

“Elles y gagneront des employés mieux recrutés, plus satisfaits de leur sorte, plus attachés à leur service professionnel par l'accomplissement de leurs devoirs envers Dieu et la famille, plus dispos au travail, du moment où ils pourront se retremper dans le repos du dimanche. Tout se tient. Là, comme dans mille cas analogues, pour ne pas dire toujours, s'occuper de son personnel, c'est à la fois faire une bonne action et une bonne affaire. Enfin, le Gouvernement aura sans bruit réalisé un grand bienfait, préparé la voie à des progrès ultérieurs et contribué à restaurer chez nous le respect de Dieu, sans lequel il est chimérique d'espérer la paix sociale et la stabilité politique.”—*Le Repos du Dimanche de Genève*. H. Geory, 1875.

JOHN GRITTON.

ART. IV.—A NEW FORM OF VERSE.

THE Rondeau, with its French name, has a novel sound to English ears, and may fairly be called a new form of verse, as far as the general reader is concerned. But it has been known and extensively used for centuries in France, and is at present very popular with French writers. Even in this country there were a few Rondeaux published so long ago as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, it is only within the last few years that this form has been reintroduced into English literature. In July, 1877, an article appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*, by Mr. E. W. Gosse, on the history and origin of Rondeaux, and some other French forms. And in the spring of 1878, there was appended to “*Latter-Day Lyrics*,” edited by Mr. Davenport Adams, an interesting “*Note on some Foreign Forms of Verse*,” from the pen of Mr. Austin Dobson: while the volume itself contained half-a-dozen specimens of this particular measure.

Since Mr. Dobson's “*Note*” was written, many more Rondeaux have appeared, and this new form now seems likely to gain a permanent, if not a popular position, in English poetry.

Mr. Austin Dobson observes that the request made to him to supply some brief notes on the subject of the Rondeau, and other old French forms, was rather “*embarrassing*, because the pieces of this kind in our language are not very numerous. They come not in ‘*battalions*,’ but rather as ‘*single spies*’—with something on them of the strangeness born of another air and sun. They have, besides, a little of that hesitation which betokens those who are not quite sure of the welcome they will receive. To quit metaphor, it has been urged, that the austere and lofty spirit of our island Muse is averse to the poetry of art, pure and simple; that genuine inspiration and emotion do not express or exhibit themselves in stereotyped shapes and set

refrains." Then again, continues Mr. Dobson, there are opponents to whom "Rhymes are difficult things,—they are stubborn things, Sir!"—and to such,

Committed perchance to the comfortable but falsely seductive immunities of blank verse, the introduction of outlandish complications is a gratuitous injury. To them it appears conclusive to say: "These forms are certainly not new; if they are so excellent, why were they not introduced before?" There is, at all events, one answer, which once held equally good of not a few foreign products which have since become domestic necessities—"Because no one has introduced them." When the English Sonnet was in leading strings, there were doubtless contemporary critics who regarded it as a merely new-fangled Italian conceit, suitable enough for the fantastic gallantries of Provençal "Courts of Love," but affording little or no room for earnest or serious effort. They could not foresee, "Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints"—in the primitive essays of Surrey and Wyatt. And who shall say that some Shakespeare of the future (or the present) shall not unlock his heart with a Rondeau? Not that it is for a moment proposed to put the Rondeau on a level with the Sonnet. Still, it must not be forgotten that the Sonnet, however deservedly popular with English writers, is nevertheless a "foreign product" and an "arbitrary form."

The modern Rondeau consists of thirteen lines, with two rhymes and two (generally) unrhyming refrains, made up of the first four syllables—that is, the first half—of the first line of the poem. The lines fall into three groups or verses—the first of five lines, the second of three, with refrain, and the third of five lines, with refrain. The sequence of the rhymes is, a, a, b, b, a; a, a, b (and refrain); and a, a, b, b, a (with refrain); or, b, b, a, a, b (with refrain).

An example will best elucidate these rules. It is by a gifted young writer, and has never before been published.

A Passing Glimpse.

A passing glimpse of His dear Face
Shone on my soul a moment's space :
It came—it went—it did not stay ;
Yet it was there, and come what may
Nought can the memory sweet efface.

A Countenance of love I trace,
(Which Sorrow chiselled into grace),
That deigns to shed on me a ray,
A passing glimpse!

As forest-flowers the beams embrace
Which (though dark branches interlace)
Steal through, to tell them of the day :
So my soul clasps, and shall for aye,
This glory in a gloomy place,
A passing glimpse !

The Rondeau (like the Sonnet in its earlier history), had always been used for lighter themes, and was well suited for such airy fancies. It has, however, lately been employed, as in "Sungleams," which contains fifty rondeaux, for graver subjects. An attempt has been made to convert the light-hearted French trifler into an English Puritan, "sober, stedfast, and demure." And the Rondeau seems to be capable of bearing the burden, not only of rural description, but of religious contemplation.

The following example (from "Sungleams") shows the refrain rhyming with five of the lines—an addition to the difficulty, but perhaps also to the music, of the measure.

"Christ be my Light."

Christ be my Light, to show the way,
As through Life's doubtful paths I stray;
A pillar of soft fire by night,
To guide my darkling footsteps right,
And an illumined cloud by day.

When earth's sweet sunshine fades away,
And mists of evening gather grey,
And one dark Shadow looms in sight,
Christ be my Light!

When Heaven's gate shows its pearly ray,
And golden splendours round me play,
And I behold God's armies bright
Circling the throne in lustrous white,
Still let my longing spirit say,
Christ be my Light!

The following Rondeau gives the refrain unrhymed:—

On a Wreath of Flowers from Jerusalem.

The Holy Land this wreath has lent,
Of gold and scarlet gaily blent
With humbler tints of green and blue—
The self-same flowers that met Love's view,
While here His pilgrim years He spent.

O'er such fair favourites I have bent
When through our English lanes I went,
And loved the very blooms that strew
The Holy Land.

O flowers of East or West, to you
Our faithless hearts the Saviour drew
For everlasting solacement;
Marking your every hue and scent
As with mild eyes He wandered through
The Holy Land.

It is to be observed that the refrain is the natural overflow of the eight and thirteenth lines, and not a mere detachable phrase.

The Rondeau we give next alludes to some flowers of the West, which will be appearing this month. Like "A Passing Glimpse," it is by Alice Sutcliffe.

Sweet Violets.

Sweet violets, you come again
From the dark earth without a stain ;
 Fragrant and fresh, with petals blue,
 You flash Spring-joys before my view,
And banish thoughts of bygone pain.

I will not any more complain
Of sunless days and winter rain ;
 Two words shall make me hope anew—
 Sweet violets.

A lesson too from you I gain,
Of lowly love not spent in vain,
 If on another's path I strew
 Faint breathings of my early dew :
To soothe and comfort be my strain,
 Sweet violets.

And here is one in which reference is made to the "rathe primrose" :—

Mabel and Dora.

(On their bringing me some Primroses after Evensong.)

Sweet gifts they bring—that darling pair,
As side by side by side to Evening Prayer
 They carry golden tufts of Spring,
 Young Love's unprompted offering
To him who leads the worship there.

With Nature's charm of dark or fair,
And varied glow of streaming hair,
 And eyes that harmless lightnings fling,
 Sweet gifts they bring !

But Grace can show a charm more rare,
When those dear innocents prepare
 Their simple words to pray or sing,
 Which, as to Heaven their way they wing,
An angel whispers through the air,
 "Sweet gifts they bring !"

Our next example is of a more grave character :—

*A New Form of Verse.**Sweetness and Strength.*

Sweetness and strength in Thee I find,
 Thou Lord and Lover of mankind—
 Sweetness the weary soul to ease,
 Like voice of birds or murmuring bees,
 Or sylvan music undefined :

Might to uphold the trembling mind,
 A Rock that breasts the wave and wind ;
 A Rose that scents the Evening breeze—
 Sweetness and strength.

Lord, as I sail Life's wintry seas,
 Or sit beneath its Summer trees,
 Give me a will serene, resigned,
 With force and fortitude combined :
 I beg of Thee, on bended knees,
 Sweetness and strength.

If other Rondeaux of this serious nature, not in "Sungleams," were known to us, we would gladly quote them. Examples might be found elsewhere, in a lighter style, but they are not quite suitable to this Magazine. It is, however, satisfactory to know that this new departure of the Rondeau has received the sanction of one of the chief authorities on the subject—Mr. Austin Dobson—in a poetical address (hitherto unpublished), to the Author of "Sungleams," which may well serve as our last illustration, and a very charming one, of this new form of verse.

This Gallic form you rightly choose,
 And rightly teach your English Muse
 In this yet unfamiliar strain
 To tell of English vale and plain,—
 To tell of English downs and dews.

Talk as they will of trick and ruse,
 Surely they err who still refuse
 For our less-laughing moods to train
 This Gallic form.

Let none its dainty charm abuse
 From this time forth, and none accuse,
 As once, its bird-like, blithe refrain
 Of nought but idle themes again,
 Since for a graver song you use
 This Gallic form.

RICHARD WILTON.