LETTER XV.

May 4.

MY DEAR S.:--

This morning I felt too tired to go out any where; but Mr. and Mrs. Binney persuaded me to go just a little while in to the meeting of the Bible Society, for you must know that this is anniversary week, and so, besides the usual rush, and roar, and whirl of London, there is the confluence of all the religious forces in Exeter Hall. I told Mrs. B. that I was worn out, and did not think I could sit through a single speech; but she tempted me by a promise that I should withdraw at any moment. We had a nice little snug gallery near one of the doors, where I could see all over the house, and make a quick retreat in case of need.

In one point English ladies certainly do carry practical industry farther than I ever saw it in America. Every body knows that an anniversary meeting is something of a siege, and I observed many good ladies below had made regular provision therefor, by bringing knitting work, sewing, crochet, or embroidery. I thought it was an improvement, and mean to recommend it when I get home. I am sure many of our Marthas in America will be very grateful for the custom.

The Earl of Shaftesbury was in the chair, and I saw him now for the

first time. He is quite a tall man, of slender figure, with a long and narrow face, dark hazel eyes, and very thick, auburn hair. His bearing was dignified and appropriate to his position. People here are somewhat amused by the vivacity with which American papers are exhorting Lord Shaftesbury to look into the factory system, and to explore the collieries, and in general to take care of the suffering lower classes, as if he had been doing any thing else for these twenty years past. To people who know how he has worked against wind and tide, in the face of opposition and obloquy, and how all the dreadful statistics that they quote against him were brought out expressly by inquiries set on foot and prosecuted by him, and how these same statistics have been by him reiterated in the ears of successive houses of Parliament till all these abuses have been reformed, as far as the most stringent and minute legislation can reform, them,--it is quite amusing to hear him exhorted to consider the situation of the working classes. One reason for this, perhaps, is that provoking facility in changing names which is incident to the English peerage. During the time that most of the researches and speeches on the factory system and collieries were made, the Earl of Shaftesbury was in the House of Commons, with the title of Lord Ashley, and it was not till the death of his father that he entered the House of Peers as Lord Shaftesbury. The contrast which a very staid religious paper in America has drawn between Lord Ashley and Lord Shaftesbury does not strike people over here as remarkably apposite.

In the course of the speeches on this occasion, frequent and feeling allusions were made to the condition of three millions of people in

America who are prevented by legislative enactments from reading for themselves the word of life. I know it is not pleasant to our ministers upon the stage to hear such things; but is the whole moral sense of the world to hush its voice, the whole missionary spirit of Christianity to be restrained, because it is disagreeable for us to be reminded of our national sins? At least, let the moral atmosphere of the world be kept pure, though it should be too stimulating for our diseased lungs. If oral instruction will do for three million slaves in America, it will do equally well in Austria, Italy, and Spain, and the powers that be, there, are just of the opinion that they are in America--that it is dangerous to have the people read the Bible for themselves. Thoughts of this kind were very ably set forth in some of the speeches. On the stage I noticed Rev. Samuel R. Ward, from Toronto in Canada, a full blooded African of fine personal presence. He was received and treated with much cordiality by the ministerial brethren who surrounded him. I was sorry that I could not stay through the speeches, for they were quite interesting. C. thought they were the best he ever heard at an anniversary. I was obliged to leave after a little. Mr. Sherman very kindly came for us in his carriage, and took us a little ride into the country.

Mrs. B. says that to-morrow morning we shall go out to see the Dulwich Gallery, a fine collection of paintings by the old masters. Now, I confess unto you that I have great suspicions of these old masters. Why, I wish to know, should none but old masters be thought any thing of? Is not nature ever springing, ever new? Is it not fair to conclude that

all the mechanical assistants of painting are improved with the advance of society, as much as of all arts? May not the magical tints, which are said to be a secret with the old masters, be the effect of time in part? or may not modern artists have their secrets, as well, for future ages to study and admire? Then, besides, how are we to know that our admiration of old masters is genuine, since we can bring our taste to any thing, if we only know we must, and try long enough? People never like olives the first time they eat them. In fact, I must confess, I have some partialities towards young masters, and a sort of suspicion that we are passing over better paintings at our side, to get at those which, though the best of their day, are not so good as the best of ours. I certainly do not worship the old English poets. With the exception of Milton and Shakspeare, there is more poetry in the works of the writers of the last fifty years than in all the rest together. Well, these are my surmises for the present; but one thing I am determined--as my admiration is nothing to any body but myself, I will keep some likes and dislikes of my own, and will not get up any raptures that do not arise of themselves. I am entirely willing to be conquered by any picture that has the power. I will be a non-resistant, but that is all.

May 5. Well, we saw the Dulwich Gallery; five rooms filled with old masters, Murillos, Claudes, Rubens, Salvator Rosas, Titians, Cuyps, Vandykes, and all the rest of them; probably not the best specimens of any one of them, but good enough to begin with. C. and I took different courses. I said to him, "Now choose nine pictures simply by your eye, and see how far its untaught guidance will bring you within the canons

of criticism." When he had gone through all the rooms and marked his pictures, we found he had selected two by Rubens, two by Vandyke, one by Salvator Rosa, three by Murillo, and one by Titian. Pretty successful that, was it not, for a first essay? We then took the catalogue, and selected all the pictures of each artist one after another, in order to get an idea of the style of each. I had a great curiosity to see Claude Lorraine's, remembering the poetical things that had been said and sung of him. I thought I would see if I could distinguish them by my eye without looking at the catalogue I found I could do so. I knew them by a certain misty quality in the atmosphere. I was disappointed in them, very much. Certainly, they were good paintings; I had nothing to object to them, but I profanely thought I had seen pictures by modern landscape painters as far excelling them as a brilliant morning excels a cool, gray day. Very likely the fault was all in me, but I could not help it; so I tried the Murillos. There was a Virgin and Child, with clouds around them. The virgin was a very pretty girl, such as you may see by the dozen in any boarding school, and the child was a pretty child. Call it the young mother and son, and it is a very pretty picture; but call it Mary and the infant Jesus, and it is an utter failure. Not such was the Jewish princess, the inspired poetess and priestess, the chosen of God among all women.

It seems to me that painting is poetry expressing itself by lines and colors instead of words; therefore there are two things to be considered in every picture: first, the quality of the idea expressed, and second, the quality of the language in which it is expressed. Now, with regard

to the first, I hold that every person of cultivated taste is as good a judge of painting as of poetry. The second, which relates to the mode of expressing the conception, including drawing and coloring, with all their secrets, requires more study, and here our untaught perceptions must sometimes yield to the judgment of artists. My first question, then, when I look at the work of an artist, is, What sort of a mind has this man? What has he to say? And then I consider, How does he say it?

Now, with regard to Murillo, it appeared to me that he was a man of rather a mediocre mind, with nothing very high or deep to say, but that he was gifted with an exquisite faculty of expressing what he did say; and his paintings seem to me to bear an analogy to Pope's poetry, wherein the power of expression is wrought to the highest point, but without freshness or ideality in the conception. As Pope could reproduce in most exquisite wording the fervent ideas of Eloisa, without the power to originate such, so Murillo reproduced the current and floating religious ideas of his times, with most exquisite perfection of art and color, but without ideality or vitality. The pictures of his which please me most are his beggar boys and flower girls, where he abandons the region of ideality, and simply reproduces nature. His art and coloring give an exquisite grace to such sketches.

As to Vandyke, though evidently a fine painter, he is one whose mind does not move me. He adds nothing to my stock of thoughts--awakens no emotion. I know it is a fine picture, just as I have sometimes been conscious in church that I was hearing a fine sermon, which somehow had

not the slightest effect upon me.

Rubens, on the contrary, whose pictures I detested with all the energy of my soul, I knew and felt all the time, by the very pain he gave me, to be a real living artist. There was a Venus and Cupid there, as fat and as coarse as they could be, but so freely drawn, and so masterly in their expression and handling, that one must feel that they were by an artist, who could just as easily have painted them any other way if it had suited his sovereign pleasure, and therefore we are the more vexed with him. When your taste is crossed by a clever person, it always vexes you more than when it is done by a stupid one, because it is done with such power that there is less hope for you.

There were a number of pictures of Cuyp there, which satisfied my thirst for coloring, and appeared to me as I expected the Claudes would have done. Generally speaking, his objects are few in number and commonplace in their character--a bit of land and water, a few cattle and figures, in no way remarkable; but then he floods the whole with that dreamy, misty sunlight, such as fills the arches of our forests in the days of autumn. As I looked at them I fancied I could hear nuts dropping from the trees among the dry leaves, and see the goldenrods and purple asters, and hear the click of the squirrel as he whips up the tree to his nest. For this one attribute of golden, dreamy haziness, I like Cuyp. His power in shedding it over very simple objects reminds me of some of the short poems of Longfellow, when things in themselves most prosaic are flooded with a kind of poetic light from the inner soul.

These are merely first ideas and impressions. Of course I do not make up my mind about any artist from what I have seen here. We must not expect a painter to put his talent into every picture, more than a poet into every verse that he writes. Like other men, he is sometimes brilliant and inspired, and at others dull and heavy. In general, however, I have this to say, that there is some kind of fascination about these old masters which I feel very sensibly. But yet, I am sorry to add that there is very little of what I consider the highest mission of art in the specimens I have thus far seen; nothing which speaks to the deepest and the highest; which would inspire a generous ardor, or a solemn religious trust. Vainly I seek for something divine, and ask of art to bring me nearer to the source of all beauty and perfection. I find wealth of coloring, freedom of design, and capability of expression wasting themselves merely in portraying trivial sensualities and commonplace ideas. So much for the first essay.

In the evening we went to dine with our old friends of the Dingle, Mr. and Mrs. Edward Cropper, who are now spending a little time in London. We were delighted to meet them once more, and to hear from our Liverpool friends. Mrs. Cropper's father, Lord Denman, has returned to England, though with no sensible improvement in his health.

At dinner we were introduced to Lord and Lady Hatherton. Lord Hatherton is a member of the whig party, and has been chief secretary for Ireland. Lady Hatherton is a person of great cultivation and intelligence, warmly interested in all the progressive movements of the day; and I gained

much information in her society. There were also present Sir Charles and Lady Trevelyan; the former holds some appointment in the navy. Lady Trevelyan is a sister of Macaulay.

In the evening quite a circle came in; among others, Lady Emma Campbell, sister of the Duke of Argyle; the daughters of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who very kindly invited me to visit them, at Lambeth; and Mr. Arthur Helps, besides many others whose names I need not mention.

People here continually apologize for the weather, which, to say the least, has been rather ungracious since we have been here; as if one ever expected to find any thing but smoke, and darkness, and fog in London. The authentic air with which they lament the existence of these things at present would almost persuade one that in general London was a very clear, bright place. I, however, assured them that, having heard from my childhood of the smoke of London, its dimness and darkness, I found things much better than I had expected.

They talk here of spirit rappings and table turnings, I find, as in America. Many rumors are afloat which seem to have no other effect than merely to enliven the chitchat of an evening circle. I passed a very pleasant evening, and left about ten o'clock. The gentleman who was handing me down stairs said, "I suppose you are going to one or two other places to-night." The idea struck me as so preposterous that I could not help an exclamation of surprise.

May 6. A good many calls this morning. Among others came Miss Greenfield, the (so called) Black Swan. She appears to be a gentle, amiable, and interesting young person. She was born the slave of a kind mistress, who gave her every thing but education, and, dying, left her free with a little property. The property she lost by some legal quibble, but had, like others of her race, a passion for music, and could sing and play by ear. A young lady, discovering her taste, gave her a few lessons. She has a most astonishing voice. C. sat down to the piano and played, while she sung. Her voice runs through a compass of three octaves and a fourth. This is four notes more than Malibran's. She sings a most magnificent tenor, with such a breadth and volume of sound that, with your back turned, you could not imagine it to be a woman. While she was there, Mrs. S.C. Hall, of the Irish Sketches, was announced. She is a tall, well-proportioned woman, with a fine color, dark-brown hair, and a cheerful, cordial manner. She brought with her her only daughter, a young girl about fifteen. I told her of Miss Greenfield, and, she took great interest in her, and requested her to sing something for her. C. played the accompaniment, and she sung Old Folks at Home, first in a soprano voice, and then in a tenor or baritone. Mrs. Hall was amazed and delighted, and entered at once into her cause. She said that she would call with me and present her to Sir George Smart, who is at the head of the queen's musical establishment, and, of course, the acknowledged leader of London musical judgment.

Mrs. Hall very kindly told me that she had called to invite me to seek a retreat with her in her charming little country house near London. I do

not mean that she called it a charming little retreat, but that every one who speaks of it gives it that character. She told me that I should there have positive and perfect quiet; and what could attract me more than that? She said, moreover, that there they had a great many nightingales. Ah, this "bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream," could I only go there! but I am tied to London by a hundred engagements. I cannot do it. Nevertheless, I have promised that I will go and spend some time yet, when Mr. S. leaves London.

In the course of the day I had a note from Mrs. Hall, saying that, as Sir George Smart was about leaving town, she had not waited for me, but had taken Miss Greenfield to him herself. She writes that he was really astonished and charmed at the wonderful weight, compass, and power of her voice. He was also as well pleased with the mind in her singing, and her quickness in doing and catching all that he told her. Should she have a public opportunity to perform, he offered to hear her rehearse beforehand. Mrs. Hall says this is a great deal for him, whose hours are all marked with gold.

In the evening the house was opened in a general way for callers, who were coming and going all the evening. I think there must have been over two hundred people--among them Martin Farquhar Tupper, a little man, with fresh, rosy complexion, and cheery, joyous manners; and Mary Howitt, just such a cheerful, sensible, fireside companion as we find her in her books,--winning love and trust the very first few moments of the interview. The general topic of remark on meeting me seems to be,

that I am not so bad looking as they were afraid I was; and I do assure you that, when I have seen the things that are put up in the shop windows here with my name under them, I have been in wondering admiration at the boundless loving-kindness of my English and Scottish friends, in keeping up such a warm heart for such a Gorgon. I should think that the Sphinx in the London Museum might have sat for most of them. I am going to make a collection of these portraits to bring home to you. There is a great variety of them, and they will be useful, like the Irishman's guideboard, which showed where the road did not go.

Before the evening was through I was talked out and worn out--there was hardly a chip of me left. To-morrow at eleven o'clock comes the meeting at Stafford House. What it will amount to I do not know; but I take no thought for the morrow.