

NOVEMBER 17, 5 A.M., I found myself safe back in my little student's room at the Observatory of Paris. I sought a few minutes of repose before going home to my dear ones, who were still sleeping. The morning stars in the southeast were beaming through my wide-open window. From my divan I gazed into the calm blue. Had I just awaked

from a beautiful dream in which a balloon had carried me heavenward?

No, no, it was not a dream; here were the charts, the note-books, the roses, and the mistletoe. My body seemed lighter than ever, and I had the sensation of floating in the air, and my heart was overflowing with gratitude.

THE POETRY OF WILLIAM BLAKE.

THE PRIZE ESSAY IN "THE CENTURY'S" COMPETITION FOR COLLEGE GRADUATES OF 1898.

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BLAKE'S country, like the mythical ones of old, is shut away by a cloud, and a forest, and a fiery river. Luring the adventurous by its simple isolation, it has seemed always to hide behind impassable barriers, or even to float ahead and vanish, like a mirage. Those who have penetrated farthest into it have been least able to tell us coherently of what they saw; for, like the legendary land again, it seems to disturb the balance of its visitors. They come wandering back to us muttering of purple skies, and men walking upside down. Blake's country, too, is a rendezvous of quack explorers; of indolent empty-heads who show a relic or two of the enchanted land, and preach to our ignorance of things they never have seen or felt. In plain language, Blake, like Browning, Whitman, and a half-score other great personalities, has been too much in the hands of ill-poised theory-mongers on the one side, and of shallow sentimentalists on the other. When a startlingly isolated figure appears, there stands always ready a throng of proselyters eager to stamp their badge upon him; while there also stands ready a band of sickly admirers, who mask their want of penetration by their lavish tears and smiles. Blake never had, until recently, either the one or the other kind of "followers"; but now he has both, to his detriment. There may be virtue in a simple statement of Blake's more obvious qualities—a statement free, I trust, alike from preconceptions and blind loyalty, and certainly founded on the humility which intercourse with an exalted spirit always brings.

The Blake I know is a child, grasping manhood at intervals. Childhood is mercury, manhood is strength. Blake, in the most of his art, is so mercurial, so instantaneous in following impulse, so airily positive, that childhood alone has types of mind corresponding with his. The note of youth is the most conspicuous quality in his lyrical poems—a youth divinely gifted, no doubt; seeing at a single glance what soberer heads reach only by steady shocks of reason; youth visited in dreams by truth unearthly. Certainly the results of Blake's mental processes are somewhat titanic. But the processes were essentially those of immaturity. Blake never grew up.

The man who declared, "All things exist in the human imagination," was merely a phrase-making continuation of the child who told a boasting traveler that *he* should call a city splendid "in which the houses were of gold, the pavements of silver, the gates ornamented with precious stones." It is the same hurried generalization, a like reliance upon the feathers of impulse as the rock of law. Individualism, clear of theory and forcible by reason of its innocent absoluteness, is hardly to be distinguished from childhood. Manhood brings with it not only caution, steadfastness, restraint, but a kind of knowing dependence on the rest of humanity. Blake's individualism, the most absolute, the most immutable, which the record of English poetry can show, kept him throughout life in that state of unthinking dependence upon his own impulse, that fleeting, quivering sensibility, which is the essence of the child temperament.

I.

THIS brilliant immaturity of Blake accounts for many things in his career. It accounts especially for his perfect unlikeness to his age. People have said of him, in the stock phrases they use regarding any literary phenomenon, that he "reacted" against his age, and therefore was "evolved" from it. That was precisely what he did not do. He was too innocently and daintily set apart from his times to bear even a revolutionary relationship with that pedant period. Are we to suppose that in youth he read the works of John Wolcot, of Anne Seward,—the "Swan of Lichfield," who never grew out of the ugly duckling stage,—of Anne Barbauld, of divine Shenstone, and ineffable Akenside; and then, holding up his tiny hands, cursed the age and poised a lance against it? Not at all. Then, as always, his own tastes sufficed him, and his own impulses were inspiration enough. It is sufficiently remarkable not to find a gifted boy carried away by the atmosphere about him; but Blake's youth was the more remarkable still in that he totally ignored his opposites, and wrought from his own vein of metal. Having not a mood or a molecule in common with anybody else, he necessarily stood apart from his age. We must constantly remember, however, that he stands just as far apart from all other poets who ever wrote.

Of the essential Blake we make this assertion—not of the Blake who makes his appearance in the "Poetical Sketches" of 1783. Our twelve-year-old poet, though usually dwelling apart in an ideal realm, had moments of being as human and conventional a boy as any; hence, of trying to fashion himself after his heroes, to make himself big and pompous—in short, and in general, to labor for things beyond his reach. This lordly ambition of boyhood swerves Blake aside from his true element, and sets him to work upon tragedies, ballads, apostrophes, and the rest. He intends at one time to be Shakspeare, and, kindly refraining from bettering the dramatist's account of Richard III and Henry VIII, lays hold of a royal personage Shakspeare left untouched, and produces "King Edward III." It is convincing to see how the boy, with all his command of a really beautiful and distinctive verse, misses the dramatic, misses sublimity, misses Shakspeare. It is interesting, too, to see how far, at this time, he could wander into Elizabethan conventionalities. The apostrophe to "Spring," followed dutifully by lines to

the other seasons, is full of such lapses. In "The Evening Star" an occasional line or two—

Speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,
And wash the dusk with silver,

or,

the wolf rages wide,
And the lion glares through the dun forest—

give us a foretaste of his magic; but "Fair Eleanor" is fit for a lace-collared youngster to speak at a school entertainment. "Gwin, King of Norway," except for a few splendid lines, is forced and hollow; a certain "War Song" is parrot-talk; and "Samson," though it gives us the wonderful image,

He seemed a mountain, his brow among the
clouds;

She seemed a silver stream, his feet embracing,

is a laborious struggle to express half-formed ideas.

But to do justice to the "Poetical Sketches" it is necessary to comment here upon a handful of songs which, cut clean apart from the fine frenzy generated out of other poets, come nearer to the essential Blake than the pure joyousness of any other boy of fourteen ever came to the utterance of his manhood. These songs, in mere precocity, lose nothing by comparison with the earliest work of Pope and Cowley. They are the more important for us because of their distinctively Blake-like quality. The analyst with note-book is at liberty to find any amount of "Elizabethan influence" in these verses, to lay a finger on this bit from Herrick, and that from Fletcher, and the other from Crashaw; but strip off every petal from these rose-leaf songs, and then say which one is accountable for the inmost fragrance. Nay, that fragrance is Blake. He gathers a dozen individualities into his own, and sends them forth laden with his essence.

How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.

That, in purity, in height, in delicate breadth, is Blake and none other. And this is Blake spacious and austere:

Whether on Ida's shady brow,
Or in the chambers in the East,

The chambers of the Sun, that now
From ancient melody have ceased;

Whether in heaven ye wander fair,
Or the green corners of the earth,
Or the blue regions of the air
Where the melodious winds have birth;

How have you left the ancient love
That bards of old enjoyed in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move,
The sound is forced, the notes are few!

Yet even these always-quoted stanzas are as honey to snow compared with the high, elusive notes that came later. They are too richly wrought, too sweet by half. Still more absolutely Blake-like—more poignant, and sudden, and full of his stinging ardor—are the lines of this "Mad Song," the metrical liberty of which, for me, only connects the poem more closely with his characteristic work:

The wild winds weep,
And the night is a-cold:
Come hither, Sleep,
And my griefs enfold!
But lo! the morning peeps
Over the eastern steeps,
And the rustling birds of dawn
The earth do scorn.

Like a fiend in a cloud,
With howling woe
After night I do crowd
And with night will go;
I turn my back to the east,
From whence comforts have increased,
For light doth seize my brain
With frantic pain.

So much for Blake at the age of experiment, and for the sole poems in which the faintest tendency to imitation is traceable. Fascinating as they are, significant as is this voice of melody in the stark deadness of the times, the "Poetical Sketches" are of highest interest by contrast with the Blake of a later growth. They count little more in the general scheme of his poetical career than his early fumbings with an engraver's tools counted with regard to his tremendous designs. They are products of ambition as well as of inspiration. When Blake grew ambitious, he lost his hold on the qualities most his own.

II.

ARRIVED at its full power, Blake's mind dwelt mainly on two ideas: the reality of the

spiritual world, and the divine nature of energy. From these radiated the complex and astounding mass of theories, or rather imaginative conceptions, which we may euphemistically term his system of philosophy. Blake was no thinker, in the ordinary sense, yet his philosophical development was a course of inductive reasoning—after his unique fashion. His data were his own states of mind, his own impressions, his own visions; the last most of all. Interesting explanations have been offered regarding this "abnormal insight" of Blake's; but the research is not of marked profit beyond the "Well done, good and faithful servant" of the class-room. Whether or not Blake "really saw" angels in a hay-field, or angels glittering in a tree, or fairies holding obsequies, or God's face at the window, he thought he saw them, he built a philosophy upon them, and he uttered the philosophy in verse. This is surely enough for discussion. There is no doubt that this temperamental extension of Blake's powers was the fundamental fact in his life, and that virtually the whole of his mystical theory results from it. There is no more common error in the world than generalization based upon one's individual abilities and tastes. Having some sort of insight into the supernatural, and an imaginative strenuousness which enabled him to see almost anything he wished to see, Blake, in the most innocent manner possible, laid down his laws that "all things exist in the human imagination"; that "imagination is the real and eternal world, of which this vegetative universe is but the faint shadow"; that "energy is the only life"; that "man has no body distinct from his soul"; and a host of more or less related dicta. These utterances are simply the records of Blake's spiritual experience; merely oracular statements of his individual perceptions and feelings. One may or may not accept them as divine revelation. One cannot avoid regarding them as expressions of a towering life, and as the testimony of a man who, by the grace of God, knew intuitively much that we shall never know by reasoning or by experience.

We are not trying to probe after the truth of mysticism, but to indicate what mental processes lay back of Blake's poetical work. Once realizing that he saw the earth and the heavens above as nothing in themselves, as mere hieroglyphs of a supernal reality, we may approach with sympathy the elate, floating, intangible poems, with a knowledge that their limitations are really their

strength. It is doubtful if Blake will ever be taken on his own ground by a large number of readers. He touches life at so few points that his pen is usually dipped in mist or quicksilver, not blood. At times he is as the pure cloud that reaches its silken fringes to earth, but, subject to the waftings of its sky-element, hastily withdraws and floats intangibly over. At times he is that cloud darting lightnings, and sweeping past in dark, rolling vapor; always above, impenetrable. In both moods Blake is removed definitely from the clash of society, from tangible human things, from aught that the material and muscled can possibly grasp. Unless spiritual vision is to be granted to all mankind,—as, indeed, some prophets affirm,—or mysticism is to become as common as the spelling-book, a sympathetic understanding of Blake will never be broadspread. But it may keep some readers from snap judgments and hasty disgust if they remember the simple fact that he saw all things through the golden glass of symbolism, and necessarily missed some of the bold outlines.

There are some aspects of life which this method of vision exactly suits. Innocence in nature or humanity is chief of these aspects. Therefore, when Blake turned to the depiction of childhood, and the environment of childhood, he achieved poetry in which the expression is adequate, just, and wholly beautiful. Blake's most zealous interpreters have upbraided the general public for preferring the "Songs of Innocence" to anything else he wrote; but there is some right instinct in the preference, after all. These songs are not suggestive of heavy thought in the same degree that later poems are; perhaps they are less significant of "the true Blake." But certainly one finds here a mastery of the subjects which *are* treated, a lyrical correspondence between substance and form, and a simplicity which masks to esthetic perfection the spiritual suggestiveness for which the poems exist. In these respects few of Blake's poems reach the level of the "Songs of Innocence."

We have already said that the less Blake's ambition to poetize, the finer poetry he wrought. Certain practical circumstances caused the "Songs of Innocence" to yield the poetry pure of the ambition. During the six years which passed between the "Sketches" and the "Songs," Blake labored steadily at his trade of engraver and designer. In these years the artist side of his genius seems to have predominated. He

became deeply engrossed in the technical part of his work. He discovered, or, to be strictly accurate, there was revealed to him in vision, a new process of printing designs and verses together by a kind of reversed etching. So the poetical work of this period was, in his opinion, incidental to the founding of his reputation in art; and the verses, when published by the new method, seemed useful chiefly to fill in the vacant spots in the designs. To that very thing the "Songs of Innocence" doubtless owe much of their spontaneity and their elemental sweetness. Browning says, in a passage quoted by Gilchrist: "If there should arise a new painter, will it not be in some such way, by a poet now, or a musician (spirits who have conceived and perfected an ideal through some other channel), transferring it to this, and escaping our conventional roads by pure ignorance of them?" It is such a virgin power which appears in the "Songs of Innocence." But for their lyrical quality they owe quite as much to the character of Blake at the time of writing. He did not yet wear the brow of a seer. His mystical philosophy was in the inchoate; his tremendous theories were then mere instincts and emotions, mingling insensibly with the pure joy of living. He himself had not felt the bitterness of deception, enmities, oppression. He had lived the free life of a child, and the rod of the taskmaster had not yet descended. He was innocence itself, and having cast aside all ambitions but the expression of his own impulses, he inevitably brought forth "Songs of Innocence."

They are more than "child studies": they are childhood itself, for they are Blake. They are the mysterious raptures of a spirit which neither London smoke nor eighteenth-century sophistication could tarnish. And the medium of expression is refined to the vanishing-point. There is no more guile in the purest of these lays than speaks in the "O—o—oh" of a child's sudden wonder; no more, in fact, than speaks in the lighted countenance without the exclamation. But words are thick and blunt. Let the none too familiar "Lamb" suggest what it may:

Little lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bade thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?

Little lamb, who made thee,
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little lamb, I'll tell thee;
Little lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For He calls himself a Lamb;
He is meek, and He is mild,
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name.
Little lamb, God bless thee!
Little lamb, God bless thee!

Surely mysticism never assumed a daintier guise than this. With "The Lamb" may be mentioned "The Echoing Green," "The Blossom," "Spring," and "Infant Joy," as poems which have this rare note of innocent, sprightly wonder. From such an extreme of simplicity the "Songs" range downward all the way to "The Little Black Boy," which is over-subtle, and "The Divine Image," which is didactic. Perhaps the most perfect balance of thought and emotion is found in "A Cradle Song" and "Night," in both of which, as well, the melody exerts its utmost fascination. In the "Cradle Song" the most significant of a beautiful set of verses are the following:

Sweet babe, in thy face
Holy image I can trace;
Sweet babe, once like thee
Thy Maker lay, and wept for me:

Wept for me, for thee, for all,
When He was an infant small.
Thou His image ever see,
Heavenly face that smiles on thee!

Smiles on thee, on me, on all,
Who became an infant small;
Infant smiles are His own smiles;
Heaven and earth to peace beguiles.

It will need but a single stanza of "Night" to show what a spell the poem casts:

The sun descending in the west,
The evening star does shine;
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine.
The moon, like a flower
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight,
Sits and smiles on the night.

It has been well said that "in Blake's poetry the finest expression of his genius is its power to open for the soul sudden vistas of immortality, to conduct it by means of a half-recognized emotion into fair fields whither it would lack the power to go of itself." This energy of suggestion is

strongly marked in the "Songs of Innocence." Blake has selected those figures and scenes which naturally symbolize the most; he has presented them with an artlessness which is the highest reach of art; he has insured a hearing by introducing an element of music which he never again recaptured; and he has infused, with that indescribable power granted only to the highest genius, the elusive, pervasive, and magical quality that we name "atmosphere." The effect of all this is to lead the reader to the verge of great discoveries, to give him a taste of the universal and ineffable, and then to leave him in the attitude of wonder and exaltation, which is, perhaps, all that human beings have a right to affect. Mystical poetry can achieve no higher victory than this.

III.

In the memorable conflict which went on for some time between Blake's lyrical instincts and his didactic, "prophetic" tendencies, the former were bound to be eventually worsted. To retain the simple music of his soul is more than the average man can do, try as he may. And Blake, so far as we know, never made any such effort, but rather girded himself continually for his

great task

To open the eternal worlds! To open the miniature eyes
Of man inward; into the worlds of thought; into eternity;
Ever expanding in the bosom of God, the human imagination.

Whitman, in his self-conscious and blustering assumption of responsibility as seer, hardly surpassed the determined endeavor of Blake to do the impossible. There is no need to say that Blake's labors as "prophet" were barren. But he certainly let his lyrical power go to waste while he was listening to thunderous voices from the mountain-top. For proof of this assertion, we have merely to bring forward the poems grouped as "Songs of Experience," and place them where they belong, beside the lovely poems of childhood, of which they are the negation and the opposite.

How much of direct purpose there was in this attempt to present the same life with a blight upon it, we cannot know. The two books appeared together in Blake's time, with the description, "Two contrary states of the human soul"; but that is not conclusive. At any rate, Blake might have said to himself at the moment of writing,

Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no
more.

Innocence is gone. Nature is no longer
blithe and confiding; but earth raises up her
head,

Her light fled,
Stony, dread,
And her locks covered with grey despair;

while the burden of her song is:

Break this heavy chain,
That does freeze my bones around!
Selfish, vain,
Eternal bane,
That free love with bondage bound.

The children of Holy Thursday now are
pictured as

reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

The chimney-sweep gives text for a sermon on hypocritical cruelty; the "little boy lost," for an outcry against persecution for freedom of belief; the babe of the new "cradle song" is warned against the "dreadful light" about to break; roses have invisible worms at the heart; gay little animals are slain in their pretty play; and in place of a lamb, we have the symbol of ferocity, a tiger,

burning bright
In the forests of the night.

Nature, then, may be considered ruined by "experience." But another ruination is apparent—that of Blake the lyricist. He does not fall into stiffness and hollowness; that were impossible. But, in place of simplicity, he gives us rude eloquence; in place of delicate suggestion, fierce stimulation; in place of melody, a rushing volume of emphasis. One may contend that this is precisely the value of the "Experience," and that the great change in nature is accurately bodied forth by this harsh note. Unquestionably there is an austere might, a Hebraic spaciousness and a richness of coloring, not apparent in the "Innocence." But Blake the singer is lost to us, nevertheless.

Some of the "Songs of Experience" are very powerful; others very trivial. Blake was always ineffectual the moment he deserted his ideal ground and attempted to cope with worldliness on its own terms. Our winsome poet is hard to recognize in this vein:

Dear mother, dear mother, the Church is cold;
But the Ale-house is healthy, and pleasant, and
warm.

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Besides, I can tell where I am used well;
The poor parsons with wind like a blown bladder
swell.

Thank fortune, there is not much of this,
and we are just as likely to hit upon a beautiful fancy:

Ah, Sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun;
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveler's journey is done.

The weakest parts of the series are those which embody a remonstrance against oppression. In protest against specific ills, Blake shows the character of a sensitive man put beside himself by the brutal materialism of his opposites, and forgetting his own dignity in the heat of his anger. When attacking an abstraction, however, he rises to his idealistic vein, in which he is always superb. The most of "The Garden of Love," for example, seems to me extremely beautiful, not only in diction, but in versification:

I laid me down upon a bank,
Where Love lay sleeping;
I heard among the rushes dank
Weeping, weeping.

Then I went to the heath and the wild,
To the thistles and thorns of the waste;
And they told me how they were beguiled,
Driven out, and compelled to be chaste.

"The Angel" and "A Little Girl Lost" have much the same quality. But there is no comparison between these and the poems which embody a plea for a return to nature. This is really the central idea of the book, and, indeed, one of the principal ideas of Blake's philosophy in general. Almost all his "prophetical" books assert, in some manner, that all material things are holy, so they be under the dominion of the spiritual; that nature must be restored to its rightful place as the symbol of God's power and the medium of energy. In the "Experience" Blake embodies this thought in two wonderfully effective poems, "A Little Girl Lost" and "A Little Girl Found." The "little girl" evidently represents the human soul. She wanders for days in the desert, under the "frowning, frowning night," but falls placidly asleep at last, and is borne away to a cave of wild beasts. There, in her exquisite snow-whiteness, she is protected by leopards and tigers. So much for what nature will do for those who visit it in simplicity. But the parents also, seeking their child, "pale through pathless ways," come to the cave, are welcomed there, and

To this day they dwell
In a lonely dell,
Nor fear the wolvis howl
Nor the lion's growl.

This is the final teaching of the "Songs of Experience"—that nature, supposed sinful and accursed, and taking terrifying shapes, is permeated with divine goodness. Oppressed, it cannot live; but free, it yields blessing to those who approach it with pure hearts.

IV.

Of all the English poets to whom the French Revolution had more than a far-away significance, Blake was the most profoundly stirred. Burns, indeed, with Cowper, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, viewed the great struggle with eyes aflame. But while to these men the Revolution was a lesson, to our humble engraver of Poland street it was a confirmation. By temperament, as we have seen, he was a revolutionist. When the monarchy fell, his ideas were just beginning to gain substance. Now, when he saw liberty raising its head in Paris, and men casting out magistrates, putting tyrants and degenerates to death, and glorifying passion and freedom to the uttermost, the effect upon his philosophy was to mold it into a white-hot, gigantic mass. With Blake exaltation always meant an ascent to dizzy heights of idealism. So this struggle became to him much more than a political movement, an affair of taxation and popular rights; it became symbolic of the struggle for free life in all phases. It touched his religion, his ethics, his esthetics. It brought his intellect and his emotional nature into energetic union. It transformed him from a suggestive singer into a furious declaimer and rhapsodist.

With extraordinary swiftiness and ease, "Thel," "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," "The French Revolution," "The Vision of the Daughters of Albion," and "America" streamed from Blake's brain and hand. There followed a descent into the comparative clarity of the "Songs of Experience"; and then, plunging his head among the clouds again, Blake produced, at intervals, "Urizen," "The Song of Los," "Ahania," "Jerusalem," and "Milton." To the complacent and orderly mind, with a touch of imagination, these outpourings cause an indescribable shock. Tempest alone, with its whirling disorder, can produce the same sense of confusion and insecurity. And this "prophecy" is worse than tempest, for one

cannot discern its center of force, or rely upon its beginnings and endings as such. There is, so far as one can tell after a considerable amount of study, nothing to be got from it but chaos. Genuine ethical suggestions, wonderful illuminations, and even beautiful glimpses of nature, appear in profusion. But they are always incomplete as they stand, and do not appear to be attached to anything else. In fact, the average reader, after a conscientious and determined attempt to discover what the rhapsody is about, will be apt to declare it all moonshine.

But returning day by day to these books, and gradually attaining a state of mind akin to that of the seer, the student will almost certainly declare that an immense meaning is wrapped up in them. One feels it rather than knows it. An intuitional faculty sufficiently broad and forceful cannot miss the perception that a vast mind is here speaking, and speaking truth drawn from Heaven knows what source. The wildness, the spluttering, the eery plunges, the shouting of names like Golgonooza, Kwantok, Kox, and Kotope, are not "faults"; they are parts of the phenomenon. They give not the effect of recklessness, but of being minor and outer manifestations of a tremendous force. No one has accomplished an unveiling absolutely satisfactory, and no one ever will. Mr. Swinburne's interpretation is elaborate, but fantastic and largely superimposed. In the monumental work of Messrs. Ellis and Yeats one cannot separate the philosophy of Blake from the philosophy of the commentators. One may accept these interpretations if he pleases, and fit them accurately to the subject-matter. But how be sure even then that the meaning is extracted? It is characteristic of Blake's loftiest work that there is always something beyond one's reach, something inexpressible. It is not "obscurity," it is simple vastness. He opens the avenues to knowledge of the divine, and our visions fail at the first turning. I think that in future time students will turn again and again to these prophecies, and penetrate farther and farther into their recesses; but I am positive that no explorer will ever reach the end and name the last nebulous idea dwelling there. These books are the soul of Blake, and souls stand aloof from the media by which mortals are intelligible to one another.

Assuredly this is not the place to attempt an interpretation of the "prophetical" books, or even to analyze the apparent subject-

matter of each one. Some of them are not poetry, stretch the definition as you may. The rest require a lifetime of study, and a volume for elucidation. It may be said, merely to round out our study, that the titles bear no traceable relations to the text; that the books are not "prophecy" as we use the word; that they seem to be detailed copies of the visions of Blake as they swept across his mind; that they express in tortuous and terrific form, in somber, crowded images, Blake's philosophy of the fourfold nature of man, the divine nature of energy, and the reality of the spiritual. They are not to be approached in a spirit of easy skepticism, of impatience at their eccentricities, or of regret that they are not "Songs of Innocence." To the gifted, the reverent, the thoughtful, the "eternal gates' terrific porter" will open these gloomy caverns, and the voice of a seer will issue forth.

V.

MY final word on Blake must be chiefly a bringing together of the scattered impressions already recorded. Blake, as I know him, was a child gifted with imaginative raptures lifting him to the plane of a seer. He had a child's self-sufficiency, a child's faith, a child's incompleteness. His inner life centered about two or three great ideas, all of which were more or less dependent upon his peculiar endowment of spiritual sight. Whatever else he taught was subsidiary to these two or three, or explanatory of them, or in conflict with them; for Blake held that "the man who never alters his opinions is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind." These theories we find foreshadowed in "Songs of Innocence," stated emphatically in "Songs of Experience," repeated in stray poems like "The Golden Net," "The Land of Dreams," "Auguries of Innocence," and bursting into a dark torrent of amorphous imagery and suggestion in the "prophetical" books. The variety and pregnancy of his work proves not his immensity of thought, but his resources of personality. His philosophy was a mere starting-point for the great rush of his imagination. That philosophy was bold, brilliant, fascinating. It leaped beyond its times, and anticipated the individualistic conceptions of a half-century later. But the

great ideas advanced by Blake were few; and, as far as the bare thought is concerned, one half of his work was a frank repetition of the other half.

King of the vague, Blake was powerless in the human, the dramatic, the concrete. There is flame in his poetry, but no blood. Of the material onset of society he knew nothing, and cared to know nothing. His interests were in an ideal and supernal world—the relations of God and man, spirit and flesh, good and evil. At his best, he either depicts those aspects of life ideally most suggestive, or lets humanity go altogether, and swims in an opaque element of his own. The same man whom we see "opening the eternal worlds" we behold mixing in trivial squabbles, and employing the cheap weapons of satire and bluster. He is neither consistent, nor self-mastered, nor true to any truth but his own. He is endowed with few of the solid, practical gifts which are the birthright of the commonplace. But his walk on earth was, nevertheless, a noble one, exhaling tenderness and strength, song and pure spirit, finding its nether joys in the most ethereal things in nature, and its higher joys in communion with the world of which this lower one seemed to him the imperfect reflection.

I do not suppose that Blake's influence either upon art or upon thought will ever be great. Not much in his verse is of a kind to be transferred from one personality to another; for one cannot "graft" spirit. Not much in his philosophy will outlast the swift changes and discardings and discoverings in the realm of ethics. Are not, indeed, one half of Blake's assertions already disproved or become obvious? Yet this philosophy has the surety of a sort of permanence in being directly the emanation of Blake's personality. As a man he will live; as one in whom energy attained great stature and absolute freedom; as one who saw the beauty of life, and draws us with him to the vision. He is, in a word, one of the great stimulants of modern times. He is shut away in his own world; shut away by a cloud, and a forest, and a river. But there are approaches to the mysterious land; and when one, using simplicity and steadiness and love, reaches the true Blake, he will find that the impact of that mind upon his own will be such an experience as to give life a different face.



MR. LOWELL AND HIS SPANISH FRIENDS.

BY DOÑA EMILIA GAYANGOS DE RIAÑO.

WITH AN UNPUBLISHED POEM BY MR. LOWELL.



THE recent compilation, by Mr. Joseph B. Gilder, of Mr. Lowell's despatches, "Impressions of Spain" (Boston, 1899), is especially valuable as giving an interesting description of the poet's official life in Spain. It may interest readers to see a hitherto unpublished poem by him, and to hear a little about his intercourse with some of his friends in Madrid.

Mr. Lowell brought letters to my father, Don Pascual de Gayangos, a valued friend and correspondent of Prescott and Ticknor. We saw much of him. My father's fine library was a great resource to him, and hardly a day passed without one or more notes, or "notelets," passing between us. I am the happy possessor of one hundred and seventy-three of them, full of fun, and with comments on passing events and on the books which came to him from America and England. It was a great amusement to him to help me with the translation of a Swabian manuscript at the British Museum, written by a traveler who visited Spain in the fifteenth century. Mr. Lowell was elected an honorary member of the Academia Española, and attended its evening meetings with great assiduity and to the advantage of its members no less than of himself. He liked Spain, and looked with indulgence on our faults. The picturesqueness pleased him, and the tawny landscapes and the snow-covered mountains of Guadarrama were a delight to him, frequently renewed in the long country walks he used to take with us and other friends on Sundays to the Moncloa and Pardo. When he expressed a wish to perfect his knowledge of Spanish I recommended our friend Don Hermenegildo de los Rios to read with him. They got on capitally, and became very friendly. Twice a week Mr. Lowell came to me for his Spanish lesson, an hour or more of most delightful converse on many subjects, including his life in Italy, Germany, and America, with reminiscences of days and evenings spent with Longfellow, Emerson, and others, described in Mr. Edward Everett Hale's pleasant book, "Lowell and his Friends." He spoke much

of the trees and birds that surrounded Elmwood, which were so dear to him and his wife. How thankful we must be that he closed his eyes in the home he loved so well!

I encouraged him to write in Spanish, verse and prose. When Queen Mercedes died I suggested that the king would be pleased if he should write a few lines about her. On July 13, 1878, he wrote to me: "Last evening you commanded a poem. I venture to send you on the next leaf fourteen [lines] which I composed last night as I was trying to get asleep." This was the sonnet printed in "Heartsease and Rue," p. 115.

DEATH OF QUEEN MERCEDES.

HERS all that Earth could promise or bestow, —
Youth, Beauty, Love, a crown, the beckoning
years,
Lids never wet, unless with joyous tears,
A life remote from every sordid woe,
And by a nation's swelled to lordlier flow.
What lurking-place, thought we, for doubts or
fears,
When, the day's swan, she swam along the cheers
Of the Alcalá, five happy months ago?
The guns were shouting Io Hymen then
That, on her birthday, now denounce her doom;
The same white steeds that tossed their scorn
of men
To-day as proudly drag her to the tomb.
Grim jest of fate! Yet who dare call it blind,
Knowing what life is, what our humankind?

The first verses he wrote in Spanish were written September 18, 1878. "I copy some verses, I won't call them Spanish, which came into my head one day as I passed your house while you were gone. They are the first I ever tried, and ought to be the last." They are entitled "Casa Sin Alma," and are to be found in "Heartsease and Rue," p. 105.

When he went with Mrs. Lowell to the Balearic Islands, he wrote me an amusing account of the incidents which befell him there. He meant to have seen much more of our country, but Mrs. Lowell's long and dangerous illness kept him a prisoner for months, enduring with admirable fortitude almost more than a human being could bear. His affectionate regard for us was increased by