

Who was urging redoubled pace, and to hear him was to obey.

And a leap, indeed, gave she, and vanished forevermore. And Hóseyñ looked one long, last look as who, all bereaved, Looks fain to follow the dead as far as the living may, Then he turned Buhéyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping sore.

"And they jeered him one and all. Poor Hóseyñ is crazed past hope!

How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite? To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or girl, And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an antelope, The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by night! 'And the beaten in speed!' wept Hóseyñ. 'You never have loved my Pearl.'"

Upon one such poem as this, if we were so unfortunate as to lose all else he has written, Mr. Browning could safely rest his fame. In power and in psychological analysis, the poem entitled "Clive" is fully its equal, but is, we think, inferior as a work of art, inasmuch as it is less poetically suggestive, and, owing to the nature of the subject, less steeped in the atmosphere of beauty. It vibrates, however, with a trumpet-toned heroism that can well dispense with Oriental glamor. Never has the soldier of Plassy, who "gave English India," been painted in nobler colors than here where he tells the story of the moment in his life when he felt most afraid! Nor does he shrink from confessing that, "whether he showed fear or not, fear he felt, and very likely shuddered, since he shivers now."

We venture to say that the most devoted admirer of Mr. Browning must read more than once the poem of "Pietro of Abano," before he can affirm that he understands its drift and purpose. The author was determined not to let us off so easily with the comparatively direct and simple beauties of "Clive," "Muléykeh," etc.; he must give his friends and critics yet one more of his hardest nuts to crack in this extraordinary and at times grotesque production, in which, after having apparently exhausted his eccentricities of language, he finds himself compelled to resort to music, and ends with a "lilt," as he calls it, in four bars of musical notation. However, we have long since learned that the meat within his kernels compensates for all the roughness of the rind, and the patient reader who is not repelled by the irritating awkwardness of forced uncouth rhymes, by the bewildering entanglement of parenthesis within parenthesis, and the labyrinthine intricacies of thought encountered in this poem, will be amply rewarded by a manifestation of those splendid qualities which the world has grown to revere in Mr. Browning's mind. Nowhere has he more fully and freely displayed his tolerant humanity, his piercing insight, his finely tempered wisdom, as broad as it is keen, and his wholesome satire, unspoiled by a touch of acidity. The whole action of the poem is supposed to take place in the space occupied between the enunciation of the syllables "*Bene-dicite*," which the old cabalistic seer Pietro of Abano utters over the head of the Grecian stranger who seeks to wrest from him his magic secret.

A recent critic has spoken of "the noble cadences and significant music" at Mr. Browning's disposal whenever he sees fit to lay aside his ruggedness, and is lifted by his theme into unwonted enthusiasm or

emotion. The harmony in some of the lines of Pietro justifies such epithets, and makes most of the lyric melodies of the day ring thin and hollow in comparison.

Such verse as we find in this and other poems in the book, when contrasted with the metrical phrases of even such skilled melodists as Swinburne or Tennyson, reminds us of the diapason and full-chorded dignity of an organ or an orchestra as compared with the primitive rhythm and cloying sweetness of tambourine and flute.

The story of the Greek's gradual but rapid advancement as high as to the Papal Chair, and how at each stage of progress he repudiates anew the debt of gratitude to his benefactor,—all this is told with the subtlety of analysis, the pungent satire, the pitiless logic, the dramatic impartiality, and the vigorous originality of illustration, which in our day belong exclusively and essentially to Robert Browning. Surely these qualities counterbalance the frequent obscurity of construction, and the Hudibrasian burlesqueness of rhyme in which his sphinx-like genius takes perverse delight.

This poem, to which he has evidently devoted his best strength, is but one more version of the moral or rather social lesson which the entire work of his life has inculcated. To take the world as he finds it, that is his motto—not to "foolishly turn, disgusted, from his fellows, as pits of ignorance—to fill, and heaps of prejudice—to level." According to him, the wise man does not censure, nor despise, nor judge, nor condemn, nor exaggerate—he simply *endeavors to understand*. If he be worldly and clever, he will make vices as well as virtues subservient to his ends, and "learn to compute as helps the very things which he had foolishly estimated as hindrances." If he be poet and sage he will not falsely idealize a world wherein sin and misery play such paramount rôles, but impartially show us how "fair and good are products of foul and evil," and will track home crime through all the intricacies of motive, and the extenuating complications of circumstance under the goadings of temptation. Browning's chief glory is that he retains always his own serene health and sanity in the midst of his researches into the world's maladies, and thereby succeeds in lifting us to a height where a large toleration has nothing in common with mawkish pity, and where a broad and noble humanity never for a moment degenerates into the morbid sentimentality which blurs or obliterates the straight line of demarcation between right and wrong.

#### Cable's "Grandissimes."\*

MR. CABLE is a literary pioneer. He has broken a path for the daylight into the cane-brakes and everglades, and into the heart of Creole civilization. He is the first Southern novelist (unless we count Poe a novelist) who has made a contribution of permanent value to American literature. The old-fashioned romances of chivalry, which by a strange anachron-

\* *The Grandissimes. A Story of Creole Life.* By George W. Cable, author of "Old Creole Days." New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1880.

ism of feeling are still surviving among the Southern people, and the terrifically lurid and feverish productions of the author of "Beulah," are, of course, not to be mentioned in the same breath with Mr. Cable's dignified and wholesome work. Even compared to such novels as J. W. DeForest's "Kate Beaumont," which was typical of a class representing, with a fair degree of insight and literary skill, the outside Northern view of Southern society, "The Grandissimes" not only holds its own but easily casts its predecessors into the shade. Although obviously the result of years of reflection and acute observation, it has the beautiful spontaneity of an improvisation, and all the slow and laborious processes of thought, from which it has gradually grown to its present completeness of stature, are not even remotely felt by the reader. For all that, it is patent to any one skilled in aesthetic analysis that the author's attitude toward his work is primarily that of a philosopher; we are inclined to think that he saw his problem before he saw its possibilities for a story. And his problem is nothing less than the conflict of two irreconcilable civilizations. To grapple with so large a theme requires courage, but Mr. Cable has shown that he has not overestimated his powers. At any rate, it would have been nobler to fail in an attempt to describe a battle of civilization than to succeed in describing a lady's foot or a charming conglomeration of laces and satins. We are well aware that these fascinating trivialities have not been without influence upon the fate of nations; but if we were to judge by a certain school of novelists which has eminent representatives on both sides of the Atlantic, it would be safe to conclude that nothing happens in the world which has not its origin in a *boudoir* intrigue. It is refreshing to escape from the tepid and perfumed atmosphere of this artificial over-refinement into the healthy semi-barbarism of Mr. Cable's Louisiana during the years immediately following the cession to the United States. In fact, the state of affairs in Louisiana in 1804 is so nearly parallel with the state of affairs to-day, or at all events previous to 1876, that to all intents and purposes the book is a study (and a very profound and striking one) of Southern society during the period of reconstruction. Accordingly, we cannot help suspecting Mr. Cable of a benevolent intention to teach his Southern countrymen some fundamental lessons of society and government, while ostensibly he is merely their dispassionate historian. Whether the Creole gentlemen whom Mr. Cable characterizes with such admirable vigor and distinctness are capable of accepting a lesson, even though it involves the very problem of their existence, is a question which we dare not decide. But if our inferences from the story are correct, that little strip of France, which by an unfortunate accident was deposited on the delta of the Mississippi, represents a civilization that is doomed, and which already bears in its bosom the germ of decay. Whether single individuals like Honoré Grandissime, who break with the traditions of their people, and whom their kinsmen, with the instinct of self-preservation, hate and would like to trample upon, can do more than prolong the period of

decay and the final death-struggle, is another problem which the reader is left to solve in accordance with the logic of the story. Nevertheless, we venture to say that M. Grandissime shows a marvelous depth of insight or of instinct when he attaches himself to the plain and honorable apothecary; for the apothecary, though he has no antiquity to boast of in the way of pedigrees, carries the future in his pocket, while M. Grandissime's grandeur lies chiefly in the past, and his only chance of survival (not individually but generically) is determined by his ability to identify himself with the Anglo-American civilization, and his readiness to adopt its codes of law and honor. Opposed to him, as the champion of the Gallic tradition and the *ancien régime*, stands his uncle Agricola Fusilier—an admirably conceived type of the shallow but magniloquent Southerner who bewilders and overwhelms you with his sonorous rhetoric, and while patronizing, humiliates you by his exaggerated and insincere flatteries. In the title "citizen," which is so strenuously insisted upon, and in a great deal of Fusilier's self-exalting and didactic talk, we find a subtle allusion to a fact which we have nowhere else seen commented upon—viz., that the South clothes itself in the worn-out intellectual garments of Europe, and glories in its provincial attitude toward the nations of Latin blood. It is no rare thing in the Creole South to hear social theories and doctrines which were exploded half a century ago in France, propounded with a recklessly progressive air, as if they were the latest novelties in the world of thought.

The influence of the pure and high-minded hero, Frowenfeld, upon Honoré, Palmyre, Doctor Keene, and in fact every one with whom he comes in contact, was evidently a central *motif* with the author, and as such is properly emphasized. It strikes the reader, however, that Frowenfeld's influence is unduly passive; it is by being what he is, and not by any pronounced deed, that he lifts and exalts the lives which intersect his own. As with the sweet Pippa in Browning's dramatic poem "Pippa Passes," the exhaled purity and loveliness of his character become, as it were, a palpable influence for good and give an upward impulse to many a wavering life. For all that, it is not to be denied that Frowenfeld's character is very pale, in its approximate perfection, when compared to that of the vividly individualized Creoles by whom he is surrounded. Again, if we are to persist in minute fault-finding, we perceive that Mr. Cable has not followed the dramatic rule (which is, indeed, applicable to all fiction) requiring, as it were, an acceleration of *tempo*, and a proportionate accumulation of interest toward the end. His last chapters, though they deal out poetic justice, and gather up most satisfactorily all the suspended threads of the plot, seem to be a little lagging, and, on the whole, impress one less strongly than many of their predecessors. This may in part be owing to the fact that the *denouement* becomes after the forty-third chapter a foregone conclusion, and its anticipation necessarily distracts one's attention. The interest of the book really culminates in the terrible story of Bras-Coupé, which is very skillfully interwoven with the fates of

the principal characters in the book, and incorporeally pursues them to the end.

We would fain go into a still further analysis of Mr. Cable's excellent novel; but as our space compels us to be brief, we will pass by the many tempting passages we had marked for comment, and merely add a concluding remark regarding his style. We believe it is the opinion of the average reader that it is too luxuriant, that it is full of allusions which are hard to trace. We have heard this judgment frequently expressed, but we have always combated it. To us Mr. Cable's style is that of a highly imaginative man, in whose mind every fresh thought opens up a long vista of alluring suggestions. An author who is in this manner actually embarrassed by his wealth has to exercise severe self-denial when the temptation to imaginative digression presents itself; and if occasionally he grants himself the luxury of a striking metaphor or paradox, it is because he knows its value to be too great to justify the sacrifice. Who would, indeed, miss those inimitable little touches which in "The Grandissimes" are scattered through the soberer narrative like blazing poppies through a field of wheat? We shall not quote (though we can hardly refrain from calling attention to the "worthless berries, whose splendor the combined contempt of man and beast could not dim"), but would rather leave to the reader the pleasure of chuckling to himself at each fresh discovery.

#### "The Stillwater Tragedy."\*

TO MR. ALDRICH'S old admirers "The Stillwater Tragedy" presents a serious difficulty: it compels them, temporarily, to suspend their admiration. The reason why, it may be difficult to state concisely; but instead of attempting it, we will relate a conversation which took place the other night, say at a certain New York club. Of the speakers, one was a Bostonian, and accordingly a born literary critic; the other was a New Yorker. They had both read "The Stillwater Tragedy," and, as the following colloquy will show, had tolerably well-defined opinions:

"As for me," said the Bostonian, "I am free to confess that I like all that Mr. Aldrich writes. He is never crude. His humor is delightful, his wit keen and brilliant, and refinement and culture are required to enjoy him. He never shocks your sensibilities, he never fails to amuse. You can read him aloud to your lady friends without fear of encountering embarrassing passages. The love-making, which is mostly parenthetical, is always well-bred and discreet. Take, for instance, this 'Stillwater Tragedy,' which you are determined to find fault with. What is there in the relation between Richard and Margaret to which the most fastidious reader could object—?"

"Granted, granted," interrupted the New Yorker, with some eagerness. "You have misunderstood me, if you imagine that I object to that, or anything else. It is not what there *is* in Aldrich's books

which offends me, but it is the absence of the things which are not there, that I criticise. It is all very clever, astonishingly clever. But it is a kind of cold, cynical brilliancy which in a short story may be very entertaining, but which in a novel soon palls upon one's taste. The neatness with which every phrase is turned, the ingenuity with which the simple details of the plot are arranged, would no doubt be worthy of high praise, if they were not there as substitutes for the more weighty and essential qualities which constitute the novelist's first claim to his title. Where in 'The Stillwater Tragedy' do you find a single situation which has the faintest power to move the heart? Did you really care very much whether the colorless Margaret, who is an enfeebled copy of the lovely Prudence Palfrey, did or did not, in the end, join her fate to that of the sensible, but utterly uninteresting, Richard Shackford? To me, I admit, it was a matter of supreme indifference. I read the book because in any book of Aldrich's I am justified in expecting to find a certain number of bright and clever sayings, and in this expectation I was not wholly disappointed. Moreover, it is always a pleasure to read an English style of such singular refinement and purity, even though the story which it is intended to convey may be feeble and bloodless. A fine arrangement of drapery may be impressive, even though it clothes nothing but a lay figure."

As our space forbids us to report verbatim, we shall only give a *résumé* of the concluding argument. The New Yorker maintained that "The Stillwater Tragedy" was not a serious study of the labor question, while he admitted that the various types of workmen were vividly characterized, and undoubtedly had been suggested by living models. The murder with which the book opens, he further asserted, was robbed of all its tragic force, first, by the despicable character of the murdered man, and secondly, by the familiar, semi-humorous way in which it is treated. If this were realism, he would even prefer a tinge of melodrama. The web of evidence, which at first apparently implicates the nephew, and then allows him, with such surprising ease, to extricate himself again, was ingeniously contrived, but not sufficiently so to make the reader feel for one moment the slightest apprehension as to Richard's ultimate fate. And, reverting once more to the discreetness and propriety of the courting, did his opponent really maintain that this cool and measured regard had the remotest afflatus of the genuine passion? In his opinion, Mr. Aldrich and his school virtually said to their readers: "Ladies and gentlemen, you know what love is. Therefore, I need not describe it to you. When I introduce two lovers, you know perfectly well how they feel toward each other. Why, then, should I waste words in descanting upon the sentiment which animates them? It is a story as old as the hills, and accordingly a little stale. Moreover, love of the wild and enthusiastic sort is out of date and out of fashion. The modern substitute for it is a much milder article, which may cause a headache, but never kills."

But thus, if our critic is right, no author is justified in reasoning. As far as he is concerned, the

\* The Stillwater Tragedy. By T. B. Aldrich, author of "Marjorie Daw," "The Queen of Sheba," "Flower and Thorn," etc. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1880.