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THE NATIONAL ERA.

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 16, 1850.

For the National Era.

MY BROTHER.

BY MISS ALICE CAREY.

They said he was dying—I knew it was so,
For his blue eyes looked not into mine,
And calling the angels to hide me from wo,
With the light of the kingdom divine;
I covered him softly away from the chill
That was dimming his beauty—vain strife;
Already I felt that the shadow of ill
Was crossing his pathway of life.

Cold, cold in the churchyard, I cried, is the light,
As the moon up the steep azure rounds,
And the snow that has fallen so ghastly and white
Lies level along the still mounds.
Then folding his pale hands away from my own,
They said, God his life will renew,
As the seed in the dry furrow, sorrowfully sown,
Sprouts up in early spring dew.

POEMS BY GRACE GREENWOOD.

We had intended to notice the new volume of *Poems* by Grace Greenwood, just issued from the press of Ticknor, Reed, & Fields, Boston; but a critical correspondent has favored us with a review of it, which is so much better than anything we could write, that we gladly give it place. We have noticed in the *New York Tribune* and other leading journals many valuable and cordial critiques on the work, but none that excels the one we now lay before our readers.—*Ed. Era.*

GREENWOOD LEAVES.*

A year ago, the lady known to readers of the popular magazines and literary weeklies as Grace Greenwood, gave the public a selection from her earlier prose writings. This book, "Greenwood Leaves," has been too often and too favorably noticed to require further review; and we introduce it here only to indicate one source of the materials from which we estimate its author's literary capacity. Everybody will be glad to hear that a second volume is now before us, consisting of selections from her Poems. And before speaking of its contents we must praise the elegant appearance of the book—a characteristic in which Messrs. Ticknor, Reed, & Fields, are outdone by no publishing house in the country. The friends of the authoress will also be pleased to see her portrait, engraved from an excellent painting by Mr. C. G. Thompson.

The Poems in this volume have, we believe, without exception, appeared before, and been widely and admiringly read. Their republication, therefore, seems more a response to a call from the author's friends than a fresh adventure for literary reputation. This fact might almost seem to remove them beyond the pale of criticism, even did not the writer's evident care in giving her best things, and her modest wish that they be regarded in the light of a promise, rather than a performance, render minute analysis impertinent. Yet we may be excused for speaking briefly of a few characteristics of the volume, and calling attention to a few favorite passages and poems.

We think the author's reputation will gain by the appearance of her poems in this manner. Considered as a *volume of poetry*, the book has a special claim upon our attention. There may be room for a carping criticism in the inspection of the articles separately. Part of them are somewhat deficient in that felicity of expression and artistic proportion which make the difference between fine metrical essays and poems. But when we read the book as a record of some of the best hours of its author's life—trace the living chain that holds the parts together—linger over passages of rare power and pathos, and lines so exquisitely wrought that any one of them would of itself declare the presence of poetic genius, we arrive at a better comprehension of the ability of the writer. We can almost imagine the work was written at a few successive sittings, so rapidly are we borne along by the sweep of its strong passion and bold harmony. The vitality of the author is wonderful. There is life enough in the book to make half a dozen good volumes—life so full and free that, rather than endure suppression, it will *blaze* into utterance. These poems carry their own apology in that they were written because the author could not help it. The channel by which a pent-up stream reaches the surface is hardly a subject for lectures from a professor of hydrostatics, and the strong and pathetic rhythms of a soul toiling out of night into day, cannot be scanned by a mere student of Campbell and Whately. As a whole, we receive the volume as a great promise, from one who knows of what she speaks when she talks of the future.

Of the quality of the genius here displayed we will speak hereafter. We would gladly quote many passages which have delighted us, but space will not permit, and the poems of this writer suffer essentially from such a process of mutilation. She pours a continuous tide of life through each; and, beautiful as many passages are, they must be approached along this current of thought and feeling to be fully enjoyed. We will therefore only briefly speak of a few poems which especially please us.

Passing "The Dedication," which, though short, and in prose, is yet an exquisite poetical gem, and the "Proem," we come to the most ambitious among the earlier poems, "Ariadne" and "Pygmalion." Of these we prefer the latter—indeed, in completeness and felicity of execution, it is surpassed by few of her later productions. The "Horseback Ride" is full of the poetry of motion, and makes us almost curse that "stitch in the side" which stands between our heart and horseflesh. There are beautiful stanzas in "The Restored," written out of a more subtle inspiration than often comes to its author. "Dreams" is powerfully written, and the touching lines "To a Bereaved Friend," and "The Last Gift," need no words of ours to commend them to all who have suffered. There is fine fun in "Wanted—a Theme," and "The Lost Heart." The latter is an exquisite specimen of the writer's style of poetic treatment. Many of the poems are tributes to friendship. Of these, we like best "The Love Letter," if we may particularize among the beautiful things of this kind. "Darkened Hours," "The Dream," "The First Doubt," "The Midnight Vigil," and "The May Morning," are all striking productions, and deserve better treatment than to be made into a catalogue, as here. Several noble reform lyrics are interspersed through the volume, of which we will only mention "The Army of Reform." "Constance" is a true poem; and we commend a diligent perusal of "A Fragment" to faint-hearted lovers. But the most remarkable pieces of all, to us, are, "The Poet of To-Day," and "Arnold de Winkleried," in grandeur of conception, and boldness of execution, they stand out from these pages as prophetic, in a nobler sense than any others of their author's future. The volume ends with a beautiful tribute to a friend.

But we do not intend now to write a mere notice of these beautiful verses, either to detect faults of execution where their author has perhaps already discovered more than we, or to particularize beauties which, truly as we enjoy them, delight us as much for their promise of things more beautiful as by their own merit. We would rather, from the materials afforded by these two volumes, attempt an estimate of the quality and power of their author's mind.

It cannot be regarded an act of critical injustice to do this; for now, by issuing her prose and verse in separate publications, Grace Greenwood has taken a place as a decided force in American Literature. She can no longer expect to be judged only by the rules that apply to those who write to fill magazine pages from the ordinary motives. It is now her privilege to be treated as an author of books. Neither can she demand that the peculiar circumstances of her enviable social position shall either absolve her from the obligations or shield her from the exposures of a "Literary Woman." It is certainly a great comfort to her friends that she is not "*blue*;" yet if she were, public expectation could be no more exacting than it must now be towards one who, in the odd moments of a life crowded with home duties and travel, and disturbed by the kindness of innumerable friends, has contrived, at an age when most authors begin to print, to write two of the most readable of American books. Therefore we do not apologize for telling all about her which we can find scattered through these pages. Of *herself*, too, for Grace Greenwood cannot be separated from her words, she is the background to every page before us, and these are worthily treated only when regarded as an expression more or less complete of her large and versatile nature.

A glance at these volumes will show that their author has written no single work which may be taken as a complete expression of herself. All the articles, prose and poetical, bear unmistakeable signs of the circumstances of their birth and their place of destination. They were mostly written to answer the calls of a periodical literature, and are the offspring of a thousand moods—attempts at embodying thoughts and feelings often too overmastering to yield to the writer's power of utterance. We find indignant declamation against social evils, whose laws of origin and extirpation were not very clearly seen, while the heart was aching with a sense of their terrible enormity; the effervescence of glad animal spirits, frolicking amid the common joys of life, or stimulated into rebellious mirth by the excitement of travel and an acute enjoyment of the pleasures of sight-seeing; the generous outpouring of a warm heart towards friends in whom she trusts with an affection as strong and sustaining as it is free and childlike; attempts to wrench from the canvass, the marble, or the pages of good books, or Nature, the secret of that beauty which has subdued her, and give it in a few glowing and concentrated sentences to the world; half despairing essays to climb those calm ideal heights of religious contemplation which always tower along her horizon crowned with sunbeams, though separated from her by gulfs and floods; or half-devout, half-passionate dreams of that love which is at once human and divine, solving the problem of this life, and opening long vistas into the life to come—the joy, the sorrow, and the consecration of the soul—all this, and more, we find in these books. Yet no one of these spiritual states has been written out with great accuracy or the highest artistic effect. A certain haste and incompleteness is a general characteristic of the articles. They have been thrown off at a white heat from the forge, and with a few quick strokes of the hammer, rather than fashioned over the slow intense fires and by the delicate handling with which the great poets, who are masters of their own inspiration, have produced immortal works. These pages are a record in short-hand, of a life rich in varied experiences. In them we see the authoress bounding through meadows and woods, over hills and across cultivated fields, too intent upon *things* to care greatly for her own imitations of them, and silencing the clamor of "numerous friends" for "specimens," by tossing to them now a wild flower, a maple bough, or a golden sheaf of corn, or saucily drenching the face of her pursuer in a shower of spray, as she spurs her horse over a brook, or rides into a line of breakers. If in these hurried salutations she has now and then thrown us a weed clutched with a handfull of flowers, and has not been careful to use her scissors upon the thorns lurking amid her clusters of roses, perhaps the fault is as much in those who have worried and teazed her into haste, as in herself.

However this may be, we see nothing here to justify any special imputation of lightness in the assumption of literary responsibilities. Few women become authors deliberately; and the choice of circumstances which draws a young girl from the enclosure of home into the arena of letters, is rarely known to those who confidently pronounce upon her motives and success. We should never accuse Grace Greenwood of intellectual frivolity. Truly, she is not quite so anxious as some young ladies we know, to make pictures of herself in interesting, sentimental postures. We should say, that she oftener tried a gallop among the hills, a dance, or a chat, or in the event of failure there, a strong effort at "choking down," as a cure for those vapors which will come over the best of us, than doleful hexameters on the torture of pairs of imaginary lovers, through ten mortal pages of Godey or Graham. We like her all the better that she does not invite us to be the confidant of those moods which every true man or woman conquers in hours of retirement, or by the side of the heart's best friend. But we can read out of her pages an earnestness of purpose, a longing for excellence, a reverence for truth and love and beauty. Even her humor, in its wildest freaks, is often but the head of foam that rides a dark, rushing current. She is no stranger to that sadness which oppresses every genuine soul, as it looks around, within, and above itself, and which envelops the noblest characters like a pensive atmosphere of interwoven light and shadow. Her fun as often leaves tears upon her cheeks as her pathos. It may be all the better that she has written so long in her peculiar dashing moods; that she has been content to extend herself on every side, to make essays of her power in a hundred directions, and grow up to a large and generous womanhood, before she presumed to embody in more ambitious works those thoughts and sentiments which can hardly be seen in all their wide relations by girls or boys on the sunny side of twenty-five. Beneath her apparent levity may be discovered a more intelligent earnestness, and a juster appreciation of the difficulties in the way of successful authorship, than under the large profession and meager performance of many shallower and more conventional natures.

So much, in justice to the circumstances and peculiar intellectual conformation of this writer, must be admitted. And it is with all this in our mind that we now proceed briefly to estimate her power, and remind her of the claims to which it legitimately exposes her.

It is a matter of congratulation, both to Grace Greenwood and her readers, that the finest and strongest element of her genius is that which she possesses in common with every true woman. The strongholds of her power are her quick, intense, and far-reaching sympathies. Endowed with a great, warm heart, she is capable of a depth of feeling known to few. And yet the *range* of her affections is proportionally great. While others cling to a few objects of thought and feeling, fearing to trust themselves away from their influence, she, with an energy and versatility as refreshing as remarkable, embraces a thousand within the atmosphere of her glowing sympathies. She loves at once sincerely and widely. In turning the pages of these volumes, we are constantly alighting upon a new "enthusiasm." A person, a picture, a train of thought, a new phase of emotion, or plan of benevolent action, for the time appears to absorb her. Yet she is hopelessly fixed in none of these moods. No person can make her unjust to others—no great work of art narrow her taste—no habit of intellect make her a pedant—no scheme of reform drive her into a violent partisanship. She will love, and talk, and work for all; give to them a great will and devotion—everything except herself. So generous and impressible is her nature, that, from the intensity with which she sees, a hundred people might suppose her fitted peculiarly to shine in the sphere through which she approaches them. But while each is briskly advancing in hope of securing an advocate for his "ism," possibly thinking he is walking into a "slush" of compassions, he suddenly "brings up" against a rock. We have not yet discovered in her the casual tokens of exhaustion and satiety from thus extending her circle of thought and life, yet in this direction lies her greatest danger—for every nature has its bounds, and a too generous and susceptible genius often responds to every call, until the love for variety becomes the thirst for mental excitement, and, in a series of convulsions to push out boundaries, the central power is weakened and the intellectual life collapses.

This sympathetic energy appears on every page of the books now before us, and modifies every development of their author's mind. It is the finest quality in her humor. In her lighter moods she is always the great-hearted woman, and her shafts of wit, though swiftly sped, are never poisoned. She can laugh merrily over the ridiculous features of things she loves, and still hold to them with a genuine reverence and faith. It is this superabundance of good nature that makes her mirth so contagious, and even disarms criticism before her *puns*; for we would rather accept the worst of them than lose the laugh and twinkle of the eye with which it comes to us.

The same quality is apparent in her criticism. Without being a critic, she often writes better things of books, persons, and art, than those who sit in the reviewer's chair. Her susceptibility to impressions from all sides quickly brings her into contact with beauty and truth, and she writes of what has moved her out of a full heart. Of course, the mingling of herself with what has pleased her destroys the value of such essays as *criticism*; for criticism is the accurate representation of another's nature, not the outpouring of affection for it. Yet we would spare these pages of her books reluctantly, for they abound in those happy intuitions which offer to the critic his choicest materials.

But it is in her poems and a few of her tales that we feel this power most decidedly. She writes of friendship and love as few others can. All the generous sentiments are here represented with a force and beauty at times almost overmastering. Her joy could force a laugh upon the most care-worn cheek, and her pathos drench the sunniest face with tears. Yet she never reaches the summit of her power until inspired by a great religious sentiment. Freedom, among the Christian virtues, [illegible] mind; and rarely are we so moved as by her eloquent denunciations of public sin, and her fearless advocacy of the great reforms of the day. This deep religiousness is the highest manifestation of her genius, and assures us of her future advancement. No woman can live content with what she has done, whom God has so often led up to those high places where faith abides, and the anomalies of Providence are resolved into an all-embracing harmony.

This central power in our author's nature is greatly aided in its expression by a vivid representative imagination. Of the possession of imagination in some of its forms, she has yet given little evidence. She fails in the delineation of character; Harry Grove and Kate Richmond are all of her offspring who have not dodged us. Neither is she preëminently an artist. She has not the Tennysonian power of holding a subject in an intense mood of contemplation till every thought or image which belongs to it has moved to its own place. Her best productions fail in completeness, and are but fine fragments. Great in thought, and glowing with passion, they are but hints of the vision she saw, and stimulate rather than satisfy the reader. But she is richly endowed with that form of imagination which in some indescribable way imparts vitality to the mind. She is alive in every part, and cannot write otherwise than entertainingly upon the most trivial subject. And her power of description is great. Nature and life arrange themselves into pictures which spring to her page with all the characteristics of reality. Yet her eye is oftener turned upon life than nature, and her descriptive power has hitherto been most favorably shown in vivid representations of manners, mental states, and moral impressions. No one can write better of manners and social life. A late series of letters from Washington, published in the Philadelphia *Saturday Evening Post*, bears ample testimony to this. Some of her Congressional portraits in these are models of their kind. The best of her poems are those in which her religious sympathies unite with her descriptive powers, as in "Arnold de Winkleried," where a grand picture is wrought out under the inspiration of an elevated moral sentiment. She has yet to do greater things in this direction. We know of no American writer, excepting Whittier, whom she may not hope to excel in ballad writing.

But the action of both these faculties of which we have now spoken is greatly modified in this writer by other peculiarities of spiritual conformation. Endowed, beyond her sex, with a quick eye for incongruities, and a manly strength of will and heroism of thought, her Affections and Imagination work under the incessant and almost skeptical gaze of her Intellect. Much of her peculiar power and her weakness arises from this combination. By it her sympathies are kept from passing over into sentimentalism, and her Imagination is restrained within due bounds. A strong and healthy Intellectual atmosphere envelops her prose and verse. Thus her best words always give life and power, and in her loftiest flights we feel assured that her eye has measured the distance before her wings were spread. In a complete state of mental discipline, her intellect and fancy would be permeated with passion, and her feeling always respond to vigorous thought.

But so it is not always in the pages before us. Her faculties are sometimes out of harmony with each other. Her Intellect often stands sneering at her heart, and her Imagination writhes in self-imposed chains. Thus a painful impression is produced. We are conscious of the presence of great energies in a state of conflict. She has not yet emerged from the sphere of passion. The action of all her faculties is slightly feverish and spasmodic. And while in this condition we can hardly look for that harmony of action which is the result of clearly defined aims and rigorous mental discipline, and long repose of soul. Her faults in this direction are such as she could not easily have avoided; and they are to be overcome by no half-despairing, half-inspired, occasional efforts. The niche in Fame's temple that awaits her is not to be reached by one magnificent leap, but by a winding stair. When we consider how many obstacles must be conquered, how many disturbing influences forgotten, how much of the experience of life brought within reach of the intellect, how many efforts made for expression, how many vanishing intuitions clutched and held fast on the verge of the mental horizon, before one true poem can be written, we can only be surprised at such uniform excellence as we find in this series of articles written to answer the emergencies of magazine literature, and can prophecy any degree of success to one who has wrought so persistently and with such uniformly elevated purposes as our author.

We had intended to speak of the style of these volumes—especially that of the prose articles, which is in many respects original and admirable. But the length of our remarks must be an excuse for so meager reference to it.

We are aware of the imperfection of this attempt at analyzing the mind of a writer whose rapidly increasing popularity is the best proof of her genius. We do not pretend to have indicated with perfect accuracy the secret sources of her power. These lie beyond analysis. Criticism can never explain the effect which books like hers produce upon us. And, after all, the whole business of criticism is somewhat farcical. We tie an author into his chair and paint his portrait, and, while congratulating ourselves upon our admirable success, a change of expression in the face shows our picture to be only a caricature. Neither do we presume to decide in what direction this writer will best succeed. Genius knows its own resources better than those who have been only spectators of its occasional efforts. There are people enough to tell Grace Greenwood what she must or must not do; we will only thank her for what she has done, and speak a word of encouragement to greater attempts. That she will be true to *her own* best convictions in her future literary labors, we shall not doubt. That she can ever fold her hands and sit down to receive the homage of those who are already satisfied with her, we will not do her the great injustice to believe. Those who come to burn incense before her will find an altar on which the fire has gone out; while she is far beyond, in the wilderness, walking along those paths which are paved with flints before they are strewn with roses. We know no woman to whom faithful and constant labor in the way indicated by her nobler instincts will secure a richer harvest. And while we read these volumes, so rich in earnest promise, we look with a great hope to the results of their author's continued labor, assured that she who in her girlhood has so delighted us, will not rest till, in the power of a mature womanhood, her name has become inseparably connected with American Literature.

* Greenwood Leaves. Poems. By Grace Greenwood. Boston: Ticknor, Reed, & Fields: 1850–'51.

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