

FRANCIS ORRAY TICKNOR

[1822—1874]

C. ALPHONSO SMITH

DR. TICKNOR'S work has never lacked admirers in the South, but it is only in very recent years that his recognition may be said to have become in any sense national. Paul Hamilton Hayne had declared in 1879 that the light irradiating from Ticknor's poems "seldom failed to be light from the heaven of a true inspiration." Professor William P. Trent wrote in 1905 that the work Ticknor did "ought to have given him more fame during his life and secured him much more consideration from posterity than has been allotted him." Mr. Charles W. Hubner in 1906 characterized Dr. Ticknor's war poetry as follows: "In the power of passionate feeling, in terse, concentrated diction, clear, ringing music, and idealistic imagery, the poetry evolved by the incidents, the pathos, the glory and the gloom of our Civil War, shows but few examples that can be considered superior to the best of Ticknor's contributions to that phase of our American literature."

But, as late as 1896, Mr. Samuel Albert Link could find no mention of Dr. Ticknor's name in any of the handbooks or cyclopedias of American literature. It should be said, however, that in 1891 Karl Knortz, in his 'Geschichte der Nordamerikanischen Literatur' (Berlin, volume II, pages 327-328), had devoted a page to Dr. Ticknor, though a page of no special insight or discrimination. Since 1896, however, Dr. Ticknor has begun to come into his own. "Little Giffen" is found in practically every recent representative anthology of American poetry, and Ticknor's name is now rarely omitted in up-to-date histories of American literature. "Dr. Ticknor," says Pancoast in his 'Introduction to American Literature' (1898), "lived the self-sacrificing life of a kindly, hard-worked physician, but in the scant leisure which the duties of his profession allowed him he wrote some poems—less known than they should be—which deserve to live. One of these, 'Little Giffen,' which commemorates one of the otherwise unknown heroes of the war, has a concentrated force and directness which make it not unworthy of comparison with some of Browning's shorter narrative poems." In Burton Egbert Stevenson's 'Poems of American History' (1908), Ticknor is repre-

sented by "The Virginians of the Valley," "A Battle Ballad," "Our Left," "Albert Sidney Johnston," and "Little Giffen."

Francis Orray Ticknor was born in Baldwin County, Georgia, November 13, 1822. His father, also a doctor, was a native of New Jersey who had come South and married into a distinguished family of Savannah, where he resided for several years. His early death left Mrs. Ticknor, the mother of the poet, with three small children to provide for. Moving at once to Columbus, Georgia, she sent Francis to school in Massachusetts. After a thorough training there, he studied medicine in New York and Philadelphia, returned to Georgia, and settled permanently at Torch Hill, a few miles from Columbus.

He had married Miss Rosalie Nelson, daughter of a soldier of the War of 1812 and a woman in every way fitted to quicken by appreciation his devotion to letters and to enter by her breadth of sympathy into the wider and more practical demands of his profession. Mrs. Ticknor still survives her gifted husband, and the author of this sketch would like to assure her that her loyalty to her husband's memory, her just appreciation of his real worth as a man and as a poet, and her unshaken confidence in the ultimate triumph of his name and fame have already been vindicated by the verdict of the years and have themselves become a part of the history of Southern literature.

The Ticknor home at Torch Hill is thus sketched by Paul Hamilton Hayne: "With the poet's love of all that is pure, sweet, and natural, he soon surrounded his home with flowers and fruits. In the spring and summer I have heard it described as a perfect Eden of roses; while towards autumn the crimson foliage and blushing tints of the great mellow apples, especially if touched by sunset lights, caused the 'Hill' to gleam and glitter as with the colors of fairyland. Here in this peaceful nest Ticknor lived for nearly a quarter of a century, exceptionally blessed in his domestic relations, though more than once that Dark Presence no mortal can shun entered his household, to leave it for a season desolate. He was a gifted musician, playing exquisitely upon the flute, and a draughtsman of the readiest skill and taste. Still I picture him always as preëminently the poet—the poet 'born,' yet with every natural endowment purified and strengthened by careful, scholarly culture."

Dr. Ticknor believed that he owed his first duty to his State, and when the great war came he espoused the cause of the Confederacy. His pen found its chief inspiration not in the constitutional questions at issue nor in the progress of the war as a whole, but rather in the individual prowess of Confederate soldiers. He was a man of rooted

convictions but without bitterness. The prayer of his heart was for peace. Thus in "Ora Pace":

Ora Pace! Ye that lift
The nation's weapons, keen and swift,
Ere ye loose the thunder, pray
That the wrath may pass away!
Ere the lightnings ye release,
Patient statesmen, pray for peace!

Ora Pace! Ye that stand
The shield and summer of the land;
Though the blood is hot and high,
Bounding for the battle-cry,
Remember, boys, whose kiss ye bear,
And pray for peace, ye sons of prayer!

Dr. Ticknor was already known in 1861 as a fluent versifier, but the drama that unrolled itself between 1861 and 1865 deepened and enriched his whole nature and changed what might have continued to be mere versification into poetry of abiding beauty and appeal. With his own home and the homes and churches of his neighborhood turned into Confederate hospitals, with the flower of his native State on the firing-line, with mingled tidings of victory and defeat coming daily from the front, with "the sudden making of splendid names," the latent poet in Dr. Ticknor was matured, and both theme and inspiration came unprompted to his hand.

His reputation as poet and physician grew steadily to the end. War brought its personal bereavements and its general desolation, but Dr. Ticknor found alleviation in the adequacy of his song and in the constant though frequently unpaid ministrations of his profession. "Far and wide," says Hayne, "among the 'sand-barrens' or in the farmhouses of the neighboring valley, the good and wise physician was known and welcomed. His gleeful smile, his spontaneous criticisms (for his mind actually bubbled over with innocent humors) cheered up many a despondent invalid and, it is possible, scared Despair, if not Death himself, away from the bedsides of patients just about finally to succumb. What wonder, therefore, that when—partly through fatigue, exposure, and the unremitting discharge of duty—their benefactor was, in his turn, stricken down, to die after a brief, painful illness, the community mourned him as only those are mourned who could truly say, like Abou ben Adhem in his vision of the angel and the book of gold, 'write me as one who loved his fellow-men.'" Dr. Ticknor died December 18, 1874.

The poem that first made Dr. Ticknor's name widely known in

the South was "The Virginians of the Valley," written evidently in the beginning of the war. The setting of the poem is taken from a once famous book, 'Knights of the Horseshoe' (1845), by William Alexander Carruthers of Virginia.* In this entertaining volume Carruthers describes the romantic ride of Governor Spottswood and his followers through the Valley of Virginia, which they explored and opened to permanent settlement. The Virginia House of Burgesses, in commemoration of their services, is said to have awarded golden horseshoes to the most deserving of Spottswood's men, thus establishing a sort of Virginia knighthood of which Dr. Ticknor makes felicitous use.

The poem entitled "Loyal," a universal favorite, is a rare example of skillful though hazardous structure. It consists of eight stanzas of introduction with a culminating stanza of application, in which the reference is to the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee (fought November 30, 1864), and more particularly to the heroic death of General Patrick R. Cleburne. In *The Confederate Veteran* of January, 1900 (Nashville, Tennessee), General John B. Gordon calls this "the bloodiest battle of modern times." Of the Confederate infantry engaged thirty-three per cent were killed, and Cleburne's Division (Cheatham's Corps) lost fifty-two per cent.

Dr. Ticknor's best-known poem, "Little Giffen," published first in *The Land We Love*, November, 1867 (Charlotte, North Carolina), narrates the true story of little Isaac Giffen, son of a Tennessee blacksmith. He was nursed back to health by Dr. and Mrs. Ticknor, only to fall in some unknown battle and to fill at last a nameless grave. In the simplicity of its pathos, the intensity of its appeal, and the dramatic compression of its thought, "Little Giffen" ranks among the best short poems of American literature.

The range of Dr. Ticknor's poetic interests may be seen in the divisions of his work. Miss Rowland, his editor, classifies his poems into martial and chivalrous lyrics, songs of home, poems of sentiment and humor, and memorial and religious poems. His songs of home are representatively Southern and Saxon in their loyalty to home life and in their delicate handling of home themes; his poems of sentiment and humor are easy and graceful; his memorial and religious poems show a deeper feeling and finer art; but his best work is in the martial and heroic vein. His incision of phrase, his artistic husbandry of details, his rare sense of structural unity and convergence, his quick responsiveness to the really heroic, his ballad-like vividness and simplicity—these qualities reach their finest fruition in the poems called forth by the events of 1861-1865.

*See 'The Library of Southern Literature,' volume II, pages 753-783.

Dr. Ticknor's feeling for form is his most notable characteristic. The influence of Poe is evident in "The Hills," but Tennyson was more probably his model. However short the poem—and Dr. Ticknor did not essay long poems or complicated verse forms—there is in all of his best work the unmistakable presence of form, the stamp of wholeness in thought, texture, and expression. He is thus eminently quotable. The following citations display a phrasal force and a power of suggestive condensation not easily paralleled:

"Utter Lazarus, heel to head"
(*"Little Giffen"*)

"Skeleton boy 'gainst skeleton death"
(*Ibid.*)

"Whose touch was the foe undone,
Whose name was a nation's cheer"
(*"Our Great Captain"*)

"From the victor-wreath to the shining Palm:
From the battle's core to the central calm."
(*"Albert Sidney Johnston"*)

"This man hath breathed all balms of light,
And quaffed all founts of grace,
Till Glory, on the mountain height,
Has met him face to face."
(*"Lee"*)

"And lo! the midnight of her shrouded mine
Garners the radiance of the years to shine"
(*"Georgia"*)

"And the great Alchemist shall teach the Sun
That Earth's great gloom and Life's great light are one."
(*Ibid.*)

"No truth is *lost* for which the true are weeping,
Nor *dead* for which they died"
(*"Under the Willows"*)

"Mansions of mist and silver, white and slender,
The shy wood-spider weaves;
Swingeth the swallow to his old home under
The unforgotten eaves"
(*"An April Morning"*)

"One chord in thy heart unbroken!
One key to that chord alone!
A touch—and thy thought hath spoken;
A sigh—and thy song hath flown!"
(*"The Old Harpsichord"*)

*"This much, if nothing more:
That vainly o'er our lost delights
The pomp of marble towers,
Without the gentle care that writes
Its Martha-thought in flowers."
("The Cemetery")*

C. Stephens Smith.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Poems of Frank O. Ticknor, M.D., edited by K[ate] M[ason] R[owland], with an Introductory Notice of the Author by Paul H. Hayne (J. B. Lippincott & Co., Philadelphia, 1879). This remains the only edition yet published. Miss Michelle Cutliff Ticknor, of Albany, Georgia, a granddaughter of the poet, will probably edit an enlarged edition. A scrapbook with beautifully illuminated borders and other hand-painted designs, the work of Mrs. Eveline Page Carter, the poet's sister-in-law, contains many poems by Dr. Ticknor not included in Miss Rowland's edition.

See, for further criticism, The Pioneers of Southern Literature, booklet No. 3, by Samuel Albert Link (Nashville, Tennessee, 1896); The South in History and Literature, by Miss Mildred Lewis Rutherford (Atlanta, Georgia, 1906); Representative Southern Poets, by Charles W. Hubner (Washington, D.C., 1906); and Reminiscences of Famous Georgians, by Lucian Lamar Knight (Atlanta, Georgia, 1907-1908).

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LITTLE GIFFEN

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Out of the focal and foremost fire,
Out of the hospital walls as dire;
Smitten of grape-shot and gangrene,
(Eighteenth battle, and *he* sixteen!)
Spectre! such as you seldom see,
Little Giffen, of Tennessee!

"Take him and welcome!" the surgeons said;
Little the doctor can help the dead!
So we took him; and brought him where
The balm was sweet in the summer air;
And we laid him down on a wholesome bed—
Utter Lazarus, heel to head!

And we watched the war with abated breath—
Skeleton boy against skeleton death.
Months of torture, how many such?
Weary weeks of the stick and crutch;
And still a glint of the steel-blue eye
Told of a spirit that *wouldn't* die.

And didn't. Nay more! in death's despite
The crippled skeleton "learned to write."
Dear mother, at first, of course; and then
Dear captain, inquiring about the men.
Captain's answer; of eighty-and-five,
Giffen and I are left alive.

Word of gloom from the war, one day;
Johnston pressed at the front, they say.
Little Giffen was up and away;
A tear—his first—as he bade good-by,
Dimmed the glint of his steel-blue eye.
"*I'll write*, if spared!" There was news of the fight
But none of Giffen.—He did not write.

I sometimes fancy that, were I king
Of the princely Knights of the Golden Ring,
With the song of the minstrel in mine ear,
And the tender legend that trembles here,
I'd give the best on his bended knee,
The whitest soul of my chivalry,
For Little Giffen, of Tennessee.

THE VIRGINIANS OF THE VALLEY

(W. N. N.)

The knightliest of the knightly race
That, since the days of old,
Have kept the lamp of chivalry
Alight in hearts of gold;
The kindest of the kindly band
That, rarely hating ease,
Yet rode with Spottswood round the land,
And Raleigh round the seas:

Who climbed the blue Virginian hills
Against embattled foes,
And planted there, in valleys fair,
The lily and the rose;
Whose fragrance lives in many lands,
Whose beauty stars the earth,
And lights the hearths of happy homes
With loveliness and worth.

We thought they slept!—the sons who kept
The names of noble sires,
And slumbered while the darkness crept
Around their vigil-fires;
But, aye, the "Golden Horseshoe" knights
Their old Dominion keep,
Whose foes have found enchanted ground,
But not a knight asleep!

ALBERT SIDNEY JOHNSTON

(SHILOH)

His soul to God! on a battle-psalm!
The soldier's plea to Heaven!
From the victor-wreath to the shining Palm:
From the battle's core to the central calm,
And peace of God in Heaven.

Oh, Land! in your midnight of mistrust
The golden gates flew wide,
And the kingly soul of your wise and just
Passed in light from the house of dust
To the Home of the Glorified.

THE SWORD IN THE SEA

The billows plunge like steeds that bear
The knights with snow-white crests;
The sea-winds blare like bugles where
The Alabama rests.

Old glories from their splendor-mists
Salute with trump and hail
The sword that held the ocean lists
Against the world in mail.

And down from England's storied hills,
From lyric slopes of France,
The old bright wine of valor fills
The chalice of Romance.

For here was Glory's tourney-field,
The tilt-yard of the sea;
The battle-path of kingly wrath,
And kinglier courtesy.

And down the deeps, in sumless heaps,
The gold, the gem, the pearl,
In one broad blaze of splendor, belt
Great England like an earl.

And there they rest, the princeliest
Of earth's regalia gems,
The starlight of our Southern Cross,
The sword of Raphael Semmes.

"UNKNOWN"

The prints of feet are worn away,
No more the mourners come;
The voice of wail is mute to-day
As his whose life is dumb.

The world is bright with other bloom;
Shall the sweet summer shed
Its living radiance o'er the tomb
That shrouds the doubly dead?

Unknown! Beneath our Father's face
The star-lit hillocks lie:
Another rosebud! lest His grace
Forget us when we die.

GEORGIA

Between her rivers and beside the sea,
My mother-land! What fairer land can be?

The lyric rapture in her leaping rills,
The crown-imperial on her purple hills.

Her lips are pure that never breathed a curse;
Her hands are white before the universe.

Behold the witness of the King of Peace
Clear, in the splendor of her dew-lit fleece.

And lo! the midnight of her shrouded *mine*
Garners the radiance of the years to shine.

Yea! the swart Gnome that bides his time below
Shall rise at last, in full regalia glow!

And the great Alchemist shall teach the Sun
That Earth's great gloom and Life's great light are one!

Oh, sweetest souls that ever rose by prayer
White from the furnace-dungeon of despair!

That wrought new grace from battle's chaos-mould,
And reared new shrines from ashes not yet cold.

Not cold!—from flames the strangest that have given
From all this world, an altar-smoke to Heaven!

Crowned on the cross, above high-fetter line,
They smile on hate with Love's own smile divine.

Prouder than hills that plume thy star-ward crest,
Sweeter than dales that dimple at thy breast.

Richer than Rome! when God's great chariot rolls,
Imperial Georgia! count thy children's souls.

UNDER THE WILLOWS

Brave "ends" may consecrate a cruel story,
And crown a dastard deed;
Brave hearts are laurelled with eternal glory
That held another creed.

Who knows the end? or in what record written
The crowned results abide?
The volume closed not with an Abel smitten
Or Christ the crucified.

How poor and pale from yonder heights of Heaven
Our Cæsar's pomp appears
To those who wear the purple robes of Stephen,
Or Mary's crown of tears!

So let us watch, a single pale star keeping
Its vigil o'er the tide.
No truth is *lost* for which the true are weeping,

DIXIE

AIR—"ANNIE LAURIE."

Oh! Dixie's homes are bonnie,
And Dixie's hearts are true;
And 'twas down in dear old Dixie
Our life's first breath we drew; (*Repeat*)
And there our last we'd sigh,
And for Dixie, dear old Dixie,
We'll lay us down and die.

No fairer land than Dixie's
Has ever seen the light;
No braver boys than Dixie's
To stand for Dixie's right; (*Repeat*)
With hearts so true and high,
And for Dixie, dear old Dixie,
To lay them down and die.

Oh! Dixie's vales are sunny,
And Dixie's hills are blue;
And Dixie's skies are bonnie,
And Dixie's daughters, too, (*Repeat*)
As stars in Dixie's sky;
And for Dixie, dear old Dixie,
We'd lay us down and die.

* * * * *

No more upon the mountain,
No longer by the shore—
The trumpet song of Dixie
Shall shake the world no more;
For Dixie's songs are o'er,
Her glory gone on high,
And the brave who bled for Dixie
Have laid them down to die.

LOYAL

(TO GENERAL CLEBURNE)

The good Lord Douglas—dead of old—
In his last journeying
Wore at his heart, encased in gold,
The heart of Bruce, his king,

Through Paynim lands to Palestine—
For so his troth was plight—
To lay that gold on Christ his shrine,
Let fall what peril might.

By night and day, a weary way
Of vigil and of fight,
Where never rescue came by day,
Nor ever rest by night.

And one by one the valiant spears
Were smitten from his side,
And one by one the bitter tears
Fell from the brave that died;

Till fierce and black around his track
He saw the combat close,
And counted but the single sword
Against uncounted foes.

He drew the casket from his breast,
He bared his solemn brow!
Oh, foremost of the kingliest!
Go "first in battle" now!

Where leads my lord of Bruce, the sword
Of Douglas shall not stay!
Forward! We meet at Christ his feet
In Paradise, to-day!

The casket flashed; the battle clashed,
Thundered, and rolled away;
And dead above the heart of Bruce
The heart of Douglas lay!

Loyal! Methinks the antique mould
Is lost, or theirs alone
Who sheltered Freedom's heart of gold,
Like Douglas, with their own!

HOME

Forest-girded, cedar-scented,
Veiled like Vesper, sweet and dim;
Pure as burned the Temple's glory,
Shadowed by the Seraphim;
Islet from contending oceans,
Coral-cinctured, crowned with palm,
Where the wrestling world's commotions
Melt through music into calm;
Throats that sing and wings that flutter
Softly 'mid the balm and bloom;
Sweeter sounds than lip can utter
Hath my heart for thee,

My home.

Bless that dear old Anglo-Saxon
For the sounds he formed so well;
Little words, the nectar-waxen
Harvest of a honey-cell,
Sealing all a summer's sweetness
In a single syllable!
For, of all his quaint word-building,
The queen-cell of all the comb
Is that grand old Saxon mouthful,
Dear old Saxon *heartful*,

THE HALL
(PAGE BROOK)

There is dust on the door-way, there is mould on the wall;
There's a chill at the hearth-stone, a hush through the hall;
And the stately old mansion stands darkened and cold
By the leal loving hearts that it sheltered of old.

No light at the lattice, no gleam from the door;
No feast on the table, no mirth on its floor,
But "Glory departed" and silence alone.
"Dust unto dust" upon pillar and stone.

No laughter of childhood, no shout on the lawn;
No footstep to echo the feet that are gone:
Feet of the beautiful, forms of the brave,
Falling in other lands, gone to the grave!

No carol at morning, no hymn rising clear;
No song at the bridal nor chant at the bier.
All the chords of its symphonies scattered and riven;
Its altar in ashes, its incense in Heaven!

Is there pæan for Glory, whose triumph shall stand
By the wreck of a home once the pride of the land?
Its chambers unfilled as its children depart,
The melody stilled in its desolate heart!

Yet the verdure shall creep to the mouldering wall,
And the sunshine shall sleep in the heart of "The Hall";
And the foot of the pilgrim shall find till the last
Some fragrance of Home at this shrine of the Past.

EASTER

Christ! *arisen?* Lift your eyes!
Lo! what glory fills the skies!
Winter's death is dead, and born
The summer's hope in springing corn.
White the lily cleaves the sod,
Who shall bind the Son of God?

Christ! *arise?* The sun to-day
Unseals a tomb, and rolls away
All mists of midnight like a stone;
All raiment save of light alone.
Shall the single shadow fall
On the Christ, the Lord of all?

Christ! *arisen?* Roman steel
Sentineled that stone and seal.
Rome, in her imperial power,
Watched until the dawning hour—
Watched and *witnessed!* bowed and said:
"Christ is risen from the dead!"

Oh, by all an Age's trust!
By our darlings laid in dust!
In our griefs the single stay;
Of our joys the central ray;
Cease, my Doubt, thy sentry tread!
"Christ is risen from the dead!"