



CERTAIN mansions in Art's home, without being wealthy, splendid, magisterial or of god-gauged proportions, though not always without, have a quality of apartness strangely attractive. When the afternoon mist gnaws the hill-hollow leech-like, till it become cavitous in the twilight, and the head and shoulders of the mountain hang—like the gorgeous roof of a crystal palace—above receding halls of quietude, vaguely visible through the vapour-veil (transparent to the eye of Turner, that man who scaled heaven every week-day, and on Sundays went to Wapping; to other eyes but tantalizingly suggestive of discovery); there, or, as Swinburne sings,

“Here, where the world is quiet,”

by the hearth of a mind, when the evensong dies down, Memory is a mother, Passion a soulless woman of perfect charm, and, quite separate from her, Love like a sister or dear friend clothed and in her right mind: there too Mystery moves a maiden, Awe is a child, and Fear impossible.

Such is the aspect of mind or mountain not unfitly to be termed holy—but for the narrow and squalid daily application of the word—which is found from time to time the only, the chief or one of the decorations of a room in our Lady's House.

To me especially certain works, singly or collectively, of a few artists seem to be the produce of such holy seclusion, not from the world, but in it: the preface of Boccaccio's Decameron, with its sweet all-fatherly benignity; Dante's Vita Nuova, the conceited, imaginative masque of love and attendant sorrows.

To *Chérie*, the tragedy of love-starved maidenhood, De Goncourt has imparted something of the parental tenderness of the old Italian; while Rossetti's *House of Life* has more than surpassed, at least in scope, the old love-drama.

Other names might be added, other works particularized. I do not attempt that completeness of criticism, necessarily futile, which leaves nought unsaid: striving merely to give form to my own impression on reading the work of De Guérin; ascribing to him the quality I have attempted to single out from among the rich dowries of the masters.

The clatter of centaur heels has not the harsh factual ring of realism, yet is perfectly whole in life-likeness; though separated by the immense fog of time's breath, palpable in the cold embrace of space, from our ears.

"The rumbling of my going is more beautiful than the plaints of woods, than the noise of water."

When, cooled by night's exhalation of day's sweat, he in the mouth of the cavern hears the inarticulate sleep-speech of the earth mother,—

"Then the foreign life, that had penetrated me during the day, detached itself drop by drop, returning to the peaceful bosom of Cybele; as, after the shower, the remnants of the rain attached to the leafage have their fall and rejoin the runnels."

Many, probably, may here stop, surprised to find freshly handled, work already once finished and signed by Matthew Arnold. He, in remodelling each sentence, seems not only to become a distinct but a distant echo. "What is it," I cried, "this outside world whither my mother is borne, &c.," this is not literal, and tastes ready made to my palate; as does not the piquant personal use of the word "dehors" as exceptional in French as its literal transcript in English.

"At times, when watching in the caverns, I have believed that I was about to overhear the dreams of the sleeping Cybele; and that the mother of gods, betrayed by sleep, was babbling secrets: but I have never recognized aught but sounds which dissolved in the breath of the night, or words inarticulate as the bubbling hum of rivers."

When his mother returns with material memories of the Unknown fresh on her body,—

"My growing-up was almost entirely in the shades where I was born. My abode was buried at such a depth in the thickness of the mountains, that I should have been ignorant of the side of issue, if, turning astray sometimes in at this opening, the winds had not driven there freshets of air and sudden troubles. Sometimes also my mother returned, surrounded with the perfume of valleys, or dripping from waves she frequented. And, these incomings she made without ever instructing me of valleys or rivers, but followed by their emanations, disquieting my spirits, I roved to and fro agitated in my shades. 'What are they,' I said to myself, 'these withouts, to which my mother betakes herself, and in which reigns something of such power that it calls her to it so frequently?'"

When, turning, he views his flanks' labour,—

"Thus, while my agitated flanks possessed the inebriation of the course, above them I relished its pride, and turning my head, I stayed myself some time to consider my smoking crupper."

When arrested in full gallop by imminent approach to the Unseen,—

"In the midst of the most violent courses, it has happened to me suddenly to break off my gallop, as if an abyss yawned up to my feet, or a god stood upright before me."

Pervading these passages is the home-feeling of such rooms as reveal Art housewifely. This sense within the sense is not perhaps the grandest quality for the artist; yet is it not one of the rarest? and to it is here added beauty of detailed—especially of landscape—description, as, in *The Bacchante*, of the wind-cradled birds.

"When they, obeying the shades, lower their flight towards the forests, their feet stay themselves against branches, which, piercing into the sky, are easily rocked by gusts which pass across the night.

For even into their sleep they revel in the seizure of the wind; and like

their plumage to shiver and dispart at the least breaths that come upon the top of the woods."

After a day which the warm wine of Bacchus has made drowsy,—

"The birds lifted themselves above the woods, searching the sky, if the going of the winds is re-established; but, still drunken, their wings barely furnished a rickety flight full of error."

A marvel too this latter work; though not approaching The Centaur in realization, yet has it, and perhaps on this account, a more unbridled sympathy with the moodiness of Nature melting Maenad mountain and moving sea into a common existence.

"Sometimes from the hesitation of her steps, seeking assurance, and from the air of her head, constrained and laden, one had said she walked at the bottom of the ocean."

"When I stayed my feet on the highest of the hills, I shook like the statues of the gods in the arms of priests who lift them up to the sacred pedestals."

This oneness with Nature was his as a little lad, when the wind went through him, standing under, as through the branches bending over, and drew from both an adequate expression.

"Oh! how beautiful they are, those noises of Nature, those noises abroad in the airs, which rise with the sun and follow him; follow the sun as a grand concert follows a king.

Those noises of waters, of winds, of woods, of hills, of valleys; the rollings of thunders and of globes in space; magnificent noises, with which are mixed the finer voices of birds and of thousands of chanting beings. At each step, under each leaf, is a little violin.

Oh! how beautiful they are, those noises of Nature, those noises abroad in the airs.

How full of them are the days of summer! What resoundings, when the plains burst into life and joy like big grown-up girls; when from all sides rise laughter and songs; the cadence of flails through the air, with the accompaniment of crickets and those harmonious and inexpressible breaths that are without doubt the guardian angels of the fields; those angels who have for hair the rays of the sun.

Oh! how beautiful they are, those noises of Nature, those noises abroad in the airs."

Of the man, author of these few pages where one scents, plucked in Mnemosyne's hand, flowers which bloomed nigh two thousand years ago, finding them just as sweet as to-day's with this difference, the pungency of immortality, we know all that is ever known of the dead, friends' opinions, letters, journal, and all, to the least facts of his life, uninteresting, apparently unimportant, except as fetters. Many, whom his work attracts, by its freedom from the cloying of modern circumstance so pitifully visible even in the best work, would turn in disgust from the man, never freed entirely from a repulsive Christianity, to which his nature was antipathetic. His journal and letters are, however, enlivened by draughtsmanlike sketches of landscape, though burdened by much soul-questioning, doubting and obduracy of dogmatic faith.

Among his most famous critics have been Georges Sand, Sainte-Beuve and Matthew Arnold. The first wrote him a worthy panegyric, by way of introduction to fame: with the two latter, however much we may admire their characters as men, the foolish notion of immaculate criticism blights all freshness of individual sympathy, or nearly all, in their work; both seem chiefly engrossed with the capacity for wear presented by the cloak of accident, which in this case proves too heavy for the spirit-fire and ends by smothering it.

Had I read Mr. Swinburne's essay on Matthew Arnold, I had rejoiced to have quoted passages in my corroboration; and I only regret none could have been found to confirm, to my mind, right appreciation of De Guérin's masterly prose.

Matthew Arnold, when he leaves the man for the essential artist, compares him to Keats; which comparison seems to me inapt. De Guérin had none of the splendid virility and spontaneity of Keats; Keats had not De Guérin's exquisite taste and next to perfect finish. Keats is ardent, creative, curious; De Guérin reflective, analytical, nice. They have in common delicate susceptibility,—a small link to chain the frank revelry of the Englishman to the composed reserve of the Frenchman.

To my mind the work presenting the closest English equivalent to De Guérin's is the *Marius* of Pater, though wider in scope, more difficult of execution, and less evidently perfect in realization; there is a staid mannerliness in their treatment, and a ruminant delectation of after-thought, so at variance with Keats's masterly relish of attainment, which to the manly might of his impetuosity appeared always discovery.

He said, "If a sparrow come before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel." How different the "*Toutes choses mieux ressenties que senties*" of De Guérin; whose nature, if not ample like that of Keats, is rare, refined, a thing set apart for the delight of separate natures, lulling them into the reflective mood of long interminable summer afternoons, the indolent mental season of mature comprehensive possession!