THE YELLOW BOOK.*

The new quarterly, which calls itself the Yellow Book, contains about half-a-dozen of the silliest articles that have appeared anywhere for many months, and another half-dozen that are quite admirable. Among the latter are Mr. Henry James’s short story “The Death of the Lion,” Mr. William Watson’s two sonnets, the “Fool’s Hour, A Fragment of a Comedy,” which is the joint work of Mr. George Moore and John Oliver Hobbes, and Mr. George Sainsbury’s “Sentimental Cellar,” which is a pleasant conceit. The “Death of the Lion” is very near Mr. Henry James’s best; there is satire, humour, and epigram enough in its fifty pages for half-a-dozen ordinary stories. We could wish that Mr. Watson would not use “viewless” for invisible.—(Mr. Gosse, by the way, has a worse word in a poem to be found here, none other than “quenchless”)—but there is stateliness and sanity in both these sonnets, and we could advise a certain Mr. Beerbohm, of whom more presently, to read the first rather carefully. There seems to be more of John Oliver Hobbes than of Mr. Moore in the fragment of the comedy, but whosoever it is, it is good reading. We must say a word for Dr. Richard Garnett’s “Translations of Tansillo,” which are excellent in themselves, and accompanied by a learned and discerning comment.

But these are not the things for which the Yellow Book has been awaited, and they seem oddly out of place in the throng that surrounds them. For the decadents are here with pen and pencil, as “exquisitely morbid” and as unconsciously comic as usual. Mr. Aubrey Beardsley achieves excesses hitherto undreamt of. He seems to have conceived the disagreeable idea of taking certain arrangements of lines invented by the Japanese, and specially suited to blithe and pleasant freaks of decoration, and applying them to the most morbid of grotesques. His offence is the less to be condoned because he has undoubted skill as a line draftsman and has shown himself capable of refined and delicate work. But as regards certain of his inventions in this number, especially the thing called “The Sentimental Education,” and that other thing to which the name of Mrs. Patrick Campbell has somehow become attached, we do not know that anything would meet the case except a short Act of Parliament to make this kind of thing illegal. After these it is balm to sore eyes to turn to Sir Frederic Leighton’s studies, to Mr. Furse’s charming “Portrait of a Lady,” and to Mr. Rothenstein’s drawing which bears the same title. The only writer who is entirely worthy to be ranked with Mr. Beardsley is, we think, Mr. Max Beerbohm, who contributes a “Defence of Cosmetics.” It is Mr. Beerbohm’s opinion that we are “ripe for a new era of artifice.” The “old prejudice is a-dying,” and this is a time of “jolliness and glad indulgence”:

For the era of rouge is upon us, and as only in an elaborate era can man by the tangled accrescency of his own pleasures and emotions reach that refinement which is his highest excellence, and by making himself, so to say, independent of Nature, comes nearest to God, so only in an elaborate era is woman perfect. Artifice is the strength of the world, and in that same mask of paint and powder shadowed with vermeil tint and most thinly pencilled is woman’s strength.

Is not this triumphantly silly? Think of this “elaborate era”—the men with their “accrescencies” of pleasures and emotions, the women with their “accrescencies” of powder and vermeil tint: what an ecstatic picture! The mere thought of it sends Mr. Beerbohm into transports of nonsense. Cosmetics are the cause of causes, their revival “so splendid an influence, conjuring boons innumerable.” “The season of the unsophisticated is gone by, and the young girl’s final extinction
the unsophisticated is gone by, and the young girl's final extinction beneath the rising tide of coxcombism will leave no gap in life, and will rob art of nothing." If anyone objects, Mr. Beerbohm has a way with him:

"Tush," I can hear some damned flutterate exclaim, "girlishness and innocence are as strong and as permanent as innocence itself."

Genial, is it not? One "darned flutterate" found himself wondering how any editor came to print such pernicious nonsense. It is almost a relief, after this, to fall back upon the mild futility of "George Egerton's" contribution. She was in an omnibus, and a "precious little pearl of thought," a "rare little-mind-being," was "evolving slowly out of her inner-chaos," when a fellow-passenger with a white-handled umbrella came in, and "trampled it unto death." That is all, and nothing more. But having lost the idea, it was at least rather thirsty of "George Egerton" to persevere with her story, nevertheless. That is, or ought to be, against the rules of the game. Other contributors, however, do their best to atone by piling up the agony. Who can fail to be harrowed by the story of Mr. Dane, the elderly failure, whose midnight agonies and-death Mr. Henry Harland tells without sparing? He is so utterly demoralised and worn out that his heart stopped altogether when he dropped a little keepsake mirror and broke it on the hearthstone. There was a whole world of melancholy in his hand:

How white it was, how thin, how withered; the nails were parched into minute corrugations; the veins stood out like dark wires; the skin hung loosely upon it, and had a dry lustre.

This helps to brace us up for Mr. Hubert Crackanthorpe's even more merciless narrative of the wretched girl who is seized with a galloping consumption. Then, to suit a different mood, there are the minor poets who vie with each other in showing how immensely emancipated they are. We thought for a moment, when we saw Mr. Ie Gallienne had chosen to write about a tree, that he at least had got a thoroughly healthy and simple subject. But we didn't know our decadent. This is how it comes out:

Some Rizzi nightingale that plained adulterous love
Beneath the boudoir-bough of some fast-married bird,
Some dove that coed to someone else's lawful dove,
And felt the dagger-beak pierce while his lady heard.

Then, maybe, dangling from thy gloomy gallows boughs
A human corpse swings, mournful, rattling bones and chains—
His eighteen-century flesh hath fattened nineteenth-century cows—
Ghastly Æolian harp fingered of winds and rains.

It is like a delirious dream, but the first verse would be hard to beat for bad taste, and the second for sheer ugliness. We even prefer Mr. Arthur Symons's "Stella Maris," though the figure of the Romeo of the poem gains nothing in poetic distinction when he boasts a plurality of Julicuts.

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ROSSETTI AND THE PRE-RAPHAELITES.

"Dante Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement." By Esther Wood. (Sampson Low.)—This book gives an intelligent and sympathetic account of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, as well as of the life of Rossetti, whom the author rightly regards as the most potent and original force in the "brotherhood."

The study does not pretend to add any material information to what is already known, either of Rossetti or of the Pre-Raphaelites generally; but a few personal touches are supplied which will be new to most readers. The author speaks of "Dante Rossetti"; but it is interesting to know that the poet was proud, on occasion, of his full and mellifluous title. When he entered the Academy Schools, and was required to give his name to Mr. Jones, R.A., the keeper, Rossetti amused his companions and impressed the venerable official by slowly rolling out, in his rich, sonorous tones, 'Gabriel—Charles—Dante—Rossetti.' 'Dear me, sir,' stammered Mr. Jones, in confused amazement.