

# THE LAUREATE OF THE LARGER ENGLAND.

BY W. D. HOWELLS.

IF Mr. Rudyard Kipling should remain the chief poet of his race in his time, his primacy would be the most interesting witness of the imperial potentialities of that race in literature. He was not born English, if that means born in England, but the keynote of his latest volume is a patriotism intense beyond anything expressed by other English poets. He is so intense in the English loyalty which always mystifies us poor Americans, that one has a little difficulty in taking him at his word in it. But he is most serious, and in the presence of the fact one cannot help wondering how far the ties of affection, the sentiment of a merely inherited allegiance, can stretch. If we had not snapped them so summarily a century ago should we be glowing and thrilling at the name of England, which now awakens only a cold disgust in us, or at the notion of an anthropomorphic majesty, which only makes us smile? One cannot read "A Song of the English" in Mr. Kipling's new book\* without thinking we might, though as it is we read it without a responsive heart-throb, or any feeling but wonder for its beauty and sincerity.

Its patriotism is not love of the little England,

"Encompassed by the inviolate seas,"

on the west coast of Europe; but of the great England whose far-strewn empire feels its mystical unity in every latitude and longitude of the globe. It has its sublimity, that emotion, and its reason, though we cannot share it; and it is only in asking ourselves why a man of any nation, any race, should so glory in its greatness or even its goodness, when he has the greatness, the goodness of all humanity to glory in, that we are sensible of the limitations of this outborn Englishman. Possibly when we broke with England we broke more irreparably with tradition than we imagined, and liberated ourselves to a patriotism not less large than humanity. Possibly it has been for much more than we knew that we have made a home here for all mankind, and America is yet to

\* The Seven Seas. By Rudyard Kipling. New York: D. Appleton & Co.

make her own home in the heart of every man. At any rate, it seems certain that if we had not taught England that sharp lesson of a hundred years ago in colonial government, there would be no such imperial England as we see to-day, and no such poet of the imperial English race to sing her grandeur as he who holds the first place to-day among English poets.

Upon this hypothesis we may claim Mr. Kipling, whether he likes it or not, as in some sort American. He has, in fact, given us a kind of authority to do so by divining our actual average better than any American I can think of offhand, in this very extraordinary poem, where he supposes the spirit of America to speak at a well-known moment of civic trouble:

## AN AMERICAN.

The American Spirit speaks:

If the Led Striker call it a strike,  
Or the papers call it a war,  
They know not much what I am like,  
Nor what he is, my Avatar.

Through many roads, by me possessed,  
He shambles forth in cosmic guise;  
He is the Jester and the Jest,  
And he the Text himself applies.

The Celt is in his heart and hand,  
The Gaul is in his brain and nerve;  
Where, cosmopolitanly planned,  
He guards the Redskin's dry reserve.

His easy unswept hearth he lends  
From Labrador to Guadeloupe;  
Till, elbowed out by sloven friends,  
He camps, at sufferance, on the stoop.

Calm-eyed he scoffs at sword and crown,  
Or panic-blinded stabs and slays:  
Blatant he bids the world bow down,  
Or cringing begs a crumb of praise;

Or, sombre-drunk, at mine and mart,  
He dubs his dreary brethren Kings.  
His hands are black with blood: his heart  
Leaps, as a babe's, at little things.

But, through the shift of mood and mood,  
Mine ancient humour saves him whole—  
The cynic devil in his blood  
That bids him mock his hurrying soul;

That bids him flout the Law he makes,  
 That bids him make the Law he flouts,  
 Till, dazed by many doubts, he wakes  
 The drumming guns that—have no doubts ;

That checks him foolish hot and fond,  
 That chuckles through his deepest ire,  
 That gilds the slough of his despond  
 But dims the goal of his desire ;

Inopportune, shrill-accented,  
 The acrid Asiatic mirth  
 That leaves him careless 'mid his dead,  
 The scandal of the elder earth.

How shall he clear himself, how reach  
 Our bar or weighed defence prefer—  
 A brother hedged with alien speech  
 And lacking all interpreter ?

Which knowledge vexes him a space ;  
 But while reproof around him rings,  
 He turns a keen untroubled face  
 Home, to the instant need of things.

Enslaved, illogical, elate,  
 He greets th' embarrassed Gods, nor fears  
 To shake the iron hand of Fate  
 Or match with Destiny for beers.

Lo ! imperturbable he rules,  
 Unkempt, disreputable, vast—  
 And, in the teeth of all the schools,  
 I—I shall save him at the last !

The American Spirit speaks here as if with the blended voices of Emerson and Ironquill; and it is from no one essentially alien to us that knowledge of us so subtle can come. I am tempted to call the piece the most important thing, intellectually, in Mr. Kipling's new volume of "The Seven Seas." To me, it gives a sense of his penetration and his grasp that nothing else does, though there are many other things in the book which I like as well and which have the force and charm possible only from the habit of thinking in tones and colors. These things all bear witness to his uncommon quality as a poet, but if it is something more to be a humanist, then the piece I have quoted marks him as a poet with this distinction to his advantage.

Of course the last book of Mr. Kipling does not make the impression of novelty which his earlier verse made. A man can be novel but once, and for the artist in every kind all surprises after the first are to be in the way of greater strength and depth. These are what keep him new; and no mere variety without them can save his novelty from staling. Certain things this poet gave assurance of in the beginning almost in full measure: dramatic instinct, picturesque emotion, and a mighty music as of drums and trumpets. His verse always marched, with the bands

playing, and the flags flying; and it marches so still, but not more bravely; that would be difficult. What it could do and does do is to impart the effect of a sort of veteran solidity in its splendors; everything is more perfect; without losing dash or dare, it is steadier and more equal. The years have not passed without enlarging the poet to vaster ranges of feeling, and giving him new light on his own thoughts and experiences. This is all they can do for any of us; when they do it for one of the best of us it is to the common good of all.

In the new Barrack-Room Ballads here, there is, to be sure, nothing with the peculiar thrill of Danny Deever, nothing with the peculiar homesick, heartsick touch of Mandalay, but there are other things as moving and as true, with a plunge of tragedy into depths which were not sounded before, however the surface was troubled. I could allege this or that in proof, but the temper of the whole book is the best proof, and I must let this witness also for something else that I feel strongly in it: the constant individuality, the constant impersonality. No poet has more distinctly made himself felt than this poet who has always merged and hidden himself in his types, his characters. The terms upon which he could do his kind of work at all were purely dramatic. He could never stand for himself alone; he must always stand for some one else too. He must not move us with his melancholy, his rapture, his passion, except as he makes it appear that of another. With all his love of the heroic, he is one of the least romantic of the poets because the least subjective. But when I have said that he is the least subjective, I am in instant doubt of my position, except as it concerns his expression. As concerns his impression, he is one of the most subjective. He has not so much gone out to that imperial England of his as received it into himself, and given it forth again with the color, the stamp of his mind upon it. For the first time in literature that empire is imagined.

It is imagined with pride in "The Song of the English," and with a certain pain and futile appeal in this lovely poem, which I like much better, and find the tenderest and sweetest in the whole book.

#### THE FLOWERS.

"To our private taste, there is always something a little exotic, almost artificial, in songs which, under an English aspect and dress, are yet so manifestly the product of other skies. They affect us like trans-

lations; the very fauna and flora are alien, remote; the dog's-tooth violet is but an ill substitute for the rathe primrose, nor can we ever believe that the wood-robin sings as sweetly in April as the English thrush."—*The Athenæum*.

Buy my English posies—  
*Kent and Surrey may,*  
*Violets of the Undercliff*  
*Wet with Channel spray;*  
*Cowslips from a Devon combe,*  
*Midland furze afire—*  
 Buy my English posies,  
*And I'll sell your hearts' desire!*

Buy my English posies!—  
 You that scorn the may  
 Won't you greet a friend from home  
 Half the world away?  
 Green against the draggled drift,  
 Faint and frail and first—  
 Buy my Northern blood-root  
 And I'll know where you were nursed!  
 Robin down the logging-road whistles, "Come to  
 me,"  
 Spring has found the maple grove, the sap is running  
 free;  
 All the winds o' Canada call the ploughing-rain.  
 Take the flower and turn the hour, and kiss your  
 love again!

Buy my English posies!—  
 Here's to match your need.  
 Buy a tuft of royal heath,  
 Buy a bunch of weed  
 White as sand of Muysenberg  
 Spun before the gale—  
 Buy my heath and lilies  
 And I'll tell you whence you hail!  
 Under hot Constantia broad the vineyards lie—  
 Throned and thorned the aching berg props the  
 speckless sky;  
 Slow below the Wynberg firs trails the tilted wain—  
 Take the flower and turn the hour, and kiss your  
 love again!

Buy my English posies!—  
 You that will not turn,  
 Buy my hot-wood clematis,  
 Buy a frond o' fern  
 Gathered where the Erskine leaps  
 Down the road to Lorne—  
 Buy my Christmas creeper  
 And I'll say where you were born!  
 West away from Melbourne dust holidays begin—  
 They that mock at Paradise woo at Cora Lynn—  
 Through the great South Otway gums sings the great  
 South Main—  
 Take the flower and turn the hour, and kiss your  
 love again!

Buy my English posies!—  
 Here's your choice unsold!  
 Buy a blood-red myrtle-bloom,  
 Buy the kowhai's gold  
 Flung for gift on Taupo's face  
 Sign that spring is come—  
 Buy my clinging myrtle  
 And I'll give you back your home!  
 Broom behind the windy town; pollen o' the pine—  
 Bell-bird in the leafy deep where the *ratas* twine—  
 Fern above the saddle-bow, flax upon the plain—  
 Take the flower and turn the hour, and kiss your  
 love again!

Buy my English posies!—  
 Ye that have your own  
 Buy them for a brother's sake  
 Overseas, alone.  
 Weed ye trample underfoot  
 Floods his heart abrim—  
 Bird ye never heeded,  
 Oh, she calls his dead to him!

Far and far our homes are set round the Seven  
 Seas.  
 Woe for us if we forget, we that hold by these!  
 Unto each his mother-beach, bloom and bird and  
 land—  
 Masters of the Seven Seas, oh, love and understand!

I think the appeal, here, is futile, because it is from the ardor of the younger world to the indifference of the elder, which must grow more and more with age. It is in the nature of exile to turn with unforgetting fondness to home, but the home soon forgets the exile, or if it does not forget, cannot care for him. The inviolate seas that keep the insular England safe cannot keep her alive to the love that glows for her in the far-off lands they sever from her; and it appears to those who are politically of neither the larger nor the lesser England that if ever her mighty empire is to perish, it will die first at the heart. Canada will not grow cold first, nor Africa, nor Australasia, nor India, but England herself. It has happened so with all empires; and it is not material that empires should survive, the English more than the Roman. But it is very material that what is good in English feeling and English thinking should still inherit the earth; that is far better than English fighting or English ruling; and I do not know anything more significant of what may be hereafter than the fact that the English poet who continues the great tradition of English poetry most conspicuously should not be English born, should not have been reared under English skies, or islanded by English seas. I do not forget the beautiful, the exquisite verse of William Watson when I praise that of Rudyard Kipling; but it seems to me I am sensible of a vaster promise, a more assured future in his work; and there is no one else to name with him. He is, by virtue of his great gift, the laureate of that larger England whose wreath it is not for any prime minister to bestow; but wherever the English tongue is written or spoken, those who are native to it may claim a share in his recognition. He stands for the empire of that language which grows more and more the only English empire which has a common history and a common destiny.



WILLIAM MCKINLEY: TO BE INAUGURATED PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES MARCH 4, 1897.

From a photograph taken by Leo D. Weil, Chicago, and copyrighted by him, 1896. William McKinley is now just fifty-four years old, having been born January 29, 1843, at Niles, Ohio. He served in the Civil War, attaining the rank of major, and at the close of the war entered the profession of the law. From 1877 to 1891 he was a Republican representative in Congress from Ohio. He was elected Governor of Ohio by the Republicans in 1891, and reelected in 1893. In November, 1896, he was elected President of the United States.