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KENDALL:
THE AUSTRALIAN POET.



By
REV. J. J. MALONE.

Price, One Penny.

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MELBOURNE:
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309 & 311 LITTLE COLLINS STREET.



HENRY KENDALL.



HENRY KENDALL is a poet who owes everything, except his poetry, to Australia. This is rather a sweeping assertion, and it strikes the keynote to the general tone of whatever I have to say on the subject. Those amongst us who are familiar with the works of Tennyson, Wordsworth, Swinburne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Shelley will find the echoes of their music here and there running and ringing through the sweetest and saddest of his songs. He tells us himself, with a candour which is almost an apology, and in words which turn away wrath—

So take these kindly, even though there be
Some notes that unto other lyres belong,
Stray echoes from the elder sons of song;
And think how, from its neighbouring native sea
The pensive shell doth borrow melody.
I would not do the lordly masters wrong
By filching fair words from the shining throng,
Whose music haunts me, as the wind a tree.
Lo, when a stranger, in soft Syrian glooms,
Shot through with sunset, treads the cedar dells,
Far down by where the white-haired cataract booms,
He, faint with sweetness caught from forest smells,
Bears thence, unwitting, plunder of perfumes.

In that exquisite sonnet, of whose bewitching music he was such a consummate master, he acknowledges the debt he owes to the "elder sons of song" of the mother country. Had he gone to these old masters merely to learn the rare and

difficult art of musical expression, or as a man goes out into the fields to the open book of Nature, merely to catch the breath of inspiration, and have his soul thrilled into that high emotion whose voice is song, no critic would presume to quarrel with the use he makes of his talent, or deny his work originality. So closely knitted together is the race of man, however scattered by seas and mountains, and the laws of kings, into tribes and nations, that we are all borrowers one from another, owe an immense debt to our ancestors, and make posterity our debtor.

Kendall, however, caught something more than the mere perfume from the "cedar dells," and repeats something more than the mere echoes of the "native neighbouring sea" of modern English poetry. One of his critics, by no means of a carping or captious turn of mind, compares him to the mocking bird of America, which can imitate exactly the note of every other songster. The worst feature in his poetry is that imitative tendency, and, considering his grand opportunities, the most unpardonable. For it was the privilege of Kendall—a privilege peculiar to him among his brother poets, Gordon and Brunton Stephens—to have been born in this country, and amidst some of the wildest, loveliest, and most characteristic aspects of Australian scenery. He has woven the memories of that home of his childhood like rays of light into some of the tenderest and sweetest of his verses—in "Illa Creek," and "Bell-birds," and "Araluen." In "Bell-birds" he catches up with such rare art the accents of those silver tongues of the forest that you may hear through the tinkle of his verses how—

Softer than slumber and sweeter than singing
The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.

He brings us back in that poem to the haunts of his young imagination.

Mr. Sutherland, one of the most indulgent of all his critics, thus describes the scenery around that home of his childhood:—

Between the coast ranges of New South Wales and the Ocean lies a long, narrow plain, which, at Ulladulla, about 160 miles south of Sydney, is reduced to only ten or fifteen miles in length. The neighbouring mountains seem to shut the township and its little harbour out from the world, and shelter the

district so completely that the vegetation is of distinctly tropical character, and the scenery rich beyond description. Here the boy Kendall, escaping from an unhappy home, learned to find his chief pleasure in the solitudes of mountain, of tangled forest, or of lonely shore. He wandered along the brooks that, tumbling down by falls and cataracts from the mountains, tossed and fretted with sullen murmur under the groves of palm, or down in dimly-lighted gullies chafed round the roots and over the prostrate stems of innumerable fern-trees. Or he followed the bell-birds deep into the untrodden wilds, where palms and cedars and sycamores are densely interwoven with wild vines. Behind, stood the mountains he learnt to love, varied with lonely gullies and precipitous gorges; in front, there was ever the dash of the greatest of all oceans, forming here a charming bay or a silent lagoon, where the boy would lie for hours gazing into the reflected skies, or there a rocky headland, where, even on the calmest and sunniest day, the sea beats upward from the base in sheets of spray.

That is a vivid and picturesque description of the wild and varied scenery in which he passed his childhood, and certainly no spot on earth could be a more "meet nurse for a poetic child." It calls up vividly before my imagination the scenery around that lovely Loutit Bay in the flood and mountain land of Lorne, and I remember, as I climbed a few months ago its solitary mountains, and looked down over its precipitous gorges, or leaped from rock to rock along its rugged coast, by the long and lonely roar of the great Southern Ocean, or crept into the coolness and the shadow of those dimly-lighted gullies, clothed with such tropical luxuriance of foliage, or wandered, under the tall tree-ferns, over jagged rocks and floating snags and fallen trees, by the sound of the clear, fresh river, to where one of these white-haired cataracts came tumbling here and there over the rocks, dropping into placid pool and rapid runnel; I remember, amidst its ever-varying tints of light and shadow, of song and silence, feeling that here, surely, was the ideal home for the poet of nature, and especially for the lone and lovely, the wild and picturesque nature of Australia.

However keen the eye of the mere stranger or traveller to detect the novel and characteristic features of a landscape; however susceptible his temperament to receive and reflect back into language its peculiar spirit, he can never have that wide acquaintance with its ever-varying aspects, nor imaginative sympathy with its subtle and ever-changing moods, which the man possesses whose cradle has been

rocked in the midst of it, and whose romantic and impressionable youth has been trained up under its mighty and mysterious influences.

The adopted child of nature can never expect to share so much of the mother's love as the child who has been nursed upon her bosom. No amount of after observation can compensate for the loss of the vivid insight of childhood into its intrinsic beauty, and the transfiguring power of its associations. Childhood is of all ages the age of receptivity. The young heart, fresh from nature, is responsive to its every impulse. Its hues colour his imagination, its sounds mingle with and become a part of the very music of his soul. "The meanest flower that blows" leaves the breath of its delicate perfume in his memory; "the hare-bell's faintest whisper to the passing breeze" finds a responsive echo in his heart. Everything is a novelty to him, and a wonder and a joy.

Apparelled in celestial light
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

Wordsworth, whose affectionate sympathy with nature gave him a more piercing insight into her inner spirit, and whose poetry, as a consequence, has caught up more of her mysterious accents than any other, perhaps, ancient or modern, traces out that emotional educating power of nature over the heart of a child—

Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse, and with me
The girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

The floating clouds their state will lend
To her; for her the willow bend,
Nor shall she fail to see,
Even in the motions of the storm,
Grace that shall mould the maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her: and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place,
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

Such is the power of nature over the plastic heart that surrenders itself in the genuine Quaker spirit to her sway.

Kendall: The Australian Poet.

Now, Kendall had his childhood and youth cast in the midst of a wild and beautiful scenery—the scenery to English literature practically of a new world. The virgin forest lay all around him, and, like Stanley in Darkest Africa, he was privileged to be the first of its explorers. Had he gone straight to that nature for his inspiration, and allowed his soul, like the forest lyre of Æolus, to vibrate into language at her touch, the old world would have honoured him, and his own land crowned him, no doubt, as the laureate of a new literature of a new world. The poet has been likened to the first man standing in his new-born strength, and gazing for the first time on the glories of creation. “The vision and the faculty divine” which he possesses gives him new insight into the beauty and mystery of the Universe, and there is, as a consequence, an eternal freshness in his melodious utterance of it into song. But Kendall had no necessity, even if he possessed it, to exercise that rare and extraordinary gift in order to create something which would be new to English literature. He had merely to look around him, to listen, and speak the word that came to him, amidst the glorious intuitions of childhood, and the wizard dreams of youth, in the depths of the primeval forest, to be a “singer of the dawn” of Australian literature. In his Ode on the Sydney International Exhibition, he recognises the novel opportunity which the poet of this land possesses:—

What though we never heard the great god's lays,
Which made all music the Hellenic days—
What though the face of thy fair heaven beams
Still only on the crystal Grecian streams—
What though a sky of new, strange beauty shines
Where no white Dryad sings within the pines:
Here is a land whose large, imperial grace
Must tempt thee, goddess, in thine holy place.
Here are the dells of peace and plenilune,
The hills of morning and the slopes of noon;
Here are the waters dear to days of blue,
And dark, green hollows of the noontide dew;
Here lies the harp, by fragrant wood-winds fanned,
That waits the coming of thy quickening hand.
And shall Australia, framed and set in sea,
August with glory, wait in vain for thee?

It would be most unjust to say that Kendall has not reflected in his poetry the scenery of his native land. His

one title to literary pre-eminence as an Australian poet is his descriptive power. By the very necessities of birth and education, he had to take from Australian skies the hues, though not often enough from Australian life the themes of his poetry. He seems to have felt that he was in a new world, and that if he did not possess that introspective faculty of the great creative poet to call up new worlds of thought and of existence, he could, at all events, look around him and photograph the world he saw in his poetry. It is impossible to read his poems and not to feel that the nature to whose society he fled from the uncongenial atmosphere of home he loved with all the intensity and abandonment of the poet and the lover. In that love of nature for her own sake he was inflamed by the poetry and personality of his friend and patron, Charles Harpur. Rugged, simple, and a lover of the wild forest and mountain scenery, Harpur is the father of Australian literature. He has not written many poems, not any that are likely to be ever popular. There is a freshness, however, a strength, and a native fragrance about them which will always entitle them to a place in Australian literature. Kendall owed much to Harpur, was an intense lover of the man and his poetry—caught possibly from him the poetic impulse, and pays him back in his lines to his memory the tribute of his gratitude and his admiration. Like Harpur, he, too, looked at nature apart from man, and loved her, not for her vague, suggestive power, but for her mere inanimate beauty. The gentler aspect, above all, of that wild scenery seems to have touched him with its soothing tenderness. In one of his beautiful "Prefatory Sonnets," he tells us—

I purposed once to take my pen and write,
 Not songs, like some, tormented and awry
 With passion, but a cunning harmony
 Of words and music caught from glen and height,
 And lucid colours born of woodland light,
 And shining places where the sea streams lie.
 But this was when the heat of youth glowed white,
 And, since I've put the faded purpose by,
 I have no faultless fruits to offer you
 Who read this book; but certain syllables
 Herein are borrowed from unfooted dells
 And secret hollows dear to noontide dew;
 And these at least, though far between and few,
 May catch the sense like subtle forest spells.

Like Wordsworth, he fled to nature for repose, and his quiet and melancholy temperament sought it not amidst the tumult of the waves that broke upon the rocks, or the storms that beat upon the mountains, but in the silence of the deep mountain valleys and the shadow of the "unfooted dells."

We, having a secret to others unknown,
In the cool mountain mosses
May whisper together, September, alone,
Of our loves and our losses.
One word for her beauty, and one for the place
She gave to the hours,
And then we may kiss her, and suffer her face
To sleep with the flowers.

The sea, on which for two years he roved when a boy, never seems to have struck any deep thunder notes out of his soul. He loved it, sang of it, sleeps by it in the Waverley Cemetery at Sydney, but the roll of the great Pacific is not heard resounding through his song. There is much of the stormy strength of Byron in the poetry of Adam Lindsay Gordon. His muse, like the stormy petrel, delights to be amidst the remorseless dash of billows. The sea was to him one of the elements in whose ennobling stir he felt himself exalted, and on whose heaving billows he loved to fling himself, as on the back of some fiery charger, and

Ride as never a man has ridden,
In your sleepy twirling surges hidden,
To gulfs foreshadowed, thro' straits forbidden,
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.

But Kendall preferred to sit upon the rocks by the shore, and watch the dash of its billows, and listen to the murmur or the thunder of its roar.

Nor, though perhaps the finest lines he ever wrote are to be found in his dedication "To a Mountain," was the power of hills upon him, nor was he at all possessed with the passion of the solitary whose life was passed among the "Hills of Athol, far from sight of city spire or sound of minster clock." He tells us, in that dedication of his "Songs of the Mountains," in a strain of lofty and magnificent eloquence worthy of Shelley in his most ecstatic moments—

Kendall: The Australian Poet.

To thee, O father of the stately peaks,
Above me in the loftier light—to thee,
Imperial brother of those awful hills
Whose feet are set in splendid spheres of flame,
Whose heads are where the gods are, and whose sides
Of strength are belted round with all the zones
Of all the world, I dedicate these songs.
And if, within the compass of this book,
There lives and glows one verse in which there beats
The pulse of wind and torrent—if one line
Is here that like a running water sounds,
And seems an echo from the lands of leaf,
Be sure that line is thine. Here, in this home,
Away from men and books and all the schools,
I take thee for my teacher. In thy voice
Of deathless majesty, I, kneeling, hear
God's grand authentic gospel. Year by year,
The great sublime cantata of thy storm
Strikes through my spirit—fills it with a life
Of startling beauty. Thou my Bible art,
With holy leaves of rock, and flower, and tree,
And moss, and shining runnel. From each page
That helps to make thy awful volume, I
Have learned a noble lesson. In the psalm
Of thy grave winds, and in the liturgy
Of singing waters, lo! my soul has heard
The higher worship; and from thee, indeed,
The broad foundations of a finer hope
Were gathered in; and thou hast lifted up
The blind horizon for a larger faith.
Moreover, walking in exalted woods
Of naked glory, in the green and gold
Of forest sunshine, I have paused like one
With all the life transfigured; and a flood
Of light ineffable has made me feel
As felt the grand old prophets caught away
By flames of inspiration.

It may be questioned whether anything finer than these lines has yet appeared in Australian literature, or anything which clothes so wonderfully the sublime simplicities of Wordsworth with the transfiguring diction of Shelley. He has given no evidence, however, in his poetry, of having made the mountain the temple of his worship, its rock and leaf and runnel his Holy Bible, and its loud storms the majestic organ voice of his rapturous devotion. He tells us, in fact, later on—

No song is here
Of mighty compass; for my singing robes
I've worn in stolen moments.

Kendall: The Australian Poet.

His muse was lyrical, and dwelt among the "deep, green, gracious glens, where the silver fountains sing for ever," rather than with the eagle on the lofty crag amidst

The cloud and thunder, and the face sublime
Of blue mid-heaven.

Strange words of wind and rhymes of rain
And whispers from the inland fountain

are found more frequently in his verse than the swell of the majestic ocean, or the sweep of the mountain storm. His soul was practically dumb in the presence of the sublimities of nature. He seems to have loved, however, with a sincere and intense love, her gentler aspects—"the mountain moss," "the unfooted dell," "the deep, green, gracious glen," the murmuring river, and to have caught up with marvellous skill into his poetry

Songs of stream and forest wind,
Tones of wave and harp-like tree.

Mitchell, in one of the most beautiful passages in all literature, tells us that he delighted in poets who delight in rivers.

All my life long I have delighted in rivers, rivulets, rills, fierce torrents tearing their rocky beds, gliding, tumbling brooks, kissing a daisied marge.

There is something peculiarly entrancing in the sound of the shining rivers, as they glance and prattle and murmur and sing and sigh, and leap and loiter and run by wood and hill and meadow. The old pagans called them the eyes of a landscape, and peopled with beautiful nymphs their crystal waters. They possess a mesmeric power over the human heart, that seems to find in them a companionship almost human in its responsive sympathy. The poet owes to them much of his inspiration. Burns, the prince of lyric poets, tells us—

The Muse nae poet ever fand her,
Till by himsel' he learned to wander
Adown some trottin' burn's meander,
And nae think lang.
His sweetest trait and pensive ponder
A heart-felt sang.

Kendall, too, was a lover of the river, and found in its quiet inland murmur something that spoke with a bewitching tenderness to his very inmost soul. By his native Araluen he wandered as a boy, with all boyhood's wayward fancy and wizard dream, gave its name to his little daughter, as the darling of his soul, and made it the all but accomplished ambition of his life to steal its music and put it in his song. Wherever the sound of running water reaches him, there is a freshness, a vigour, a spontaneity, a genuine touch of nature, in his verses.

There is a river in the range
 I love to think about;
 Perhaps the searching feet of change
 Have never found it out.
 Ah! oftentimes I used to look
 Upon its banks, and long
 To steal the beauty of that brook,
 And put it in a song.
 I wonder if the slopes of moss,
 In dreams so dear to me,
 The falls of flower and flower-like floss
 Are as they used to be.
 I wonder if the waterfalls,
 Those singers far and fair,
 That gleamed between the wet, green walls,
 Are still the marvels there.

In the Glen of Arrawatta, the lonely settler hears
From the still depths
 Of dripping gorges, many a runnel voice,

and the sound of it brings him back again to the dreams of youth, and kindles in his soul that unappeasable longing of the exile for his native valley home.

Then fell a softer mood, and memory paused
 With faithful love, amidst the sainted shrines
 Of youth and passion in the valleys past
 Of dear delights that never grow again.
 And if the stranger (who had left behind
 Far anxious homesteads in a wave-swept isle,
 To face a fierce sea-circle day by day,
 And hear at night the dark Atlantic's moan)
 Now took a hope and planned a swift return,
 With wealth and health and with a youth unspent,
 To those sweet ones that stayed with want at home,
 Say, who shall blame him—though the years are long,
 And life is hard, and waiting makes the heart grow old?

That is one aspect of nature which he has studied, and which colours some of the most pathetic and least perishable of his poems. You find it in "Araluen," "Bell Birds," "Coogee," "Moss on a Wali," "Mountain Moss," "Mooni," "Names Upon a Stone," "Narrara Creek," "After Many Years," and it twinkles through some of his more sombre and melancholy landscapes, and tinkles here and there through the storrier voices that sweep across his dreams.

"After Many Years" furnishes us with the best illustration of that gentler mood of his character. It is probably the sweetest thing he has written. There is a bewitching tenderness and a charming simplicity in it. The very metre seems to ripple with a faint, sad music. Tennyson is not more happy in his marvellous power of shaping the love and sorrow he felt into language crisp, clear, and musical. It is the true poet-soul touched with a genuine emotion.

There is another aspect of nature, however, which he has reflected, and which is more characteristic of the scenery of his native land—the weird, the ghastly, the gloomy. His muse has wandered not merely by the running brooks and in the hollows of the dells, but has followed the path of the explorers—

In central wastes afar from any home
Or haunt of man, and in the changeless midst
Of sullen deserts, and the viewless miles
Of sultry silence.

A writer in the "Melbourne Review" thus poetically interprets the general spirit of Kendall's poetry:—

Sad music wandered from the trembling strings
He touched with brooding fingers, like the wail
The native oak gives to the hasting gale,
Chanting of loss and lone imaginings.
No note was his of rapture and the play
Of errant fancy light as mountain air,
Within his verse the sombre forests dwell,
The sunset lingers in a quivering sky,
Burnt desert tracks in crimson caverns die,
And languid lands a weary message tell,
Yet gracious glooms athwart the landscape run
Of flowers and leafage, and the streamlet's flow,
Of balmy depths whose airs are soft and low,
And tranquil twilight bathes the sunken sun.

No poet can claim to be a true interpreter of the natural features of this primeval land who does not succeed in transfusing the oppressive stillness and brooding melancholy of the lonely bush into his poetry. Kendall has succeeded in doing that with more fidelity, with greater vividness and power than either Gordon or Brunton Stephens. He was a close student of the bush scenery, had a keen eye to detect its subtle and varying, though seemingly monotonous aspects, and set himself expressly to shadow it forth into song. His "melodious, melancholy song" has all the stern gloom and solitariness of the lonely bush upon it. Reading it is like taking a tour through the country. You meet here and there green patches of land with shining runnels "babbling of a plenteous fall," and golden wattle blossoms breathing out their subtle and delicate sweetness in the leafy hollows of the dells, and you begin to feel that you are travelling through some of those lovely Irish landscapes, where the valleys are all veined with silver streams, till suddenly the blinding smoke and stifling heat of a bush fire warns you that you are in the land of brown, impenetrable scrub, whose gum trees are all blackened here and there by the track of the flying flames, or stand up gaunt and white and ghastly in their shrouds, like the ghosts of a dead forest, or you are wakened up out of your momentary illusion by the hoarse croaking of the frogs in the stagnant water pools of the immense, illimitable, trackless wastes—flat, flowerless, treeless,

Blue bitten with the salt of many droughts,

without bird or beast or blossom, with nothing but the blazing sun and the "breathless brazen sky" above, stretched like a roof of a furnace, fixed, fierce, and pitiless.

Stark desolation and a waste of gloom,

All smit with flame, and broken with the storms,

Black ghosts of trees, and sapless trunks that stood

Harsh hollow channels of the fiery noise.

That is the general character of Australian scenery, and Kendall, whose morbid temperament felt in its grim and ghastly features a congenial companionship, reflects that aspect of it in his poetry. A great part of his poetry, indeed, might have been written anywhere within His

Majesty's dominions. Nearly all his classic poetry might have remained unwritten without endangering his immortality. These old pagan themes have no reality in them for our modern times, and poetasters of all ages have been ringing the changes on them till they have become hollow, monotonous, and unmeaning—mere sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. It is a weariness of the flesh and of the spirit to read them. What business an Australian poet has to resuscitate these extinct deities, wrapped in their dead mythologies like Egyptian mummies, out of the rubbish under which they have been buried for centuries, and introduce them into the untrodden solitudes of this land, is a thing that may well excite our wonder and our curiosity. The true poet, to-day at all events, takes his stand upon the earth where he happens to be born, looks to the skies above him, and the land before him, and the life around him, and into the depths of his own soul, where all that world of man and nature lies mirrored, for his genuine inspiration. Had Kendall trusted to his classic themes merely, or been content to take his inspiration second-hand from English poets, singing on English soil the songs of England, he would never have fixed his name for twenty years in Australian literature. Fortunately for him, and for those amongst us who are lovers of real poetry, and are eager to pick up every accent that falls from the lips of the Muse of this young land, he has dedicated his talent to some extent to his country, and has gone to its scenery for what is truest and most imperishable in his songs. As a descriptive poet he ranks easily first in Australian literature. Few indeed, even of English poets, have surpassed him in the grace, the vigour, the vividness, and the vitality with which he paints the characteristic features of a landscape. Take that picture in "Christmas Creek," of the drought in the waste and trackless pathway of the explorers:—

Phantom streams were in the distance—mocking lights of lake
and pool—
Ghosts of trees and soft green lustre—groves of shadows deep
and cool.
Yea, some devil ran before them changing skies of brass to
blue.
Setting bloom where curse is planted, where a grass-blade never
grew.

Six there were, and high above them glared a wild and wizened
 sun,
 Ninety leagues from where the waters of the singing valleys
 run.
 There before them, there behind them, was the great, stark,
 stubborn plain,
 Where the dry winds hiss for ever, and the blind earth moans
 for rain.
 Ringed about by tracks of furnace, ninety leagues from stream
 and tree,
 Six there were, with wasted faces, working northward to the
 sea.

Or take again this picture of the fierce and red-hot summer—

When the summer heat
 Had roused the serpent from his rotten lair,
 And made a noise of locusts in the boughs.
 And, therefore, through the fiercer summer months,
 While all the swamps were rotten: while the flats
 Were baked and broken: when the clayey rifts
 Yawned wide, half-choked with herbage drifted past,
 Spontaneous flames would burst from thence, and race
 Across the prairies all day long.

At night
 The winds were up, and then, with four-fold speed,
 A harsh gigantic growth of smoke and fire
 Would roar along the bottoms, in the wake
 Of fainting flocks of parrots, wallaroos,
 And wildered wild things, scattering right and left,
 For safety vague, throughout the general gloom.
 Anon the nearer hillside growing trees
 Would take the surges; thus from bough to bough
 Was borne the flaming terror. Bole and spire,
 Rank after rank, now pillared, ringed, and rolled,
 In blinding blaze, stood out against the dead,
 Down-smothered dark, for fifty leagues away.

Or take that picture of the desolate glen, where the solitary widow sits alone nursing the memory of her dead husband—

Where black Orara nightly chafes his brink,
 Midway between lamenting lines of oak,
 And Warra's Gap, the shepherd's grave was built;
 And there the wild dog pauses, in the midst
 Of moonless watches, howling through the gloom
 At hopeless shadows flitting to and fro,
 What time the east wind hums his darkest hymn,
 And rains beat heavy on the ruined leaf.

What could be more desolate than the description of the hut built by the early settler in that Glen of Arrawatta?

A wurley, fashioned like a bushman's roof:
The door brought out athwart the strenuous flame,
The back thatched in against a rising wind.
And while the sturdy hatchet filled the cliffs
With sounds unknown, the immemorial haunts
Of echoes sent their lonely dwellers forth,
Who lived a life of wonder: flying round
And round the glen—what time the kangaroo
Leapt from his lair and huddled with the bats—
Far scattering down the wildly startled fells.
Then came the doleful owl; and evermore
The bleak morass gave out the bittern's call,
The plover's cry, and many a fitful wail
Of chilly omen, falling on the ear
Like those cold flaws of wind that come and go
An hour before the break of day.

The genius of Kendall revelled in these scenes of sullen shadow and stillness, that

Make one ponder by the silent lands,
Beyond the lonely tracks of Burke and Wills.

But mere descriptive power is not the highest gift of the poet, nor is purely descriptive poetry the greatest or the most entrancing. The true poet uses nature merely as the background of his thought, the canvas on which he is to stretch his picture, or the colours with which he is to clothe it. Literature is distinguished from science by being illumined by the presence of a great personality. Like the great Creator Himself, the poet uses this world of nature merely for man to live and move, and have his being within it. Principal Shairp, in his "Poetic Interpretation of Nature," classifies the various schools of poetry according to their ways of looking at this outer world—from the child-like freshness and delight of Chaucer to the imaginative sympathy of Wordsworth. Kendall belongs to the school of purely descriptive poetry, and his descriptions have a monotony that in the end wearies and oppresses us. He has more of the landscape painter in his character than the poet, and would have succeeded better with the brush than with the pen. "The Hut by the Black Swamp" is one of his characteristic poems. It introduces us to one of those ghastly scenes in the savage solitudes of the bush, where the early settler built his bark hut, and called it, in

his Anglo-Saxon way, a home. A murder has been done there, and the poet gathers together the weird and terrible features of bush scenery in order to give a hideous and suitable setting to the deed of death. Kendall has been compared to Edgar Allan Poe, of America, and there is something of the same gruesome spirit underlying most of his poetry, and evidences here and there in the very structure of his verse to show that he was a disciple of that morbid and melancholy genius. "The Hut by the Black Swamp," like "The Glen of Arawatta," "A Death in the Bush," "Cooranbean," "Ghost Glen," illustrates that aspect of his mind, and furnishes us with an instance of the purely objective character of his poetry. He makes use of nature by applying what Ruskin calls "the pathetic fallacy" to the scene, grouping together images of dread and darkness and desolation to give dramatic effect to the event, and convey to the reader a sense of the horrible deed which haunts the place with its speechless terror. Like Gordon, he was wanting in that dramatic power by which the great tragic or epic poet gets at the very heart of things, and shows us human character evolving itself amidst the stress of circumstances and human action in all its manifold situations on the stage. No doubt the adventurous life of a young community, such as this, is full of romantic incident, and has within it the essential elements of a great dramatic poem. There is scarcely an exile who sets his foot on the shores of this land but possesses in the tumult of his soul, tossing from wave to wave between the vain and ungovernable regrets of the past, and the vague and shadowy possibilities of the future, the great tidal movements of a grand drama. There is scarcely a settler's tent pitched amid the gloom of the pathetic forest, or a digger's hut lying in the lonely mountains, scarcely a wayside shanty of dab and wattle, or a rising township on the fringe of the immeasurable forest, that stretches like a dark background away into the immensity, but hides within it the humour and the pathos, the passion and the pain, the joys and the sorrows of human life, more touching in themselves, and crowded with more genuine human incident, than anything to be found in the camps and courts of England and the great Elizabethan dramas.

It needs merely the eye of the great dramatic poet to seize

it and his art to reproduce it. So far, however, none of our Australian poets have recognised the novel and dramatic interest attaching to the life of a nineteenth century man, with all his culture and refinement, cast like Robinson Crusoe, in Juan Fernandez, on the shores of this vast, solitary, and immemorial land. Geo. Gordon MacCrae has attempted to do for the Australian aboriginal what Alfred Domett has done so admirably for the Maori of New Zealand, and Longfellow, with inimitable art, for the North American Indian; but none have set themselves, as yet, to picture the life of the daring invader of their peaceful forests, or the thrilling incidents that accompany the bold and rapid march of that invasion.

There is one aspect of early colonial enterprise which naturally attracted the genius of Kendall, and that is the fate of its brave and unfortunate explorers. He has touched that in many of his poems—in "Leichardt," "On the Paroo," "Christmas Creek," and "The Fate of the Explorers." His treatment of it possesses less strength and individuality than Gordon, but more descriptive power and melody. The drought—the desert—the immense spaces—the weariness of the travel he has painted with a great wealth of colour; and though the dramatic element is wanting to interest the reader with its sullen fears and sanguine hopes and settled despair, still he has managed to convey to us a sense of their untold trouble, and to arouse a sympathy with their heroes and of their hapless endeavours. But when we read such poems as "The Death in the Bush," "The Glen of Arawatta," "Beyond Kerguelen," "Leichardt," "On the Paroo," "Cooranbean," "The Fate of the Explorers," we cannot help regretting that such a magnificent canvas should have been hung there by the poet of the Australian bush, and that no picture of human life should have been painted on it. Up to the present, Australian poets have done little more than spread the canvas for the grand tragic poet of the daring and stubborn manhood of young Australia, to make it breathe and burn with living human characters, drawn from the life of the explorers of its untravelled wastes, and the pioneers of its early culture and colonisation. They have been too much with nature, and too little with man, painting, like Kendall, with terrific power the "The Hut by the Black Swamp,"

without giving us an insight into the life of the man who built it, and dwelt in it, and dreamed in it, as a man will dream who has nothing but the beating of his own heart to listen to in the intolerable silence of those unpeopled solitudes under the southern stars. There is little human interest in the poetry of Gordon; there is scarcely any at all in Kendall. In the "Glen of Arawatta" he set himself expressly to give us one of these dramatic incidents of the early days—the murder of a settler in the bush by the aboriginals.

A settler's story of the wild old times
 One told by camp fires when the station drays
 Were housed and hidden, forty years ago,
 While swarthy drivers smoked their pipes, and drew
 And crowded round the friendly gleaming flame,
 That lured the dingo howling from his caves,
 And brought sharp, sudden feet about the brakes.

But though the poem is a masterpiece of vivid and vigorous descriptive power, there is hardly a particle of human interest from end to end of the story. We leave him as we found him, scarcely stirred at all to sympathy with his fate, so vague and impersonal he seems to be "Alone with God and silence in the hills." "Ghost Glen" is, however, as weird as anything in the language. Edgar Allan Poe, in his morbid dreams, has seen and shadowed forth nothing more terrific. The effect it produces on the mind is proof of the imaginative power he possessed of painting the eerie and the awful. It makes one shudder, like some of those ghost stories to which we listened when the winds were moaning in the chimney by the fireside at home.

After "Ghost Glen," his lines, "On a Street," is the poem in which he comes nearest to the dramatic element. It is the most realistic thing he has written—the most direct, the most spontaneous. Kendall was, unfortunately, like so many men of poetic genius, a victim to intemperance. Losing his situation in consequence of his intemperate habits in Sydney, he came to Melbourne in the year 1869, with his wife and little daughter, Araluen, believing that in the "Queen City of the South" a poet and a journalist might find a congenial and even comfortable home. It seems, however, that at that day poetry was a drug in the market.

The question is whether poetry of any kind can yet be said to have any marketable value in the metropolis. The poetry of Kendall, at all events, was not a financial success for himself or his publisher, and, to use a common phrase, even nowadays is scarcely ever quoted. Whilst in Melbourne he wrote for the "Argus," "Australasian," "Colonial Monthly Magazine," and, by a strange irony of fate, for "Punch" and "Humbug," two of the comic papers. He made a few friends in our city—Adam Lindsay Gordon, whom he admired, and George Gordon MacCrae, who clung to him and gave him the pity of a poet for his melancholy and wayward genius. The passion, however, that had driven him out of New South Wales came back upon him at fitful intervals amidst the toil and trouble of his life in Melbourne. The two years of "bitter old Bohemian days" which he passed here became the saddest of his whole existence. His "Leaves from an Australian Forest," published by George Robertson in 1869, turned out to be a financial failure, and the death of his little daughter, Araluen, in a wretched home at Richmond, came to add its bitter anguish to his baffled hopes and cruel and hopeless poverty. Who shall tell the inward agonies of a poet so morbidly susceptible to every pang of pain and shame and poverty, doomed, partially because of his own devouring passion, to see his daughter die, and his fond and faithful wife linger out a little longer a life of wretchedness. His lines "On a Street" are an attempt to give expression to that unspeakable sorrow which withered up his soul while it wrinkled with precocious furrows his brow, and shot his hair grey—"grey with grief instead of time." That bitter cry of self-accusation which runs through them like the cry of a lost soul, underlies his whole life, and is the under-current of nearly all his poetry.

There is a great deal of the purely fantastic in his poetry, and much that is mere tinsel. This is genuine. A great sorrow here has wrung his heart, and we can hear the cry of its piercing agony. The skill with which he conveys the power of the fierce old memory, dragging him back ever to the scene of his desolation, is full of true and tragic art. There is a terrible sincerity of remorseful and repentant love in it, piercing as the cry of David in his Psalms, that

atones for all his guiltiness. They show us that, when Kendall was touched with real emotion, and forgot his art in his eagerness to find expression, he could write genuine poetry. He had a deep and tender love for his wife, and dedicated to her, as the guiding light of his life and the inspiration of his song, his "Leaves from Australian Forests."

To her who, cast with me in trying days,
 Stood in the place of health and power and praise;
 Who, when I thought all light was out, became
 A lamp of hope that put my fears to shame;
 Who faced for love's sole sake the life austere
 That waits upon the man of letters here;
 Who, unawares, her deep affection showed
 By many a touching little wifely mode;
 Whose spirit, self-denying, dear, divine,
 Its sorrows hid, so it might lessen mine.
 To her, my bright best friend, I dedicate
 This book of songs—'twill help to compensate
 For much neglect. The act, if not the rhyme,
 Will touch her heart, and lead her to the time
 Of trials past. That which is most intense
 Within these leaves is of her influence;
 And if aught here is sweetened with a tone
 Sincere, like love, it came of love alone.

"Araluen," one of the most pathetic pieces he has written, one of the most lyrical in its tenderness, is full of the breath of that pure and perfect and imperishable love. The last verse of that poem, in which the sorrowing love of her, sobbing by the empty cradle, touches him to the quick with an exquisite pity and pathos, is among the best and truest he has ever written.

You that sit and sob beside me, you upon whose golden head
 Many rains of many sorrows have from day to day been shed;
 Who, because your love was noble, faced with me the lot
 austere,
 Ever pressing with its hardship on the man of letters here;
 Let me feel that you are near me, lay your hand within mine
 own,
 You are all I have to live for, now that we are left alone.
 Three there were, but one has vanished. Sins of mine have
 made you weep.
 But forgive your baby's father now the baby is asleep.
 Let us go, for night is falling; leave the darling with her
 flowers,
 Other hands will come and tend them, other friends in other
 hours.

He has given expression to the passion of unrequited, as to the purity of wedded love. "Rose Lorraine" is one of his sincere poems, and it shows again that the lyric love, "half angel and half bird," could warble on his lips in burning and beautiful language. A lyric poem has been defined as the adequate and consummate expression of one supreme moment of rapture. Kendall, like Gordon, possessed the lyrical faculty in a very eminent degree, and should have been content, as Carlyle says of Burns, to utter himself in "fitful gushes and glowing hints, fantastic breaks and warblings, in the short and swift, sudden and spontaneous, lark flights of song." We catch here and there through his songs single thrills of rapture not rounded off and finished into perfect form like the lyrics of Moore and Robert Burns, but full of "subtle notes of incompleteness."

In his "September in Australia" we see the play of that lyrical faculty. The poem itself is not remarkable, except for luscious sound and glowing colour, but there are verses in it of lyrical sweetness and lispings tenderness, marvellous and musical as anything in Swinburne. The lips of the great lyric poet are there, but they have nothing of the rapt lyric soul to utter.

O season of changes, of shadow and shine,
September the splendid;
My song hath no music to mingle with thine,
And its burden is ended.
But thou, being born of the winds and the sun,
By mountain, by river,
May lighten, and listen, and loiter, and run
With thy voices for ever.

There is scarcely a single poem giving a perfect and adequate expression of a mood of mind or a phase of feeling in the whole of his poetry. In one of the last and most beautiful poems he has written, "After Many Years," he tells us that he has failed to find an utterance for the song that had been floating from childhood in his dreams, and fluttering in the unapproachable abysses of his soul. He seems to have been, like Beethoven in his grand symphony, all his life long running his fingers up and down the keyboard seeking to find expression for the dim and wondrous melody that came to him in a supreme moment of inspira-

tion, like a stray echo of some angel's song, and kept warbling vaguely its delirious music in his soul. Unlike Beethoven, however, he never caught its celestial tones and fixed them in articulate and immortal song.

The song that once I dreamed about,
 The tender, touching thing,
 As radiant as the rose without,
 The love of wind and wing;
 The perfect verses to the tune
 Of woodland music set,
 As beautiful as afternoon,
 Remain unwritten yet.

There is not a particle of humour from end to end in his poetry. His attempts at it in "Bob," "Billy Vickers," "Jim the Splitter," types of colonial character, are ludicrous. His imagination, as we saw above, delighted to roam amongst the more melancholy aspects of Australian scenery, drew its dismal themes out of its weird places, and clouds with its impenetrable gloom the whole current of his song. The consciousness of a desperate passion that lay like a sleeping demon, in his most tranquil moments, in his breast, and the sense of grim and stern, but vain, remorse for "the youth thrown away and the faculties wasted," is the burden of nearly all his song.

I might, as thou seest, have stood in high places,
 Instead of in pits where the brand of disgrace is,
 A byword for scoffers, a butt and a caution,
 With the grave of poor Burns and Maginn for my portion.

"The skirts of a stupendous grief" are trailing through all his poetry. We cannot help feeling, while reading it, that it is the work of a man whose oppressive hypochondria, intense and brooding, drove him at last to a madhouse.

In "The Voice of the Wild Oak," written in what he calls the "shadow of 1872," the period of his temporary insanity, he gives expression to that gloomy despondency.

But he who hears, this autumn day,
 That more than deep autumnal rhyme
 Is one whose hair was shot with grey,
 By grief instead of time.

He has no need, like many a bard,
To sing imaginary pain,
Because he bears, and finds it hard,
The punishment of Cain.

The poetry of Gordon is clouded with something of the same melancholy, though not arising from the same reason. He is not oppressed by any grim regrets for the past, which he would live over again willingly and the same, but for the worthlessness of the present and the utter hopelessness of the future. Gordon, however, had a fervent love of life, and of all vital and vigorous action, which infuses a certain sanguine element into his poetry. The delicate and morbid Kendall knew nothing of the wild delight of life, and there is a want of energy, of vigour, and of vitality in his poetry. His turf ballads are all failures. There is nothing of that swift and headlong energy which carries the reader away like some fiery and impetuous charger, as in the rushing music of Adam Lindsay Gordon. Gordon is the poet of strength, Kendall of sweetness. As far as the mere art of poetry is concerned, Kendall is vastly his superior. In fact, there are few poets in the English language superior to him in the grace and vigour and lyrical sweetness of expression. Keats and Shelley and Wordsworth and Tennyson and Swinburne and Edgar Allan Poe have all contributed to give him what he longed for, and what he partially possesses—

The power and the sweetness to fashion
Lyrics with beats like the heart-beats of passion,
Songs interwoven of lights and of laughters,
Borrowed from bell-birds in far forest rafters.

He has not, indeed, handled many metres, and he has invented none. There is a want of variety and originality in his rhythm, which makes the reading of him wearisome and monotonous. The few metres, however, he has employed are perfect as the models on which they have been copied. The swinging rhythm of "Locksley Hall," which rolls like some majestic ocean billow, he has reproduced again and again with wonderful ease and fidelity. The tropical luxuriance of colour, and gorgeous sunset hues of the ethereal Shelley, the luscious sweetness, the lulling music, the voluptuousness of phrase which haunted Keats

like a passion, the charming simplicities of Wordsworth, which rise up out of the depths of his being like the chant of some old Hebrew prophet, are all to be met with in his poetry.

“Beyond Kerguelen,” one of his most characteristic poems, has a wealth of words and a use of them not inferior to the copious and marvellous diction of Swinburne. If poetry consisted in the mere art of musical expression, few poets would rank higher in the English language than Henry Kendall. But there is something more in poetry than mere word painting. It has a deeper purpose—a more spiritual, a more exalted. Its function is to awaken man to the divine element within and without him, to kindle the soul with a vision of high ideals of goodness and truth and beauty, and give a voice to its dim, immortal yearnings.

Blessings be on them, and eternal praise,
 Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares,
 The poets who on earth have made us heirs
 Of truth and pure delight, by heavenly lays.

Poetry is what Wordsworth calls it—“The breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression on the countenance of all science.” Poetry is what Coleridge calls it—“The blossom of all human knowledge, human thought, human passion, human language.” It ranges over the whole field of human life and human thought and human emotion. Wherever the soul of man comes into vivid contact with things, whether it be an aspect of nature or a fact of history or a truth of the understanding, there arises within it a thrill of delight, and that thrill, translated into speech, is poetry. And as it covers the whole field of human existence, so does it invade the whole circle of human knowledge. Now, the great defect of Kendall’s poetry is a want of reality. He never seems to have brought his soul into vivid and immediate contact with things, nor, with all his keen sensibility to the beauty of this outer world, has he transferred the living sense of it into his verses. He wants that piercing insight and imaginative sympathy without which purely descriptive poetry is tame and uninteresting as the catalogue of the ships in Homer. He devoted too much of his time to the study of poetry as

an art, and made it, to a great extent, the business of his life to be a mere professional phraser. It is difficult, indeed, to understand, yet would be unjust not to repeat, such criticism as that in which Mr. Sutherland reviewed his "Leaves from Australian Forests"—

The publication (he says) of "Leaves from Australian Forests," by George Robertson in 1869, may fairly enough claim to be the most memorable event in Australian literature. It has announced a writer who, though perhaps only third-rate among the poets of our language, was yet first rate among the poets of our generation. No English poet has appeared since 1860 who is Kendall's superior. Swinburne and Arnold and Morris are indulgently treated, if, in deference to the enthusiasm of their admirers, we allow them an equal measure of poetic feeling with Kendall.

That is how one of the most cultured of our colonial critics has spoken of the poet of the Australian forest.

In the "Sydney Morning Herald" of 2nd August, 1882, a writer has given with the notice of his death a brief review of his poetry—

He has been recognised as the exponent of the poetic sentiment of these young communities, as one who had communed with the spirit of our forests and hills and plains, and had been gifted with the power of interpreting the voice of nature in smooth, soft measures, and depicting her moods in brilliant imagery.

It is thus his own countrymen have spoken of his poetic power, and their criticism has been partly re-echoed in England. Poetry is a subject upon which every man is free to have his own opinion, provided only he can show cause for maintaining it. It seems pretty clear, however, that these young communities do not look up to Kendall as the exponent of their poetic sentiment. He has never achieved that popularity which the poet who reflects the native spirit is sure to enjoy. His verses have never gone to, because they have never come from, the heart of the people.

The delicate and morbid temperament which he carried with him through life, and which he reflects in his poetry, is not by any means the characteristic temperament of the manhood of young Australia. That temperament has a

buoyancy, a freshness, an elasticity, a vigour, a delight of our-door air and exercise, a wild love of sport, and of all animal excitement, for which Kendall, because he never felt it, has never found expression. Gordon is, so far, and deservedly, the poet of the people, the one whose rushing muse has taken from their own hearts "the fever, the fulness of animal life, the spirit of joyous motion," and translated it into a music less polished, less refined, but more robust, more spontaneous, and more natural. Gordon was himself a splendid type of the free and dashing bushman, and his poetry, in the careless swing of its rhythm and rush of its emotion, is a faithful reflex of that character. Kendall was a mere melancholy poetic dreamer, sitting in the silence and shadow of the forest, and moaning, amid its weariness and desolation, over his blighted hopes and buried loves and banished dreams of happiness, or listening in his more tranquil moments to the songs of tree and river, and striving to catch up the magic of their music, and set it in a song. The great, silent forests around him, so sullen, so impassive, so inhuman, full of strange delight and terror, haunted him with their loneliness. That mood of the Australian scenery he has interpreted with a copiousness and a felicity of phrase which Gordon could not master. His long and patient study of Australian climate and scenery has given him a full and accurate knowledge of it, which his artistic skill as a word painter has set in condensed and picturesque phrases—

Jewels five words long.

That on the outstretched finger of all time
Sparkle for ever.

Beyond these glittering phrases, scattered here and there through his poems, and a few, perhaps, of his more pathetic and exquisite lyrics, little of all that he has written will go down to posterity. The general character of his poetry is too despondent to stay, like a cloud on the sunrise, in the glittering air of this bright land, and the golden promise of its future. His "Leaves from Australian Forests" are deciduous, and will fall: his "Songs from the Mountains" will die away into an echo.

And we are waiting still for the true Australian poet to sweep the forest lyre into a fresh, full-hearted song of the morning, buoyant with all the exuberant life, and bright with all the boundless hope of this free, young, beautiful land.





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1. To set forth Catholic truth, as it is taught by the Church, in a clear and simple way, and to remove certain common misconceptions concerning it from candid minds.
2. To use the printing press and the platform, as far as practicable, as potent means for combating the prevailing disbelief in revelation, for protecting the Catholic people from the attacks of heresy and infidelity, and for fostering an attitude of reverent faith towards God's holy Word.
3. To carry on a crusade against the license of the age, against luxury and self-indulgence, and those false standards of life which undermine the moral teaching of the Church.
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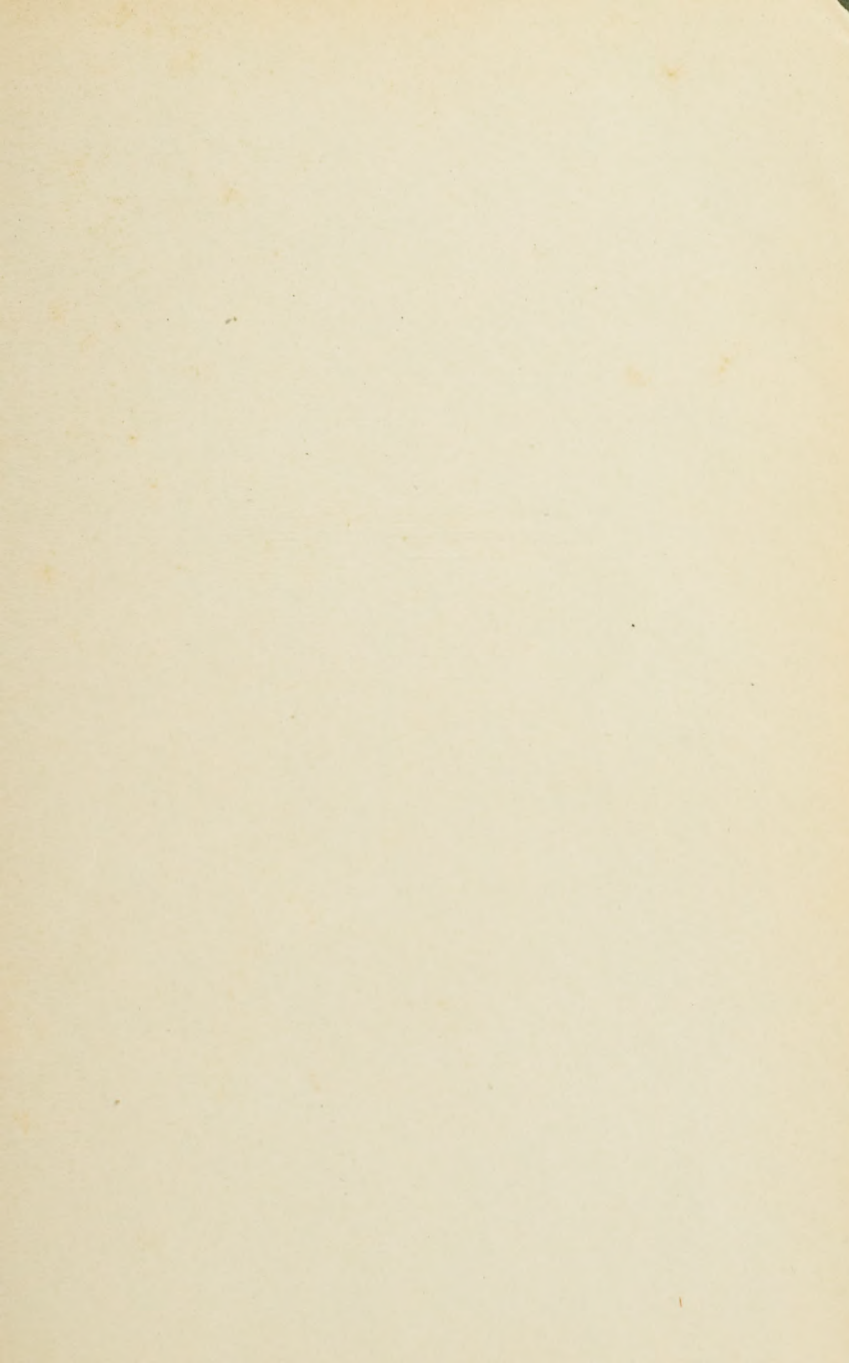


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