

GARTH WILKINSON.



AMES JOHN GARTH WILKINSON, born so early as January 1812, still lives; and still his tall strong frame wears a memory of the robustness of his long youth. The most of his life abnormally active, the harvest of it is little "sensational." For the physician sows seeds of which others gather the fruit; an exponent of spiritual science writes for obscurity (and who gives himself with passion to an exalted materialism, as Emanuel Swedenborg's, wraps a veil about obscurity itself); the dilettante has his circle of literary friends and is like to pass with them. Yet in the NEW CHURCH Dr. Wilkinson has a great worth, a position almost apostolic in its dignity; the man of virtue and knowledge is noble in spirit circles.

Dr. Wilkinson's literary labour has been great. His are many of the accepted translations of Swedenborg into English, and he has written much commentary of that seer's system: works indeed only to be received as ultimate by a New Churchman, but surely not the exclusive property of the Swedenborgian in their ultimate value. Their titles speak, wanting only the small knowledge of Swedenborg's writings which is universal to explain them, and indicate their purpose: EPIDEMIC MAN; THE AFRICAN AND THE TRUE CHRISTIAN RELIGION HIS MAGNA CHARTA. Also derived from Swedenborg, but infinitely expanded, is the marvellous book, not authorised I think by the College of Surgeons, called THE HUMAN BODY AND ITS CONNEXION WITH MAN, laying down a new scientific method, purporting to be a beginner's book of physiology.

These facts merely interesting to a narrower interest.

"The book attracted the attention of Rossetti," criticism will say, whenever hunger drives it to IMPROVISATIONS FROM THE SPIRIT. The volume is uncut, thickish; of the size known technically as 24mo. It contains one hundred and nine poems. It is bound in cloth of a cold piercing green colour. Its date is 1857.

The poems vary in length from eight verses to fourteen pages: their form is in all cases rudimentary, without technical ingenuity; especially in the rhymes. They are narrative and philosophical, the lyric character all but absent. Some, the most virile and free, have abstractions for subject: Newness, Gentleness, Uncertainty. Many are addressed to persons, to the members of the writer's family and circle, to W. M. Wilkinson, the writer of the book upon Spirit-drawing, a dozen or so of them. Many again describe the notable, in remotest symbolic terms; poets, philosophers and scientific men: Poe, Turner, Hahnemann, Finden the engraver, Berzelius, Chatterton, Tegnér, taken at random. High ethical and religious dicta are hung, for the rest, upon a variety of topics, surgical, biblical, physiological, political and religious; the object of the writer seeming to be to look at all the world from the very original standpoint he was able to reach, as it lay around him, radiating from his own heart and brain and soul.

Breadth, fearlessness and indifference give the first shock in the Improvisations.

provisations. These qualities perhaps the best excuse for the comparison to Blake's poems one sees inevitable; better than similarity of strange epithet and symbol, derived from a common source, let us not say the spiritual world, (at least yet) but disposition towards it.

Occasionally the impression, the mere vibration produced by the work as literary composition, is like that produced by some of Wordsworth's most lyrical work, the Lucy poems a good instance: where doggerel will break suddenly into a cry, so shrill and clear and passionate, that the doggerel becomes an essential to the song's worth: fusion of idea in Wilkinson corresponding to fusion of emotion in Wordsworth.

A little extract from MADNESS will illustrate much at this point:

He lies down to sleep:
Cockatrices come,
Purring from the deep,
From the Demon home:

Purring cats of hell,
Mousing for the mad:
They have left their shell,
For a season glad.

And he dreams their dream:
'Tis a woven lie:
Providence's stream
Runneth from on high:

They do ride the stream:
They are Kings of God:
And the sun world's gleam
Issues from their nod.

In great honesty, quotations must not be made from the book except with reference to subject. The injustice is best annulled by a further quotation, on the understanding that these extracts from MADNESS and SOLITUDE are to represent two poles of expression (moderation has guided the choice in each case):

I see it now: it lies upon the plain,
Like the big drops of summer's pregnant rain,
And o'er the city hovers, in the breeze,
And windeth like a river through the trees.

The darkness doth espy it where it lies:
And the night loveth it thro' many eyes:
And jewels of the morning come and play
Around the footsteps of its wintry way:

It is a shape in starry garments clad;
It is a joy whose feet are ever sad:
And in its hands it holds a book of light,
Whose leaves are anthems of creation's height.

Here the element of imagination is sufficient: the cat serpents which wait upon the mad, and the personification of solitude; but the pulse beats low in these passages against the quick-following strokes of *THE BIRTH OF ADAM*, where brain and spirit are quick in every verse. Criticism of Wilkinson will never need to lose itself in eulogy; but certain summits in the *IMPROVISATIONS* are signal attainments of imagination: *THE BIRTH OF ADAM* among these, and in *PATIENCE* the mighty image where the vaulted back of the ass Christ rode into the State of God is become in heaven the bridge that angels walk. A further point must be touched upon (for a chief reason of respect to the poet, and others): Dr. Wilkinson's assertion that the poems were written by impression. To say no word on this subject beyond what Dr. Wilkinson has said in the note at the end of *IMPROVISATIONS* is the only way to escape the necessity of going back to radical principles of sciences not yet fully orthodox.

"A theme," says Dr. Wilkinson, describing his essays of writing from Influx, "is chosen and written down.* So soon as this is done, the first "impression upon the mind which succeeds the act of writing the title, is "the beginning of the evolution of that theme; no matter how strange "or alien the word or phrase may seem. That impression is written down "and then another, and another until the piece is concluded."

"However odd the introduction may be, I have always found it lead by "an infallible instinct into the subject."

"The depth of treatment is in strict proportion to the warmth of heart, "elevation of mind, and purity of feeling existing at the time."

"In placing reason and will in the second place, it is indispensable for "man, whose highest present faculties these are, to be well assured what "is put in the first place. Hence, Writing from an Influx which is really "out (-side) of your Self, or so far within your Self as to amount to the "same thing, is either a religion or a madness. In allowing your faculties "to be directed to ends you know not of, there is only One Being to whom "you dare entrust them: only the Lord.† Of consequence, before writing "by Influx, your prayer must be to Him, for His Guidance, Influx, and "Protection."

The argument following exhibits Dr. Wilkinson's view that the character of his inspiration was pentecostal, as he proceeds to demonstrate his orthodoxy as a New Churchman. "Suffice it to say," a further explanation adds, "that every piece was produced without premeditation or preconception:

* Sometimes accompanied by a prayer or spell, invariably trash:

First shall his state be sung: (Turner's)
Then his art's bell be rung.

† Cf. Jakob Böhme, *Sämmtliche Werke*, Vol. vi. page 445: "Davon weiss ich zu sagen, was das für ein Licht und Bestätigung sei, wer das Centrum Naturä erfindet. Aber keine eigene Vernunft erlanget es; Gott versperret es zwar Niemandem, aber es muss in Gottesfurcht mit stetem Anhalten und Beten gefunden werden . . . sage ich treulich, als ich hoch im Centro Naturä und im Principio des Lebens erkannt habe."

“tion: had these processes stolen in, such production would have been
“impossible. The longest pieces in the volume occupied from thirty to
“forty-five minutes.* The production was attended by no feeling, and by
“no fervour, but only by an anxiety of all the circumstant faculties, to
“observe the unlooked for evolution, and to know what would come of it.”

An isolated individual opinion has only a limited worth; another critic
or occasion may develop the suggestion that the phenomenon of the Wil-
kinson poems is that of ECSTATIC MEMORY. The experience of all poets,
the sharply defined periods of their power, and the links between the life of
thought and the moment of creation, shall come in aid to that intent. For
a heavenly development there are two general requisites. The first is, an
unremitting assiduity in all that naturally concerns the subject: the entire
knowledge and manipulation and progress of the thing as far as industry
can attain them. The second is, the heart's Prayer to the Lord, in New
Church language, as good for the moment as any other name for spiritual
disposition.

Concerning the speech of angels with man, Swedenborg lays down that
the thought of man coheres with his memory, and his speech flows from it,
therefore, when an angel or spirit is turned to him and conjoined with him.
This is one of a thousand such definitions of Swedenborg which cover
more or less completely, and invest such results as the Improvisations with
authority, in the sense of spiritual knowledge.

JOHN GRAY.

P.S.—As an afterthought perhaps there may be no harm in printing out
THE BIRTH OF ADAM in extenso:

From the rock a sound went forth :
'Twas an echo of the north :
On the sea much people stood :
'Twas the archangelic brood.

There was silver silence heard :
Sound as of creation's bird,
When with noiselessness of wing,
He doth wake the morning's string.

Ever and anon the noon
Glowed with deeper presence down,
And the archangelic band,
Mated heart, and clasped hand.

Came a finger o'er the sea,
Shoulder in eternity,
Where the palace infinite
Darkens with excess of light.

And

* The poem called *The Second Völuspá*, the longest in the book (336 unrhymed two-footed verses) occupied from fifty to sixty minutes.

And it stooped to rock of earth,
Touched it with a loving girth;
Spanned it betwixt finger span.
Where a lightning river ran.

Where a love-eternal ray
From each finger-tip did play,
And the rock between was changed,
Where the loving lightning ranged.

And the mood of many things,
Rose into the air on wings,
And the river-lightning ran,
Music in creation-plan.

Then the rock perceived its glow,
And the rock began to flow,
And the image of the skies,
Slowly from the rock did rise.

And the finger-tips alone,
Were applied unto the stone,
And the builded Adam rose,
Like a man of outward shows.

And the mystery now lay
In a second finger-ray,
For the Adam incomplete,
Wanted all his bosom's heat.

So the fingers once again,
Sprinkled on a lightning rain:
And the mystery of love,
Through Adamic heart did move.

But the fingers wandered now
To his vacancy of brow,
And the place of thought was filled
With the light those fingers willed.

Then his feet were next correct:
And no station circumspect,
But was put within their palms,
Fit for terra firma's calms.

And his fingers, chosen joints,
That the oil of skill anoints,
Were the last completed tools:—
Over these the spirit rules.

So was Adam planned and made,
And his form and figure 'rayed
In the heaven, law after law,
In the firmamental jaw.

But no life was yet within :
For the heaven is but a skin :
And Archangels are but flies,
Save for that within them lies.

So in wonder silences,
Moved in rest eternal breeze,
And did mould without all ken
Body-soul in spirit men.

And then Adam lived : and life
Rolled down orders' stages rife :
And the rock of earth that stood,
Sailed for time on primal flood.