

Editor's Study.

I

LOOKING backward has this advantage over any prospective outlook, that it is not an imaginary view, but one regarding actual events and accomplishments; the perspective is clear, and the data for comparison, if not for perfect co-ordination, are complete. It is true that if we look back far enough the record is lost, and even such monuments as remain are enigmatic, and our vision of early men and institutions is more imaginary than that of things to come. This year we are looking back a thousand years to the date of the death of Alfred, the first English king. That far the record stands forth in clear outline; but it is mainly due to his studious industry, completing the work already done by Bede, the father of English scholarship, that we have any definite knowledge of our ancestors and their doings in the few preceding centuries.

If we look back to the first Christian century, we have, outside of monuments, no clear knowledge of the Europe and Asia of that time save through the Latin and Greek literatures; and in these there is not to be found a single intimation, through contemporary mention, of the greatest personality that ever was upon earth. Going back three thousand years, we could not find in the records now extant of so advanced peoples in civilization as the Egyptian and Assyrian any distinct indication of the Hebrew people beyond that of its mere existence, although, in the religious history of the world, of all ancient peoples it was the most eminent; for any knowledge of its character, history, and singular mission we depend wholly upon its own scriptures. By way of contrast, we have in those scriptures a vivid illumination and informing characterization of every other important ancient people. Indeed, for the unlearned there is little other knowledge of those peoples; in their minds Babylon, Tyre, and Sidon exist only as pictured by the prophets. How much of "the know-

ledge of Egypt" goes with Moses in the Exodus; how much of Chaldaic lore is revived in the story of Genesis, to say nothing of the great Chaldaic spiritual drama preserved in the Book of Job! The only picture of patriarchal life in all literature is given in the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—a picture true to its specialty, but also generically typical. The Hebrew was so assimilative (creatively assimilative, for whatever he derived from Chaldea, or Egypt, or Persia he transformed, informing it with his own spirit) that his history and institutions give us indications beyond themselves—reflexes of the peoples with whom he had contacts in his ever-shifting career.

Even a brief retrospect, going no further back than to the time of our own grandfathers, is an imperfect view. From *It is* to *It was* is a change not merely of tense, but of the point of view as well, so that even the immediate past refuses to be revived in its full content and color, however readily it may yield its precise form. Human nature is the same in all ages and under all conditions in only its simple, primary emotions, and these are so modified in their expression by culture that they seem to undergo transformation, moving upon new planes, weaving more complex webs with ever-varying patterns. When, therefore, we attempt to take into our view the whole of a past century or of a past millennium, the picture is in outline, truer in form than in reality.

We strive not the less to truly restore the past, through scholarly research and in our literature and art; it is the special office of the historian. We mark the closing of a century by literary enterprises that supplement the historian's proper work—undertakings by specialists having for their end a summary of the century's progress in different fields. Sometimes a single field will furnish material for a volume, such as Dr. Williams's *Story of Nineteenth Century Science*. In 1876 the close of the first century of the re-

public was celebrated in this Magazine by a series of papers—a score of them—devoted to American progress in art, literature, science, education, mechanical invention, etc. That series was the pioneer in this kind of literary enterprise. The general delight in these landmarks of progress increases with the momentum of the progress itself. A single decade now shows more of advance in science and industry than was shown in any full century before the nineteenth. Even year by year there is material for satisfaction in counting up our increasing treasure of accomplishment as the miser counts his gold. Our retrospects stimulate our optimism and exalt our expectations. Indeed, so glittering is the near achievement and so forward our eager regard that we are in danger of losing one of the chief values of these retrospective occasions—the scholar's opportunity to dwell upon the past, to learn its lessons, and to fully appreciate its proper virtues and achievements. As the tree while it climbs and puts forth its branches takes deeper root in the soil, so should any people in its vigorous growth and aspiration have a deepening of its historic sense, of that downward pride—looking to its roots—which is a rich humility.

II

The month chosen for the celebration of the King Alfred millennial happens, very appropriately for us, to be that in which we celebrate our nation's birthday. As this writing meets the eye of the reader he can almost see his country's flag unfurled on every eminence, and can almost hear the ringing of bells and the firing of cannon—the sounds that John Adams said should forever herald the national holiday, and which were nearly the last to reach his ear, as he died on the Fourth of July seventy-five years ago. It is a gala-day, a day of pride; and this year—the most notable in our national existence—we celebrate it, mingling with our patriotic songs joyous pæans of thanksgiving for our unprecedented material prosperity. Never has there been a moment when with greater propriety and benefit we could take the long backward look and consider the pit whence we were digged.

Our separation from England in no sense deprives us of our heritage. We were never more insistent in claiming that heritage, were never truer Englishmen, than when we declared our independence of a government that exploited its subjects; and our revolt taught England her present wise and beneficent colonial policy—a lesson which we now have to learn for ourselves.

There is no sovereignty but service. This principle was being conspicuously illustrated in the Europe of King Alfred's time. In the preceding century Charlemagne had accepted the crown of empire at the hands of Pope Leo III., who then knelt to the emperor. The mediæval dream of the unity of Christendom was for a moment realized, and because it was a dream ruling the hearts of men, those who stood for it—the emperor for the temporal hope, the pope for the spiritual—received universal fealty. But before Alfred became king the dream had been broken. Charlemagne's successors served themselves rather than the people; while the papacy suffered spiritual loss from the necessary assumption of temporal power, honestly though vainly endeavoring to maintain and satisfy the popular aspiration. Feudalism soon secured its hold, with its good and its evil, serving through both, and lasting while it served, until it was finally supplanted by the nations of modern Europe, for whose emergence it had prepared the way.

But Alfred himself was the best example in all history of the truth that the king serves his people. The epitome of his character and services given by Richard Green in his *Short History of the English People* will forever stand as a worthy appreciation.

“Aelfred was the noblest as he was the most complete embodiment of all that is great, all that is lovable, in the English temper. He combined as no other man has ever combined its practical energy, its patient and enduring force, its profound sense of duty, the reserve and self-control that steadies in it a wide outlook and a restless daring, its temperance and fairness, its frank geniality, its sensitiveness to affection, its poetic tenderness, its deep and passionate religion. . . . His temper was instinct

with piety. . . . But he was no mere saint. . . . Vexed as he was by sickness and constant pain, his temper took no touch of asceticism. His rare geniality, a peculiar elasticity and mobility of nature, gave color and charm to his life. . . . He not only longed for the love of his subjects, but for the remembrance of generations to come. . . . To the scholars he gathered round him he seemed the very type of a scholar, snatching every hour he could find to read or listen to books read to him. . . . He passed from court and study to plan buildings and instruct craftsmen in gold-work, to teach even falconers and dog-keepers their business. . . . Each hour of the day had its appointed task; there was the same order in the division of his revenue and in the arrangement of his court. . . . Scholar and soldier, artist and man of business, poet and saint, his character kept that perfect balance which charms us in no other Englishman save Shakspeare. . . . His intellectual activity breathed fresh life into education and literature. His capacity for inspiring trust and affection drew the hearts of Englishmen to a common centre and began the upbuilding of a new England. Little by little men came to recognize in Aelfred a ruler of higher and nobler stamp than the world had seen. Never had it seen a king who lived solely for the good of his people."

Of the debt of our language to King Alfred, Professor Matthews has already treated in the pages of this Magazine. To him belongs the distinction of having written the first English prose—translations, mainly, of the Consolations of Boethius, the Pastoral of Pope Gregory, Orosius's universal history, and Bede's Anglo-Saxon history.

England was not yet known as England, and the English written by Alfred was far from being the English we know. Below is a passage as quoted from the Anglo-Saxon text by Mr. Frederic Harrison, in his interesting essay, "The Writings of King Alfred":

"Eala thu scippend heofenes and eorþan, thu the on tha ecan setle ric-sast, thu the on hoeredum foerelde thone heofon ymbhweorfest, and tha tunglu thu gedest the gehyrsume."

"O thou creator of heaven and earth,

that rulest on the eternal throne, thou that makest the heavens to turn in swift course, and the stars to obey thee," etc. [From Boethius.]

It was five hundred years to Chaucer, and seven hundred to Shakspeare.

Alfred did not make England, or English law, or the English language, but he began the making of all these, and he was the first great Englishman. We could not more gladly recognize our kinship with the English than in taking this long leap backward over a thousand years and joining them in doing honor to the noblest of their kings.

III

The brief essay on "The Scope of Modern Love," published in this number, is by Henry T. Finck, the author of a recent interesting work on *Primitive Love*. The theme of the essay is, in the limited space allotted to it, developed only in large lines, but so suggestively that the reader will be glad to hear from Mr. Finck again on other phases of the subject. As our readers will have noticed, we are making a feature of brief essays occupying two or three pages, a little more than the editorials of a daily or weekly paper, but shunning the vice of the general article, which usually aims at completeness, and is unduly elaborate, exhausting the subject—and the reader. The themes chosen are those specially appropriate to a popular magazine whose appeal is always to the thoughtful reader. This essay by Mr. Finck, and another in this number, entitled "A Tropical Renaissance," by Mr. Sylvester Baxter, are good examples; and the editor takes this opportunity to invite others from contributors who can present points of novel and general interest—literary, social, or scientific.

If the general article has the vice of attempting too much, by way of elaboration and completeness, even to the extent of including details that are obvious or unessential, there is the same vice also in the short story as it is commonly written. Anybody can see how much more entertaining an article is if the writer confines himself to the point of interest which tempted him at first to write it. There is, or should be, some particular appeal to the reader's sensibility which

the writer has in view when he attempts a short story; or, if he is not thinking of the reader (better if he is not), there is something which has especially moved himself—some dramatic *motif*, as we say—so that his imagination inevitably seeks embodiment. Well, it is then just *that* which, as an artist, he has to convey, and he is to do nothing which is not essential to that. Everything beyond is not only inert, but distracting. There is a good deal that he may think essential which is not so. We make no plea for bareness, but in what is merely concomitant to the main effect—weather, natural scenery, furniture, costume, details of personal appearance, relieving incident, secondary characters—a hint is better than the elaboration, however well done. Considerable indulgence must be given to some writers, who, like Edith Wharton, give us in every phrase an intellectual satisfaction. But even in the case of such writers we shall find on a critical examination (if we have the heart for it) that in all their elaborate texture there is nothing idle or inert—not too much or too little for the full appeal, the artistic effect. Even simplicity is comparative, but it is always possible as well as desirable. A story is like a living body: add a member, and it is a monstrosity; cut off one, and it is mutilated.

Edward Everett Hale, cleverest of short-story writers, once contributed to this Magazine a love-story occupying little more than half a page. That was a bravura. The best of very short magazine stories that we remember is "A Legend of Sonora," by Hildegard Hawthorne. It begins as a love-romance, and by the subtlest of transitions passes into a ghost-story—all within the compass of about eight hundred words.

IV

But to return to Mr. Finck and his treatment of modern love. The culture of affection is shown by the author mainly through an extreme contrast—between the modern man and the savage. This is natural, since the author's studies for his recent book are drawn from the earliest records of human development. The really primitive man is of course without a record, and should never be confounded with the savage, who is a degenerate.

The difference between the primitive and the modern man is like that between a wild rose and an "American Beauty"; and if we could only get at this primitive man we should discern the rare flavor of his romance, the distinctive quality of his tender affections. This wild Eden must be left to the poet for such intimations of it as may be possible. Milton surely was far astray in every point, as are the sculptors who have attempted the plastic embodiment of Adam or of Eve. We are so fixed in our fine cosmicity that a touch of insanity almost seems necessary ere the imagination can yield one note or color of that alien garden; or is it we that are alien and that the old familiar?

But for the purpose of contrast, to mark the development of modern affection, and especially of romantic love, we need go no further back than to our grandfathers. We have the growing disclosure of it in the modern novel from Jane Austen down. Mr. Finck notes the effect of the greater freedom between the sexes upon the development of romantic love. This is an important point—especially in America, where there is comparatively so little chaperonage. But it does not tell the whole story, being itself not so much the cause as it is the index of that revolution through which woman has come to live for herself—for her individual development—rather than for the race. If we take a narrow and aristocratic section of contemporary humanity, the result seems disastrous. It has been estimated that in fifteen consecutive blocks on upper Fifth Avenue there are but fifteen children. And, taking a more general view, we cannot but consider the denial of motherhood to so many women, whether it be voluntary or involuntary, the saddest tragedy of our modern life.

Nevertheless, the freer play of human affection in all the relations of life which has come with a more complex development of society and a greater diversification of human interests is a great gain to the home and to the community. It has given to our affections greater dignity, an ampler fruition. It is merely an incident that it has also made possible some of the greatest novels of contemporary literature.

EDITOR'S DRAWER

The Fall of James Potter

BY FREDERICK VEEDER

PERSONALLY he always traced his downfall to that hired man having come home and gone to sleep in the horse-trough, and he never ceased to regret that he hadn't turned on the water and drowned the wretch. Other people looked upon the hired man as an instrument in the hands of Providence.

The Honorable James Potter had many

of the elements of popularity. Not the least of these lay in the beautiful political possibilities of his name. It is not strange that he was sent to the Legislature many times, and finally to Congress. To his free and enlightened constituents he was Jim Potter, Jimmy Potter, Uncle James, Old Jim, Honest Jimmy, Our Jim, Jimpot, Old Pot, Old Jay Pee, Old Reliable Potter,



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