

Freeman's Journal

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CHAMBER-MUSIC. Poems by James Joyce

Ellein Mathews, London, 1s. 6d.

Those who remember University College life of five years back will have many memories of Mr. Joyce. Wilful, fastidious, a lover of elfish paradoxes, he was to the men of his time the very voice and embodiment of the literary spirit. His work, never very voluminous, had from the first a rare and exquisite accent. One still goes back to the files of "St. Stephen's," to the "Saturday Review," the "Homestead," to various occasional magazines to find those lyrics and stories which, although at first reading so slight and frail, still hold one curiously by their integrity of form. "Chamber-Music" is a collection of the best of these delicate verses, which have, each of them, the bright beauty of a crystal. The title of the book evokes that atmosphere of remoteness, restraint, accomplished execution characteristic of its whole contents. There is but one theme behind the music, a love, gracious, and, in its way, strangely intense, but fashioned by temperamental and literary moulds, too strict to permit it to pass ever into the great tumult of passion. The inspiration of the book is almost entirely literate. There is no trace of the folk-lore, the fold-dialect, or even the National felling that have coloured the work of practically every writer in contemporary Ireland. Neither is there any sense of that modern point of view which consumes all life in the languages of "problems." It is clear, delicate, distinguished playing, of the same kindred with harps, with wood-birds, and with Paul Verlaine. But the only possible criticism of poetry is quotation.

I

Strings in the earth and air
Make music sweet;
Strings by the river where
The willows meet.

There's music along the river,
For Love wanders there;
Pale flowers on his mantle,
Dark leaves on his hair.

All softly playing,
With head to the music bent,
And fingers straying
Upon an instrument.

XXVIII

Gentle lady, do not sing
Sad songs about the end of love;
Lay aside sadness and sing
How love that passes is enough.

Sing about the long, deep sleep
Of lovers that are dead, and how
In the grave all love shall sleep:
Love is aweary now.

Mr. Joyce's book is one that all his old friends will, with a curious pleasure, add to their shelves, and that will win him many new friends.

T.M.K.