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LITERARY
IDEALS IN
IRELAND. /

By JOHN EGLINTON; *and others*.
W. B. YEATS
A. E.;
W. LARMINIE.

PUBLISHED BY T. FISHER UNWIN, LONDON.
And at the DAILY EXPRESS OFFICE, DUBLIN.
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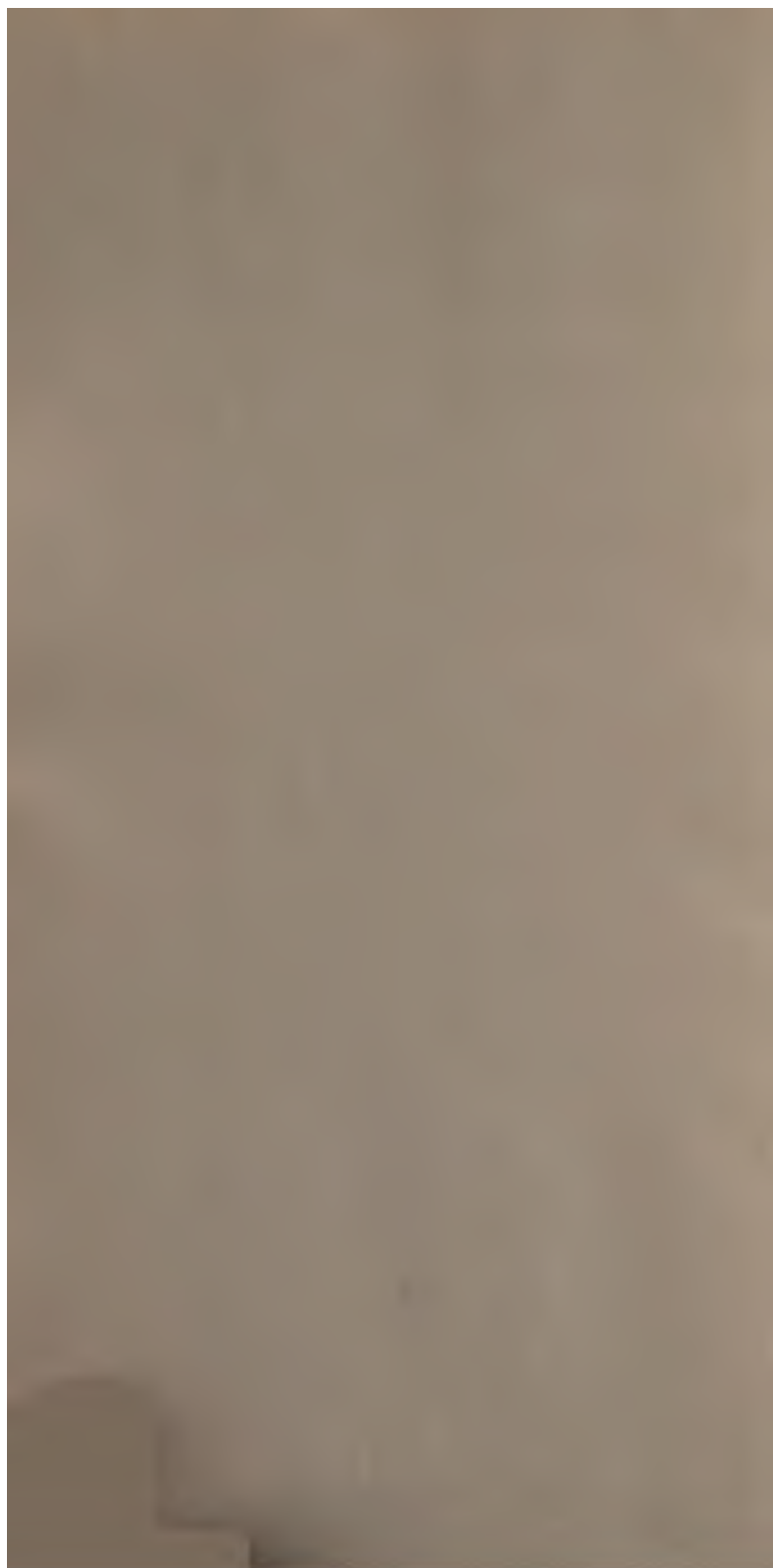
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LITERARY IDEALS IN IRELAND.

REVISED
EDITION
1905

By JOHN EGLINTON; *and others*:

W. B. YEATS

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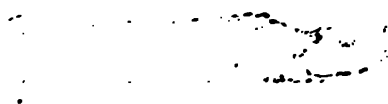
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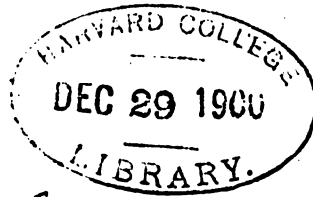


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YIP HING
YIP HING
YIP HING

EDITOR'S NOTE.

THE following articles constitute a controversy which was not intended when the first article was written, but which spontaneously grew from week to week in the Saturday issues of the **DAILY EXPRESS**, and developed, as will be seen, a certain organic unity. Written by men who are amongst the foremost of the modern school of Irish writers, they reveal aims and views so original and so illustrative of the new movement of ideas which is observable in contemporary Ireland, that it was felt it would be interesting to bring them together in volume form, if only as furnishing a possible chapter of Irish literary history.

DUBLIN, May, 1899.

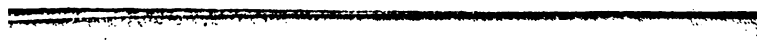
1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that this is crucial for ensuring transparency and accountability in the organization's operations.

2. The second part outlines the various methods and tools used to collect and analyze data. It mentions the use of surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gather information from stakeholders. Additionally, it discusses the application of statistical software to process and interpret the collected data.

3. The third part describes the results of the data analysis. It highlights the key findings and trends observed, such as the increasing demand for certain services and the declining interest in others. It also notes the challenges faced during the analysis process and the steps taken to overcome them.

4. The final part provides a summary of the overall findings and offers recommendations for future actions. It suggests that the organization should focus on improving its service quality and expanding its reach to new markets. It also recommends regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of the implemented strategies.

**What Should be the Subjects
of a National Drama?**



What Should be the Subjects of National Drama ?

SUPPOSING a writer of dramatic genius were to appear in Ireland, where would he look for the subject of a national drama ? This question might serve as a test of what nationality really amounts to in Ireland—a somewhat trying one, perhaps, yet it is scarcely unfair to put the question to those who speak of our national literature with hardly less satisfaction in the present than confidence in the future. Would he look for it in the Irish legends, or in the life of the peasantry and folk-lore, or in Irish history and patriotism, or in life at large as reflected in his own consciousness ? There are several reasons for thinking that the growing hopes of something in store for national life in this country are likely to come to something. In the great countries of Europe, although literature is apparently as prosperous as ever and is maintained with a circumstance which would seem to ensure it eternal honour, yet the springs from which the modern literary movements have been fed are probably dried

up—the springs of simplicity, hope, belief, and an absolute originality like that of Wordsworth. ~~as seems likely,~~ as seems likely, the approaching ~~changes on~~ the Continent are to be filled with great social and political questions and events which can hardly have immediate expression in literature, it is quite conceivable that literature, as it did once before, would migrate to a quiet country like Ireland, where there is no great tradition to be upset or much social sediment to be stirred up, and where the spectacle of such changes might afford a purely intellectual impulse. More important, of course, and certain than any such chances from without is the positive feeling of encouragement which is now taking the place of the hatreds and despondencies of the past. We may think that the peasantry are outside the reach of culture, that the gentry exhaust their function in contributing able officers to the British army, and that, frankly, there is nothing going on in the political or ecclesiastical or social life of Ireland on which to rest any but the most sober hopes for the future, still no one can say that political feebleness or stagnation might not be actually favourable to some original manifestation in the world of ideas. What Renan says, in speaking of the Jews, that “a nation whose mission it is to revolve in its bosom spiritual truths is often weak politically,” may be used with regard to

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fluence us as they may. The significance of that interest in folk-lore and antiquities, which is so strong in this country, can hardly be different from that of the writings of Herder and others in German literature, and may lie in this, that some hint is caught in such studies of the forgotten mythopoetic secret.

As to Irish history and the subjects which it offers—a well-known Scotch Professor once said that Ireland was not a nation because it had never had a Burns nor a Bannockburn. It is, however, as reasonable to think that these glorious memories of Scottish nationality will form a drag on its further evolution as that the want of a peasant poet, or of a recollection of having at least once given the Saxons a drubbing, will be fatal to an attempt to raise people above themselves in this country by giving expression to latent ideals. Ireland must exchange the patriotism which looks back for the patriotism which looks forward. The Jews had this kind of patriotism, and it came to something, and the Celtic peoples have been remarkable for it. The Saxon believes in the present, and, indeed, it belongs to him. The Romance nations, from whose hold the world has been slipping, can hardly be expected just yet to give up the consolations of history.

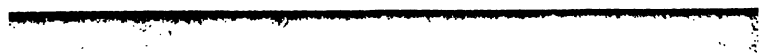
In short, we need to realise in Ireland that a national drama or literature must

spring from a native interest in life and its problems and a strong capacity for life among the people.] If these do not, or cannot exist, there cannot exist a national drama or literature. In London and Paris they seem to believe in theories and "movements," and to regard individuality as a noble but "impossible" savage; and we are in some danger of being absorbed into their error. Some of our disadvantages are our safeguards. In all ages poets and thinkers have owed far less to their countries than their countries have owed to them.

JOHN EGLINTON.

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A Note on National Drama.



A Note on National Drama.

Mr. Yeats added these words, as a post-script, to an article on "The Poetry and Stories of Miss Nora Hopper" :—

I had some thought of replying to an article headed, "What should be the Subjects of a National Drama?" in your issue of last Saturday, but found, when I considered the matter, that this article, which I had already finished, answered the most important of your contributor's arguments. He said that "these subjects" (ancient legends) "obstinately refuse to be taken out of their old environment and be transplanted into the world of modern sympathies. The proper mode of treating them is a secret lost with the subjects themselves." And I have given the example of Ibsen, whose "Peer Gynt" founded on "these subjects" is not only "national literature," the very thing your contributor said it could not be, but the chief glory of "the national literature" of its country, and the example of Wagner, whose dramas, also founded upon "these subjects," are becoming to Germany what the Greek Tragedies were to Greece.

The paragraphs of his article which Mr. Yeats thought answers to arguments of Mr. John Eglinton's were as follow:—

All great poets—Dante not less than Homer and Shakespeare—speak to us of the hopes and destinies of mankind in their fullness; because they have wrought their poetry out of the dreams that were dreamed before men became so crowded upon one another, and so buried in their individual destinies and trades, that every man grew limited and fragmentary. If you were to take out of poetry the personages and stories and metaphors, that first, it may be, visited the shepherds and hunters, who lived before men tilled the ground, not merely its substance, but its language would crumble to nearly nothing. Modern poetry grows weary of using over and over again the personages and stories and metaphors that have come to us through Greece and Rome, or from Wales and Brittany through the middle ages, and has found new life in the Norse and German legends. William Morris's "Sigurd," if it is as fine as it seemed to me some years ago, may yet influence the imagination of Europe, and Henrik Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" and "The Heroes of Heligoland" are already great influences, while Richard Wagner's dramas of "The Ring," are, together with his mainly Celtic "Parsifal" and "Lohengrin," and "Tristan and Isolde," the most passionate influence in the

arts of Europe. The Irish legends, in popular tradition and in old Gaelic literature, are more numerous, and as beautiful as the Norse and German legends, and alone among great European legends have the beauty and wonder of altogether new things. May one not say, then, without saying anything improbable, that they will have a predominant influence in the coming century, and that their influence will pass through many countries?

* * * *

Miss Hopper merely describes the Temple of the Heroes as being on an island of the Shannon, and is sometimes even less certain about the places of her legends, though she has much feeling for landscape; and this uncertainty is, I believe, a defect in her method. Our legends are always associated with places, and not merely every mountain and valley, but every strange stone and little coppice has its legend, preserved in written or unwritten tradition. Our Irish romantic movement has arisen out of this tradition, and should always, even when it makes new legends about traditional people and things, be haunted by places. It should make Ireland, as Ireland and all other lands were in ancient times, a holy land to her own people. Had Aodh brought his gifts to any of the traditional sacred places, and had the emotion of the place and its history been in the story, the dreamy beauty of his sacrifice would have grown more beautiful from mix-

ing with ancient beauty and with the beauty
of sun and moon burning over an island or
hill or hollow that is a part of the scenery
of our lives.

W. B. YEATS.

**National Drama and Con-
temporary Life?**

National Drama and Contemporary Life.

I am sorry that Mr. Yeats, in his recent article on Miss Norah Hopper's poems, should have taken for granted that my intention in raising the question I did was combative, as, in truth, I simply wished to put it as clearly as possible, without suggesting any definite answer. It should hardly have occurred to me to put it at all, but that Mr. Yeats' own dramatic poems seemed to open up the possibility of a drama with a distinctive note in this country.

Mr. Yeats mentions Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" and Wagner's musical dramas as examples of national literature founded on the ancient legends of the authors' countries. I should say at once that I did not deny the possibility of a poet being inspired by the legends of his country; it would be strange indeed if he did not sometimes look towards them. The extent to which a great poetic intelligence, supremely interested in life, would use these legends for his images and themes would depend a good deal on the kind and degree of interest prevalent con-

cerning them. If they yielded him typical situations and characters, such as Shakespeare looked for in legend and history, I fancy his joy would be great to discover these in stories which were the peculiar heritage of his country, and known to every one in it. But in the hands of such a poet these characters and situations become entirely new creations by virtue of the new spirit and import which he puts into them; the mode of treating them as they exist in tradition is a lost secret, but the power to make them live again in a new way is a secret of which the artist must be possessed. Prospero, in the "Tempest," lying in Shakespeare's mind, drew the vitality by which he still lives from that source. Brutus and Cassius in "Julius Cæsar" are rather re-incarnations of Romans in the Elizabethan age than archæologically Romans. Finn and Oculain, if they are to appear once more in literature—and I, for one, shall welcome them—must be expected to take up on their broad shoulders something of the weariness and fret of our age, if only to show how lightly they may be carried, and to affright with shadowing masses of truth, such as mortals hurl not now, the uneasy seats of error.

I was not aware, I confess, of the fact which Mr. Yeats mentions, that Wagner's dramas are becoming to Germany what the Greek tragedies were to Greece. The crowd

of elect persons seated in curiously-devised seats at Bayreuth does not seem very like the whole Athenian democracy thronging into their places for a couple of obols supplied by the State, and witnessing in good faith the deeds of their ancestors. Perhaps the strongest part of Tolstoi's recent manifesto, "What is Art?" was his analysis of Wagner's theory that the two arts of drama and music could supplement each other and coincide, as Wagner supposed. The Greeks were a poetical people, just as the Germans are a musical people, and as the Greek dramas have come down to us without the music, so, one fancies, Wagner's music, or fragments of it, will go down to posterity without the words. His weakness as a dramatist is perhaps proportional to the passionateness of his music and the elaborateness of his stage accessories; and, indeed, I should not care to have to argue seriously against his being to this age what Sophocles and Shakespeare were to theirs. The national poet, and even dramatist, of Germany is still, I think, another man, whose themes were not always German, and whose poetry remains the record of an age awakening to new ideas. As to "Peer Gynt"—if "Faust" is reproached with a lack of coherence, what are we to say of "Peer Gynt," which is a sort of "Faust" in nubibus? Ibsen appears to have found himself in a drama which is not ideal drama,

because neither in its form nor in its dominating ideas is it poetical, but which seems the nearest thing to a distinctive drama reached in this century.

There are two conceptions of poetry, mutually antagonistic so far, and not to be reconciled except in the life-work of another great poet, of which one may be called Wordsworthian, which regards the poetic consciousness as acting from within outward and able to confer on even common things the radiance of the imagination; the other, to which those who are rather in sympathy with art than with philosophy are inclined, regards the poet as passive to elect influences and endowing old material with new form. The first regards the poet as a seer and a spiritual force; the second as an aristocratic craftsman. The first looks to man himself as the source of inspiration; the second to tradition, to the forms and images in which old conceptions have been embodied—old faiths, myths, dreams. The weakness of the first is an inclination to indifference toward the form and comeliness of art, as in Whitman; while the second, if it hold aloof from the first, cuts itself asunder from the source of all regeneration in art. The bias of the first is toward naked statement, hard fact, dogmatism; the bias of the second toward theory, diffuseness, insincerity. The latter appears to me to be the bias of *belles lettres*

at present. The poet looks too much away from himself and from his age, does not feel the facts of life enough, but seeks in art an escape from them. Consequently, the art he achieves cannot be the expression of the age and of himself—cannot be representative or national.

The whole subject of the drama derives an interest from a consideration of the weakness of the present century in this respect. English literature, as a recent writer in the American "Dial" says, has nothing to show but Shelley's "Cenci"; and the same writer urges that the drama is the "top achievement of the human intellect."

JOHN EGLINTON.

**John Eglinton and Spiritual
Art.**

John Eglinton and Spiritual Art.

Mr. John Eglinton wrote recently that though "the ancient legends of Ireland undoubtedly contain situations and characters as well suited for drama as most of those used in Greek tragedies," yet "these subjects," meaning old legends in general, "refuse to be taken up out of their old environment, and be transplanted into the world of modern sympathies. The proper mode of treating them is a secret lost with the subjects themselves." I might have replied by naming a good part of modern literature; but as he spoke particularly of drama I named Ibsen's "Peer Gynt," which is admittedly the chief among the national poems of modern Norway; and Wagner's musical dramas, which I compared with the Greek tragedies, not merely because of the mythological substance of "The Ring" and of "Parsifal," but because of the influence both words and music are beginning to have upon the intellect of Germany and of Europe, which begins to see the German soul in them.

He replied by saying that he preferred

Ibsen's dramas, which are "not ideal," which is nothing to the point, and that "the crowd of elect persons seated in curiously devised seats at Bayreuth does not seem very like the whole Athenian democracy thronging into their places for a couple of obols supplied by the State, and witnessing in good faith the deeds of their ancestors." He is mistaken about the facts, for Wagner's musical dramas are not acted only or principally at Bayreuth, but before large crowds of not particularly elect persons at Vienna and at Munich and in many places in Germany and other countries. I do not think the point important, however, for when I spoke of their influence I thought less of the crowds at Vienna or at Munich than of the best intellects of our day, of men like Count Villiers de L'Isle Adam, the principal founder of the symbolist movement, of whom M. Remy de Gourmont has written, "He opened the doors of the unknown with a crash, and a generation has gone through them to the infinite." The crowds may applaud good art for a time, but they will forget it when vulgarity invents some new thing, for the only permanent influence of any art is an influence that flows down gradually and imperceptibly, as if through orders and hierarchies.

His second article abandons the opinion—an opinion that I thought from the beginning

a petulance of rapid writing—that ancient legends “cannot be transplanted into the world of modern sympathies,” and thinks that a poet “may be inspired by the legends of his country,” but goes on to distinguish between “two conceptions of poetry mutually antagonistic, two ways of treating legends and other things.” I am glad to discuss these distinctions with him, for I think it a misfortune that Mr John Eglinton, whose influence on Irish opinion may yet be great, should believe, as I understand him to believe, in popular music, popular painting, and popular literature. He describes the “conception” of poetry, he believes me to prefer, as preferred “by those who are rather in sympathy with art than with philosophy,” as regarding the poet as “an aristocratic craftsman” as looking for “the source of inspiration” to “the forms and images, in which old conceptions have been embodied—old faiths, myths, dreams,” and as seeking “in poetry an escape from the facts of life;” and he describes the “conception” he himself prefers and calls Wordsworthian as looking “to man himself as the source of inspiration,” and as desiring a poetry that expresses “its age” and “the facts of life,” and is yet, strange to say, “a spiritual force” and the work of “a seer.”

I will restate these distinctions in the words of the younger Hallam, in his essay

on Tennyson; one of the most profound criticisms in the English language. Arthur Hallam described Tennyson, who had then written his earlier and greater, but less popular poems, as belonging to "the æsthetic school," founded by Keats and Shelley—"A poetry of sensation rather than of reflection," "a sort of magic producing a number of impressions too multiplied, too minute, and too diversified to allow of our tracing them to the causes, because just such was the effect, even so boundless and so bewildering, produced" on the imagination of the poet "by the real appearance of nature." This poetry, the work of men whose "fine organs" "have trembled with emotion at colours and sounds and movements unperceived by duller temperaments," must always, he thinks, be unpopular because dull temperaments shrink from, or are incapable of the patient sympathy and exaltation of feeling needful for its understanding. He contrasts it with the popular school, the school he thinks Wordsworth belonged to, in all but his highest moments, which "mixes up" anecdotes and opinions and moral maxims for their own sake—the things dull temperaments can understand—with what is sometimes the poetry of a fine temperament, but is more often an imitation.

This poetry of the popular school is the poetry of those "who are rather in sym-

pathy" with philosophy than with art, and resembles those paintings one finds in every Royal Academy surrounded by crowds, which "are rather in sympathy" with anecdotes or pretty faces of babies than with good painting. It is the poetry of the utilitarian and the rhetorician and the sentimentalist and the popular journalist and the popular preacher, but it is not the poetry of "the seer," the most "aristocratic" of men, who tells what he alone has tasted and touched and seen amid the exaltation of his senses; and it is not a "spiritual force," though it may talk of nothing but spiritual forces, for a spiritual force is as immaterial and as imperceptible as the falling of dew or as the first greyness of dawn. Why, too, should Mr. John Eglinton, who is a profound transcendentalist, prefer a poetry which is, like all the lusts of the market place, "an expression of its age" and of "the facts of life," the very phrases of the utilitarian criticism of the middle century—to a poetry which seeks to express great passions that are not in nature, though "the real appearance of nature" awakens them; "ideas" that "lie burningly on the divine hand," as Browning calls them, "the beauty that is beyond the grave," as Poe calls them?

The Belgian poet, M. Verhaeren, has also discussed these "two conceptions of poetry," and has described the one as founded on physical science and the other as founded

upon transcendental science, and has shown that "the bias of belles lettres at present," of which Mr. John Eglinton complains, has accompanied a renewed interest in transcendental science. And it may well be that men are only able to fashion into beautiful shapes the most delicate emotions of the soul, spending their days with a patience like the patience of the middle ages in the perfect rounding of a verse, or in the perfect carving of a flower, when they are certain that the soul will not die with the body and that the gates of peace are wide, and that the watchers are at their places upon the wall.

I believe that the renewal of belief, which is the great movement of our time, will more and more liberate the arts from "their age" and from life, and leave them more and more free to lose themselves in beauty, and to busy themselves, like all the great poetry of the past and like religions of all times, with "old faiths, myths, dreams," the accumulated beauty of the age. I believe that all men will more and more reject the opinion that poetry is "a criticism of life," and be more and more convinced that it is a revelation of a hidden life, and that they may even come to think "painting, poetry, and music" "the only means of conversing with eternity left to man on earth." I believe, too, that, though a Homer or a Dante or a Shakespeare

may have used all knowledge, whether of life or of philosophy, or of mythology or of history. he did so, not for the sake of the knowledge, but to shape to a familiar and intelligible body something he had seen or experienced in the exaltation of his senses. I believe, too, that the difference between good and bad poetry is not in its preference for legendary, or for unlegendary subjects, or for a modern or for an archaic treatment, but in the volume and intensity of its passion for beauty, and in the perfection of its workmanship; and that all criticism that forgets these things is mischievous, and doubly mischievous in a country of unsettled opinion.

W. B. YEATS.

**Mr. Yeats and Popular
Poetry.**

Mr. Yeats and Popular Poetry.

The remark criticised by Mr. Yeats, that "these subjects (ancient legends) refuse to be taken up out of their old environment and be transplanted into the world of modern sympathies," and that "the proper mode of treating them, as they exist in tradition, is a secret lost with the subjects themselves," was not exactly a "petulance of rapid writing," but, on the whole, I am ready to accept responsibility for it. At any rate, its falsity is not apparent in the light of the examples he mentions—Ibsen's "Peer Gynt" and Wagner's musical dramas.

When a great legend or narrative comes down to us from antiquity—as, for instance, the Biblical story of David—it does so in a certain form, the form in which it has spontaneously clothed itself, and which fits it as the body fits the soul. No one could improve upon the story of David, unless, by a miracle, he could introduce some new and transforming element into his conception of it. In like manner, the Irish legends have come down to us in a certain form and language, proper to the original conception of

them, and they can only be made to live again by something new added to them out of the author's age and personality. As an instance of an old legend or narrative so transformed in the mind of a great and serious artist we might mention Milton's "Samson," which is thus the utterance of Milton's age as much as if the whole conception were original. On the other hand, Morris's "Sigurd" or Ferguson's "Congal," to whatever praise either of them is entitled, is not in the same way an original poem or the utterance of the author's age, as the highest poetry always is. To emphasize this truth is not "mischievous," but serviceable in this or in any country where a serious desire for a truly original literature exists.

The facts of life with which poetry is concerned are not the complex and conventional facts, but the simple and universal. This age cannot have a realistic poet, as it fondly dreams, because poetry is ideal and not realistic. The cinematograph, the bicycle, electric tramcars, labour-saving contrivances, etc, are not susceptible of poetic treatment, but are, in fact, themselves the poetry, not without a kind of suggestiveness, of a scientific age, with which the poetry of Greek and Hebrew tradition vainly endeavours to vie. It is no wonder that an age which has achieved this concrete type of poetry should be content with an attitude of simple politeness

toward those dreamers who walk with their heads in a cloud of vision ; we can understand its being so better than we can its genial invitation to our poetic dreamers to apply their visionary faculty and quaint rhythmic trick to a treatment of the mechanical triumphs of modern life, as Homer treated the manners and customs of an heroic age. The epics of the present are the steam-engine and the dynamo, its lyrics the kinematograph, phonograph, etc., and these bear with them the hearts of men as the Iliad and Odyssey of former days uplifted the youth of antiquity, or as the old English ballads expressed the mind of a nation in its childhood. When the poetic and mythopoeic faculty deserted the disillusioned Greeks they began to speculate on the nature of poetry, and when the moderns, perceiving a certain void in their lives, have begun to ask for an ideal poetic art springing directly out of modern life, it has been found necessary to investigate the origin and nature of poetry. The further these investigations are carried, the greater confirmation will that theory of poetry receive which is so honourably associated with the name of Wordsworth, and which has been adopted and carried forward by Carlyle, Ruskin, Emerson, Whitman, and others ; a theory for the statement of which we may refer to the fragment prefixed by Wordsworth to the "Excursion." It is to

give the cause of idealism into the hands of the Philistines to allow for a moment that poetry is less a "fact of life" than business or engine-screaching. Far better fall into a ridiculous attitude of hostility toward modern tendencies, like Ruskin or the grim Carlyle, who refused to consider as poetry what was not rooted in the facts of life, or to regard such facts of life as could not be illustrated by poetry as other than "phantasms."

It is curious that the poetry which has been most a fact of the life of the nineteenth century in England, and has been most universal in its appeal, should be called with some propriety "Wordsworthian"—after a man who was certainly without great poetic talent or artistic faculty, but who, simply because he was right, and by virtue of his simplicity and seriousness, reached, as Emerson rightly said, the high-water mark of poetry in this century. With Wordsworth, except at his best, we need not concern ourselves. If, at his best, he is a popular poet, which is doubtful, it is surely in the sense in which Shakespeare and the Bible are popular rather than as Hall Caine and Marie Corelli, or even Byron and Swinburne, are so; and it is not clear that such a popularity need be considered as greatly to his discredit. It is rather a sign that poetry is much more of a fact of life than

is commonly supposed, and that a man has only to be original to be universal. The poetry of thought in this century—the poetry of Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning—is more important than the poetry of art and artifice—the poetry of Coleridge, Rossetti, Swinburne—because of its higher seriousness and more universal appeal; because it is more concerned with the facts of life and is more inspired by faith and hope; because it expresses its age better and what is best in the age.

"I fear," said Blake to Crabb Robinson, "that Wordsworth loves nature," and Mr. Yeats, as a philosopher, though not, we are glad to believe, as a poet, would no doubt sympathise with that solicitude. The writer whom he so greatly admires, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, cherished a particular objection to the sun and daylight; and Paul Verlaine, whose influence Mr. Yeats would perhaps consider less baneful in this country than that of Wordsworth, acknowledged that he "hated to hear the laugh of a healthy man." But really, what do the symbolists, who talk so much of the "exaltation of the senses," mean exactly by saying that the "poetic passion is not in nature," and that art is to be "liberated from life." Life is nothing but what we make it, and we do not alter its substance by twisting it into an abnormality. If the transcendent realities

do not exist in the normal human consciousness, they do not exist in "poetry, music, and painting," or at all. Mr. Yeats thinks that Shakespeare interested himself in life and humanity consciously for the sake of his art. This is a matter of opinion; but we think it more likely that Shakespeare's interest in life was a broadly human and representative interest, and that this was the source and power of his art. Art which only interests itself in life and humanity for the sake of art may achieve the occult triumphs of the symbolist school, but humanity will return its indifference in kind, and leave it to the dignity and consolation of "unpopularity."

JOHN EGLINTON.

Literary Ideals in Ireland.

Literary Ideals in Ireland.

It is a dangerous thing to intervene between two such masters of dialectic as W. B. Yeats and John Eglinton, but the comparatively simple issue raised at first has been found to need, for its just discussion, a divergence into the elemental principles of art and a consideration of life itself; and now the disputants ask of each other questions as difficult to answer as the question asked of Christ by Pilate. I think that they have only vaguely apprehended each other's position, and that there is little real difference between them. What has caused this misapprehension is, that although they stand on much the same ground they have come to it by different roads; they represent different intellectual traditions. John Eglinton is a disciple of Thoreau, Emerson, Arnold, and Whitman. Mr. Yeats is a romanticist of the line of Shelley and Keats; but his is a romanticism exalted so that a spiritual passion breathes through his work, and earthly love and beauty in it become the symbols of divine things. I think also, if I rightly understand John Eglinton's admiration of

Wordsworth, it is because Wordsworth, more than any of his contemporaries, divined a spiritual presence in nature—a being veiled by light and clouds and stars and seas. Though both seek as best in literature the traces of an identical essence, there yet seems a division of aim. I would be glad to reconcile these differences, which are bewildering in a country which has hesitated so long before adopting a literary ideal—where a conflict of opinion on such matters, not very clearly argued, may delay the day of better things we hope for.

I am not sure that "these ancient legends refuse to be taken out of their old environment." I think that the tales which have been preserved for a hundred generations in the heart of the people must have had such a power, because they had in them a core of eternal truth. Truth is not a thing of to-day or to-morrow. Beauty, heroism, and spirituality do not change like fashion, being the reflection of an unchanging spirit. The face of faces which looks at us through so many shifting shadows has never altered the form of its perfection since the face of man, made after its image, first looked back on its original:—

For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,

And Ursa's children died.

These dreams, antiquities, traditions, once actual, living, and historical, have passed

from the world of sense into the world of memory and thought; and time, it seems to me, has not taken away from their power nor made them more remote from sympathy, but has rather purified them by removing them from earth unto heaven: from things which the eye can see and the ear can hear; they have become what the heart ponders over, and are so much nearer, more familiar, more suitable for literary use, than the day they were begotten. They have now the character of symbol, and, as symbol, are more potent than history. They have crept through veil after veil of the manifold nature of man, and now each dream, heroism, or beauty, has laid itself nigh the divine power it represents, the suggestion of which made it first beloved; and they are ready for the use of the spirit, a speech of which every word has a significance beyond itself, and Deirdre is like Helen, a symbol of eternal beauty, and Cuculain represents as much as Prometheus the heroic spirit, the redeemer in man.

It is for such a treatment, I think, Mr. Yeats argues; but I do not believe John Eglington has so understood him, or he would, I think, have hesitated before entering on this discussion. In so far as these ancient ideals live in the memory of man, they are contemporary to us as much as electrical

science; for the shows which time brings now to our senses, before they can be used in literature, have to enter into exactly the same world of human imagination as the Celtic traditions live in. And their fitness for literary use is not there determined by their freshness, but by their power of suggestion. Modern literature, where it is really literature and not bookmaking, grows more subjective year after year, and the mind has a wider range over time than the physical nature has. Many things live in it—empires which have never crumbled, beauty which has never perished, love whose fires have never waned; and, in this formidable competition for use in the artist's mind, to-day stands only its chance with a thousand days. To question the historical accuracy of the use of such memories is not a matter which can be rightly raised; the question is—do they express lofty things to the soul? If they do they have justified themselves.

Mr. Eglinton, here I think rather petulantly, asks what does Mr. Yeats mean by saying, "the poetic passion is not in nature," and that "art is to be liberated from life?" A little reflection should have suggested the exact sense of the words to so subtle a mind. But, as I said before, the misapprehension may be due to a difference of intellectual tradition: in the various schools, words are used with a different significance; the

light of the mystic is not the light of the scientist, nor the light of the educator, nor the light of the common man; he may not be familiar with the transcendental philosophy which Mr. Yeats, in common with an ever-increasing number of thoughtful men, has adopted, to which the spirit in man is not a product of nature, but antecedes nature, and is above it as sovereign, being of the very essence of that spirit which breathed on the face of the waters, and whose song, flowing from the silence as an incantation, summoned the stars into being out of chaos. To regain that spiritual consciousness with its untrammelled ecstasy, is the hope of every mystic. That ecstasy is the poetic passion; it is not of nature, though it may breathe within it, and use it, and transform its images by a magical power. To liberate art from life is simply to absolve it from the duty laid upon it by academic critics of representing only what is seen, what is heard, what is felt, what is thought by man in his normal—that is, his less exalted, less spiritual moments, when he is least truly himself. Though he has been for a hundred years absorbed in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, in the moment he has attained to spiritual vision and ecstasy he has come to his true home, to his true self, to that which shall exist when the light of the sun shall be dark and the flocks of stars withdrawn

from the fields of heaven. The art which is inspired by the Holy Breath must needs speak of things which have no sensuous existence, of hopes all unearthly, and fires of which the colours of day are only shadows. The "quaint rhythmic trick" is a mnemonic by which the poet records, though it be but an errant and faltering tune, the inner music of life. To sum it all up, Mr. Yeats, in common with other literary men, is trying to ennoble literature by making it religious rather than secular, by using his art for the revelation of another world rather than to depict this one. John Eglinton would not, I think, dissent greatly from this as a high aim. He has been misled as to Mr. Yeats's position by an unfamiliarity with the symbols which the poet employs in his subtle and mystic art.

A. E.

**Legends as Material for
Literature.**

Legends as Material for Literature.

To A. E.'s statement of his views on the matter in dispute between Mr. Yeats and John Eglinton I, at least, can take no exception. I am by no means inclined to exclude Irish legends from the subjects permissible to Irish poets; but it is, perhaps, well that the desirability of dealing with them, and, incidentally, the best mode of dealing with them, should be brought into the arena of discussion. I am not at all sure whether the latter would not be the more profitable. But as to the possibility of making excellent use of old legends for poetic purposes there is surely a sufficient number of examples outside Ireland to place it beyond question. I do not think Wagner's place in the world of art is so securely established as to make his example decisive. In any case, the most important part of his effort being in music, consummate success in that sphere would prove nothing as regards literature. There are, however, so many other instances in which legends drawn from all sources ancient and modern—Cel-

tic, as in the Arthurian legends; Greek, American, Indian, and others—have been employed by modern poets, with such unquestionably fine results that it seems a little hard that those of Ireland alone should be tabooed. Yet Tennyson, out of the small number of these legends known to him, found one worthy of careful treatment.

With A. E.'s statement of his position I am, as just said, in almost entire agreement. But I do not think his position is quite the same as that of Mr. Yeats. The latter seems to me to incline more than is quite safe to the theories of the French schools. Before, however, touching on these, let me say a few words with regard to English verse, and the school said to have been founded by Keats and Shelley. It is clear that the latter was far from being a mere aesthete. In the larger part of his poetry he aimed distinctly at teaching. In the "Cenci," according to his own avowal, he laid aside "the presumptuous attitude of an instructor," and assumed the humbler task of depicting that which is. We now set but little value on most of his formal doctrine; and so it comes to pass that his fame principally depends on the extraordinary beauty of parts of his work. But will anyone maintain that had the poet not been animated by his unselfish humanitarian enthusiasm we should have had this beauty

in anything like equal measure ? Who will affirm that the ardour which carried him almost into the region of the unheard and the unseen, was not born of the rapture of his impracticable ideals ? The poems of Keats are, let it be granted, almost purely æsthetic. So were the early poems of Shakespeare, and, one might add, some of his early dramas. But while Keats died at twenty-six, Shakespeare lived on to write *Lears* and *Hamlets*, plays in which the merely beautiful is assigned but a somewhat subordinate part. Tennyson, too, hardly at all influenced by Shelley, but largely indebted to Keats, and, like him, predominantly æsthetic in his earlier work, lived on, and added many other elements to his poetry. His wide reading, his keen observation, his sympathy with scientific discovery, lent to his work not only an immense variety which has won it the favour of widely different classes of readers, but also a strength and a substance which have endowed a considerable part of it with permanent value. In some parts of the "*Idylle of the King*," which hardly attain to epic seriousness and dignity, the weakness appears to be owing to the undue prominence of the purely æsthetic element.

When Tennyson was about in mid-career a group of poets arose who in no way continued his tradition. The melancholy æstheticism of William Morris, the florid æstheticism of

Mr. Swinburne, the hothouse aestheticism of Rossetti, all sprang from a different source or sources. It is not pretended that they have given us anything more beautiful than Keats, Shelley, or Tennyson. Still less could this be maintained of the younger poets. Some of these have gone back to older traditions, and have struggled with some measure of success to produce poetry under difficulties. For it is plain that at the end of the nineteenth century there are few or none of those ideas in the air which rouse the emotions into vigorous action. Poetry may not be merely, as Byron said, the expression of excited passion, but the history of many literary epochs has shown that it is seldom written with conspicuous success if there are no great animating ideas stimulating the whole community. There are no such ideas now. The poets either have nothing to write about, or, if they have, they sit down to their work in a cold-blooded languor from which great results can by no possibility spring. Under these circumstances they naturally attribute extravagant importance to form, and endeavour to conceal poverty of matter by elegance of dress. But even here they are not very successful. The lack of exuberant vitality deprives them of the energy by which difficulties of form are really overcome; and while they are free from the positive blemishes of their great predecessors, the

latter in their best work are as easily superior in mere form as they are in substance. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that many of our present writers should seek to make a virtue of necessity, and find a merit in their inevitable poverty. When ideas, emotions, and imagination fail, language remains. It is evident that since Mr. Matthew Arnold discoursed of "magic" in poetry, English critics and English poets have, abusing his discovery, come more and more to think that nothing is worth considering but verbal effects. But the French poets, whether they learned of the existence of such a thing as "magic" from England, or discovered it for themselves, have driven the theory of it to lengths undreamt of in England. Nothing, they say, should be named; everything should be suggested. Now, this is, of course, what is done by "magic." Browning thought the musician had a unique power in that "out of three sounds he frames, not a fourth sound, but a star." This power is not confined to the musician. The poet also has it, and can produce similar effects by combinations of words. But, of course, it is not new. The great poets of the past have exercised it unconsciously. It came to them naturally in fitting situations, with exquisite effect. But they did not commit the mistake of attempting to weave whole poems out of such material. They felt instinctively that if they could have done so they would

thereby have defeated their own ends by "cloying with excess of sweet." This, the modern French poets and their English disciples set themselves deliberately to do. They hardly succeed. In the perpetual attempt to "make stars" they lose themselves in the inane. Mere weariness and vacuity come of the aimless ransacking of the dictionary to find words which "may capture and recapture sudden fire" instead of finding ideas on which the sunlight of emotion, playing naturally, may work its effects of magic, as the natural sunlight on the mountains or the sea. It is clear enough that these wonderful theories have yielded no result comparable to their pretensions, a thing by no means to be marvelled at, seeing that they are as unsound in art as they are practically barren of novelty. There are, curiously enough, several instances to be found in which the poetic literature of France has exercised on that of other countries an injurious effect. It looks, at the present moment, as if we were going to witness a further exemplification of a rule hitherto almost inevitable and invariable.

A. E. has not, I fancy, any great love for French instructors in this matter. His own work is of a very different order from theirs. Mr. Yeats has given us the good work we already owe to him, either before he embraced his present theory or in spite of it. Anyone who desires to see how imposing are

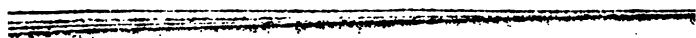
the performances of the Gallic poets in this connection, will do well to read "the clear, beautiful, and characteristic" poems translated by Mr. Arthur Symonds, and included in his article on Mallarmé in the November number of the "Fortnightly Review." These productions remind one of the homœopathic soup, for which "Punch" once gave the recipe—"Take a robin's leg—mind, the drumstick merely," etc. The resulting broth is exceedingly rich and nutritious.

The third point that has arisen in this discussion is the relation of transcendentalism to poetry. It is clear that just as the meaning and seriousness of life shrink to nothing in the absence of transcendentalism, so does the value of the art shrink which deals with a life from which transcendental belief has disappeared. The life becomes aimless, corrupt, or both, the only point of interest remaining being the pathos of the spectacle of souls robbed of their heritage. But the men and women who are so affected yield no satisfactory material to the artist. The only way in which literature can deal with them at all is to give us realistic studies in pathology, of which the principal value will be for science, not for art; otherwise they only serve the purpose of the drunken Helot. When, however, we have agreed that transcendental faith or sentiment is a necessary condition for the health of the soul, we have by no means settled that the substance of art should be transcendentalism,

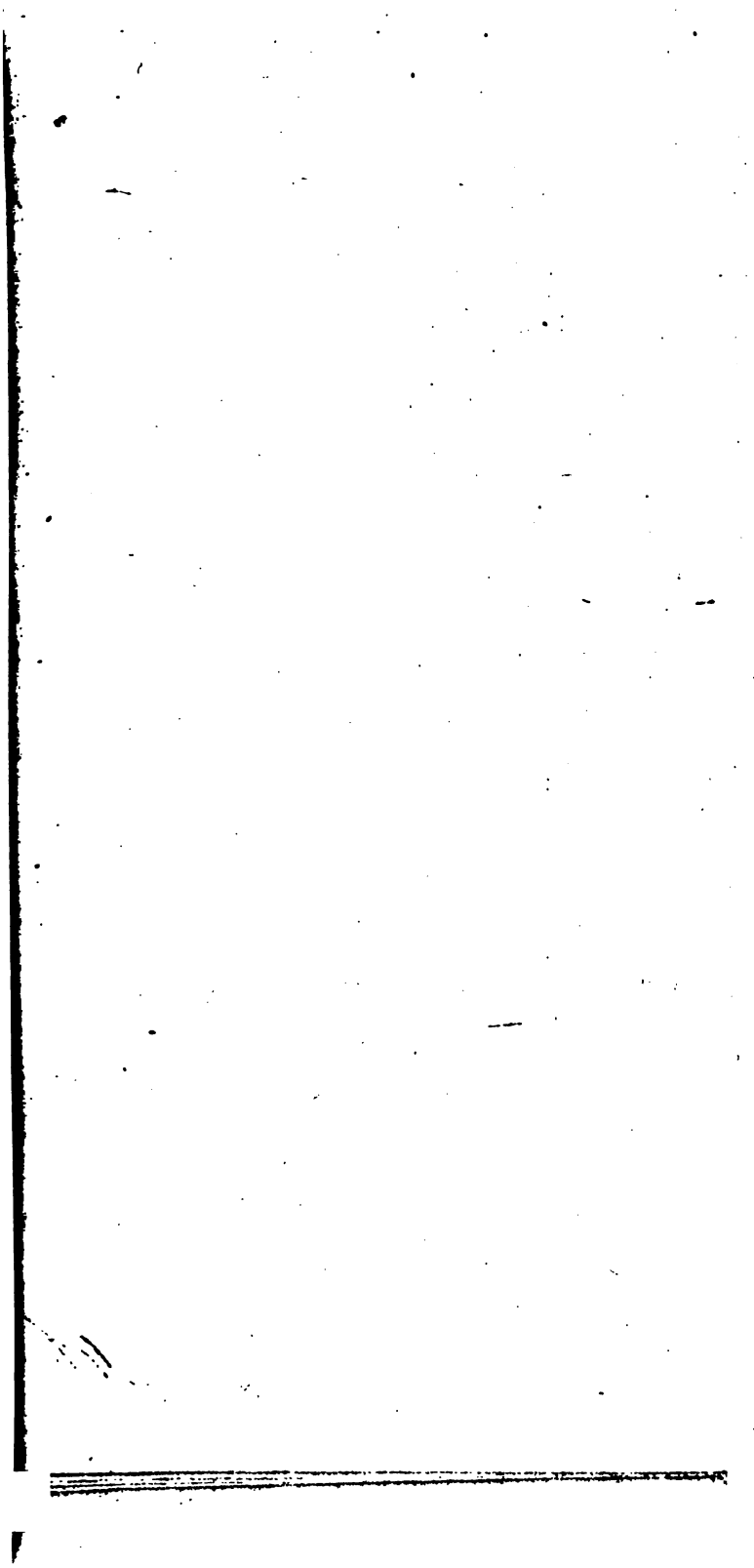
pure and simple. We are living on the physical plane; we are embodied spirits; and we must accept the conditions. They are tacitly accepted by the professed artist. Art is a language, and it consists of physical signs. What we know of souls able to converse otherwise will not go far as material; and if we knew infinitely more we could only communicate it by means of physical signs. But just as our means of expressing our ideas, so is the nature of our knowledge. Knowledge of life and its facts is simply a knowledge of the behaviour of spirits immersed in matter under very varied conditions. The actions of men are the chief revelation to us of the nature of spiritual beings under the particular limitations and disadvantages entailed by the physical envelope. It would seem needless, then, to point out that to cease to study life is to turn away from the chief source of knowledge available. But how we shall interpret the knowledge will depend on our general attitude. Looking at the facts from the side of the lower nature, we shall learn things of but small profit—the lessons of mere selfishness, prudence, or worldly wisdom, which is all that so many are content to garner; but learning of a higher kind is there for us in abundance. The great poets have all attained in it to higher mastery. Behind the facts of life they perceive the serious and

solemn background, and exhibit to us their significance in that relation. This, as it seems to me, is the utmost transcendentalism can be made to yield, until, as perhaps may yet happen, the barrier between visible and invisible being broken down, we learn the language that is spoken by those behind the veil; and when that consummation is reached art will probably cease to be necessary.

WILLIAM HARMONIE



The Autumn of the Flesh.



The Autumn of the Flesh.

Our thoughts and emotions are often but spray flung up from hidden tides that follow a moon no eye can see. I remember that when I first began to write I desired to describe outward things as vividly as possible, and took pleasure, in which there was, perhaps, a little discontent, in picturesque and declamatory books. And then, quite suddenly, I lost the desire of describing outward things, and found that I took little pleasure in a book unless it was spiritual and unemphatic. I did not then understand that the change was from beyond my own mind, but I understand now that writers are struggling all over Europe, though not often, with a philosophic understanding of their struggle, against that picturesque and declamatory way of writing, against that "externality" which a time of scientific and political thought has brought into literature. This struggle has been going on for some years, but it has only just become strong enough to draw within itself the little inner world which alone seeks more than amusement in the arts. In France, where move-

ments are more marked, because the people are pre-eminently logical, "The Temptations of S. Anthony," the last great dramatic invention of the old romanticism, contrasts very plainly with "Axel," the first great dramatic invention of the new; and Maeterlinck has followed Count Villiers de L'Isle Adam. Flaubert wrote unforgettable descriptions of grotesque, bizarre, and beautiful scenes and persons, as they show to the ear and to the eye, and crowded them with historic and ethnographical details; but Count Villiers de L'Isle Adam swept together, by what seemed a sudden energy, words, behind which glimmered a spiritual and passionate mood, as the flame glimmers behind the dusky blue and red glass in an Eastern lamp; and created persons from whom has fallen all even of personal characteristic except a thirst for that hour when all things shall pass away like a vapour, and a pride like that of the Magi following their star over many mountains; while Maeterlinck has plucked away even this thirst and this pride and set before us faint souls, naked and pathetic shadows already half vapour and sighing to one another upon the border of the last abyss. There has been, as I think a like change in French painting, for one sees everywhere, instead of the dramatic stories, and picturesque moments of an older school, frail and tremulous bodies unfitted for the labour of life, and landscape

where subtle rhythms of colour and of form have overcome the clear outline of things as we see them in the labour of life.

There has been a like change in England, but it has come more gradually and is more mixed with lesser changes than in France. The poetry which found its expression in the poems of writers like Browning and of Tennyson, and even of writers, who are seldom classed with them, like Swinburne, and like Shelley in his earlier years, pushed its limits as far as possible, and tried to absorb into itself the science and politics, the philosophy and morality of its time; but a new poetry, which is always contracting its limits, has grown up under the shadow of the old. Rossetti began it, but was too much of a painter in his poetry to follow it with a perfect devotion; and it became a movement when Mr. Lang and Mr. Gosse and Mr. Dobson devoted themselves to the most condensed of lyric forms, and when Mr. Bridges, a more considerable poet, elaborated a rhythm too delicate for any but an almost bodiless emotion, and repeated over and over the most ancient notes of poetry, and none but these. The poets who followed have either, like Mr. Kipling, turned from serious poetry altogether, and so passed out of the processional order, or speak out of some personal or spiritual passion in words and types and metaphors that draw one's imagination as far as possible from the com-

plexities of modern life and thought. The change has been more marked in English painting, which, when intense enough to belong to the processional order, began to cast out things, as we see them in the labour of life, so much before French painting, that ideal painting is sometimes called English upon the Continent.

I see, indeed, in the arts of every country those faint lights and faint colours and faint outlines and faint energies which many call "the decadence," and which I, because I believe that the arts lie dreaming of things to come, prefer to call the autumn of the flesh. An Irish poet whose rhythms are like the cry of a sea bird in autumn twilight has told its meaning in the line, "The very sunlight's weary, and it's time to quit the plough." Its importance is the greater because it comes to us at the moment when we were beginning to be interested in many things which positive science, the interpreter of exterior law, has always denied: communion of mind with mind in thought and without words, foreknowledge in dreams and in visions, and the coming amongst us of the dead, and of much else. We are, it may be, at a crowning crisis of the world, at the moment when man is about to ascend, with his arms full of the wealth he has been so long gathering: the stairway he has been descending from the first days. The poets, if one may find their images in the *Kalavala*, had not

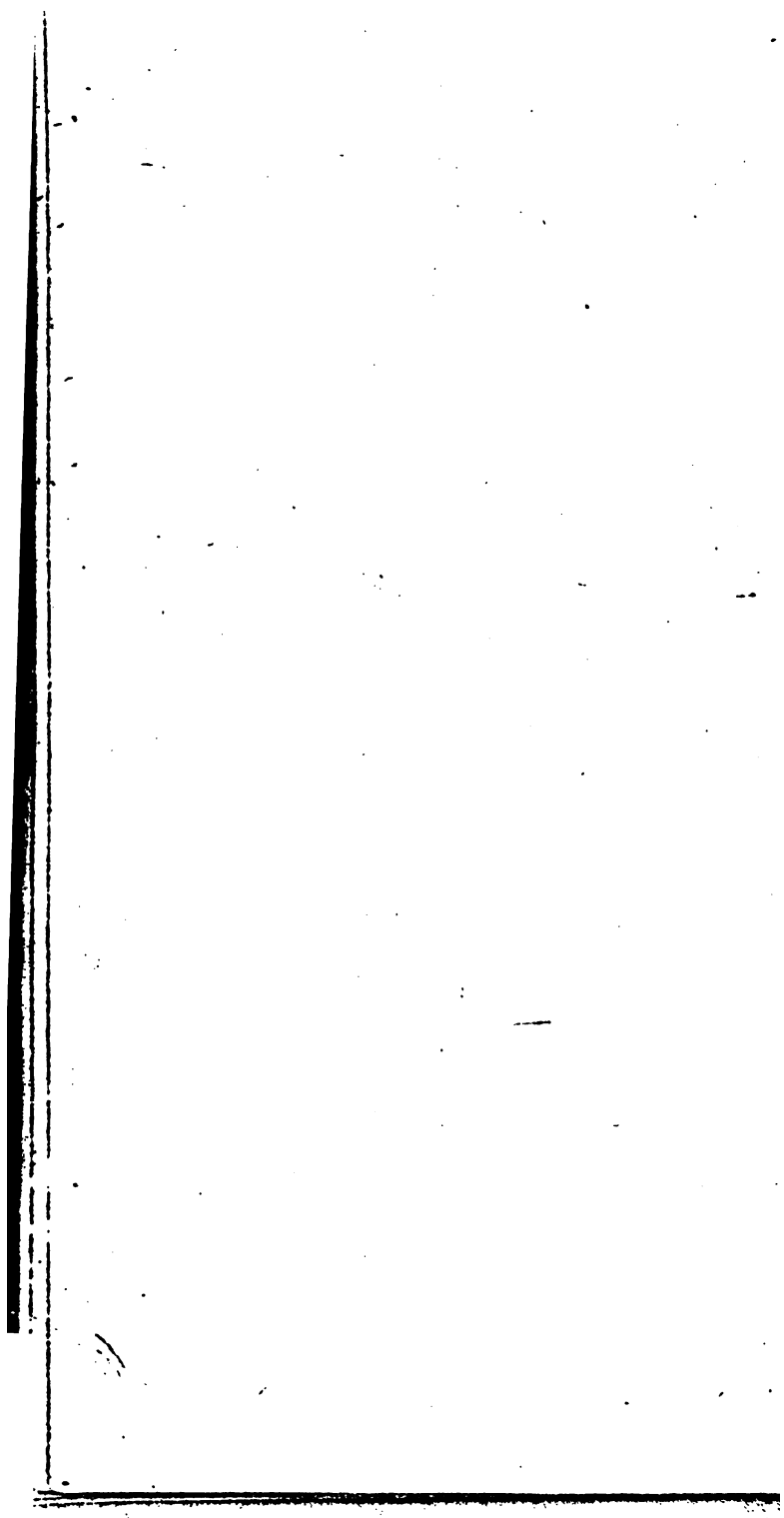
Homer's preoccupation with things, and he was not so full of their excitement as Virgil. Dante added to poetry a dialectic which, although he made it serve his laborious ecstasy, was the invention of minds trained by the labour of life, by a traffic among many things, and not a spontaneous expression of an interior life; while Shakespeare shattered the symmetry of verse and of drama that he might fill them with things and their accidental relations.

Each of these writers had come further down the stairway than those who had lived before him, but it was only with the modern poets, with Goethe and Wordsworth and Browning, that poetry gave up the right to consider all things in the world as a dictionary of types and symbols and began to call itself a critic of life and an interpreter of things as they are. Painting, music, science, politics, and even religion, because they have felt a growing belief that we know nothing but the fading and flowering of the world, have changed, too, in numberless elaborate ways. Man has wooed and won the world, and has fallen weary, and not, I think, for a time, but with a weariness that will not end until the last autumn, when the stars shall be blown away like withered leaves. He grew weary when he said—"These things that I touch and see and hear are alone real," for he saw them without illusion at last, and found them but air and

dust and moisture. And now he must be philosophical about everything, even about the arts, for he can only return the way he came and so escape from weariness, by philosophy. The arts are, I believe, about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have lain upon the shoulders of priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling our thoughts with the essences of things, and not with things. We are about to substitute once more the distillation of alchemy for the the analyses of chemistry and for the method of some other sciences; and certain of us are looking everywhere for the perfect alembic that no silver or golden drop may escape. Mr. Symons has written lately on M. Mallarmé's method, and has quoted him as saying that we should "abolish the pretension, aesthetically an error, despite its dominion over almost all the masterpieces, to enclose within the subtle pages other than—the horror of the forest or the silent thunder in the leaves, not the intrinsic dense wood of the trees," and as desiring to substitute for "the old lyric afflatus or the enthusiastic personal direction of the phrase" words "that take light from mutual reflection, like an actual trail of fire over precious stones," and "to make an entire word hitherto unknown to the language" "out of many vocables." Mr. Symons understands these and other sentences to mean

that poetry will henceforth be a poetry of essences, separated one from another in little and intense poems. I think there will be much poetry of this kind, because of an ever more arduous search for an almost disembodied ecstasy, but I think we will not cease to write long poems, but rather that we will write them more and more as our new belief makes the world plastic under our hands again. I think that we will learn soon how to describe at great length an old man wandering among enchanted islands, his return home at last, his slow gathering vengeance, a flitting shape of a goddess, and a flight of arrows, and yet to make all of these so different things "take light by mutual reflection, like an actual trail of fire over precious stones," and become "an entire word," the signature, or symbol of a mood of the divine imagination as imponderable as "the horror of the forest or the silent thunder in the leaves."

W. B. YEATS.



**Nationality and Cosmopoli-
tanism in Literature.**

1875

Nationality and Cosmopolitanism in Literature.

As one of those who believe that the literature of a country is for ever creating a new soul among its people, I do not like to think that literature with us must follow an inexorable law of sequence, and gain a spiritual character only after the bodily passions have grown weary and exhausted themselves. Whether the art of any of the writers of the decadence does really express spiritual things is open to doubt. The mood in which their work is conceived, a sad and distempered emotion through which no new joy quivers, seems too often to tell rather of exhausted vitality than of the ecstasy of a new life. However much, too, their art refines itself, choosing ever rarer and more exquisite forms of expression, underneath it all an intuition seems to disclose only the old wolfish lust hiding itself beneath the golden fleece of the spirit. It is not the spirit breaking through corruption, but the life of the senses longing to shine with the light which makes saintly things beautiful; and it would put on the jewelled raiment of seraphim, retaining still a heart of clay smitten through and through

with the unappeasable desire of the flesh : so Rossetti's women, who have around them all the circumstances of poetry and romantic beauty, seem through their sucked-in lips to express a thirst which could be allayed in no spiritual paradise. Art in the decadence in our times might be symbolized as a crimson figure undergoing a dark crucifixion ; the hosts of light are overcoming it, and it is dying filled with anguish and despair at a beauty it cannot attain. All these strange emotions have a profound psychological interest. I do not think because a spiritual flaw can be urged against a certain phase of life that it should remain unexpressed. The psychic maladies which attack all races when their civilization grows old must needs be understood to be dealt with ; and they cannot be understood without being revealed in literature or art. But in Ireland we are not yet sick with this sickness. As psychology it concerns only the curious. As expressing a literary ideal, I think a consideration of it was a mere side-issue in the discussion Mr. Yeats' article continued. The discussion on the one side was really a plea for nationality in our literature, and on the other a protest on behalf of individualism. It is true that nationality may express itself in many ways ; it may not be at all evident in the subject matter, but may be very evident in the sentiment. But a literature loosely held together by some emotional cha-

characteristics common to the writers, however great it may be, does not fulfil the purpose of a literature or art created by a number of men who have a common aim in building up an overwhelming ideal—who create, in a sense, a soul for their country, and who have a common pride in the achievement of all. The world has not seen this since the great antique civilisations of Egypt and Greece passed away. We cannot imagine an Egyptian artist daring enough to set aside the majestic attainment of many centuries. An Egyptian boy as he grew up must have been overawed by the national tradition and have felt that it was not to be set aside; it was beyond his individual rivalry. The soul of Egypt incarnated in him, and, using its immemorial language and its mysterious lines, the efforts of the least workman who decorated a tomb seem to have been directed by the same hand that carved the Sphinx. This adherence to a traditional form is true of Greece, though to a less extent. The little Tanagra terra-cottas might have been done by Phidias, and in literature Ulysses and Agamemnon were not the heroes of one epic, but appeared endlessly in epic and drama. Since the Greek civilization no European nation has had an intellectual literature which was genuinely national. In the present century, leaving aside a few things in outward circumstance, there is little to distinguish

the work of the best English writers or artists from that of their Continental contemporaries. Millais, Leighton, Rossetti, Turner—how different from each other, and yet they might have painted the same pictures as born Frenchmen and it would not have excited any great surprise as a marked divergence from French art. The cosmopolitan spirit, whether for good or for evil, is hastily obliterating distinctions. What is distinctly national in these countries is less valuable than the immense wealth of universal ideas; and the writers who use this wealth appeal to no narrow circle: the foremost writers, the Tolstois and Ibsens, are conscious of addressing a European audience.

If nationality is to justify itself in the face of all this, it must be because the country which preserves its individuality does so with the profound conviction that its peculiar ideal is nobler than that which the cosmopolitan spirit suggests—that this ideal is so precious to it that its loss would be as the loss of the soul, and that it could not be realised without an aloofness from, if not an actual indifference to, the ideals which are spreading so rapidly over Europe. Is it possible for any nationality to make such a defence of its isolation? If not, let us read Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoi, men so much greater than any we can show, try to absorb their universal wisdom and no longer confine our-

selves to local traditions. But nationality was never so strong in Ireland as at the present time. It is beginning to be felt, less as a political movement than as a spiritual force. It seems to be gathering itself together, joining men, who were hostile before, in a new intellectual fellowship; and if all these could unite on fundamentals it would be possible in a generation to create a national ideal in Ireland, or rather to let that spirit incarnate fully which began among the ancient peoples, which has haunted the hearts and whispered a dim revelation of itself through the lips of the bards and peasant story-tellers.

Every Irishman forms some vague ideal of his country, born from his reading of history, or from contemporary politics, or from an imaginative intuition; and this Ireland in the mind it is, not the actual Ireland, which kindles his enthusiasm. For this he works and makes sacrifices; but because it has never had any philosophical definition, or a supremely beautiful statement in literature which gathered all aspirations about it, the ideal remains vague. This passionate love cannot explain itself; it cannot make another understand its devotion. To reveal Ireland in clear and beautiful light, to create the Ireland in the heart, is the province of a national literature. Other arts would add to this ideal hereafter, and social life and politics must in the end be in harmony. We

are yet before our dawn, in a period comparable to Egypt before the first of her solemn temples constrained its people to an equal mystery, or to Greece before the first perfect statue had fixed an ideal of beauty which mothers dreamed of to mould their yet unborn children. We can see, however, as the ideal of Ireland grows from mind to mind it tends to assume the character of a sacred land. The Dark Rosaleen of Mangan expresses an almost religious adoration, and to a later writer it seems to be nigher to the Spiritual Beauty than other lands :—

And still the thoughts of Ireland brood
Upon her holy quietude.

The faculty of abstracting from the land their eyes behold, another Ireland through which they wandered in dream, has always been a characteristic of the Celtic poets. This inner Ireland which the visionary eye saw, was the *Tir-na-noge*, the country of immortal youth, for they peopled it only with the young and beautiful. It was the Land of the Living Heart, a tender name which showed that it had become dearer than the heart of woman, and overtopped all other hopes as the last dream of the spirit, the bosom where it would rest after it had passed from the fading shelter of the world. And sure a strange and beautiful land this Ireland is, with a mystic beauty which closes the eyes of the body as in sleep, and opens the eyes of the spirit as in dreams; and

never a poet has lain on our hillsides but gentle, stately figures, with hearts shining like the sun, move through his dreams, over radiant grasses, in an enchanted world of their own; and it has become alive through every haunted path and wood and mountain and lake, so that we can hardly think of it otherwise than as the shadow of the thought of God. The last Celtic poet who has appeared shows the spiritual qualities of the first, when he writes of the grey rivers in their "enraptured" wanderings, and when he sees in the jewelled bow which arches the heavens

The Lord's seven spirits that shine through
the rain.

This mystical view of nature, peculiar to but one English poet, Wordsworth, is a national characteristic; and much in the creation of the Ireland in the mind is already done, and only needs retelling by the new writers. More important, however, for the literature we are imagining as an offset to the cosmopolitan ideal, would be the creation of heroic figures, types, whether legendary or taken from history, and enlarged to epic proportions by our writers, who would use them in common, as Cuulain, Fionn, Ossian, and Oscar, were used by the generations of poets who have left us the bardic history of Ireland, wherein one would write of the battle fury of a hero, and another of a moment when his fire would turn to gentleness,

and another of his love for some beauty of his time, and yet another tell how the rivalry of a spiritual beauty made him tire of love ; and so from iteration and persistent dwelling on a few heroes their imaginative images found echoes in life, and other heroes arose continuing their tradition of chivalry.

That such types are of the highest importance and have the most ennobling influence on a country, cannot be denied. It was this idea led Whitman to "exploit" himself as the typical American. He felt that what he termed a "stock personality" was needed to elevate and harmonise the incongruous human elements in the States. English literature has always been more sympathetic with actual beings than with ideal types, and cannot help us much. A man who loves Dickens, for example, may grow to have a great tolerance for the grotesque characters which are the outcome of the social order in England, but he will not be assisted in the conception of a higher humanity ; and this is true of very many English writers who lack a fundamental philosophy, and are content to take man, as he seems to be for the moment, rather than as the pilgrim of eternity—as one who is flesh to-day but who may hereafter grow divine, and who may shine at last like the stars of the morning, triumphant among the sons of God.

Mr. Standish O'Grady, in his notable epic of *Cuchulain*, was the first in our time to treat

the Celtic traditions worthily. He has contributed one hero who awaits equal comrades, if, indeed, the tales of the Red Branch chivalry do not absorb the thoughts of many imaginative writers, and Ossulain remain the typical hero of the Gael, becoming to every boy who reads the story a revelation of what his own spirit is.

I have written at some length on the two paths which lie before us, for we have arrived at a parting of ways. One path leads, and has already led many Irishmen, of whom Professor Dowden is a type, to obliterate all nationality from their work. The other path winds spirally upwards to a mountain-top of our own, which may be in the future the Meru to which many worshippers will turn. To remain where we are as a people, indifferent to literature, to art, to ideas, wasting the precious gift of public spirit we possess so abundantly in the sordid political rivalries, without practical or ideal ends, is to justify those who have chosen the other path and followed another star than ours. I do not wish anyone to infer from this a contempt for those who, for the last hundred years or so, have guided public opinion in Ireland. If they failed in one respect, it was out of a passionate sympathy for wrongs of which many are memories, thanks to them. And to them is due the creation of a force which may be turned in other directions, not without a memory of those pale

sleepers to whom we may turn in thought,
placing

"A Kiss of fire on the dim brow of failure,
A crown upon her uncrowned head."

A. E.









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