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"FIT VIA VI."

VOL. XI.

OTTAWA, KANSAS, JANUARY, 1895.

NO. 5.

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NATURE IN THE POEMS OF CATULLUS AND TIBULLUS.

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If one would properly appreciate nature as it is presented in the works of any poet, he should have at least a fair knowledge, first, of the poet's surrounding, both during his early life and the period of his activity; and second, of his character and disposition. Of the first of these, history has left but scanty record in the cases of Catullus and Tibullus. It states that Catullus was born near Verona, at the very foot of the famous Alps. How much of his early life was spent there, it does not record; but it does state that after he went to Rome, where most of his later life was spent, he loved to return occasionally to the home of his childhood. This is a brief record, yet it is sufficient to account for the fact that his poems breathe the mountain air.

Tibullus' early life, so history affirms, was spent on his father's estate in fertile Latium, not far from the great capital. He often resorted thither after he began his literary career at Rome. So it is not surprising that his poems are laden with the perfumes of the fruits and flowers and grains of the level country.

Of the character and disposition of the two poets, history speaks more freely, doubtless gathering much of its information from their poems.

Catullus was quick, impetuous, passionate; Tibullus, quiet, gentle, self-controlled. Catullus was gay and frivolous; Tibullus, sad and thoughtful. Catullus gloried in the friendship of the great; Tibullus was indifferent even to the splendors of royalty. Catullus revelled in the pleasures of the capital and sought the country chiefly to recover his wasted energies; Tibullus loved the country as a whole, for its own sake, for its quiet, its simplicity, and its freedom from the ills of life.

Many of these characteristics of the two men are stamped more or less plainly on the presentation of nature in their poems. The impetuous passionateness of Catullus sends forth a flame of inspiration; and the poem on that "gem of islands and peninsulas" is the immortal result. This is often repeated in his works. A flash of inspiration, a stroke of the pen, and he has won for some Italian scene, some beautiful object, or natural occurrence, the admiration of succeeding generations. The address to his estate, the passage of "The oak shaking its branches on the summit of Mt. Taurus," and those three verses on the return of spring: "Now Spring brings back the gentle warmth, and the fury of the equinoctial sky grows quiet in the pleasing breezes of Zephyrus," all these are examples of this. They indicate not meditative communion with nature, but rather a quick and passionate view of it under the flash-light of genius.

Tibullus dwells at greater length and apparently with more careful thought on rural life and rural scenes. His verses abound with such expressions as: "*messes*," "*flava ceres*," "*spicca corona*," "*serta florea*," "*pinguia musta*" and "*bona vina*." He himself says: "I sing of the country and the gods of the country." And it is true that few, if any, of the classic writers devote so large a part of their works to the celebration of the country, or mention so many of the rural duties in so small a space as he. *Bacchus*, *Priapus*, *Ceres*, *Pales* and *Osiris* are all mentioned in the ten poems of Tibullus found in Crowell's selections. In the sixteen poems of Catullus, found in the same selections, no strictly rural deity is mentioned. There is no doubt that Tibullus lived in far closer sympathy and more thoughtful communion with nature than did "that eagle of the Alps, the young Catullus."

Sellar, in his "Roman Poets of the Republic," says of Catullus, that "As individual men and wo

men excited in him intense affection or passion, so certain beautiful places and objects in nature charmed his fancy and sank into his heart." His works do not show a broad and general appreciation of nature. It was "certain beautiful places that charmed his fancy." And so he limits his natural descriptions, for the most part, to specific places and specific objects which few ever have the privilege of beholding.

Not so with Tibullus. He was in love with nature everywhere. He presents a picture of natural quiet or beauty or simplicity which might be witnessed at any time in almost any part of Italy. He speaks of shunning the heated rising of the dog-star:

*"Sub umbra /
Arboris ad rivos praetereuntis aquae."*

"Under the shade of a tree and beside streams of flowing water."

And in another place he says:

*"Rura ferunt messes, calidi cum sideris aestu
Deponit flavas annua terra comas
Rure levis verno flores apis ingerit alveo,
Compleat ut dulet sedula melle flavos."*

"The country produces its harvests, and under the heat of the burning dog-star earth annually lays aside her golden hair. The slender bee brings into his hive the sweets of the flowers in the verdant field, that, ever busy, he may fill his honeycombs with sweet honey."

Neither of these descriptions is local in its application, but either applies as well to one part of Italy as to another, and to another country as well as to Italy. Even when he would portray the beauties of Elysium, he must needs begin with a common picture of nature in these famous verses:

*"Hic choreae cantusque vigent, passimque vagantes
Dulce sonant tenui guttore carmen aves,
Fert castam non culta seges, totosque per agros
Floret odoratis terra benigna rosis."*

"Here dances and songs abound; and birds, flitting hither and thither, send forth sweet song from their slender throats; the soil, untilled, bears casia, and through all the fields the kindly earth is abloom with fragrant roses."

But in the matter of natural imagery, Catullus is greatly superior to Tibullus. In fact the poems of the latter contain no very beautiful natural images, while those of the former present some of the finest in the Latin language. He speaks of his love for Lesbia as having fallen through her fault.

*"Velut prati
Ultimi flos, praetereunte postquam tactus aratro est."*

"Just as a flower on the edge of a meadow after it has been touched by the passing plow."

In his poem on the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, he says:

*"Haec mandata prius constantemente tenentem
Thesaea ceu pulsae ventorum flamine nubes
Aereum nivei montis liquere caecumen."*

"These commands left Theseus, who at first held them with constant mind, just as the clouds, driven by a blast of wind, leave the breezy summit of a snowy mountain."

And in the same poem he presents in that longer comparison the beautiful picture of nature which Martin paraphrases, as follows:

*"As when at early dawn the western breeze
Into a ripple breaks the slumbering seas,
Which, gently stirred, move slowly on at first,
And into gurglings low of laughter burst,
Anon, as fresher blows the rising blast,
The waves crowd onward faster and more fast,
Floating away till they are lost to sight
Beneath the glow of the empurpled light.
So, from the royal balls, and far from view,
Each to his home with wandering steps withdrew."*

Such comparisons are among the most pleasing features of his works. The manner in which their references to nature are used by the two poets is also worthy of notice. Catullus refers to nature to introduce or illustrate some thought or argument which he wishes to make prominent. These references may, in many cases, be removed, and the thought, not the beauty, of the poems remain uninjured. The selections already mentioned, "The Sabine Estate," "The Return of Spring," and even "Sirenio," are illustrations of this, while the many beautiful similes prove it still more conclusively. Tibullus weaves nature into the very fabric of his poems. Nature forms a part of their subject matter. It cannot be separated from the rest without taking a part from the progressive thought of the poems.

In conclusion, then, the poems of Catullus breathe the mountain air; those of Tibullus are laden with the perfumes of the level country. The former turns the flash of inspiration on what he sees in nature; the latter turns on the constant steady light of thought and meditation. The one is inclined to limit and locate the scenes and objects he presents; the other makes them general. The one excels in natural imagery; the other in frequent reference to rural deities. The one uses nature as introduction and illustration; the other

weaves it into the very fabric of his poems. While Catullus cannot fail to be admired by all who read him, for his charming natural pictures and similes, Tibullus will always find a warmer place in the heart of the thoughtful, meditative student of nature.
