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The Tablet (29 Nov 1856)

only praise this humble pomp
He from Heaven doth bring.
—(Pp. 96, 97.)

his, "The Burning Babe :—"

THE BURNING BABE.

In hoary winter's night stood shivering in the snow,
Surprised I was with sudden heat which made my heart to
glow ;
And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,
A pretty babe all burning bright did in the air appear,
Who scorched with exceeding heat such floods of tears did
shed,
As though His floods should quench His flames with what His
tears were fed ;
Alas ! quoth He, but newly born in fiery heats of fry,
Yet none approach to warm their hearts or feel My fire but I !
My faultless breast the furnace is, the fuel wounding thorns ;
Love is the fire and sighs the smoke, the ashes shame and
scorns ;
The fuel Justice layeth on, and Mercy blows the coals ;
The metal in this furnace wrought are men's defiled souls ;
For which, as now on fire I am, to work them to their good,
So will I melt into a bath, to wash them in My Blood :
With this He vanish'd out of sight, and swiftly shrunk away,
And straight I call'd unto mind that it was Christmas Day.
—(Pp. 98, 99.)

Mr. Turnbull expresses the hope that he may some day have the pleasure of seeing through the press a manuscript, now in possession of Mr. Dolman, entitled, "The Hundred Meditations of the Love of God," as well as the other prose writings of the Martyr. We trust that he may find leisure for a work which his literary tastes and Catholic feeling will make a labour of love, and for which his bibliographical and antiquarian attainments constitute special qualifications.

AURORA LEIGH.*

The advent of this new "Aurora" had been looked for with such interest that the moment it appeared above our horizon we hastened to greet it. We found it a substantial volume of four hundred pages, and read in the short preface of the author that it was "the most mature of her works," and the one into which "her highest convictions upon life and art had entered." Without going into the calculation which, in our cooler moments, we have since made, that four hundred pages, at thirty lines the page, make a sum total of twelve thousand lines, we read it through, and have now the painful duty of recording, in the mildest phrase at our command, the deep disappointment and repugnance with which it has inspired us. The book is inexcusable, for the many powerful passages and the many poetical beauties which it contains aggravate, instead of lessening, the offence which Mrs. Browning has committed. She has told us a story which reads like a translation into blank verse of a French novel by Frederic Soulié. The *femme incomprise*, the artist-workwoman, the high-souled female with "a mission," is a terrible companion in a journey of twelve thousand lines, and ever since the genius of Thackeray introduced us to honest Miss Bunion, we chose her as the pink and flower of her class, and would admit no rivalry. But Miss Aurora Leigh is a bad specimen even of her very unattractive class. She tells us her own story in the first person singular, and though never woman thought more highly of herself, nor was at more pains to describe her own supereminent gifts, she is a very ridiculous person, and what is worse than ridiculous, she is intolerably tedious. The orphan child of an English father and a Florentine mother, she comes to England to the care of a prim maiden aunt when nine years old.

On the morning of her twentieth birthday her cousin, Romney Leigh, proposes, and is refused, for the excellently valid reason (for she loves him) that he does not sufficiently appreciate her mission, that he considers women are too subjective for great general purposes to be worked out by themselves, though he admits that—

Mere women as you are,
Mere women, personal and passionate,
You give us doating mothers and chaste wives,
Sublime Madonnas and enduring Saints.

He himself, for he is quite as mad as she, declares—

That his soul is grey
With pouring over the long sum of ill,

which, in all its items, he sees set down in figures on a page plain, silent, clear.

* Aurora Leigh. By Elizabeth Barrett Browning. London :

What men call noble, and you, issued from
The noble people—though the tyrannous sword
Which pierced Christ's heart has cleft the world in twain,
'Twixt class and class, opposing rich to poor—
Shall we keep parted? Not so. Let us lean
And strain together rather, each to each,
Compress the red lips of this gaping wound,
As far as two souls can—ay, lean and league,
I, from my superabundance—from your want,
You—joining in a protest 'gainst the wrong
On both sides!"

—(P. 139.)

Having got so far as this—

All the rest, he held her hand
In speaking, which confused the sense of much ;

However, the upshot was :—

That they two, standing at the two extremes
Of social classes, had received one seal,
Been dedicate and drawn beyond themselves
To mercy and ministration—he, indeed,
Through what he knew, and she, through what she felt,
He, by man's conscience, she, by woman's heart,
Relinquishing their several 'vantage posts
Of wealthy ease and honourable toil,
To work with God at love. And, since God willed
That, putting out his hand to touch this ark,
He found a woman's hand there, he'd accept
The sign, too, hold the tender fingers fast,
And say, "My fellow-worker, be my wife!"

—(P. 140.)

A preposterous scene ensues. Romney Leigh must needs invite all St. Giles' to meet all St. James' to witness the marriage ceremony, and breakfast afterwards. This is the Muse's description of one portion of the guests :—

Faces!—O my God,
We call those, faces? men's and women's... ay,
And children's—babies, hanging like a rag
Forgotten on their mother's neck—poor mouths,
Wiped clean of mother's milk by mother's blow,
Before they are taught her cursing. Faces!... phew,
We'll call them vices festering to despair,
Or sorrows petrifying to vices: not
A finger-touch of God left whole on them.
Those, faces! 'twas as if you had stirred up Hell
To have its lowest dreg-fiends upmost
In fiery swirls of slime—such strangled fronts,
Such obdurate jaws were thrown up constantly,
To twit you with your race, corrupt your blood,
And grind to devilish colours all your dreams.

—(P. 156.)

Romney is there and Aurora, but no bride. And the scene closes with a riot. We have come to a portion of the story which has filled us, and will fill every one who reads it, with deep regret that an English matron and a gifted woman, one whose powers are evinced even by the very pages we so utterly condemn, should have introduced into her poem characters and transactions such as have long ceased to figure in our literature. A Lady Waldemar is introduced frantically in love with Romney Leigh, avowing her passion to Aurora with brazenfaced effrontery, and endeavouring to break off the match that she may marry him. She persuades Marian to renounce the marriage for Romney's sake, and sends her to Paris, where she is drugged and ruined.

Let us hasten to the end. Romney converts his father's house into a phalanstery for the regeneration of mankind, and Lady Waldemar, with other ladies "whom her starry lead persuaded from their spheres," have been there, "and milked the cows, and churned, and pressed the curd," and stood at the washtub "elbow deep in suds" to fall in with his views of social reformation. The end is, that his father's house is burned down by the work of an incendiary, the tramp and poacher, Marian's father. He loses his eyesight, and narrowly escapes death from a falling beam. Meanwhile, Aurora, on her road to Italy, has met Marian in Paris, and discovered the villany of Lady Waldemar. She summons Romney. He still offers to marry Marian, who refuses, upon which, after a weary voyage, we reach land at last. For, to bring the book to a close, and since even the "maturest" works, embodying "the highest convictions upon life and art," must end at last, we end with what Erasmus long ago pointed out as the end of all reform, we end with a marriage between Romney and Aurora. *Solvuntur risu tabule tu missus abibis.* It is, indeed, a great blow to the dignity of woman, and a great fall for the high-souled, queenly artist, full of her mission, and of woman's rights.

There are hundreds of honest, homely souls who, without any great maturing of their ideas, or without feeling that they had attained any very high convictions upon life and art, would have advised Miss

when first he asked her, and so, by one step, reach her journey's end. But that is a low view, and it would be unjust to Aurora to represent her as doing anything so commonplace.

For, though she marries Romney, it is not until he has become stone blind, until he has had his head broken and his house burned down, his schemes all routed, and his hand refused. He has been reduced to a proper sense of his own lowliness by this rather trying process, and, after all, Aurora does not accept him as her husband. She proposes to him. This, by the way, is a great feature in the works of modern literary ladies. They delight in reducing a man to the lowest depths of misfortune and misery, and, just when the poor object is about to seek the nearest ditch to drown himself, he is unexpectedly raised to the ninth heaven by the condescending fair one herself popping the question. Aurora does it in the following terms:—

"Farewell, Aurora."

"But I love you, Sir;
And when a woman says she loves a man,
The man must hear her, though he love her not."

We shall not dwell upon the raptures that follow; but it is announced to us (not clearly, for anything so crazily obscure was never penned,) that, in some perfectly insane manner, the great scheme of working for humanity is still to be carried out as a partnership concern.

Aurora is desired:—

Now press the clarion on thy woman's lip,
And breathe the fine keen breath along the brass,
And blow all class-walls level as Jericho's
Past Jordan; crying from the top of souls
To souls, that they assemble on earth's flats
To get them to some purer eminence
Than any hitherto beheld for clouds.

The world's old,
But the world waits the hour to be renewed.

We are promised new dynasties of the race of men:—

Developed whence shall grow spontaneously
New churches, new economies, new laws, &c.

It seems difficult to carry nonsense further, but, to reach the height of pure delirium, and cap the climax of absurdity, requires but one step more, and Mrs. Browning takes it:—

My Romney!—Lifting up my hand in his,
As wheeled by Seeing spirits toward the east,
He turned instinctively—where faint and fair,
Along the tingling desert of the sky,
Beyond the circle of the conscious hills,
Were laid in jasper-stone as clear as glass
The first foundations of that new, near Day
Which should be builded out of Heaven, to God.
He stood a moment with erected brows,
In silence, as a creature might, who gazed:
Stood calm, and fed his blind, majestic eyes
Upon the thought of perfect noon. And when
I saw his soul saw—"Jasper first," I said,
"And second, sapphire; third, chalcedony;
The rest in order, . . . last, an amethyst."

—(Pp. 402, 403.)

And so the poem ends.

We have sufficiently expressed our condemnation of the book. We have admitted that it contains many passages of great power and beauty; we regret to add that it is sullied by many gross thoughts, very coarsely uttered. We have preferred to dwell more on its absurdities than on its more objectionable features; but it is as saddening a specimen as we have ever seen of the taste, tone, and tendency of what, we fear, must be called a growing school.

THE ABBEY OF DUNSHAUGHLIN.

No. II.

1641. Barnewell, of Kilbrew (near Dunshaughlin), a most respectable gentleman, sixty-six years of age, was tortured this year on the rack. The real object of this punishment was to drive him and the other Catholic gentry of the Pale into rebellion, that their estates might be confiscated. Warner tells us that this cold-blooded torture "only served to make his innocence and their own inhumanity the more conspicuous."

1642. A terrible massacre was perpetrated this year at

and marked; also a number of fragments of combs and pins made of bone, several wooden caltraps, and a horn of deer's horn." Also "two swords found at Lagore near Dunshaughlin," and a collection of iron articles "consisting of swords, knives, spears, files, hatch horsebits, &c." A vast number of other articles found at Lagore are scattered through the country, in hands of private gentlemen.

Of Lagore, called Loch-Gabhair, we have several notices in our "Annals." This place was anciently a lake, in the centre of which was an island strongly fortified, and here ruled a race of Irish chieftains who often measured swords with the Danes and struck to the dust the violators of the term-laws and churches of the neighbouring monasteries. The name of Lagore has a very honourable mention in our records of the prince of Connaught, who was high-minded and generous, dispenser of hospitality, protector of religion, encourager of learning, as these were the character of true nobility amongst the ancient Irish. Notice of Lagore occurs in the "Four Masters'" Annals of Ulster and Clonmacnoise, from which we take the following:—

"The age of the world, 3581—the second year of the reign of Tighearnmas—the eruption of these lakes—Lough Owel (near Mullingar), Lough Iron (near Westmeath), Lough Key (in Roscommon), Lough Sheelin (on the borders of Cavan, Meath, and Louth), Lough Allen (in Leitrim), Lough Foil (between Londonderry and Donegal), Black Lough (in Louth), Loch-Dabhall, and Loch-Gabhair (now dried up and called Lagore).

"A.D. 673. The Leinstermen gave a battle to Fynnaghty at a place hard by Lagore, where Fynnaghty was conqueror. (This Fynnaghty was of Meath and Monarch of Ireland for twenty years; his dominions on this occasion were invaded by the King of Leinster.)

"780. Maelduin, son of Fearghus, Lord of Leinster, died.

"781. Fogartach, Lord of Lagore, was slain in a battle of Liacc-Finn. (This place, as well as others, has been identified by O'Donovan with present Leafin, in the parish of Nobber, county Meath.)

"800. Cearnach, son of Fearghus, Lord of Leinster, died.

"823. Aenghus, son of Maelduin, Lord of Leinster, died.

"835. Cairbre, son of Maelduin, Lord of Lagore, slain by Maelseachlainn.

"846. A victory was gained by Tighearnmach of Lagore, over the Danes, at the oak wood of Daghonna's Desert, in which battle he slew twenty-five of the enemy (Maelseachlainn, or Seachnall's son). Anglicised Malachy, was at this time Monarch of Ireland; the Danes were after committing frightful depredations throughout the country, their hostility being, as usual, principally directed against the monasteries, which they roused the Irish princes to punish them).

"847. The plundering of Dublin by Maelseachlainn (Monarch of Ireland), and by Tighearnmach, Lord of Lagore. (Dublin was then in the possession of the Danes, and was their principal stronghold.)

"848. Cinaedh, Lord of Cianachta-Breagh country round Duleek, rebelled against Maelseachlainn and went with a strong force of Danes, and ordered the Ui-Neill from Sinnainn to the sea, and territories; he also plundered the churches of Lagore, and afterwards burned it, so that level with the ground (there were habitations and edifications on the island). They also burned the churches of Trevet (near Dunshaughlin), within which were three score and two hundred persons. (This plundering of the Church by an Irish prince was very unusual, in all their wars, respected the seats of religion and piety. This prince had under him a Danish army, and no doubt from association, some of the Danes acquired, to a certain extent, the lawless and cruel habits of the invader. We will see in the following year what vengeance the sacrilegious conduct of Cinaedh upon him from the people.)

"849. Cinaedh, son of Conaing, Lord of Cianachta-Breagh, was drowned in the Ainge (river Nanny) by the people of the King Maelseachlainn, and Tighearnmach, Lord of Lagore, to revenge upon him the evils he had committed against the laity and the Church. He was drowned in a sack.

"863. Tighearnmach, son of Focarta, Lord of Lagore, was drowned in the Ainge by the people of Breagh.