



A NORTHERN SEASONAL AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE—THE REGENERATION OF OLD EDINBURGH—A COMEDY BY NORDAU—GRANT ALLEN'S NEW ALLEGORY—THOMAS HARDY'S "JUDE THE OBSCURE"—GEORGE MEREDITH'S "AMAZING MARRIAGE"—WILLIAM WATSON'S NEW POEMS.



TILL I went to Edinburgh I did not know what the "Evergreen" was. Newspaper criticisms had given me vague misrepresentations of a Scottish "Yellow Book" calling itself a "Northern Seasonal." But even had I seen a copy myself I doubt if I should have understood it without going to Edinburgh; and even had I gone to Edinburgh I should still have been in twilight had I not met Patrick Geddes, Professor of Botany at the University of Dundee. For Patrick Geddes is the key to the Northern position in life and letters. The "Evergreen" was not established as an antidote to the "Yellow Book, though it might well seem a colour counter-symbol—the green of spring set against the yellow of decadent leaves. It is, indeed, an antidote,

but undesigned; else had not yellow figured so profusely upon the cover. The "Evergreen" of to-day professes to be inspired by the "Evergreen" which Allan Ramsay published in 1724, to stimulate a return to local and national tradition and living nature. Patrick Geddes and Colleagues, who publish it and other books—on a new system of giving the author all the profits, as certified by a chartered accountant—inherit Ramsay's old home. That is to say, they are located in a sort of "University Settlement," known as Ramsay Garden, a charming collection of flats, overlooking from its castled hill the picturesque city, and built by the many-sided Professor of Botany, and they aspire also to follow in "the gentle shepherd's" footsteps as workers and writers, publishers and builders. In fact, their aim is synthesis, construction, after our long epoch of analysis, destruction. They would organise life as a whole, expressing themselves through educational and civic activities, through art and architecture, and make of Edinburgh

the "Cité du Bon Accord" dreamed of by Elisée Reclus. They feel acutely "the need of fresh readings in life, of fresh groupings in science, both now mainly from the humanist's side, as lately from the naturalist's side." In this University Settlement the publishing and writing department is to represent the scriptorium of the ancient monasteries. Of the local and national traditions this new Scottish school is particularly concerned to foster the incipient Celtic renaissance, and—what is more interesting to outsiders—the revival and development of the old Continental sympathies of Scotland. The ancient league with France has deeply marked Scotch history, and even moulded Scotch architecture. As Disraeli said in his inaugural address on his institution as Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow, "it is not in Scotland that the name of France will ever be mentioned without affection." So, among the endless projects of the effervescent Professor, is one for reviving the Scotch college in Paris—the original building happening still to survive



—and for making it a centre for Scottish students and Scottish culture in the gay city. Thus, while the men of the "Evergreen" "would renew local feeling and local colour," they "would also express the larger view of Edinburgh as not only a National and Imperial but a European city—the larger view of Scotland, again as in recent, in mediæval, most of all in ancient times, one of the European Powers of Culture—as of course far smaller countries like Norway are to-day." An aspiration with which all intelligent men must sympathise. The quest at once of local colour and cosmopolitanism is not at all self-contradictory. The truest cosmopolitanism goes with the intensest local colour, for otherwise you contribute nothing to the human treasury and make mankind one vast featureless monotony.

Harmorous diversity is the true cosmopolitan concept, and who will not applaud this desire of Edinburgh to range itself again amongst the capitals of culture? Why should it take its tone from London? That centripetal force which draws villages to towns and towns to capitals everywhere tends to concentrate in one city a country's culture, and to brand as provincial that which is not of the centre. Our English men of letters abhor the town, and if now and then a great man does abide therein, it is because he has the gift of solitude amid crowds, and is not obnoxious to the contagion of the common thought. The Scotch School, though its effort to emancipate itself from the intellectual thralldom of London is to be commended, does not escape the dangers that lie in wait for all schools, which upset one convention by another. Still a school of thought which is also a school of action has in itself the germs of perpetual self-recuperation.

Yes, there can be little danger of sinking into barren formulæ, into glib æsthetic prattle about Renaissance, in a movement of which one expression is the purification of those plaguy, if picturesque, Closets, which are the foul blot upon the beautiful Athens of the North. Those sunless courts, entered by needles' eyes of apertures, congested with hellish, heaven-scaling barracks, reeking with refuse and evil odours, inhabited promiscuously by poverty and prostitution, worse than the worst slums of London itself—how could they have been left so long to pollute the fairest and well-nigh the wealthiest city in the kingdom? "Do you wonder Edinburgh is renowned for its medical schools?" asked the Professor grimly, as he darted in and out among those foul alleys, explaining how he was demolishing this and reconstructing that—at once a Destroying Angel and a Redeemer. Veritable ghettos they seemed, these blind alleys of gigantic habitations, branching out from the High Street, hidden away from the superficial passer-by faring to Holyrood. They were the pioneers of the trans-Atlantic sky-builders, were those old burghers, who,



shut in about their castled hill by the two lochs, one of which is now the enchanting Princes Street, were fain to build heavenwards as population grew. It was a stormy morning when the mercurial Professor of Botany, recking naught of the rain that saturated his brown cloak, itself reluctantly donned, led me hither and thither, through the highways and byways of old Edinburgh. Everywhere a litter of building operations, and we trod gingerly many a decadent staircase. Sometimes a double row of houses had already been knocked away, revealing a Close within a Close, eyeless house behind blind alley, and even so the diameter of the court still but a few yards. What human ant-heaps, what histories, farces, tragedies played out in airless tenebrosity! The native writers seem to have strangely neglected the artistic wealth of all this poverty: pathos and humour reside, then, only in villages! Thrums and Drumtochty and Galloway exhaust the human tragi-comedy. Ah! my friends, go to the ant-hill and be wise! The Professor of Botany—seeming now rather of entomology—explained the principle upon which he was destroying and rebuilding. One had to be cautious. He pointed out the head of a boy carved over one of the archways, the one survivor of a fatal subsidence many years ago, when the ground floor of one of the gigantic houses was converted into a shop, with plate-glass windows in lieu of the solid stonework. “Heave awa’!” cried a piping voice amid the *débris*: “I’m no dead yet.” The Professor’s own destruction was conservative in character, for it was his aim to preserve the ancient note in the architecture, and to make a clean Old Edinburgh of a dirty. Air and light were to be no longer excluded, and outside every house, as flats or storeys are called, a balcony was to run, giving on sky and open ground. Eminent personages, ancestrally connected with ancient demesnes, long perverted into pigsties, had been induced to repurchase them, thus restoring an archaic flavour of aristocratic prestige to these despised quarters. The moral effect of grappling with an evil that had seemed so hopeless could not fail to be inspiring; and, as we plodded through the pouring streets, “I will remove this, I will reconstruct that,” cried the enthusiastic Professor, till I almost felt I was walking with the Emperor of Edinburgh. But whence

come the sinews of war? Evidently no professor’s privy purse would suffice. I gathered that the apostle of the sanitary picturesque had inspired sundry local capitalists with his own patriotic enthusiasm. What a miracle, this trust in a man overbrimming with ideas, the brilliant biological theoriser of “The Evolution of Sex” in the Contemporary Science Series, the patron of fantastic artists like John Duncan! Obviously it is his architectural faculty that has saved him. There stand the houses he has built—visible, tangible, delectable; concrete proofs that he is no mere visionary. And yet we may be sure the more frigid society of Edina still looks askance on this dreamer in stone and fresco; for after all Edinburgh, as Professor Blackie said, is an “East-windy, west-endy city.” Cold and stately, it sits on its height with something of the austere mournfulness of a ruined capital. But we did not concern ourselves about the legal and scholastic quarters, the Professor and I. We penetrated into inhabited interiors in the Closes, meeting strange female ruins on staircases, or bonny housewives in bed-sitting rooms, in one of which a sick husband lay apologetically abed. And when even the Professor was forced at last to take refuge from the driving rain, it was in John Knox’s house that we ensconced ourselves—the grim, unlovely house of the great Calvinist, the doorway of which fanatically baptised me in a positive waterfall, and in whose dark rooms, as the buxom care-taker declared in explaining the presence of an empty cage, no bird could live. It is not only in its Closes, methought, that Scotland needs regeneration. Many a spiritual blind-alley has still to receive sunshine and air, “sweetness and light.” So let us welcome the “Evergreen” and the planters thereof, stunted and mean though its growth be as yet; for not only in Scotland may they bring refreshment, but in that larger world where analysis and criticism have ended in degeneration and despair. Mayhap Salvation is of the Celt.

The observer and recorder of evils is not infrequently treated as if he were responsible for those evils. It is as if the barometer were to be blamed for recording bad weather. Hence it is that the notorious Nordau, who set himself to point out this “degeneracy” of our times, in the interests of a return to cheerful sanity of thought and life, has now filtered into the vulgar consciousness as a