L'AUTO-DA-FÉ.

In the hush of winter midnight—
In the hush of sleepless hours—
When no weird will stirs in the gloomy fire,
The spirit of storm to rouse:

When never a glint of moonlight
Glisses from the great black sky,
By the red fire's glow, it smoulders low
We crouch, the sinners and I.

My sinners, they lie where I tossed them.
In the cobiron hearth-rug there,
Still vivid and bright, in the ruddy light,
As cobras in their lair.

I pushed the hair from my forehead,
That burns and throbs as fast,
Thinking the while, with a strange dull smile,
Of the task I must do at last.

Who knows but I the comfort
These foolish letters have been?
The depth and scope—the strength and hope—
Of these "essays" that are always "green"?

Who knows but I, how sadly,
To-morrow, I and my dream,
By the ashes will weep, and say,
"Wo'ee me for the vanished gleam!"

The gleam of idle gladness,
The glimmer of heavenly delight,
That hid in each line of these letters of mine,
Those letters I burn to-night?

Just the dream was a folly,
The joy was an idle thing,
Its hope was a lie, and its loyalty
Died at a whisper's sting.

So a kiss—the last—to my letters,
A resolute hand, and—there!
Do the sad ones of my paradise
Meet mine through the fierce flame's fare?
—*Temple Bar.*

LITERARY AND ART ITEMS.

GOSSIP ABOUT WRITERS.

William Cullen Bryant.

Mr. Bryant, now seventy-three years old, furnishes an example of serene and beautiful old age which stands almost without a parallel among the poets of all nations, whose reading world is familiar. From first to last, the life of William Cullen Bryant has been happy—happy in that beyond which falls to the common lot of men. From first to last he has been pure, wise and virtuous to a degree which is seldom illustrated in this world. In his childhood the bent of his mind was lovingly and assiduously encouraged by his father; and all through his life he has enjoyed the good will and esteem of his contemporaries to an extent almost unparalleled. He has deserved it, too, which is more, as the world wags. In our opinionative stands at the head of American poetry, beyond a question. As a poet, Mr. Bryant has no critics in this day.

Tracing the poetical history of Mr. Bryant, we find ourselves taken back almost to the cradle. It is not asserted that his first utterances were in rhyme, nor that the lullaby to which his cradle was rocked was sung to his own words. But it is clear that he must have began verse-making at an age when "the common man," or child, is still floundering in the puzzling mazes of the alphabet, for no poet prints his first attempts, and little Will has achieved years when he was but nine years old. The Hampshire *Gazette*, a weekly newspaper published at Northampton, Mass., was the editorial home in which the little rhymer sought publicity for his precocious effusions. There were "Poet's Corners" in those days. The practical progressiveness of this age, with its railroads, its telegraphs, and its lightning presses, has obliterated that, among other institutions of the good old times. Village newspapers are the fashions of the metropolitan giants of the press, and good-bye to the "Poet's Corner."

In those days, literature was looked upon by most people with more disfavor than now. It is still common enough for worldwise parents to look upon a "literary turn of mind" as a fatal bar to the success in life of their progeny; but in that day it was the *rule* to look askance at the unhappy child who exhibited a love for "idle poetry."

That useless and unprofitable art.

But good Dr. Peter Bryant, William's father, was a man of strong literary taste and fine scholarship. He fulled with delight these exhibitions of genius in his boy, and entered into his pursuits with genuine enthusiasm. He encouraged him in every way, and, recognizing the common danger of too great precocity in a youth, sought earnestly and faithfully to inculcate habits of correctness, systematic patient study, and thorough mastery of the rules of poetic art. Few successful *literateurs* are there who look back on the influence exerted by their parents upon their young minds, with a love and veneration so profound as that which William Cullen Bryant feels for the gentle and scholarly village doctor of Cummington. All his life, Mr. Bryant's affection and gratitude to his father, and recognition of his influence in making the poet what he is, has been one of his most marked peculiarities. Any allusion to his father, even at this day, is sure to awaken in Mr. Bryant the fondest words of eulogy. He has also sung this good parent's praise in many of his poems. It is one of those occasions which we never expect to decide, whether this indicates more or less credit on the father who could awaken it, or on the son who could cherish it so fidelity through so many years but the world can never fully know how wonderfully tenacious are the affections of Mr. Bryant's heart—how deep, how strong, how deathless.

His precocity thus carefully directed, it was none the less carefully encouraged. When the lad was ten fourteen, he composed a poem of considerable character, entitled "The Embargo, or Sketches of the Times." This was published in Boston, and made a small volume, which had a remarkable sale for the period. A second edition was called for within the year. It was a satire upon President Jefferson and his measures. In the same year another production, entitled "The Spanish Revolution," was published. The astonished public received these poems with such incredulity as to their being the work of such a young head, that in the later edition it was found advisable to print a sworn certificate as to their genuineness.

At the age of sixteen, young Bryant entered Williams College, where he remained two years; and then, on his own application, received an honorable dismissal. He at once began to study law in the office of Judge Howe, in Worthington, Mass., and at the end of three years was admitted to the bar. Meantime he had written "Thanatopsis;" but it was not published until he was twenty-two. The poem forever placed in the *North American Review*, and the reputation of the poet was forever settled—the quality of his genius recognized beyond further dispute. It would be useless to attempt to give information if we could ascertain just how many times the critics pro and con have said, in effect, "If Mr. Bryant had never written another line, his position as a poet would be made unquestionable for all time by this single effort of his muse." Trite enough this remark has become by frequent repetition, but it is as true to-day as it ever was. As Alfred de Musset says, "One rose upon a bush, through it bloom alone, proves that the bush beam it be a true rose tree."

From this time forward, Mr. Bryant's career was definitely marked out. Though he took high rank as a lawyer in his native State, he loved letters more than law, and soon relinquished practice in order to devote himself to literary pursuits. In 1825 he came to this city, and shortly after began to edit the New York *Review*. Richard A. Dana, Halleck, Washington Irving and others, were among his most intimate friends and warmest admirers at this time and subsequently. In 1826, he became one of the editors of the *Evening Post*, and was in that still remains. He became its manager and political director within a few years, and meanwhile gave it a new political bent. The politics of those days are not of much interest at the present moment, and the politics of the day it is not our province to discuss. Suffice it to say that Mr. Bryant has always been found on the side of freedom.

Mr. Elam Bliss, of this city, issued the first full edition of Bryant's poems. Irving was then in London, and caused the volume to be republished in that city, announcing himself as editor, and dedicating the volume to Samuel Rogers, the banker poet. Since then the Harpers have been Mr. Bryant's publishers, and the most friendly relations have always existed between them.

The world is most familiar with Mr. Bryant's prose writings through the editorial columns of the *Evening Post*. He has long equals in the newspaper press as a writer of elegant and correct English. A book might be made from his "leaders" in the *Post* which would rival the old *Spectator* essays for the purity of its language and the clearness of its thought. But we suppose there are few people now-a-days who ever think of Mr. Bryant as a prose writer. There is an old book, which may be found at the Astor Library, we believe, called *Tales of the Glauber Spa*, and which contains two stories from Mr. Bryant's pen—"The Skeleton's Love" and "Medfield." His sketches of travel, under the title of "Letters of a Traveler," are also most delightful prose reading.

Mr. Bryant has traveled extensively in foreign lands, and is now abroad. Any one who reads the *Evening Post* can easily perceive. He is well acquainted with the French, Italian, German and Spanish languages. His first trip abroad was made with his family in 1834. He then visited Italy for several years abroad, studying life and literature, and drawing his children, who had grown up, from his "leaders" in the admonitions of his elders, the interest awakened by talent, however great, he felt compelled to hold Mr. Bryant's regard. An honest and high-minded man himself, he could not but admire such men as these, notwithstanding his charity is broad and much-forgiving. Mr. Bryant is now among the Highlands of Scotland, and will not return for some time.—*New York Gazette.*

"Americanisms" in Shakspeare.

Words Obsolete in England in Use in America.

It is well known that many words and expressions have been preserved, and are yet in common use in America, but which have become obsolete in England, or continue to be used there only in certain localities. Such words and expressions, "whenever they occur in Shakespeare, are, of course, understood at first sight by the American reader; while, to make them intelligible to the English reader, they appear to require a note (often footed with learning) by English editors. For the sake of brevity, these may be termed *Shakspeare's Americanisms!* even though he happened to make use of them a few years before the first English settlements in America.

Of this class of words (1.) *chare* is a familiar and often-quoted example, and it is used twice by Cleopatra. If, as is likely, it was pronounced in Shakespeare's time with the third sound of *a*, *chawr*, then the word *chore* would easily follow; and in this form the word is in daily use in farmers' families in most of the Northern States.

(2.) *Thills*, for the shafts of a wagon; as "dull-horse," for the shaft or wheel-horse; also, *fills*, with the same meaning, as "An you draw backward, we'll put you i' fills."—*Winter's Tale and Cressida*, III. 2.

—(3.) "I think thee now some common cutthroat."—*All's Well*, V. 3.—Customer properly means, one who buys or trades; but in American slang we now often hear "close customer," "hard customer," "slippery customer," "rough customer," etc.

(4.) "My cake is dough."—*Taming the Shrew*, V. 1. And "Our cake is dough on both sides."—*Taming the Shrew*, I.—The English editor remarks: "This is an obsolete proverb, and its meaning is not now easily explained." But among people in this country who are in the habit of using proverbial expressions there is not one more frequent and familiar; and it is well understood by all classes to signify "a loss of hope, disappointment, or the failure of some plan or expectations.

(5.) "*Placket*" and "placket-hole" are yet well known in America; for I chanced not long ago to hear a lady giving some directions to her maid about "the placket-hole in her dress." My near relationship permitted me to ask an explanation. I was told that it was "the slit or opening in the upper part of the skirt, when it is made separate from the waist (as it usually is nowadays), and is probably unknown in England at the present day, and only happens in part of the United States, particularly thinly inhabited—as the far West and some Southern districts. The same phenomenon is referred to where Gleadower says:

"The goats run from the mountains, and the *plackets*
Were strangely chancrous to the frighted fields."
—*Lear*, IV. 2.—An envious *slicer*?—

"Tis said they ate each other."

This language, used of horses, sounds like a position taken by a jockey. Yet it happens to be true that horses, when loose and engaged in deadly conflict with each other, only use their teeth, and aim to get at one another's throats, but never use their heels. They kick only when approaching each other in the rear (or behind, in accordance), and is there generally used by persons of high breeding. At the present day in this country it is often heard among uneducated persons of English descent.

(8.) "*Fency*" for a pulpit or stand of wind, or a sudden gust, occurs some half a dozen times, and is duly explained each time by one of the best English editors—Singer; yet no cognate word is better understood in this country, and is used, especially by those living near the seaboard, or on our great lakes and rivers.

(9.) "I cannot tell," is a phrase in vulgar use here with old people; and implies a puzzled feeling, or a state of stupid doubt or perplexity. It is explained in this scene by the English editor just named—as, "I know not what to think of it."

(10.) "*Base tyke*;" "Bobtail *tyke*."—Tyke evidently meant a cur dog when Shakespeare wrote. I distinctly recollect that in early years one of our native "help" was wont to call any one she was angry with "you ugly tyke."

(11.) "——Slyly finger'd from the *theft*."—*Henry IV.*, V. 1.—A similar use of the word "deck" for a pack of playing-cards is common at the present day throughout the Western and Southern States.

(12.) "*Fetchy* and wayward was thy infancy."—*Richard III.*, IV. 4.—This word is also to be found in two or three other passages in Shakespeare, and always applies to things which are peevish, fretful and difficult to please. We now hear it used not only of children, but as often applied to grown persons.

(13.) "Thou crusty *batch* of nature."—The word "crusty" is now more used in England than here, to mean cross or ill-tempered. The word "batch" is borrowed from the baker's shop, and is still used as a popular figure of speech in America, generally in a derisory sense, and in the same sense in Shakespeare's time, when applied to persons, means that all are equally bad and contemptible.

(14.) "There is not a *whittle* in the unruly camp."—*Timon*, V. 2.—I do not know that we now ever hear a pocket-knife called a "whittle," but the practice of whittling is spoken of as an American characteristic. England, but which we Americans have preserved and can readily understand at the present day. There are, indeed, many passages in Shakespeare reminding us that at the time he wrote, England was comparatively a new country, as America is at the present day. Thus Antonio says:

"The mind I *sway* by, and the heart I bear
Shall never *sway* on the outward coast, will fear."

This truly sublime figure of speech comes from a homely source, being suggested by the movement of a pendulum, which we use for as a building material in a new country, not only for houses, but especially for bridges, as happens to be the case in America at the present day. A piece of timber will "sway" from the gradual effect of weight or pressure upon it; but it "shakes" or vibrates from the application of some sudden or transient force. And this is also the different operation of *doubt* and *fear* on the mind. The first is a slow and lasting change, while the latter is only a momentary impression.

Again, Duncan's horses are said to have "turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience."

This was doubtless what is known in America by the Western word "stampede"—a sort of panic which, from some cause, generally unknown, seizes upon horses and (more rarely) other domestic animals. It is probably unknown in England at the present day, and only happens in part of the United States, particularly thinly inhabited—as the far West and some Southern districts. The same phenomenon is referred to where Gleadower says:

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(15.) "*Sliver'd* in the moon's eclipse."—*Macbeth*, IV. 1.—"Will sliver and disbranch from grief."—*Lear*, IV. 2. This word "sliver" is yet known and used in America for a small splinter of wood.

(16.) "*Afeard*" for afraid, fearful or apprehensive. This word occurs some thirty times in Shakespeare's plays (see Mrs. Clarke's concordance), and is there generally used by persons of high station. At the present day in this country it is often heard among uneducated persons of English descent.

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