

a poet among poets, and in Miss Rossetti alone. Content to be merely a woman, wise in limiting herself within somewhat narrow bounds, she possessed, in union with a profoundly emotional nature, a power of artistic self-restraint which no other woman who has written in verse has ever shown."

Even more interesting than the above critical estimates, is the personal sketch contributed by Mr. Theodore Watts to "The Athenæum." Speaking of Miss Rossetti's physical sufferings and the fortitude with which she met them, Mr. Watts says:

"Throughout all her life she was the most notable example that our time has produced of the masterful power of man's spiritual nature when at its highest to conquer in its warfare with earthly conditions, as her brother Gabriel's life was the most notable example of the struggle of the spiritual nature with the bodily when the two are equally equipped. It is the conviction of one whose high privilege it was to know her in many a passage of sorrow and trial that of all the poets who have lived and died within our time, Christina Rossetti must have had the noblest soul."

Of another aspect of her character, we read:

"Her intimacy with Nature—of a different kind altogether from that of Wordsworth and Tennyson—was of the kind that I have described on a previous occasion as Sufeyistic: she loved the beauty of this world, but not entirely for itself; she loved it on account of its symbols of another world beyond. And yet she was no slave to the ascetic side of Christianity. No doubt there was mixed with her spiritualism, or perhaps underlying it, a rich sensuousness that under other circumstances of life would have made itself manifest, and also a rare potentiality of deep passion. It is this, indeed, which makes the study of her great and noble nature so absorbing."

Mr. Watts singles out "Amor Mundi" as being perhaps Miss Rossetti's masterpiece.

"Here we get a lesson of human life expressed, not didactically, but in a concrete form of unsurpassable strength, harmony, and concision. Indeed, it may be said of her work generally that her strength as an artist is seen not so much in mastery over the rhythm, or even over the verbal texture of poetry, as in the skill with which she expresses an allegorical intent by subtle suggestion instead of direct preachment."

#### THE FUTURE OF THE NEGRO IN FICTION.

For nearly fifty years the negro has occupied a place of more or less prominence in American song and story, and his future position therein cannot but be a matter of interesting conjecture. It was Stephen Foster's plantation melodies, more than anything else, perhaps, that first showed the negro in his true artistic character; and that whole coterie of songs, "Uncle Ned," "O Susanna," "Old Folks at Home," "Nelly Was a Lady," etc., forms still the most unique and vital addition this country has contributed to the psalmody of the world. Though not the work of a Southern poet, they bore the stamp of genuineness upon their face, and carried the ne-

gro's pathos and humor all over the land. This was before Mrs. Stowe furnished the spark that kindled into flame the smouldering fires of liberty; but when "Uncle Tom's Cabin" helped to give the negro a country, it gave him at the same time a "local habitation and a name" in the literature of that country. But all was not yet done. It was not the *suffering* side of the slavery question that showed the negro in his richest artistic values, not tales of the wretchedness and misery of his condition that pictured him in his greatest beauty. They held him fast-bound within the realm of philanthropy, and the artist found there no high lights. It needed the softening touch of a calmer hand to show him in his true colors; and this it remained for another generation to furnish. Mr. Thomas Nelson Page has collected the distilled sweetness of all that is loveliest in the negro character, and held it for all time in a chalice of pure gold. He has given to us and to the future the old-fashioned darkey pure and simple, with his humor, his pathos, his self-sacrificing humility, his cultured politeness, his noble loyalty; and like unto him is Mr. Joel Chandler Harris's "Uncle Remus," whose name has become a household word throughout the length and breadth of the land. These two, more than any other writers, have struck the key-note of the negro's artistic value, and have given him as a vital element to literature. They know him and they love him, and their pictures are not overdrawn or idealized. Messrs. Page and Harris have had a host of coadjutors, each one lending a hand to give the negro a permanent place in the literature of our time, and all combining to perpetuate the memory of the sweetest and best of the race.

But what of the future? The next decade at farthest must show us the last of the old-fashioned darkey of "befo' de war," and it is he—the pitiful remnant of him—that we have grown to love and revere in fiction. We love him all the more because we know his end is fast approaching; and when he is gone, who will take his place? The generation that is to come after him, and grow old in our midst as he grew old, is not worthy to unloose his shoe latchets, and surely can never fill the place in our hearts that he holds.

Freedom brought the negro his God-given birth-right, but at the same time it robbed him of his greatest beauty, since it lost for him a background whereon to show the noblest elements of his character. So long as he lives, the negro must possess, in a certain degree, artistic merit: his light-hearted Bohemian nature will keep this for him as surely as the sun shines, for it is the sun that brings it about; but he has lost his finest *motif*. The black "dude" with cane and eyeglass furnishes richer material to the caricaturist and the evolutionist than to the artist, and the story-teller of the future will have no easy task to keep the negro up to his present valuation for readers of fiction.

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