

Notches on The Stick

William Ewart Gladstone, in his notable tribute to the memory of Arthur Henry Hallam, ascribes to him the union of extraordinary character, at an unusual stage of development when his earthly career was terminated at Vienna in 1833. He had scarcely looked at life, yet it seemed as if he understood it, and was calm before its awful mysteries. His is a memory canonized in song, but Gladstone attempts his memories with dispassionate impartiality. He speaks of Hallam's schoolboy friendship as "surpassing every other that has ever been enjoyed by one greatly blessed both in the number and the excellence of his friends."

"It is the simple truth that Arthur Henry Hallam was a spirit so exceptional that everything with which he was brought into relation during his shortened passage through this world came to be through this contact, glorified by a touch of the ideal. Among his contemporaries at Eton, that queen of visible homes for the ideal school boy, he stood supreme among his fellows; and the long life through which I have since wound my way, and which has brought me into contact with so many men of rich endowments, leaves him where he then stood, as to natural gifts, so far as my estimation is concerned."

"But I ought perhaps to note a distinction which it is necessary to draw. Whether he possessed the greatest genius I have ever known is a question which does not lie upon my path, and which I do not undertake to determine. It is of the man that I speak, and genius does not of itself make the man. When we deal with men, genius and character must be jointly taken into view; and the relation between the two, together with the effect upon the aggregate, is infinitely variable. The towering position of Shakespeare among poets does not of itself afford a certain indication that he holds a place equally high among men."

This is the more interesting from a consideration of the author himself, as a man of the highest character, at the close of the most signal career of the century, characterizing with applause the high spirit and temper of a man whose life here was only a promise; although the spell of his illuminated personality together with the genius of Tennyson, undoubtedly wrote "In Memoriam," that most splendid threnody, the most significant work of its kind in English. Mr. Gladstone modestly compares Hallam with himself, where he refers to their debates,—"and that Hallam was a famous debater at Cambridge, as well as at Eton, will be inferred by the reader of Tennyson's poem: "On Sunday, May 14, 1826, I find this record in my journal: "Still arguments with Hallam, as usual on Sundays, about articles, creeds, etc." It is difficult for me now to conceive how during these years he bore with me; since not only was I inferior to him in knowledge and dialectic ability, but my mind was "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd," by an intolerance which I ascribe to my having been brought up in what were then termed Evangelical ideas—ideas, I must add, that in other respects were frequently productive of great and vital good." Hallam had a mind singularly open, and with great scope of vision, united to a spirit fundamentally catholic and tolerant; and it is worth noting how Gladstone has widened in these respects, when we remember that youth is usually the season of our easiest faith, when we are ready to embrace all things in the very callowness of our benevolence."

All that he has said of his friend is very well understood and received now; but when Tennyson's poem first appeared, Hallam, not being publicly known, it was

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received as an unusual example of fulsome extravagance, and treated with that scornful incredulity that Diderot or Paine might have bestowed on some contemporary account of a vision of angels,—so intolerant are we in our commonplaceness. Frederick W. Robertson gives us an example of such hasty criticism, in one of his well known Lectures, in which it was complained that so much "of poetic feeling has been wasted on a lawyer; and much wit is spent upon the tenderness which is given to 'Amaryllis of the Chancery bar.'" This is the criticism of the man who always remembers poetry as a school exercise, and is mentally construing Virgil, when he ought to peer through the bars of text into the landscape of the spirit,—which he never does, and perhaps never may do. Robertson proceeds to crack the helmet of this critical Da Bohun: "A barrister, it seems is beyond the pale of excusable because political sensibilities. So that if my friend be a soldier, I may love him, celebrate him in poetry, because the profession of arms is by all conventional associations heroic; or if he bears on his escutcheon the red hand of knighthood, or wears a ducal coronet, or even be a shepherd, still there are poetic precedents for romance; but if he be a member of the Chancery bar, or only a cotton lord, then, because these are not yet grades accredited as heroic in song, worth is not worth and honor is not honor, and nobleness is not nobility. Oh, if we wanted poets for nothing else, it would be for this, that they are the grand levellers, vindicating the sacredness of our common humanity, and in protest against such downright vulgarity of heart as this." Yet at the time the literary Remains of Hallam had been published, with an introductory memoir, by his distinguished father, and the laudatory tributes of some of the ablest men in Britain; while Tennyson had had some twenty years in which to test the quality and significance of his friendship.

Gladstone alone, among his contemporaries, is, and will be, distinguished for a certain august greatness of character. Remoteness of time, and the heightened aspect of the "great departed," may not add so much to the impression of future generations as in the case of some others, not so well appreciated in their lifetime; but we cannot suppose it can ever be materially diminished. "Not Fox or Chatham nor William Pitt," says Justin McCarthy, "had anything like Mr. Gladstone's capacity for constructive legislation; and the resources of information possessed by Fox or Chatham or Pitt were poor indeed when compared with that storehouse of knowledge which supplied Mr. Gladstone's intellectual capacity. Mr. Gladstone has been possessed through his life with an eager passion to do the right thing at all times. No human interest has been indifferent to him, and the smallest wrong as well as the greatest has aroused his most impassioned sympathy. Defects of temperament, of manner, and of fact, have, no doubt, been ascribed to him over and over again. He is not good, I am told at remembering faces and names. He is loved by his friends; he cannot but be honored by his political enemies—for personal enemies he never could have had."

And the recent Biography of Tennyson, no less than his poem, so long a classic, in revealing the bright spiritual beauty of his friend's character exhibits also the mealy strength and moral steadfastness of his own. He was a person of extraordinary self-restraint, patience, and determination. "Here," says a recent writer, "was a genius who was yet a man of like passions with ourselves, domestic, lovable, tender-hearted, faithful to a high ideal, pure of life, with nothing erratic in his conduct which needed the mantle of charity, which is the appropriate wear of so many geniuses! He was a 'seer' as Carlyle would have said and no doubt he had the requisite self-confidence. But there is in him no trace of vanity. A very great man, but modest, sane, wholesome, marked by integrity in every fibre of his mental and moral nature. And what a record that is among the men of the world truly great!"

This brings us to reflect on the importance of character in shaping, and giving quality to, the great masterpieces of literature. These evince something more than the artistic sense, or than literary dexterity of their authors. We instinctively feel that Homer, Aeschylus, Dante, Milton, even from the tone of their works, were not only great poets, but great men; and that, to adapt Gladstone's phrase with respect to Hallam, they "resembled passing emanations from some other and less darkly checkered world." One does not need other than to study his work to know that the last named greater poet was "a dedicated spirit," one who thought himself

"Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
All righteous things;
For it inheres in the very fibre of his literary work; it is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up to a life beyond life," which is here, and

which informs it. 'Time tries the truth in everything,' and that unflinching test of character in literature prevails here.

The Cavalier poets, occupied with the fineness of song, and the pretty art of the curious in form and expression, redeem by the happiness of their efforts the poverty of the things they have to say. It is not without good cause that we read and relish today such verses as—

"Her feet beneath her petticoat,
Like little mice stole in and out,
As if they feared the light;"

or,

"Ask me no more whither doth haste
The nightingale when May is past;
For in your sweet dividing throat
She winters and I keep warm her note;"

for, despite the triviality, the expression is well nigh perfect, the genuine life-blood of poetry is there,—but in tiny trickling veins instead of giant pulses. But how incomparably poor would our literature be had we only these things! How far below a *tour de force* of Gray, or a happy inspiration of Wordsworth! When these writers do attempt a noble utterance it falls flatly from them; and in many cases their *fineness* runs to the fantastic, and the affectations that a pure taste abhors. Even "Hudibras" with all his long wit is not redeemed from the disgust an earnest spirit feels in seeking to follow him; and one is tempted to doubt whether Butler was worthy a better fate than betel him.

We are not diminishing the glory of the true artist, without these higher qualities. It is not to be denied that all perfect art has justly its own praise and mad. But it is a needful thing just now to emphasize the relation of great souls and great ideas to all high and genuine art. To this truth, John Burroughs, one of the sincerest of men, comes bearing witness: "A man like Poe is of the true poet type, but his contribution is unimportant because there is not enough of him. . . . There is a mastery in him not in Longfellow, but Longfellow will outlive him because he has a winning, genial personality, and his works are sweet and wholesome. Poe's mastery is over the elements of verse, not over the elements of life or spirit. Shelley, Swinburne, Rossetti, and all that ilk do not fail as artists but as men."

I went to a table which was covered with a multitude of richly-figured and highly gilded dishes. The people who sat with me seemed devoid of wholesome appetites, and lingered admiring the menu. When I lifted the covers from the five dishes I discovered the nearest to nothing in them. Then I arose and said: "I will go where things are plainer, and where I can be fed."

Just now the public fancy runs to gilded dishes; but I can hardly think it will always be so.

PASTOR FELLE.

HIS TIME HAD ARRIVED.

The End Came When He Predicted It Would Only a Few Hours Before.

They were five, with the guide, snugly camped up in the forests of the Rangeley country, and the day's sport had been a trifle heavy, if empty. They had done a long tramp; the broad fireplace yawned a crackling comfort; there was something punch on the table and our pipes were drawing well. The talk had drifted to casualty and fatality, and to the exchange of views upon the hair-breadth line which divides the chance of life from that of death, in peculiar cases.

The guide, told of a young fellow, who had been literally frightened to his death a few years before by the onrush of a big bull moose which he had wounded with his last cartridge. The brute had been knocked over by a shot from the guide before it reached the boy, who, though unmarked by a scar, through simple terror had lost his hold upon the spark of life. Instances were named where a fall of a few inches had brought death, and others where men had fallen distances of fifty or sixty feet, only to get up and walk off unharmed.

The doctor had been a silent listener to all this talk and sagging into the glowing coals until all our stories were ended. Suddenly he went to his shakedown and from beneath it drew an old and weather-beaten satchel, from which after some search he took an envelope and returned to his chair.

"My theory is, boys," that a man lives until his time's up, and no longer, and that it makes little or no difference in his length of life what he does or doesn't do. I seldom air this theory. In fact I don't generally like to speak of death, but to-night, for reasons, I'm going to tell you of an experience which strangely bears out my theory, and which lies many years back.

"I had just fairly settled into the business left me by an old practitioner in a small mountain town in Vermont. It was not a town of wealth or great mortality, and I was not a busy man. Still, my reading kept me occupied for the most part, and I had just enough of outside work to give me exercise and maintenance. Even then I had formed opinions and read widely

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upon the doctrine generally referred to as fatalism. I had observed nothing which controverted my ideas, while there had come to me much in their support. Early on a blustery, stormy evening I was lounging in my easy chair, before a roaring fire, pondering over a very strange deposition which I had just read, when my thought was interrupted by the sound of wheels, and a moment later there was a determined knock on the door, and I opened up. A quarryman whom I knew by sight was my caller.

"For God's sake, Doc," he said, come over with me to the quarry and help Big Briggs out of his misery. He's got a tamping iron clean up through his head."

"I got my case, slid into a heavy coat, and we were off. The Overlook quarry was six miles distant, and during the drive I gathered particulars. Big Briggs had been drilling for a heavy blast all afternoon, and had loaded for an early morning firing just before the knock-off. He had been tamping down the powder charge, short time had made him careless and there had been an premature explosion. The tamping iron had been driven up through both jaws and through the top of the cranium and still remained in the wound. I mentally concluded that my driver was either drawing the tale o'erstrong through excess of excitement, or that there would be no need of my services when we reached the patient."

"But I found his statement of conditions literally correct. Poor Briggs sat there with jaws locked firmly together and with about seven inches of iron protruding from his chin and a similar length from the apex of the skull. The bar was round, two feet long, with a diameter of one quarter, inch at one end and one and one-quarter inches at the other. It must have weighed seven or eight pounds. I went to work and made him as comfortable as I could, thinking meanwhile of the least brutal way in which to tell him that the long night must soon come. I was a bit surprised that he was sane, since the wound must have been very close to the brain cells, but he was fully conscious, though in great pain."

"Finally I asked him if he wished any particular thing done or anyone sent for. Motioning for a pencil he wrote:

"Nothing to be done. I shall live for years yet, and there's no hurry."

"I looked at him closely, believing that, after all, he was not precisely level. I had examined the curious wound carefully and wouldn't have insured his life for forty-eight hours on any terms. But boys, Big Briggs lived with that iron in his head for more than six years. During all that time I attended him carefully, and we had long sign-voice discussions about our mutual belief in fatalism. He predicted very closely the date of his death, and later I procured this somewhat ghastly photograph."

He drew from an envelope a photograph of a skull pinned through by an iron bar, and in turn we examined the picture. As it was passed from hand to hand each face mirrored the depressing thought of the years of unceasing suffering which had preceded the awful nakedness of the skull. The punch bowl received renewed attentions, and the talk broke away into forced and aimless channels, difficult for men to sustain long. At last one of them, in well-intended effort to lighten the mood of the hour, said:

"Well, Doc, when have you figured on reached the limit of your earthly mission? Try and plan to finish this hunt with us, for we are bound to strike a moose before we are through."

The doctor had gazed into the coals without a word since the telling of his story, but his lips now parted in a slow and melancholy smile as he calmly answered:

"I fancy, boys, that it will come to-morrow. So sure am I of this that I shall ask you before we have good night to join

me in what I believe will be our last toast together. It will be to your comfort, friends, if you can dismiss my statement as but the vagary of an overtalkative comrade who finds himself in strange mood to-night, but we shall see." He continued in murmur to himself:

"It's a pretty world, sencer, but not all has been happiness. I have seen of the travail of my soul and I am satisfied."

He rose and filled his glass. "Fill and drink, boys," he called, and as they gathered 'round without volition to resist his whim, he continued: "Drink to the unsolvable riddle of life; to the unathomable arbitrament of fate, and to the troubled sleep which follows all in God's good time."

Three glasses were replaced with brimming edge untouched upon the table,—one, the doctor's—lay shattered on the hearth. Hurried good nights were said, and a half hour later quiet ruled the camp. But one unsleeping member of the party went out an hour later to view the skies and judge of the morrow's weather. And there he found another sentinel, who growled:

"What a damned ghastly finale for an evening's good cheer! I wish the doctor had kept his internal fancies and his uncanny toast to himself!"

The next day's hunt promised to be as empty of results as was its predecessors. With the dusk three had returned to camp with royal appetites as the sole capture of the day, and the guide was rushing up a supper, encouraged by a running fire of adjuration. At length all was ready and they drew up chairs. The doctor had not yet shown up, but he was a stayer as a sportsman, and always the last man home. They knew he had gone over to a blind which he had thrown up near a promising lick at an inlet of the lake. He had salted the lick some days before and had since noted sure signs of moose. Against the judgment of the guide, who scouted his ability to fool a moose by a blind in the location which he had chosen, the doctor had sworn that if he took one at all he would take him there, and his patience and repeated failure was a joke of the camp. Probably he had waited until darkness had fairly shut in before giving up his vigil; and even then was stumbling homeward through the gloom.

Still, while the boys variously accounted for his delay, they grew more and more uneasy, and at length the lanterns were lighted and they started in a body for the lick. No man voiced his thought or expectation or spoke a word until we reached the blind.

And there they found him, dead and half crushed under the weight of a moose of 700 pounds. The signs about told the story. The tracks were not two hours old, and showed that the hulking deer had come to drink and then had turned to browse along the fringe of lapping water. The doctor had taken a side shot, which, in the failing and deceptive light, had not been sure, and the moose had charged him furiously, a second shot failing to stop him. Beaten down and scattered was the blind, and behind it hunter and hunted had fought out their battle to the death of both. A broken antler told the fury of the onslaught, and a splintered rifle stock the desperation of the defence. And there with face upturned to the twinkling stars and fingers locked in death about the hunter's knife which all too late had been cleanly driven home, the duel had ended.

The doctor's time had come.

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