Review

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REVIEWS.

Oxford Lectures on Poetry. By A. C. BRADLEY. London: Macmillan. 1909. 8vo. viii + 395 pp.

Among critics Professor Bradley holds a place by himself. It is not only that he combines two qualities which are seldom found together, a keen and delicate sense of literary beauty, and a trained mastery of philosophical methods and ideas. It is not even, though this is manifestly true, that he possesses each of these in an uncommonly high degree. It is rather that in his mind the two are absolutely blended into one, that the one works instinctively at the bidding of the other, that each is at every point inter-penetrated by the other.

His work therefore differs strangely from that of others who have brought philosophical ideas to bear upon literary criticism. They are apt to be more interested in their philosophy than their literature. They tend to fly off at a tangent, to make their criticism a stepping-stone to a moral or metaphysical discourse. Of this tendency there is no trace in Professor Bradley. He never forgets that criticism is the task he has undertaken, and that, having undertaken it, he cannot fairly leap over the bounds which it manifestly lays down. He has to interpret a given poem; to explain its bearing upon the poet's vision of things as a whole; to explore the poet's spirit, as reflected in the more inspired and therefore the more characteristic portion of his work; to trace his character and his general attitude towards life and all that life offers to him or demands of him; to ask what are the imaginative experiences summed up in certain familiar words—'the sublime' is the instance taken in this volume—or implied in certain forms of imaginative art. This is what he sets himself to do, and not to use the poem, the poet, or the imaginative experience as a mere peg on which to hang an 'Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences,' or even a 'Critique of Judgment, Practical and Imaginative.' But if Professor Bradley has the courage to shut the door against philosophy as a 'thing in itself,' he makes amends by opening it, and opening it wide, to her as the handmaid of criticism. And it is significant that the subjects which form the bulk of this volume—even the lecture on 'The Letters of Keats' may fairly be included—are such as lend themselves with peculiar readiness to this treatment. Wordsworth, Shelley, the 'Long Poem in the Age of Wordsworth,' were saturated with reflection, with ideas

which lie on the border of philosophy, even when they do not actually cross it. So again are the letters, to say nothing of the poetry, of Keats. And in such subjects as 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake,' or 'The Sublime,' or 'Hegel's Theory of Tragedy,' the connection with philosophy is even closer.

It may be objected that in the latter instances the line which parts criticism from philosophy is actually passed; that the theme here is in truth rather philosophical than literary. This, however, as the theme is handled by Professor Bradley, is not the case. And that is precisely what makes these more abstract lectures so good a test of the soundness of his method. Here, if anywhere, he might be expected to thrust literature into the second place. But this is just what he does not do. And his results are valuable for the very reason that he refuses to do it.

In all three lectures, even in that on 'Hegel's Theory of Tragedy,' he persists in starting from the 'imaginative experience'; and it is by this same experience, perpetually recalled to our memory, that he tests the soundness of the theory at every step of the argument in which it is unfolded. Compare this lecture or that on 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake,' with other works on the same or kindred subjects; and we can hardly fail to be struck with the difference of method. The philosophers—Kant and even Hegel,—the critics—Lessing and even, in his weaker moments, Coleridge—are too apt to bring a theory, ready made and largely coloured by considerations quite other than literary, to the matter, itself avowedly literary, which they have in hand. Lessing for instance, above all things a critic and a very great one, is much more concerned to determine what are 'the rules demanded by the nature of' the Fable in general, than to record what his imagination has experienced in following the movement of any Fable in particular. The tests he applies are purely abstract tests, such as logical coherence and compactness. They are tests that have manifestly more to do with the pure intellect, if such a thing exists, than with the imagination. And the rules obtained in this rough and ready fashion are applied without ceremony to all Fables whatsoever. The result is that the Fables of La Fontaine are ruled out at one stroke; and it is hard to see how that of the Cock and the Fox, as told by Chaucer, can be saved from the same fate.

Of this method Professor Bradley will have nothing. If there is one point on which he is never weary of insisting, one principle which he seldom or never falters in practising, it is that the foundation of all criticism is the 'poetic experience'; that the first function of the critic is to realise, and to realise with all the intensity of which he is capable, the exact and complete effect made upon his imagination by the single poem, or by that which is inspired in the work of the poet, taken as a whole. It is the function not only of the critic, but of every reader worthy of the name. The former may realise more consciously what is precisely the process through which his imagination passes when it is under the spell of the poem; he may be able to analyse

it more fully and more exactly. But, whenever the poem is read aright, the experience is the same in kind; it differs, so far as it does differ, only in degree. To enter, so far as we may enter, into the poet's mind and temper, to feel, so far as without genius it is possible for us to feel, as the poet felt when he saw his vision and, in seeing, made it visible to others, that is the first step both in the more and the less skilled appreciation; that is the raw material with which both critic and ordinary reader have to deal.

Acting on these principles, Professor Bradley finds himself barred out at every turn from those loose generalisations which are the bane of the opposite method. He is forced, as Wordsworth would have said, to 'keep his eye steadily on the object,' to follow every turn and winding of the process which he has set himself to trace. Hence the closeness of his reasoning; and still more, the firmness with which, at each point, it grips the facts that are there to be explained. This is the first, and perhaps the greatest, advantage offered by his method. But there is another which, at any rate as he handles the matter, is drawn in its train. And that is the close understanding which, from the outset, he establishes between the critic and the man who reads or listens solely to enjoy. The one, as has already been said, is bound on exactly the same errand as the other. The only difference is that the former brings, or claims to bring, a wider range, a more disciplined power of observation to the task in question than the latter. He is able, or ought to be able, to interpret the experience of the moment more accurately. And, as this experience is also that of the plain reader, the latter, in following him, is enabled to interpret his own experience more precisely and fully to himself.

As applied to the more general subjects, those treated in the three lectures above mentioned, these methods and principles are fruitful in results. They ensure—at least in the hands of one who follows them out as consistently as Professor Bradley—that all the crucial facts are loyally reckoned with, that the critic shall not do violence to any of them, that he shall not allow one group of considerations to throw all the rest into the shade. Thus, in 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake,' he is as firm against those who reduce all poetry to 'pure form,' as against those who see in it nothing but a given matter taking shape in a certain form, and existing, possibly with no great lessening of its brightness, as a thing separable, in the mind both of poet and reader, from the form in which it is clothed. Each of these explanations is rejected by him on the ground that it is a mere abstraction. They are 'things in the analytic head' of the critic, 'not in the poem.' 'In a poem the true content and the true form neither exist, nor can be imagined, apart.... Its value lies neither in the one nor in the other, nor in any addition of them, but in the poem, where they are not.' (pp. 17, 18.)

In the same way with 'Hegel's Theory of Tragedy.' That theory, according to Professor Bradley—and he had already stated his views by implication in *Shakespearian Tragedy*—is defective because it is

drawn from little more than half the facts. It gives a true and most penetrating account of the poetic experience through which we pass in reading or witnessing the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. But it hardly even professes to reckon with modern tragedy; nor even with Euripides, who is considered by Hegel, and in many respects with justice, to have deep affinities with the moderns. To Hegel tragedy is a conflict between two of the substantial forces which dominate man's life; each of which in itself is sacred; but each of which in the tragic collision—for instance, that of Antigone and Creon—is pushed to the total exclusion of the other, and therefore becomes a wrong. It is the anguish with which we witness this strife of mighty opposites, each of which we feel to be sacred, that constitutes the tragic sense. No one can say—Hegel himself explicitly denies—that this definition squares with the facts of modern tragedy, with its comparative neglect of 'substantial forces' and the overwhelming stress it lays upon individual personality. And the inevitable inference is that modern tragedy is a declension from the perfect model; that it represents a type which, however high, can never be reckoned with the highest. Against this inference Professor Bradley naturally—and, as most readers will think, justly—rebels. And, while taking Hegel's conception for the basis of his own theory, he proposes to widen it, so as to bring modern tragedy within its scope. Deep as Hegel has gone, can it be said that he has gone deep enough? The essential thing is not that the conflict should be between ethical forces, however 'substantial,' but that it should carry with it waste or destruction of that which is supremely noble, surpassingly heroic. And it is just such a waste of nobility and heroism that makes the core of what is most characteristic in modern tragedy; the essence, for instance, of the tragic experience which comes to us in reading *Othello*, or in watching it acted on the stage. Is it not also, he asks, the essence of Greek tragedy? the inner soul of that conflict between forces, themselves almost external to the tragic figures, which it may readily be admitted is the specific form that the Greek spirit instinctively approved? In Greek, as in modern tragedy we are concerned, at any rate in the first instance, not with abstract forces, but with beings of flesh and blood. In both alike our first thought is for the men and women who have done and suffered before us. It is not for any ethical force, however irresistible; not for any institution, however sacred. It is for Antigone or Orestes. It is for Hamlet, or Lear, or *Othello*.

It is quite true that, behind these tragic figures, the Greek dramatist makes us feel the presence of powers which, in a certain sense, are more sacred and mightier than they. It is true that modern tragedy, if it does this at all, does it in a very different way. But that proves nothing against the latter. On the contrary, it may prove that modern tragedy, which has disengaged itself from the specific form dear to the Greeks, stands, in its highest examples, for something not less but more 'substantial,' not less but more close to the inner spirit of tragedy than the Greek masterpieces themselves. For the Greek masterpieces

tend to present the tragic issue in a more external, and therefore a more abstract, shape. In modern tragedy, on the contrary, all is inward, concrete, individual.

The explanation thus offered by Professor Bradley has a further advantage. It yields a more adequate account of that sense of reconciliation which, as Hegel insists, is part, and no small part, of our imaginative experience at the close of a Greek tragedy, and which is so perhaps still more manifestly in the case of Shakespeare. If the ultimate theme were really the strife of two forces, both of which (on Hegel's own shewing) are baffled and brought to nought, how could we feel anything but the pity, or even the emptiness, of it all? If, on the other hand, it is the strife of two personalities, the conflict of a heroic figure with another, or with itself, room is left for exultation at the heroism we have witnessed; at the nobility which by the unalterable law of things can never rise to its full height save at the call of consuming passions and at the cost of anguish, devastation and despair. And that, as a matter of experience, is one of the two feelings which struggle for mastery within us, when we are under the spell of a great tragedy. Our heart is torn at the sufferings we have followed step by step. But, when we recall the nobility, the heroic energy, which shines through those sufferings, we are thrilled with what can only be called triumph or exultation. And this is as true of *Antigone* as of *Othello*.

So brief an account of a tangled question must necessarily be imperfect. But enough has perhaps been said to shew the skill of Professor Bradley in applying philosophy to criticism; or rather, of setting his critical faculties to work in the light, and by the methods, of philosophy. He does not bring philosophy to criticism from without. On the contrary, he allows the imaginative experience, as illuminated by philosophy, to unfold itself from within. His one quarrel with Hegel is that his theory is too abstract; that it is drawn from too narrow a range of imaginative experience; that he neglects, or puts aside, some of the most crucial facts. His one purpose is to correct the one-sidedness of this theory, to bring into view the facts which it ignores, and then to let the whole mass of experience, thus restored to its integrity, speak once more for itself. 'Patience,' it was once said, 'is the secret of Hegel.' It is also, and in this instance it is still more, the secret of Professor Bradley.

We have lingered so long on our author's treatment of more general subjects that no time is left for considering the application of his method to individual poems, or the works of particular poets. Yet here too, where allowance has been made for the difference of the matter, exactly the same qualities are displayed. There is the same patience, the same persistence in following every winding of the poetic process, the same penetration in fastening upon the crucial points; in a word, the same disciplined instinct—at bottom, it is the philosopher's instinct—for bolting the facts to the bran, and then welding them together again in the strength of the inner principle which his own analysis has laid bare.

After one fashion, this is shewn in the lectures on Wordsworth, on 'The Long Poem in the Age of Wordsworth,' on Shelley's view of Poetry, and on the Letters of Keats. After all that has been said on these subjects, he has found something original to say, and something which the best of those who have previously written upon them will be the readiest to admire. And he has done all this without ever striving to startle or surprise the reader; by his sheer skill in grappling with all the complexities of the matter, and letting the facts—the experience of a keen and clear-sighted imagination—speak for themselves.

After another fashion, it is shewn in the two lectures on 'The Rejection of Falstaff' and on *Antony and Cleopatra*. After yet another, in those on 'Shakespeare the Man,' and 'Shakespeare's Theatre and Audience.' Of all the lectures, that on Falstaff is perhaps the most open to question. It might be argued that here, as in a few passages of his earlier volume, Professor Bradley is too eager to make his favourite author consistent and conscientious, too slow to admit that his creations, with all their vitality, are also figures in a stage-play and, as such, liable to be swept summarily aside at the bidding of theatrical necessity or convenience. Is it not probable, it might be asked, that Shakespeare, finding it necessary to get rid of Falstaff, made up his mind to do so without ceremony and without blushes? that his rejection, so far from serving to shew the seamy side of the King's character, is dictated mainly, if not solely, by theatrical convention? that it is an expedient on a level with the marriage of Isabella and the Duke, so 'scandalously' huddled up—the word is Professor Bradley's own—at the close of *Measure for Measure*?

But, where so much is supremely good, it is ungracious to hint doubts. Indeed, were they much stronger than they are, they would be nothing but small dust upon the balance. And it is only right that this notice should end, as it began, with an unstinted acknowledgement of the author's unique position as a critic, and to add the hope that this volume, which, if not more excellent, is certainly more varied than its forerunner, will be followed by many more. He has won his own results by mother wit and hard thought. It is to be wished that he may long continue to give the benefit of them to others.

C. E. VAUGHAN.

LEEDS.

Essai sur les Principes de la Métrique Anglaise. By PAUL VERRIER. 3 vols. Paris: H. Welter. 1909-10. 8vo. xi + 354, 232, 344 pp.

According to M. Verrier the raw material of metrics is 'le vers correctement prononcé.' After this, it is surprising to find that the English speakers on whose reading of verse he relies for the bulk of his experiments are, on his own showing, unlikely to pronounce correctly.