verses had a tribute in which the writer of them would have delighted. Dearer to him than any partiality of a critic would be the music composed by a Princess for his words. "The Blue-eyed Maiden's Song" is the title given by the magazine to what it also calls "A new song for girls: Words by the Earl of Beaconsfield: Music by H.R.H. Princess Beatrice." The words, at any rate, are not new. But only devout readers of "Henrietta Temple, a Love Story" can be expected to remember them. Two verses appear in the novel, but only the first verse has been reprinted with the Princess's music. These are the two verses, as originally printed together:—

My heart is like a silent lute
  Some faithless hand has thrown aside;
Those chords are dumb, those tones are mute,
  Which once sent forth a voice of pride.
Yet, even o'er the lute neglected,
  The wind of Heaven will sometimes fly,
And even thus the heart dejected
  Will sometimes answer to a sigh.

And yet to feel another's power
  May grasp the prize for which I pine,
And others now may pluck the flower
  I cherished for this heart of mine—
No more, no more! The hand forsaking,
  The lute must fall and shivered lie
In silence; and my heart thus breaking
  Responds not even with a sigh.

The speaker in the verses is so obviously a man (Captain Armine in the novel) that one wonders how it came by its modern magazine title, "A Blue-eyed Maiden's Song." The blue eye is irrelevant, anyhow. There is no "maiden." The description "new" is not true of the words. The next thing we shall doubt is if it is even a "song."

Another set of verses in "Henrietta Temple" really are in the mouth of the heroine. Before she is assured of the heart of Captain Armine she sings—

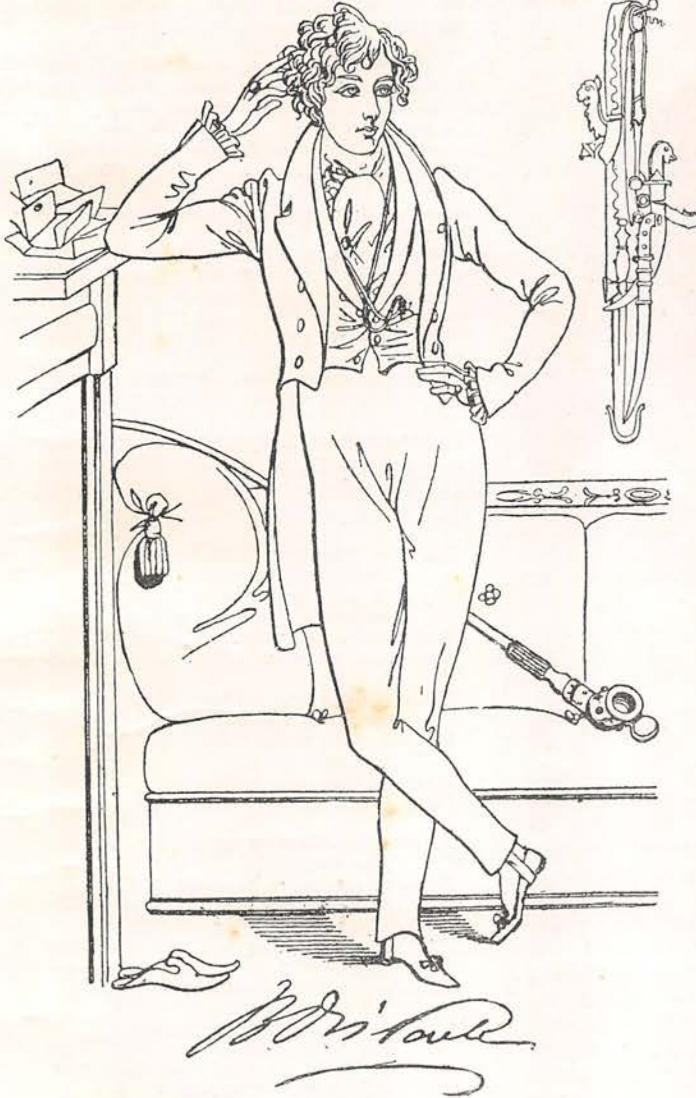
Yes, weeping is madness—
  Away with this tear!
Let no sign of sadness
  Betray the wild anguish I fear.
When we meet him to-night
  Be mute, then, my heart,
And my smile be as bright
  As if we were never to part!

Girl, give me the mirror
  That said I was fair.
Alas! fatal error,
  This picture reveals my despair.
Smiles no longer can pass
  O'er this faded brow,
And I shiver this glass
  Like his love and his fragile vow.

In the novel, all who heard this song became "pensive." But it was "to raise a smile" that the author of "The Young

Duke" palmed off upon Count Frill the verses—

Charming Bignetta! Charming Bignetta!
What a gay little girl is charming Bignetta!
She dances, she prattles,
She rides and she rattles;
But she always is charming—that charming Bignetta!



PORTRAIT OF LORD BEACONSFIELD.
From a Pen-and-Ink Sketch by Maclise.

Charming Bignetta! Charming Bignetta!
What a wild little witch is charming Bignetta!
When she smiles I'm all madness;
When she frowns I'm all sadness;
But she always is smiling—that charming Bignetta!

Charming Bignetta! Charming Bignetta!
What a wicked young rogue is charming Bignetta!
She laughs at my shyness,
And flirts with his Highness;
Yet still is she charming—that charming Bignetta!

Charming Bignetta! Charming Bignetta!
What a dear little girl is charming Bignetta!
"Think me only a sister,"
Said she, trembling. I kissed her.
What a charming young sister is—charming Bignetta!

In "Venetia" are four stanzas, as much in the manner of Byron—one of the novel's mixed heroes—as the author could make them. Marmion Herbert's daughter discovers among her unknown father's manuscripts, and reads "with a flushed cheek and an excited eye," the lines he had written "On the night our daughter was born"; and this is an "Ada, sole daughter" episode done into verse by Disraeli—

Within our heaven of love, the new-born star
We long devoutly watched, like shepherd kings,
Steals into night; and, floating from afar,
Methinks some bright transcendent seraph sings,
Waving with flashing light her radiant wings,
Immortal welcome to the stranger fair:
To us a child is born. With transport clings
The mother to the babe she sighed to bear;
Of all our treasured loves the long-expected heir.

My daughter! can it be a daughter now
Shall greet my being with her infant smile?
And shall I press that fair and taintless brow
With my fond lips, and tempt, with many a wile
Of playful love, those features to beguile
A parent with their mirth? In the wild sea
Of this dark life, behold a little isle
Rises amid the waters, bright and free,
A haven for my hopes of fond security!

And thou shalt bear a name my line has loved,
And their fair daughters owned for many an age,
Since first our fiery blood a wanderer roved,
And made in sunnier lands his pilgrimage,
Where proud defiance with the waters wage
The sea-born city's walls; the graceful towers
Loved by the bard and honoured by the sage!
My own Venetia now shall gild our bowers,
And with her spell enchain our life's enchanted hours!

Oh! if the blessing of a father's heart
Hath aught of sacred in its deep-breathed prayer,

Skilled to thy gentle being to impart,
As thy bright form itself a fate as fair—
On thee I breathe that blessing! Let me share,
O God! her joys; and if the dark behest
Of woe resistless and avoidless care,
Hath not gone forth, oh, spare this gentle guest,
And wreak Thy needful wrath on my resignéd breast!

And Lord Cadurcis writes ten sonnets to Venetia—at one sitting. To be

LADY BEACONSFIELD.

sure, there were plenty of preparations. "Cadurcis began walking up and down the room, evidently under a considerable degree of excitement, for his gestures were violent and his voice" (was) "often audible. About an hour after midnight he rang for his valet, tore off his cravat and hurled it to one corner of the apartment, called for *robe-de-chambre*, soda-water and more lights, seated himself, and began pouring forth, faster almost than his pen could trace, the poem he had been meditating." The fourth and fifth sonnets compare favourably, if anything, with the rest of the series as compositions; and they interest as expressions of the personal homage which Disraeli, in common with the rest of the golden youth of 1837, offered to "the godlike deeds" of Byron, Moore's life of his "noble friend" notwithstanding. So it is that he makes Cadurcis write to and of Venetia—

She was the daughter of a noble race,
That beauteous girl, and yet she owed her name
To one who needs no herald's skill to trace
His blazoned lineage, for his lofty fame
Lives in the mouths of men, and distant climes
Re-echo his wide glory; where the brave
Are honoured, where 'tis noble deemed to save
A prostrate nation, and for future times
Work with a high devotion that no taunt,
Or ribald lie, or zealot 's eager curse,
Or the short-sighted world's neglect may daunt,
That name is worshipped! His immortal verse
Blends with his god-like deeds, a double spell
To bind the coming age he loved so well.

Far from his ancient home, a scatterling
They drove him forth, unconscious of their prize,
And branded as a vile, unhallowed thing
The man who struggled only to be wise.
And even his hearth rebelled, the duteous wife
Whose bosom well might soothe in that dark hour,
Swelled with her gentle force the world's harsh power,
And aimed her dart at his devoted life.
That struck; the rest his mighty soul might scorn,
But when his household gods averted stood,
'Twas the last pang that cannot well be borne
When tortured e'en to torpor: his heart's blood
Flowed to the unseen blow: then forth he went,
And gloried in his ruthless banishment.

To Miss Power, a deaf and dumb grand-niece of Lady Blessington, "Disraeli the Younger" addressed some verses headed "To a Beautiful Mute"—

They say that these sweet lips of thine
Breathe not to speak;
Thy very ears, that seem so fine,
No sound can seek;
And yet thy face beams with emotion,
Restless as the waves of ocean.

'Tis well; thy face and form agree,
And both are fair.
I would not that the child should be
As others are;
I love to mark her, in derision,
Smiling with seraphic vision

At our gifts of vulgar sense,
That cannot stain
Nor mar her mystic innocence,
Nor cloud her brain
With all the dreams of worldly folly,
And its creative melancholy.

To thee I dedicate these lines;
Yet read them not.
Cursed be the art that e'er refines
Thy natural lot;
Read the bright stars, and read the flowers,
And hold sweet converse with the bowers.

A sonnet was written by Mr. Disraeli in 1839 "On the Portrait of Lady Mahon," afterwards the Countess Stanhope (for whose daughter, by-the-way, Lord Macaulay later composed rhymes). This is the sonnet—

Fair lady! thee the pencil of Vandyke
Might well have painted; thine the English air,
Graceful yet earnest, that his portraits bear,
In that far, troubled time when sword and pike
Gleamed round the ancient halls and castles fair

That shrouded Albion's beauty; though when need,
They, too, though soft withal, could boldly dare
Defend the leaguered breach, or charging steed
Mount in their trampled parks. Far different scene
The bowers present before thee; yet serene
Though now our days, if coming time impart
Our ancient troubles, well I ween thy life
Would not reproach thy lot, and what thou art—
A warrior's daughter, and a statesman's wife.

People to whom Lord Beaconsfield was nothing if not sardonic will find his poems a puzzle. There is a vein of Byrony about them, no doubt, but of irony never. True, his verse caught some of his characteristics. You could not say he was always sensitive to the difference, in diction, between pomp and dignity. You must allow that he was not simple even in speeches that came from the heart. His heroes and heroines of fiction make love in—heroics; and, if the rather treacherous tattle of Sir William Gregory is to be taken, Disraeli's own manners in domestic life were not altogether out of keeping with those of his characters. It is no bad compliment to him to say that when he is simplest he is best, as when the beauty of

MR. WYNDHAM-LEWIS, M.P.

Lady Mahon touches him or he is moved by the sight of a girl who is a mute. If, therefore, he ever wrote poems to Mrs. Wyndham-Lewis before or after his marriage, in them, if they are published, we shall expect to meet him at his best. In one sense, however, the lady put an end to his verses, for, by the fortune she brought him, the widow of Mr. Wyndham-Lewis made it possible for her late husband's Parliamentary colleague to persist and to triumph utterly in his political career.

Lord Beaconsfield's only serious pose as Bard is in "The Revolutionary Epick." They were still fond of superfluous *k*'s in 1834. "It was on the plains of Troy," says he, "that I first conceived the idea of this Work." He wrote "work" with a capital *W*, because he deemed himself "in that excited hour, a Poet," and he remembered that "the Poet hath ever embodied the spirit of his Time. Thus the most heroick incident of an heroick age produced in the Iliad an Heroick Epick; the revival of learning and the birth of vernacular genius presented us in the Divine Comedy with a National Epick; and the Reformation and its consequences called from the rapt lyre of Milton a Religious Epick. And the spirit of my Time, shall it alone be uncelebrated? *Standing upon Asia and gazing upon Europe*, with the broad Hellespont alone between us, and the shadow of night descending on the mountains, *these mighty continents*" (*sic*) (the poet here hath a flight indeed, and stands not himself upon "these mighty continents," but makes them stand instead upon themselves) "appeared to me, as it were, the rival principles of government that at present contend for the mastery of the world. 'What!' I exclaimed, 'is the Revolution of France a less important event than the siege of Troy? Is Napoleon a less interesting character than Achilles? For me remains the Revolutionary Epick!'" Only the first three sections of the "Work" were written and published, the author wishing to have the judgment of his contemporaries before proceeding further. "For," says he, "I am not one who find" (*sic*) "consolation for the neglect of my contemporaries in the imaginary plaudits of a more sympathetic posterity."

The expression of this public judgment must have been looked for in criticisms rather than in sales; for only fifty copies of this edition were issued. When, in 1864, Mr. Disraeli sent forth a second edition of his fragment, he did so, one must think, principally because he wanted to dedicate something to his political colleague and leader, the Earl of Derby, then Lord Stanley, "to whom I am indebted for an interesting and faithful friendship." Of this new edition he says: "It is printed from the only copy in my

possession *and*" (*sic*) "which was corrected in 1837 when, after three years' reflection, I had resolved not only to correct, but to complete the work" ("work," alas! with the capital *W* no longer, after the lapse of thirty years). "The somewhat sudden Accession of Her Most Gracious Majesty," he adds, "occasioned in that year a dissolution of Parliament, and *being then returned* to the House of Commons, *these dreams*" (*sic*) "for ever vanished." This is the gist of the Prefaces to the two editions, with that busy interval between them. The style of the Prefaces has at least the interest of being characteristically Disraelian. Of the grammar one may say (since there are superfluous *k*'s about) that it frequently makes one *sic-k*.

Of the Work itself there is not much to be made. It is designed, says the author, to profit "governors and the governed," and "to teach wisdom both to monarchs and multitudes." In fact, it much reminds one of a modern Encyclical. The poem opens with the appearance of Magros, the genius of Feudalism, and of Lyridon, the genius of Federalism, before the throne of Demogorgon. Each makes his plea, and the poem moves through a sort of survey of the social conditions of Man. The sentiments are all exemplary; and the expression is made in blank verse neither better nor worse, neither more nor less inverted and stilted than most of the blank verse of the time, though some of it has had a larger audience and a kinder appreciation. His description of the "Feudal Papacy," of the union between Religion and Loyalty, may be taken as a sample of the rest. He has, first, a sort of picture of a Pontiff, with "Kings as his vassals," and "a kneeling world, alike alone in faith"—

The children of the South with burning zeal
Ecstatic, wild; of stormier souls the test
Their flashing eyes. The Northman's heart devout,
Deep, and serenely gazing with a glance
Stern as his clime. Hark! the ascending prayer,
As universal dew—the vesper beads
That nun-like Nature tells. Send forth their voices
The mountains of the world; each stream its choir;
The simultaneous cities and the woods
Echo that song sublime, and o'er the sea
Tribute their praise the isles. But silent now,
For from his vest, in likeness of a dove,
A vase forth draws that mighty Presbyter.
A crowd of crownèd beings round his throne
Gather; of earth the consecrated Kings:
On them that vase he pours; a deed is done
That takes Time's breath away—of mighty faith
A regal baptism. To each purple robe
A nation clings. To heavenly delegates
A willing fealty what soul denies?
Thus all its harsher attributes are lost
To stern Authority; Obedience now
Worship becomes. Thus Loyalty is born.

So much for Magros. In the Second Book the turn of Lyridon comes; and the Third Book has the First Napoleon's Italian campaign for its theme. The abandonment of the Work at that point—an abandonment ratified complacently in the retrospect—was the Poet's frank acknowledgment of failure. He did not try the vaunt—"The time will come when you *will* hear me"—upon Parnassus. That limitation, and the recognition of it, give new force to his otherwise abounding success. They accentuate the assurance with which he made his amazing march from his desk in Old Jewry to the right hand of the Queen as her Prime Minister and Prime Favourite, not forfeiting by the way his individuality—or even his idiosyncrasy. So that there are, perhaps, people who, like myself, can spare some passing interest for even a failure of the Earl of Beaconsfield.

LORD BEACONSFIELD.