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OLD FAMILIAR FACES

BY
THEODORE
WATTS-DUNTON

AUTHOR OF
"AYLWIN"

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MCMXVI

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INTRODUCTION.

For some years before his death it was the intention of Theodore Watts-Dunton to publish in volume form under the title of ‘Old Familiar Faces,’ the recollections of his friends that he had from time to time contributed to *The Athenæum*. Had his range of interests been less wide he might have found the time in which to further this and many other literary projects he had formed; but he was, unfortunately, very slow to write, and slower still to publish. His long life produced in published works a number of critical and biographical essays contributed to periodicals and encyclopædias, a romance (‘Aylwin’), a sheaf of poems (‘The Coming of Love’), two of the most stimulating critical pronouncements that his century produced (‘Poetry’ and ‘The Renascence of Wonder’), a handful of introductions to classics—and that is all.

Only those who were frequent visitors at “The Pines” can form any idea of his keen interest in life and affairs, which seemed to grow rather than to diminish with the passage of each year, even when 81 had passed him by. At his charmingly situated house at the foot of Putney Hill, he lived a life of as little seclusion as he would have lived in Fleet Street. Here he received his friends and acquaintances, and there was little happening in the world outside with which he was unacquainted.

He was a tremendous worker, and only a few months before his death he wrote of “the enormous pressure of work” that was upon him, telling his correspondent that he had “no idea, no one can have any idea, what it is. I am an early riser and breakfast at seven, and from that hour until seven in the evening, I am in full swing of my labours with the aid of two most intelligent secretaries.”

To outlive his generation is, perhaps, the worst fate that can befall a man; but this cannot truly be said of Theodore Watts-Dunton, who seemed to be of no generation in particular. His interest in the life of the twentieth century, a life so different from that of his own youth and early manhood, was strangely keen and insistent. Sometimes in talking of his great contemporaries, Tennyson, Meredith, Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, Matthew Arnold, Borrow, there would creep into his voice a note of reminiscent sadness; but it always seemed poetic rather than personal. It may be said that he never really grew up, that his spirit never tired. His laugh was as youthful as the hearty “My dear fellow,” with which he would address his friends.

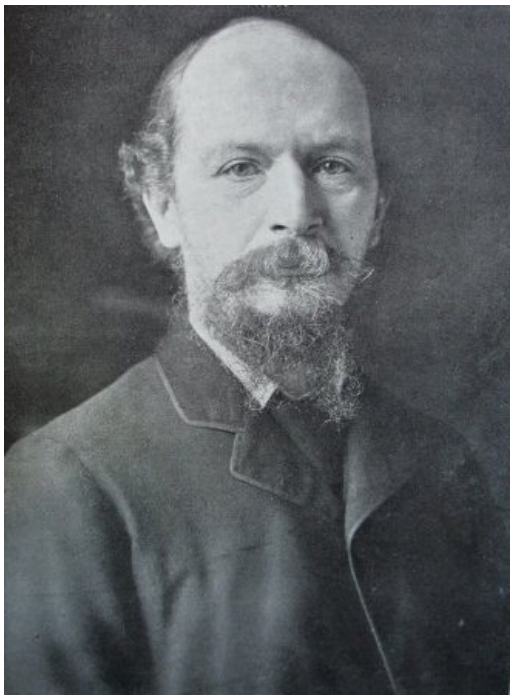
His most remarkable quality was his youth. His body had aged, his voice had shrunk; but once launched into the subject of literature, Greek verse in particular (he regarded the Attic tongue as the peculiar vehicle for poetic expression), he seemed immediately to become a young man. When quoting his favourite passage from Keats, his voice would falter with emotion.

> Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

These lines he regarded as the finest in English poetry.

He possessed the great gift of conversation. Every subject seemed to develope quite naturally out of that which had preceded it, and although in a single hour he would have passed from Æschylus and Sophocles to twentieth-century publishers, there was never any break or suspicion of a change of topic. Seated on the sofa in the middle of his study, with reminders of his friendship with Rossetti gazing down upon him from the walls, he welcomed his friends with that almost boyish cordiality that so endeared him to their hearts. If they had been doing anything of which the world knew, he would be sure to have heard all about it. His mind was as alert as his memory was remarkable; but above all he was possessed of a very real charm, a charm that did not vanish before the on-coming years. It was this quality of interesting himself in the doings of others that retained for him the friendships that his personality and cordiality had created. p. 8

Few men have been so richly endowed with great friendships as Theodore Watts-Dunton: Swinburne, the Rossettis, William Morris, Matthew Arnold, Tennyson, Borrow, Lowell, Latham, men of vastly dissimilar temperaments; yet he was on terms of intimacy with them all, and as they one by one passed away, to him was left the sad duty of giving to the world by far the most intimate picture of their various personalities. There was obviously some subtle quality in Watts-Dunton's nature that not only attracted to him great minds in the world of art and letters; but which seemed to hold captive their affection for a lifetime. Even an instinctive recluse such as Borrow, a man almost too sensitive for friendship, found in Watts-Dunton one whose capacity for friendship was so great as to override all other considerations. Watts-Dunton was "the friend of friends" to Rossetti, who wished to make him his heir, and was dissuaded only when he saw that to do so would pain his friend, who regarded it as an act of injustice to Rossetti's own family. During his lifetime Swinburne desired to make over to him his entire fortune. The man to whom these tributes were paid was undoubtedly possessed of some rare and strange gift.



The greatest among his many great friendships was with Swinburne. For thirty years they lived together at "The Pines" in the closest unity and accord. They would take their walks together, discuss the hundred and one things in which they were both interested, living, not as great men sometimes live, a frigid existence of intellectual loneliness; but showing the keenest interest in the affairs of the everyday, as well as of the literary, world. When death at last severed the link that it had taken upwards of thirty years to forge, it is not strange that there should be no reminiscences written of the man who had been to Watts-Dunton more than a brother. p. 9

It was not always easy to get Watts-Dunton to talk of those he had known so intimately; but when he did so it was frankly and freely. Once when telling of some characteristic act of generosity on the part of that strangely composite being, half genius, half schoolboy, William Morris, he remarked, "Yes, Morris was a very dear friend of mine; but he had strange limitations. Swinburne had the utmost contempt for the narrowness of his outlook. It was incredible! Outside his own domain he was unintelligent in his narrowness, and frequently bored and irritated his friends."

As artist, poet, and craftsman, however, Watts-Dunton spoke with enthusiasm of Morris; but intellectually he regarded him as inferior to Mrs. Morris. On the day following the announcement of her death, the present writer happened to be taking tea at "The Pines," and the conversation not unnaturally turned upon the Morrises. Watts-Dunton called attention to the large number of magnificent Rossetti portraits of her that hung from the walls of his study. "A remarkable woman," he said, "a most remarkable woman; superior to Morris intellectually, she reached a greater mental height than he was capable of, yet few knew it." Then he proceeded to tell how she had acquired French and Italian with the greatest ease and facility. When Morris had met her she possessed very few educational advantages; yet she very quickly made good her shortcomings. When reminded that Mr. H. Buxton Forman had recently written that he had seen beautiful women in all quarters of the globe, "but never one so strangely lovely and majestic as p. 10

Mrs. Morris," Watts-Dunton remarked, "She was the most lovely woman I have ever known, her beauty was incredible."

In answer to a question he went on to say that Rossetti painted her lips with the utmost faithfulness. In spite of her beauty and her high mental qualities, she was very shy and retiring, almost fearful, in her attitude towards others.

In literature and criticism Watts-Dunton stood for enthusiasm. His gospel as a critic was to seek for the good that is to be found in most things, literary or otherwise; and what is, perhaps, most remarkable in one who has known so many great men, he never seemed to draw invidious comparisons between the writers and artists of to-day and those of the great Victorian Era. p. 11

Life at "The Pines" was as bright as naturally cheerful and bright people could make it, people who were not only attracted to and interested in each other; but found the world an exceedingly good place in which to live. The home circle was composed of Swinburne, Watts-Dunton, his two sisters, Miss Watts and Mrs. Mason. To these must be added Mr. Thomas Hake, for many years Watts-Dunton's friend and secretary, who was in daily attendance. Later the circle was enlarged by the entry into it of the young and accomplished bride, the present Mrs. Watts-Dunton.

"The Pines" would have seemed a strange place without "the Colonel," as Watts-Dunton always called Mr. Hake, adopting a family name given to him when a boy on account of his likeness to his cousin, General, then Colonel, Gordon. Nothing amused Watts-Dunton more than for some caller to start discussing army matters with the supposed ex-officer. He would watch with a mischievous glee Mr. Hake's endeavours to carry on a conversation in which he had no special interest. Watts-Dunton never informed callers of their mistake, and to this day there is one friend of twenty-five years' standing, a man keenly interested in National Defence, who regards Mr. Hake as an authority upon army matters. p. 12

"No living man knew Borrow so well as Thomas Hake," Watts-Dunton once remarked to a friend. To the young Hakes Lavengro was a great joy, and they would often accompany him part of his way home from Coombe End. On one occasion Borrow said to the youngest boy, "Do you know how to fight a man bigger than yourself?" The lad confessed that he did not. "Well," said Borrow, "You challenge him to fight, and when he is taking off his coat, you hit him in the stomach as hard as you can and run for your life."

Swinburne and Watts-Dunton had first met in 1872. In 1879 they went to live together at "The Pines," and from that date were never parted until Swinburne's death thirty years' later. In no literary friendship has the bond been closer. Watts-Dunton's first act each morning was to visit Swinburne in his own room, where the poet breakfasted alone with the morning newspapers. During the morning the two would take their daily walk together, a practice continued for many years. "There is no time like the morning for a walk," Swinburne would say, "The sparkle, the exhilaration of it. I walk every morning of my life, no matter what the weather, pelting along all the time as fast as I can go." His perfect health he attributed entirely to this habit. p. 13

In later years he would take his walks alone. It was during one of these that he met with an adventure that seemed to cause him some irritation. A young artist hearing that "the master" walked each day up Putney Hill lay in wait for him. After several unsuccessful ventures he at length saw a figure approaching which he instantly recognized. Crossing the road the youth went boldly up and said:—

"If you are Mr. Swinburne, may I shake hands with you?"

"Eh?" remarked the astonished poet.

The young man repeated his request in a louder voice, remembering Swinburne's deafness, adding:—

"It is my ambition to shake hands with you, sir."

"Oh! very well," was the response, as Swinburne half-heartedly extended his hand, "I'm not accustomed to this sort of thing."

Meal times at "The Pines" were occasions when there was much talk and laughter; for in both Swinburne and Watts-Dunton the mischievous spirit of boyhood had not been entirely disciplined by life, and in the other members of the household the same unconquerable spirit of youth was manifest. Sometimes there were great discussions and arguments. Watts-Dunton had more than a passing interest in science, whereas, to Swinburne it was anathema, although his father was strongly scientific in his learning. The libraries of the two men clearly showed how different were their tastes; for that of Watts-Dunton was all-embracing, Swinburne's was as exclusive as his circle of personal friends. The one was the library of a critic, the other that of a poet. p. 14

Swinburne enjoyed nothing better than a discussion, and he was a foe who wielded a stout blade. He fought, however, with scrupulous fairness, never interrupting an adversary; but listening to him with a deliberate patience that was almost disconcerting. Then when his turn came he would overwhelm his opponent and destroy his most weighty arguments in what a friend once described as "a lava torrent of burning words." He possessed many of the qualities necessary to debate: concentration, the power of pouncing upon the weak spot in his adversary's argument, and above all a wonderful memory. What he lacked was that calm and calculating frigidity so necessary to the successful debater. Instead of freezing his opponent to silence with deliberate logic, he would strive rather by the tempestuous quality of his rhetoric to hurl him into the next parish.

There were times when he would work himself up into a passion of denunciation, when, trembling and quivering in every limb, he would in a fine frenzy of scorn annihilate those whom he conceived to be his enemies, and in scathing periods pour ridicule upon their works. But if he were merciless in his onslaughts upon his foes, he was correspondingly loyal in the defence of his friends. He seemed as incapable of seeing the weakness of a friend as of appreciating the strength of an enemy. p. 15

The things and the people who did not interest him he had the fortunate capacity of entirely forgetting. A friend [15] tells of how on one occasion he happened to mention in the course of conversation a book by a certain author whom he knew had been a visitor at "The Pines" on several occasions, and as such was personally known to Swinburne.

"Oh! really," Swinburne remarked, "Yes, now that you mention it, I believe someone of that name has been so good as to come and see us. I seem to recall him, and I seem to remember hearing someone say that he had written something, though I don't remember exactly what. So he has published a book upon the subject of which we are talking. Really? I did not know."

All this was said with perfect courtesy and without the least intention of administering a snub or belittling the writer in question. Swinburne had merely forgotten because there was nothing in that author's personality that had impressed itself upon him. On the other hand, he would remember the minutest details of conversations in which he had been interested. p. 16

In spite of his capacity for passionate outbursts and inspired invective, Swinburne was a most attentive listener, provided there were things being said to which it was worth listening. At meal times when his attention became engaged he would forget everything but the conversation. Indifferent as to what stage of the meal he was at, he would turn to whoever it might be that had introduced the subject, and would talk or listen oblivious of the fact that food might be spoiling. Fortunately, he was a small eater.

On one occasion when lunching at "The Pines" Mr. Coulson Kernahan happened to remark that he had in his pocket a copy of Christina Rossetti's then unpublished poem, 'The Death of a First-born,' written in memory of the Duke of Clarence. Down went knife and fork as Swinburne half rose from his chair to reach across the table for the manuscript. "She is as a god to mortals when compared to most other living women poets," he exclaimed. Then, in his thin-high-pitched, but exquisitely modulated voice he half read, half chanted, two stanzas of the poem. p. 17

> One young life lost, two happy young lives blighted
> With earthward eyes we see:
> With eyes uplifted, keener, farther sighted
> We look, O Lord to thee.
>
> Grief hears a funeral knell: hope hears the ringing
> Of birthday bells on high.
> Faith, Hope and Love make answer with soft singing,
> Half carol and half cry.

He stopped abruptly refusing to read the third and last stanza because it was unequal, and the poem was stronger and finer by its omission. Then he said in a hushed voice, "For the happy folk who are able to think as she thinks, who believe as she believes, the poem is of its kind perfect."

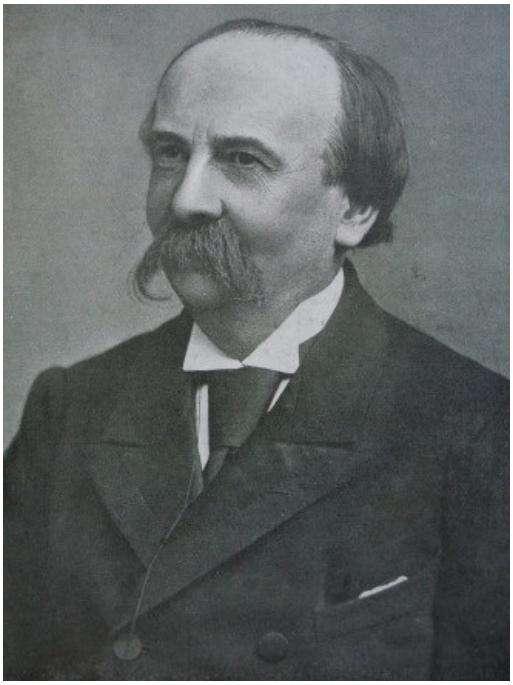
With glowing eyes and with hand that marked time to the music, he read once more the second verse, repeating the line, "half carol and half cry" three times, lowering his voice with each repetition until it became little more than a whisper. Laying the manuscript reverently beside him, he sat perfectly still for a space with brooding eyes, then rising silently left the room with short swift strides. [17]

Many of Swinburne's friends have testified to his personal charm and courtliness of bearing. "Unmistakably an aristocrat, and with all the ease and polish which one associates with high breeding, there was, even in the cordiality with which he would rise and come forward to welcome a visitor a suspicion of the shy nervousness of the introspective man and of the recluse on first facing a stranger." Mr. Coulson Kernahan has said, "I have seen him angry, I have heard him furiously dissent from, and even denounce the views put forward by others, but never once was what, for want of a better word, I must call his personal deference to those others relaxed. p. 18

"To no one would he defer quite so graciously and readily, to no one was he so scrupulously courtly in bearing as to those who constituted his own household."

If he felt that he had monopolized the conversation he would turn to Watts-Dunton and apologize, and for a time become transformed into an attentive listener.

Lord Ronald Gower writes of Swinburne's remarkable powers as a talker. Telling of a luncheon at "The Pines" in 1879, he writes:—"Swinburne's talk after luncheon was wonderful . . . What, far beyond the wonderful flow of words of the poet, struck me, was his real diffidence and modesty; while fully aware of the divine gifts within him, he is as simple and unaffected as a child." [18]



But conversation at “The Pines” was not always of the serious things of life. It very frequently partook of the playful, when the hearers would be kept amused with a humour and whimsicality, cauterized now and then with some biting touch of satire which showed that neither Swinburne nor Watts-Dunton had entirely grown up. p. 19

Reading aloud was also a greatly favoured form of entertainment. Swinburne was a sympathetic reader, possessed of a voice of remarkable quality and power of expression, and he would read for the hour together from Dickens, Lamb, Charles Reade, and Thackeray. To Mrs. Mason’s little boy he was a wizard who could open many magic casements. He would carry off the lad to his own room, and there read to him the stories which caused the hour of bedtime to be dreaded. When the nurse arrived to fetch the child to bed he would imperiously wave her away, hoping that Swinburne would not notice the action and so bring the evening’s entertainment to a close. On one occasion the child stole down to Swinburne’s room after he had been safely put to bed, where the interrupted story was renewed. When eventually discovered both seemed to regard the incident as a huge joke, and Swinburne carried the child to the nursery and tucked him up for the night.

A great capacity for friendship involves an equally great meed of sorrow. At last the hour arrived when the friend who was nearer to him than a brother followed those who one by one he had mourned, and of the old familiar faces there were left to him only the two sisters, whose love and devotion had contributed so much to his domestic happiness, and his friend, Mr. Thomas Hake, who for seventeen years had acted as confidential secretary. p. 20

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I. GEORGE BORROW. 1803–1881.

I.

I have been reading those charming reminiscences of George Borrow which appeared in *The Athenæum*.[25] I have been reading them, I may add, under the happiest conditions for enjoying them—amid the self-same heather and bracken where I have so often listened to Lavengro's quaint talk of all the wondrous things he saw and heard in his wondrous life. So graphically has Mr. Hake depicted him, that as I walked and read his paper I seemed to hear the fine East-Anglian accent of the well-remembered voice—I seemed to see the mighty figure, strengthened by the years rather than stricken by them, striding along between the whin bushes or through the quags, now stooping over the water to pluck the wild mint he loved, whose lilac-coloured blossoms perfumed the air as he crushed them, now stopping to watch the water-wagtail by the ponds as he descanted upon the powers of that enchanted bird—powers, like many human endowments, more glorious than pleasant, if it is sober truth, as Borrow would gravely tell, that the gipsy lad who knocks a water-wagtail on the head with a stone gains for a bride a "ladye from a far countrie," and dazzles with his good luck all the other black-eyed young urchins of the dingle.

Though my own intimacy with Borrow did not begin till he was considerably advanced in years, and ended on his finally quitting London for Oulton, there were circumstances in our intercourse —circumstances, I mean, connected partly with temperament and partly with mutual experience —which make me doubt whether any one understood him better than I did, or broke more thoroughly through that exclusiveness of temper which isolated him from all but a few. However, be this as it may, no one at least realized more fully than I how lovable was his nature, with all his angularities—how simple and courageous, how manly and noble. His shyness, his apparent coldness, his crotchety obstinacy, repelled people, and consequently those who at any time during his life really understood him must have been very few. How was it, then, that such a man wandered about over Europe and fraternized so completely with a race so suspicious and intractable as the gipsies? A natural enough question, which I have often been asked, and this is my reply:—

Those who know the gipsies will understand me when I say that this suspicious and wary race of wanderers—suspicious and wary from an instinct transmitted through ages of dire persecutions from the Children of the Roof—will readily fraternize with a blunt, single-minded, and shy eccentric like Borrow, while perhaps the skilful man of the world may find all his tact and *savoir faire* useless and, indeed, in the way. And the reason of this is not far to seek, perhaps. What a gipsy most dislikes is the feeling that his "gorgio" interlocutor is thinking about him; for, alas! to be the object of "gorgio" thoughts—has it not been a most dangerous and mischievous honour to every gipsy since first his mysterious race was driven to accept the grudging hospitality of the Western world? A gipsy hates to be watched, and knows at once when he is being watched; for in tremulous delicacy of apprehension his organization is far beyond that of an Englishman, or, indeed, of any member of any of the thick-fingered races of Europe. One of the results of this excessive delicacy is that a gipsy can always tell to a surety whether a "gorgio" companion is thinking about him, or whether the "gorgio's" thoughts are really and genuinely occupied with the fishing rod, the net, the gin, the gun, or whatsoever may be the common source of interest that has drawn them together.

Now, George Borrow, after the first one or two awkward interviews were well over, would lapse into a kind of unconscious ruminating bluntness, a pronounced and angular self-dependence, which might well disarm the suspiciousness of the most wary gipsy, from the simple fact that it was genuine. Hence, as I say, among the few who understood Borrow his gipsy friends very likely stood first—outside, of course, his family circle. And surely this is an honour to Borrow; for the gipsies, notwithstanding certain undeniable obliquities in matters of morals and cusine, are the only people left in the island who are still free from British vulgarity (perhaps because they are not British). It is no less an honour to them, for while he lived the island did not contain a

nobler English gentleman than him they called the “Romany Rye.”

Borrow’s descriptions of gipsy life are, no doubt, too deeply charged with the rich lights shed from his own personality entirely to satisfy a more matter-of-fact observer, and I am not going to say that he is anything like so photographic as F. H. Groome, for instance, or so trustworthy. But then it should never be forgotten that Borrow was, before everything else, a poet. If this statement should be challenged by “the present time,” let me tell the present time that by poet I do not mean merely a man who is skilled in writing lyrics and sonnets and that kind of thing, but primarily a man who has the poetic gift of seeing through “the shows of things” and knowing where he is—the gift of drinking deeply of the waters of life and of feeling grateful to Nature for p. 29
so sweet a draught; a man who, while acutely feeling the ineffable pathos of human life, can also feel how sweet a thing it is to live, having so great and rich a queen as Nature for his mother, and for companions any number of such amusing creatures as men and women. In this sense I cannot but set Borrow, with his love of nature and his love of adventure, very high among poets—as high, perhaps, as I place another dweller in tents, Sylvester Boswell himself, “the well-known and popalated gipsy of Codling Gap,” who, like Borrow, is famous for “his great knowledge in grammaring one of the ancientist langeges on record,” and whose touching preference of a gipsy tent to a roof, “on the accent of health, sweetness of the air, and for enjoying the pleasure of Nature’s life,” is expressed with a poetical feeling such as Chaucer might have known had he not, as a court poet, been too genteel. “Enjoying the pleasure of Nature’s life!” That is what Borrow did; and how few there are that understand it.

The self-consciousness which in the presence of man produces that kind of shyness which was Borrow’s characteristic left him at once when he was with Nature alone or in the company of an intimate friend. At her, no man’s gaze was more frank and childlike than his. Hence the charm p. 30
of his books. No man’s writing can take you into the country as Borrow’s can: it makes you feel the sunshine, see the meadows, smell the flowers, hear the skylark sing and the grasshopper chirrup. Who else can do it? I know of none. And as to personal intercourse with him, if I were asked what was the chief delight of this, I should say that it was the delight of bracingness. A walking tour with a self-conscious lover of the picturesque—an “interviewer” of Nature with a note-book—worrying you to admire *him* for admiring Nature so much, is one of those occasional calamities of life which a gentleman and a Christian must sometimes heroically bear, but the very thought of which will paralyze with fear the sturdiest Nature-worshipper, whom no crevasse or avalanche or treacherous mist can appal. But a walk and talk with Borrow as he strode through the bracken on an autumn morning had the exhilarating effect upon his companion of a draught of the brightest mountain air. And this was the result not, assuredly, of any exuberance of animal spirits (Borrow, indeed, was subject to fits of serious depression), but rather of a feeling he induced that between himself and all nature, from the clouds floating lazily over head to the scented heather, crisp and purple, under foot, there was an entire fitness and harmony—a sort of mutual understanding, indeed. There was, I say, something bracing in the very look of this p. 31
silvery-haired giant as he strode along with a kind of easy sloping movement, like that of a St. Bernard dog (the most deceptive of all movements as regards pace), his beardless face (quite matchless for symmetrical beauty) beaded with the healthy perspiration drops of strong exercise, and glowing and rosy in the sun.

As a vigorous old man Borrow never had an equal, I think. There has been much talk of the vigour of Shelley’s friend, E. J. Trelawny. I knew that splendid old corsair, and admired his agility of limb and brain; but at seventy Borrow could have walked off with Trelawny under his arm. At seventy years of age, after breakfasting at eight o’clock in Hereford Square, he would walk to Putney, meet one or more of us at Roehampton, roam about Wimbledon and Richmond Park with us, bathe in the Fen Ponds with a north-east wind cutting across the icy water like a razor, run about the grass afterwards like a boy to shake off some of the water-drops, stride about the park for hours, and then, after fasting for twelve hours, eat a dinner at Roehampton that would have done Sir Walter Scott’s eyes good to see. Finally, he would walk back to Hereford Square, getting home late at night.

And if the physique of the man was bracing, his conversation, unless he happened to be suffering from one of his occasional fits of depression, was still more so. Its freshness, raciness, and p. 32
eccentric whim no pen could describe. There is a kind of humour the delight of which is that while you smile at the pictures it draws, you smile quite as much or more to think that there is a mind so whimsical, crotchety, and odd as to draw them. This was the humour of Borrow. His command of facial expression—though he seemed to exercise it almost involuntarily and unconsciously—had, no doubt, much to do with this charm. Once, when he was talking to me about the men of Charles Lamb’s day—*The London Magazine* set—I asked him what kind of a man was the notorious and infamous Griffiths Wainewright. [32] In a moment Borrow’s face changed: his mouth broke into a Carker-like smile, his eyes became elongated to an expression that was at once fawning and sinister, as he said, “Wainewright! He used to sit in an armchair close to the fire and *smile* all the evening like *this*.” He made me see Wainewright and hear his voice as plainly as though I had seen him and heard him in the publishers’ parlour.

His vocabulary, rich in picturesque words of the high road and dingle, his quaint countrified phrases, might also have added to the effect of this kind of eccentric humour. “A duncie book—of p. 33
course it’s duncie—it’s only duncie books that sell nowadays,” he would shout when some new “immortal poem” or “greatest work of the age” was mentioned. Tennyson, I fear, was the representative duncie poet of the time; but that was because nothing could ever make Borrow realize the fact that Tennyson was not the latest juvenile representative of a “duncie” age; for

although, according to Leland, [33] the author of ‘Sordello’ is (as is natural, perhaps) the only bard known in the gipsy tent, it is doubtful whether even his name was more than a name to Borrow; indeed, I think that people who had no knowledge of Romany, Welsh, and Armenian were all more or less “duncie.” As a trap to catch the “foaming vipers,” his critics, he in ‘Lavengro’ purposely misspelt certain Armenian and Welsh words, just to have the triumph of saying in another volume that they who had attacked him on so many points had failed to discover that he had wrongly given “zhats” as the nominative of the Armenian noun for bread, while everybody in England, especially every critic, ought to know that “zhats” is the accusative form.

I will try, however, to give the reader an idea of the whim of Borrow’s conversation, by giving it p. 34
in something like a dramatic form. Let the reader suppose himself on a summer’s evening at that delightful old roadside inn the Bald-Faced Stag, in the Roehampton Valley, near Richmond Park, where are sitting, over a “cup” (to use Borrow’s word) of foaming ale, Lavengro himself, one of his oldest friends, and a new acquaintance, a certain student of things in general lately introduced to Borrow and nearly, but not quite, admitted behind the hedge of Borrow’s shyness, as may be seen by the initiated from a certain rather constrained, half-resentful expression on his face. Jerry Abershaw’s [34] sword (the chief trophy of mine host) has been introduced, and Borrow’s old friend has been craftily endeavouring to turn the conversation upon that ever fresh and fruitful topic, but in vain. Suddenly the song of a nightingale, perched on a tree not far off, rings pleasantly through the open window and fills the room with a new atmosphere of poetry and romance. “That nightingale has as fine a voice,” says Borrow, “as though he were born and
bred in the Eastern Counties.” Borrow is proud of being an East-Anglian, of which the student p. 35
has already been made aware and which he now turns to good account in the important business he has set himself, of melting Lavengro’s frost and being admitted a member of the Open-Air Club. “Ah!” says the wily-student, “I know the Eastern Counties; no nightingales like those, especially Norfolk nightingales.” Borrow’s face begins to brighten slightly, but still he does not direct his attention to the stranger, who proceeds to remark that although the southern counties are so much warmer than Norfolk, some of them, such as Cornwall and Devon, are without nightingales. Borrow’s face begins to get brighter still, and he looks out of the window with a smile, as though he were being suddenly carried back to the green lanes of his beloved Norfolk.

“From which well-known fact of ornithology,” continues the student, “I am driven to infer that in their choice of habitat nightingales are guided not so much by considerations of latitude as of good taste.” Borrow’s anger is evidently melting away. The talk runs still upon nightingales, and the student mentions the attempt to settle them in Scotland once made by Sir John Sinclair, who introduced nightingales’ eggs from England into robins’ nests in Scotland, in the hope that the young nightingales, after enjoying a Scotch summer, would return to the place of their birth,
after the custom of English nightingales. “And did they return?” says Borrow, with as much p. 36
interest as if the honour of his country were involved in the question. “Return to Scotland?” says the student quietly; “the entire animal kingdom are agreed, you know, in never returning to Scotland. Besides, the nightingales’ eggs in question were laid in Norfolk.” Conquered at last, Borrow extends the hand of brotherhood to the impudent student (whose own private opinion, no doubt, is that Norfolk is more successful in producing Nelsons than nightingales), and proceeds without more ado to tell how “poor Jerry Abershaw,” on being captured by the Bow Street runners, had left his good sword behind him as a memento of highway glories soon to be ended on the gallows tree. (By-the-bye, I wonder where that sword is now; it was bought by Mr. Adolphus Levy, of Alton Lodge, at the closing of the Bald-Faced Stag.)

From Jerry Abershaw Borrow gets upon other equally interesting topics, such as the decadence of beer and pugilism, and the nobility of the now neglected British bruiser, as exampled especially in the case of the noble Pearce, who lost his life through rushing up a staircase and rescuing a woman from a burning house after having on a previous occasion rescued another woman by blacking the eyes of six gamekeepers, who had been set upon her by some noble lord
or another. Then, while the ale sparkles with a richer colour as the evening lights grow deeper, p. 37
the talk gets naturally upon “lords” in general, gentility nonsense, and “hoity-toityism” as the canker at the heart of modern civilization.

II. p. 38

Borrow could look at Nature without thinking of himself—a rare gift, for Nature, as I have said, has been disappointed in man. Her great desire from the first has been to grow an organism so conscious that it can turn round and look at her with intelligent eyes. She has done so at last, but the consciousness is so high as to be self-conscious, and man cannot for egotism look at his mother after all. Borrow was a great exception. Thoreau’s self-consciousness showed itself in presence of Nature, Borrow’s in presence of man. The very basis of Borrow’s nature was reverence. His unswerving belief in the beneficence of God was most beautiful, most touching. In his life Borrow had suffered much: a temperament such as his must needs suffer much—so shy it was, so proud, and yet yearning for a close sympathy such as no creature and only solitary communing with Nature can give. Under any circumstances, I say, Borrow would have known how sharp and cruel are the flints along the road—how tender are a poet’s feet; but *his* road at one time was rough indeed; not when he was with his gipsy friends (for a tent is freer than a roof, according to the grammarian of Codling Gap, and roast hedgehog is the daintiest of viands), but
when he was toiling in London, his fine gifts unrecognized and useless—*that* was when Borrow p. 39
passed through the fire. Yet every sorrow and every disaster of his life he traced to the kindly

hand of a benevolent and wise Father, who sometimes will use a whip of scorpions, but only to chastise into a right and happy course the children he loves.

Apart from the instinctive rectitude of his nature, it was with Borrow a deep-rooted conviction that sin never goes, and never can go, unpunished. His doctrine, indeed, was something like the Buddhist doctrine of Karma—it was based on an instinctive apprehension of the sacredness of "law" in the most universal acceptation of that word. Sylvester Boswell's definition of a free man, in that fine, self-respective certificate of his, as one who is "free from all cares or fears of law that may come against him," is, indeed, the gospel of every true nature-worshipper. The moment Thoreau spurned the legal tax-gatherer the law locked the nature-worshipper in gaol. To enjoy nature the soul *must* be free—free not only from tax-gatherers, but from sin; for every wrongful act awakes, out of the mysterious bosom of Nature herself, its own peculiar serpent, having its own peculiar stare, but always hungry and bloody-fanged, which follows the delinquent's feet whithersoever they go, gliding through the dewy grass on the brightest morning, dodging round the trees on the calmest eve, wriggling across the brook where the wrongdoer would fain linger p. 40
on the stepping-stones to soothe his soul with the sight of the happy minnows shooting between the water-weeds—following him everywhere, in short, till at last, in sheer desperation, he must needs stop and turn, and bare his breast to the fangs; when, having yielded up to the thing its fill of atoning blood, Nature breaks into her old smile again, and he goes on his way in peace.

All this Borrow understood better than any man I have ever met. Yet even into his doctrine of Providence Borrow imported such an element of whim that it was impossible to listen to him sometimes without a smile. For instance, having arrived at the conclusion that a certain lieutenant had been cruelly ill used by genteel magnates high in office, Borrow discovered that since that iniquity Providence had frowned on the British arms, and went on to trace the disastrous blunder of Balaklava to this cause. Again, having decided that Sir Walter Scott's worship of gentility and Jacobitism had been the main cause of the revival of flunkeyism and Popery in England, Borrow saw in the dreadful monetary disasters which overclouded Scott's last days the hand of God, whose plan was to deprive him of the worldly position Scott worshipped at the very moment when his literary fame (which he misprized) was dazzling the world.

And now as to the gipsy wanderings. As I have said, no man has been more entirely p. 41
misunderstood than Borrow. That a man who certainly did (as F. H. Groome says) look like a "colossal clergyman" should have joined the gipsies, that he should have wandered over England and Europe, content often to have the grass for his bed and the sky for his hostry-roof, has astonished very much (and I believe scandalized very much) this age. My explanation of the matter is this: Among the myriads of children born into a world of brick and mortar there appears now and then one who is meant for better things—one who exhibits unmistakable signs that he inherits the blood of those remote children of the open air who, according to the old Sabæan notion, on the plains of Asia lived with Nature, loved Nature and were loved by her, and from whom all men are descended. George Borrow was one of those who show the olden strain. Now, for such a man, born in a country like England, where the modern fanaticism of house-worship has reached a condition which can only be called maniacal, what is there left but to try for a time the gipsy's tent? On the Continent house-worship is strong enough in all conscience; but in France, in Spain, in Italy, even in Germany, people do think of something beyond the house. But here, where there are no romantic crimes, to get a genteel house, to keep (or "run") a genteel p. 42
house, or to pretend to keep (or "run") a genteel house, is the great first cause of almost every British delinquency, from envy and malignant slander up to forgery, robbery, and murder. And yet it is a fact, as Borrow discovered (when a mere lad in a solicitor's office), that to men in health the house need not, and should not, be the all-absorbing consideration, but should be quite secondary to considerations of honesty and sweet air, pure water, clean linen, good manners, freedom to migrate at will, and, above all, freedom from "all cares or fears of law" that may come against a man in the shape of debts, duns, and tax-gatherers.

Against this folly of softening our bodies by "snugness" and degrading our souls by "flunkeyism," Borrow's early life was a protest. He saw that if it were really unwholesome for man to be shone upon by the sun, blown upon by the winds, and rained upon by the rain, like all the other animals, man would never have existed at all, for sun and wind and rain have produced him and everything that lives. He saw that for the cultivation of health, honesty, and good behaviour every man born in the temperate zone ought, unless King Circumstance says "No," to spend in the open air eight or nine hours at least out of the twenty-four, and ought to court rather than to shun Nature's sweet shower-bath the rain, unless, of course, his chest is weak.

The evanescence of literary fame is strikingly illustrated by recalling at this moment my first p. 43
sight of Borrow. I could not have been much more than a boy, for I and a friend had gone down to Yarmouth in March to enjoy the luxury of bathing in a Yarmouth sea, and it is certainly a "good while"—to use Borrow's phrase—since I considered *that* a luxury suitable to March. On the morning after our arrival, having walked some distance out of Yarmouth, we threw down our clothes and towels upon the sand some few yards from another heap of clothes, which indicated, to our surprise, that we were not, after all, the only people in Yarmouth who could bathe in a biting wind; and soon we perceived, ducking in an immense billow that came curving and curling towards the shore, such a pair of shoulders as I had not seen for a long time, crowned by a head white and glistening as burnished silver. (Borrow's hair was white I believe, when he was quite a young man.) When the wave had broken upon the sand, there was the bather wallowing on the top of the water like a Polar bear disporting in an Arctic sun. In swimming Borrow clawed the water like a dog. I had plunged into the surf and got very close to the swimmer, whom I

perceived to be a man of almost gigantic proportions, when suddenly an instinct told me that it was Lavengro himself, who lived thereabouts, and the feeling that it was he so entirely stopped p. 44
the action of my heart that I sank for a moment like a stone, soon to rise again, however, in glow of pleasure and excitement: so august a presence was Lavengro's then!

I ought to say, however, that Borrow was at that time my hero. From my childhood I had taken the deepest interest in proscribed races such as the Cagots, but especially in the persecuted children of Roma. I had read accounts of whole families being executed in past times for no other crime than that of their being born gipsies, and tears, childish and yet bitter, had I shed over their woes. Now Borrow was the recognized champion of the gipsies—the friend companion, indeed, of the proscribed and persecuted races of the world. Nor was this all: I saw in him more of the true Nature instinct than in any other writer—or so, at least, I imagined. To walk out from a snug house at Rydal Mount for the purpose of making poetical sketches for publication seemed to me a very different thing from having no home but a tent in a dingle, or rather from Borrow's fashion of making all Nature your home. Although I would have given worlds to go up and speak to him as he was tossing his clothes upon his back, I could not do it. Morning after morning did I see him undress, wallow in the sea, come out again, give me a somewhat sour look, dress, and then stride away inland at a tremendous pace, but never could I speak to him; and many years passed before I saw him again. He was then half forgotten. p. 45

For an introduction to him at last I was indebted to Dr. Gordon Hake, the poet, who had known Borrow for many years, and whose friendship Borrow cherished above most things—as was usual, indeed, with the friends of Dr. Hake. This was done with some difficulty, for, in calling at Roehampton for a walk through Richmond Park and about the Common, Borrow's first question was always, "Are you alone?" and no persuasion could induce him to stay unless it could be satisfactorily shown that he would not be "pestered by strangers." On a certain morning, however, he called, and suddenly coming upon me, there was no retreating, and we were introduced. He tried to be as civil as possible, but evidently he was much annoyed. Yet there was something in the very tone of his voice that drew my heart to him, for to me he was the Lavengro of my boyhood still. My own shyness had been long before fingered off by the rough handling of the world, but his retained all the bloom of youth, and a terrible barrier it was, yet I attacked it manfully. I knew that Borrow had read but little except in his own out-of-the-way directions; but then unfortunately, like all specialists, he considered that in these his own special directions lay all the knowledge that was of any value. Accordingly, what appeared to Borrow as p. 46
the most striking characteristic of the present age was its ignorance.

Unfortunately, too, I knew that for strangers to talk of his own published books or of gipsies appeared to him to be "prying," though there I should have been quite at home. I knew, however, that in the obscure English pamphlet literature of the last century, recording the sayings and doings of eccentric people and strange adventurers, Borrow was very learned, and I too chanced to be far from ignorant in that direction. I touched on Bamfylde Moore Carew, but without effect. Borrow evidently considered that every properly educated man was familiar with the story of Bamfylde Moore Carew in its every detail. Then I touched upon beer, the British bruiser, "gentility-nonsense," the "trumpery great"; then upon etymology, traced hoity-toityism to *toit*, a roof,—but only to have my shallow philology dismissed with a withering smile. I tried other subjects in the same direction, but with small success, till in a lucky moment I bethought myself of Ambrose Gwinett. There is a very scarce eighteenth-century pamphlet narrating the story of Ambrose Gwinett, the man who, after having been hanged and gibbeted for murdering a traveller with whom he had shared a double-bedded room at a seaside inn, revived in the night, escaped from the gibbet irons, went to sea as a common sailor, and afterwards met on a British man-of-war the very man he had been hanged for murdering. The truth was that Gwinett's p. 47
supposed victim, having been attacked on the night in question by a violent bleeding at the nose, had risen and left the house for a few minutes' walk in the sea-breeze, when the press-gang captured him and bore him off to sea, where he had been in service ever since. The story is true, and the pamphlet, Borrow afterwards told me (I know not on what authority), was written by Goldsmith from Gwinett's dictation for a platter of cowheel.

To the bewilderment of Dr. Hake, I introduced the subject of Ambrose Gwinett in the same manner as I might have introduced the story of "Achilles' wrath," and appealed to Dr. Hake (who, of course, had never heard of the book or the man) as to whether a certain incident in the pamphlet had gained or lost by the dramatist who, at one of the minor theatres, had many years ago dramatized the story. Borrow was caught at last. "What?" said he, "you know that pamphlet about Ambrose Gwinett?" "Know it?" said I, in a hurt tone, as though he had asked me if I knew 'Macbeth'; "of course I know Ambrose Gwinett, Mr. Borrow, don't you?" "And you know the play?" said he. "Of course I do, Mr. Borrow?" I said, in a tone that was now a little angry at such an insinuation of crass ignorance. "Why," said he, "it's years and years since it was acted; I p. 48
never was much of a theatre man, but I did go to see *that*." "Well, I should rather think you *did*, Mr. Borrow," said I. "But," said he, staring hard at me, "*you*—you were not born!" "And I was not born," said I, "when the 'Agamemnon' was produced, and yet one reads the 'Agamemnon,' Mr. Borrow. I have read the drama of 'Ambrose Gwinett.' I have it bound in morocco with some more of Douglas Jerrold's early transpontine plays, and some Æschylean dramas by Mr. Fitzball. I will lend it to you, Mr. Borrow, if you like." He was completely conquered. "Hake!" he cried, in a loud voice, regardless of my presence. "Hake! your friend knows everything." Then he murmured to himself, "Wonderful man! Knows Ambrose Gwinett!"

It is such delightful reminiscences as these that will cause me to have as long as I live a very

warm place in my heart for the memory of George Borrow.

From that time I used to see Borrow often at Roehampton, sometimes at Putney, and sometimes, but not often, in London. I could have seen much more of him than I did had not the whirlpool of London, into which I plunged for a time, borne me away from this most original of men; and this is what I so greatly lament now: for of Borrow it may be said, as it was said of a greater man still, that "after Nature made *him* she forthwith broke the mould." The last time I ever saw him was p. 49
shortly before he left London to live in the country. It was, I remember well, on Waterloo Bridge, where I had stopped to gaze at a sunset of singular and striking splendour, whose gorgeous clouds and ruddy mists were reeling and boiling over the West-End. Borrow came up and stood leaning over the parapet, entranced by the sight, as well he might be. Like most people born in flat districts, he had a passion for sunsets. Turner could not have painted that one, I think, and certainly my pen could not describe it; for the London smoke was flushed by the sinking sun and had lost its dunness, and, reddening every moment as it rose above the roofs, steeples, and towers, it went curling round the sinking sun in a rosy vapour, leaving, however, just a segment of a golden rim, which gleamed as dazzlingly as in the thinnest and clearest air—a peculiar effect which struck Borrow deeply. I never saw such a sunset before or since, not even on Waterloo Bridge; and from its association with "the last of Borrow" I shall never forget it.

III. p. 50

Students of Borrow will be as much surprised as pleased to find what a large collection of documents Dr. Knapp has been able to use in compiling this long-expected biography. [50] Indeed, the collection might have been larger and richer still. For instance, in the original manuscript of 'Zincali' (in the possession of the present writer) there are some variations from the printed text; but, what is of very much more importance, the whole—or nearly the whole—of Borrow's letters to the Bible Society, which Dr. Knapp believed to be lost, have been discovered in the crypt of the Bible House in which the records of the Society are stored. But even without these materials two massive volumes crammed with documents throwing light upon the life and career of a man like George Borrow must needs be interesting to the student of English literature. For among all the remarkable characters that during the middle of the present century figured in the world of letters, the most eccentric, the most whimsical, and in every way the most extraordinary was surely the man whom Dr. Knapp calls, appropriately enough, his p. 51
"hero."

It is no exaggeration to say that there was not a single point in which Borrow resembled any other writing man of his time; indeed, we cannot, at the moment, recall any really important writer of any period whose eccentricity of character can be compared with his. At the basis of the artistic temperament is generally that "sweet reasonableness" the lack of which we excuse in Borrow and in almost no one else. As to literary whim, it must not be supposed that this quality is necessarily and always the outcome of temperament. There are some authors of whom it may be said that the moment they take pen in hand they pass into their "literary mood," a mood that in their cases does not seem to be born of temperament, but to spring from some fantastic movement of the intellect. Sterne, for instance, the greatest of all masters of whim (not excluding Rabelais), passed when in the act of writing into a literary mood which, as "Yorick," he tried to live up to in his private life—tried in vain. With regard to Charles Lamb, his temperament, no doubt, was whimsical enough, and yet how many rich and rare passages in his writings are informed by a whim of a purely intellectual kind—a whim which could only have sprung from that delicious literary mood of his, engendered by much study of quaint old writers, p. 52
into which he passed when at his desk! But whatsoever is whimsical, whatsoever is eccentric and angular, in Borrow's writings is the natural, the inevitable growth of a nature more whimsical, more eccentric, more angular still.

That such a man should have had an extraordinary life-experience was to be expected. And an extraordinary life-experience Borrow's was, to be sure! This alone would lend an especial interest to Borrow's biography—the fact, we mean, of his life having been extraordinary. For in these days no lives, as a rule, are less adventurous, none, as a rule, less tinged with romance, than the lives of those who attain eminence in the world of letters. No doubt they nowadays move about from place to place a good deal; not a few of them may even be called travellers, or at least globe-trotters; but, alas! in globe-trotting who shall hope to meet with adventures of a more romantic kind than those connected with a railway collision or a storm at sea? And this was so in days that preceded ours. It was so with Scott, it was so with Dickens, it was so with even Dumas, who, chained to his desk for months and months at a stretch, could only be seen by his friends during the intervals of work. Nay, even with regard to the writing men of the far past, the more time a man gave to literary production the less time he had to drink the rich wine of life, to see the world, to study nature and nature's enigma man. p. 53

Perhaps one reason why we have almost no record of what the greatest of all writing men was doing in the world is that while his friends were elbowing the tide of life in the streets of London, or fighting in the Low Countries, or carousing at the Mermaid Tavern, or at the Apollo Saloon, he was filling every moment with work—work which enabled him, before he reached his fifty-second year, to build up that literary monument of his, that edifice which made the monuments of the others, his contemporaries, seem like the handiwork of pigmies. But as regards Borrow, student though he was, it is not as an author that we think of him; it is as the adventurer, it is as the great Romany Rye, who discovered the most interesting people in Europe, and as a brother vagabond lived with them—lived with them "on the accont of health, sweetness of the air, and for

enjoying the pleasure of Nature's life," to quote the "testimonial" of the prose-poet Sylvester Boswell.

Even by his personal appearance Borrow was marked off from his fellow-men. As a gipsy girl once remarked, "Nobody as ever see'd the white-headed Romany Rye ever forgot him." Standing considerably above six feet in height, he was built as perfectly as a Greek statue, and his practice of athletic exercises gave his every movement the easy elasticity of an athlete under training. As p. 54
to his countenance, "noble" is the only word that can be used to describe it. The silvery whiteness of the thick crop of hair seemed to add in a remarkable way to the beauty of the hairless face, but also it gave a strangeness to it, and this strangeness was intensified by a certain incongruity between the features (perfect Roman-Greek in type) and the Scandinavian complexion, luminous and sometimes rosy as an English girl's. An increased intensity was lent by the fair skin to the dark lustre of the eyes. What struck the observer, therefore, was not the beauty but the strangeness of the man's appearance. It was not this feature or that which struck the eye, it was the expression of the face as a whole. If it were possible to describe this expression in a word or two, it might, perhaps, be called a shy self-consciousness.

How did it come about, then, that a man shy, self-conscious, and sensitive to the last degree, became the Ulysses of the writing fraternity, wandering among strangers all over Europe, and consorting on intimate terms with that race who, more than all others, are repelled by shy self-consciousness—the gipsies? This, perhaps, is how the puzzle may be explained. When Borrow was talking to people in his own class of life there was always in his bearing a kind of shy, defiant p. 55
egotism. What Carlyle calls the "armed neutrality" of social intercourse oppressed him. He felt himself to be in the enemy's camp. In his eyes there was always a kind of watchfulness, as if he were taking stock of his interlocutor and weighing him against himself. He seemed to be observing what effect his words were having, and this attitude repelled people at first. But the moment he approached a gipsy on the heath, or a poor Jew in Houndsditch, or a homeless wanderer by the wayside, he became another man. He threw off the burden of restraint. The feeling of the "armed neutrality" was left behind, and he seemed to be at last enjoying the only social intercourse that could give him pleasure. This it was that enabled him to make friends so entirely with the gipsies. Notwithstanding what is called "Romany guile" (which is the growth of ages of oppression), the basis of the Romany character is a joyous frankness. Once let the isolating wall which shuts off the Romany from the "Gorgio" be broken through, and the communicativeness of the Romany temperament begins to show itself. The gipsies are extremely close observers; they were very quick to notice how different was Borrow's bearing towards themselves from his bearing towards people of his own race, and Borrow used to say that "old Mrs. Herne and Leonora were the only gipsies who suspected and disliked him." p. 56

Thus it came about that the gipsies and the wanderers generally were almost the only people in any country who saw the winsome side of Borrow. A truly winsome side he had. Yes, notwithstanding all that has been said about him to the contrary, Borrow was a most interesting and charming companion. We all have our angularities; we all have unpleasant facets of character when occasion offers for showing them. But there are some unfortunate people whose angularities are for ever chafing and irritating their friends. Borrow was one of these. It is very rarely indeed that one meets a friend or an acquaintance of Borrow's who speaks of him with the kindness he deserved. When a friend or an acquaintance relates an anecdote of him the asperity with which he does so is really remarkable and quite painful. It was—it must have been—far from Dr. Gordon Hake's wish to speak unkindly of his old friend who remained to the last deeply attached to him. And yet few things have done more to prejudice the public against Borrow than the Doctor's tale of Lavengro's outrage at Rougham Rookery, the residence of the banker Bevan, one of the kindest and most benevolent men in Suffolk.

This story, often told by Hake, appeared at last in print in his memoirs. Invited to dinner by Mr. p. 57
Bevan, Borrow accepted the invitation and, according to the anecdote, thus behaved: During dinner Mrs. Bevan, thinking to please him, said, "Oh, Mr. Borrow, I have read your books with so much pleasure!" On which Borrow exclaimed, "Pray what books do you mean, ma'am—do you mean my account books?" Then, rising from the table, he walked up and down among the servants during the whole dinner, and afterwards wandered about the rooms and passages till the carriage could be ordered for his return home. A monstrous proceeding truly, and not to be condoned by any circumstances. Yet some part of its violence may, perhaps, thus be explained. Borrow's loyalty to a friend was proverbial—until he and the friend quarrelled. A man who dared say an ungenerous word against a friend of Borrow's ran the risk of being knocked down. Borrow on this occasion had been driven half mad with rage—unreasoning, ignorant rage—against the Bury banking-house, because it had "struck the docket" against a friend of Borrow's, the heir to a considerable estate, who had got into difficulties. What Borrow yearned to do was, as he told the present writer, to cane the banker. He had, as far as his own reputation went, far better have done this and taken the consequences than have insulted the banker's wife—one of the most gentle, amiable, and unassuming ladies in Suffolk. Dr. Knapp speaks very sharply of p. 58
Miss Cobb's remarks upon Borrow, and certainly these remarks are made with a great deal too much acidity. But if the Borrovian is to lose temper with every one who girds at Borrow he will lead a not very comfortable life.

Dr. Knapp has no doubt whatever that 'Lavengro' is in the main an autobiography. We have none. The only question is how much *Dichtung* is mingled with the *Wahrheit*. Had it not been for the amazingly clumsy pieces of fiction which he threw into the narrative—such incidents as that of his meeting on the road the sailor son of the old apple-woman of London Bridge, and the

exaggerated description of the man sent to sleep by reading Wordsworth—few readers would have doubted the autobiographical nature of ‘Lavengro’ and ‘The Romany Rye.’ Such incidents as these shed an air of unreality over the whole.

All writers upon Borrow fall into the mistake of considering him to have been an East Anglian. They might as well call Charlotte Brontë a Yorkshirewoman as call Borrow an East Anglian. He was, of course, no more an East Anglian than an Irishman born in London is an Englishman. He had at bottom no East Anglian characteristics. He inherited nothing from Norfolk save his accent and his love of “leg of mutton and turnips.” Yet he is a striking illustration of the way in which the locality that has given birth to a man influences him throughout his life. The fact of Borrow’s p. 59
having been born in East Anglia was the result of accident. His father, a Cornishman of a good middle-class family, had been obliged, owing to a youthful escapade, to leave his native place and enlist as a common soldier. Afterwards he became a recruiting officer, and moved about from one part of Great Britain and Ireland to another. It so chanced that while staying at East Dereham, in Norfolk, he met and fell in love with a lady of French extraction. Not one drop of East Anglian blood was in the veins of Borrow’s father, and very little in the veins of his mother. Borrow’s ancestry was pure Cornish on one side, and on the other mainly French. But such was the sublime egotism of Borrow—perhaps we should have said such is the sublime egotism of human nature—that the fact of his having been born in East Anglia made him look upon that part of the world as the very hub of the universe.

There is, it must be confessed, something to us very agreeable in Dr. Knapp’s single-minded hero-worship. A scholar and a philologist himself, he seems to have devoted a large portion of his life to the study of Borrow—following in Lavengro’s footsteps from one country to another with unflagging enthusiasm. Now and again, undoubtedly, this hero-worship runs to excess: the faults of style and of method in Borrow’s writings are condoned or are passed by unobserved by Dr. p. 60
Knapp, while the most unanswerable strictures upon them by others are resented. For instance, at the end of the following extract from the report of the gentleman who read ‘Zincali’ for Mr. Murray, he appends a note of exclamation, as though he considers the admirable advice given to be eccentric or bad:—

> “The Dialogues are amongst the best parts of the book; but in several of them the tone of the speakers, of those especially who are in humble life, is too correct and elevated, and therefore out of character. This takes away from their effect. I think it would be very advisable that Mr. Borrow should go over them with reference to this point, simplifying a few of the terms of expression and introducing a few contractions—*don’ts*, *can’ts*, &c. This would improve them greatly.”

Now the truth is that Mr. Murray’s reader, whoever he was, [60] pointed out the one great blemish in *all* Borrow’s dramatic pictures of gipsy life, wheresoever the scene may be laid. Take his pictures of English gipsies. The reader has only to compare the dialogue between gipsies given in that photographic study of Romany life ‘In Gipsy Tents’ with the dialogues in ‘Lavengro’ to see how the illusion in Borrow’s narrative is disturbed by the uncolloquial vocabulary of the p. 61
speakers. After all allowance is made for the Romany’s love of high-sounding words, it considerably weakens our belief in Mr. and Mrs. Petulengro, Ursula, and the rest, to find them using complex sentences and bookish words which, even among English people, are rarely heard in conversation.

Dr. Knapp says emphatically that Borrow never created a character, and that the originals are easily recognizable to one who thoroughly knows the times and Borrow’s writings. This is true, no doubt, as regards people with whom he was brought into contact at Norwich, and, indeed, generally before the period of his gipsy wanderings. It must not be supposed, however, that such characters as the man who “touched” to avert the evil chance and the man who taught himself Chinese are in any sense portraits. They have so many of Borrow’s own peculiarities that they might rather be called portraits of himself. There was nothing that Borrow strove against with more energy than the curious impulse, which he seems to have shared with Dr. Johnson, to touch the objects along his path in order to save himself from the evil chance. He never conquered the superstition. In walking through Richmond Park he would step out of his way constantly to touch a tree, and he was offended if the friend he was with seemed to observe it. Many of the p. 62
peculiarities of the man who taught himself Chinese were also Borrow’s own.

“But what about Isopel Berners?” the reader will ask. “How much of truth and how much of fiction went to the presentation of this most interesting character?” Seeing that Dr. Knapp has at his command such an immense amount of material in manuscript, the reader will feel some disappointment at discovering that the book tells us nothing new about her. The character he names Isopel Berners was just the sort of girl in every way to attract Borrow, and if he had had the feeblest spark of the love-passion in his constitution one could almost imagine his falling in love with her. Yet even the portrait of Isopel is marred by Borrow’s impulse towards exaggeration. He must needs describe her as being taller than himself, and as he certainly stood six feet three Isopel would have been far better suited to sit by the side of Borrow’s friend the “Norfolk giant,” Hales, in the little London public-house where he latterly resided, than to become famous as a fighting woman who could conquer the Flaming Tinman. Few indeed have been the women who could stand up for long before a trained boxer, and these must needs be not too tall, and moreover they must have their breasts padded after the manner of a well-known gipsy girl who excelled in this once fashionable accomplishment. Even then a woman’s instinct p. 63
impels her to guard her chest more carefully than she guards her face, and this leads to disaster.

Altogether Borrow, by his wilful exaggeration, makes the reader a little sceptical about Isopel, who was really an East Anglian road-girl of the finest type, known to the Boswells, and remembered not many years ago. All that Dr. Knapp has derived from the documents in his possession concerning her is the following extraordinary passage from the original manuscript, which Borrow struck out of 'Lavengro.' He says:—

> "As to the remarkable character introduced into 'Lavengro' and 'Romany Rye' under the name of Isopel Berners, I have no light from the MSS. of George Borrow, save the following fragment, which perhaps I ought to have suppressed. I am sorry if it dispel any illusions:—
>
> "(*Loquitur Petulengro*) 'My mind at present rather inclines towards two wives. I have heard that King Pharaoh had two, if not more. Now, I think myself as good a man as he; and if he had more wives than one, why should not I, whose name is Petulengro?'
>
> "'But what would Mrs. Petulengro say?'
>
> "'Why, to tell you the truth, brother, it was she who first put the thought into my mind. She has always, you know, had strange notions in her head, gorgiko notions, I suppose we may call them, about gentility and the like, and reading and writing. Now, though she can neither read nor write herself, she thinks that she is lost among our people and p. 64
> that they are no society for her. So says she to me one day, "Pharaoh," says she, "I wish you would take another wife, that I might have a little pleasant company. As for these here, I am their betters." "I have no objection," said I; "who shall it be? Shall it be a Cooper or a Stanley?" "A Cooper or a Stanley!" said she, with a toss of her head, "I might as well keep my present company as theirs; none of your rubbish; let it be a *gorgie*, one that I can speak an idea with"—that was her word, I think. Now I am thinking that this here Bess of yours would be just the kind of person both for my wife and myself. My wife wants something gorgiko, something genteel. Now Bess is of blood gorgious; if you doubt it, look in her face, all full of *pawno ratter*, white blood, brother; and as for gentility, nobody can make exceptions to Bess's gentility, seeing she was born in the workhouse of Melford the Short, where she learned to read and write. She is no Irish woman, brother, but English pure, and her father was a farmer.
>
> "'So much as far as my wife is concerned. As for myself, I tell you what, brother, I want a strapper; one who can give and take. The Flying Tinker is abroad, vowing vengeance against us all. I know what the Flying Tinker is, so does Tawno. The Flying Tinker came to our camp. "Damn you all," says he, "I'll fight the best of you for nothing."—"Done!" says Tawno, "I'll be ready for you in a minute." So Tawno went into his tent and came out naked. "Here's at you," says Tawno. Brother, Tawno fought for p. 65
> two hours with the Flying Tinker, for two whole hours, and it's hard to say which had the best of it or the worst. I tell you what, brother, I think Tawno had the worst of it. Night came on. Tawno went into his tent to dress himself and the Flying Tinker went his way.
>
> "'Now suppose, brother, the Flying Tinker comes upon us when Tawno is away. Who is to fight the Flying Tinker when he says: "D---n you, I will fight the best of you"? Brother, I will fight the Flying Tinker for five pounds; but I couldn't for less. The Flying Tinker is a big man, and though he hasn't my science, he weighs five stone heavier. It wouldn't do for me to fight a man like that for nothing. But there's Bess, who can afford to fight the Flying Tinker at any time for what he's got, and that's three ha'pence. She can beat him, brother; I bet five pounds that Bess can beat the Flying Tinker. Now, if I marry Bess, I'm quite easy on his score. He comes to our camp and says his say. "I won't dirty my hands with you," says I, "at least not under five pounds; but here's Bess who'll fight you for nothing." I tell you what, brother, when he knows that Bess is Mrs. Pharaoh, he'll fight shy of our camp; he won't come near it, brother. He knows Bess don't like him, and what's more, that she can lick him. He'll let us alone; at least I think so. If he does come, I'll smoke my pipe whilst Bess is beating the Flying Tinker. Brother, I'm dry, and will now take a cup of ale.'"

Why did Borrow reject this passage? Was it owing to his dread of respectability's frowns?—or p. 66
was it not rather because he felt that here his exaggeration, his departure from the true in quest of the striking, did not recommend itself to his cooler judgment? For those who know anything of the gipsies would say at once that it would have been impossible for Mrs. Petulengro to make this suggestion; and that, even if she had made it, Mr. Petulengro would not have dared to broach it to any English road-girl, least of all to a girl like Isopel Berners. The passage, however, is the most interesting document that Dr. Knapp has published.

What may be called the Isopel Berners chapter of Borrow's life was soon to be followed by the "veiled period"—that is to say, the period between the point where ends 'The Romany Rye' and the point where the Bible Society engages Borrow.

Dr. Knapp's mind seems a good deal exercised concerning this period. Borrow having chosen to draw the veil over that period, no one has any right to raise it—or, rather, perhaps no one would have had any right to do so had not Borrow himself thrown such a needless mystery around it. In considering any matter in connexion with Borrow it is always necessary to take into account the secretiveness of his disposition, and also his passion for posing. He had a child's fondness for the

p. 67

wonderful. It is through his own love of mystification that students like Dr. Knapp must needs pry into these matters—must needs ask why Borrow drew the veil over seven years—must needs ask whether during the "veiled period" he led a life of squalid misery, compared with which his sojourn with Isopel Berners in Mumpers' Dingle was luxury, or whether he was really travelling, as he pretended to have been, over the world.

By yielding to his instinct as a born showman he excites a curiosity which would otherwise be unjustifiable. Even if Dr. Knapp had been able to approach Borrow's stepdaughter—which he seems not to have been able to do—it is pretty certain that she could have told him nothing of that mysterious seven years. For about this subject the people to whom Borrow seems to have been most reticent were his wife and her daughter. Indeed, it was not until after his wife's death that he would allude to this period even to his most intimate friends. One of the very few people to whom he did latterly talk with anything like frankness about this period in his life—Dr. Gordon Hake—is dead; and perhaps there is not more than about one other person now living who had anything of his confidence.

With regard to this veiled period, people who read the idyllic pictures in 'Lavengro' and 'The Romany Rye' of the life of a gipsy gentleman working as a hedge-smith in the dingle or by the roadside seem to forget that Borrow was then working not for amusement, but for bread, and they forget how scant the bread must have been that could be bought for the odd sixpence or the few coppers that he was able to earn. To those, however, who do not forget this it needs no revelation from documents, and none from any surviving friend, to come to the conclusion that as Borrow was mainly living in England during these seven years (continuing for a considerable time his life of a wanderer, and afterwards living as an obscure literary struggler in Norwich), his life was during this period one of privation, disappointment, and gloom. It was for him to decide what he would give to the public and what he would withhold.

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The concluding chapter of Dr. Knapp's book is not only pathetic—it is painful. In the summer of 1874 Borrow left London, bade adieu to Mr. Murray and a few friends, and returned to Oulton—to die. On the 26th of July, 1881, he was found dead in his home at Oulton, in his seventy-ninth year.

II. DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI, 1828–1882.

p. 69

I.

At Birchington-on-Sea one of the most rarely gifted men of our time has just died [April 9th, 1882] after a lingering illness. During the time that his 'Ballads and Sonnets' was passing through the press last autumn his health began to give way, and he left London for Cumberland. A stay of a few weeks in the Vale of St. John, however, did nothing to improve his health, and he returned much shattered. After a time a numbness in the left arm excited fear of paralysis, and he became dangerously ill. It is probable, indeed, that nothing but the skill and unwearied attention of Mr. John Marshall saved his life then, as it had done upon several previous occasions. Such of his friends as were then in London—W. B. Scott, Burne Jones, Leyland, F. Shields, Mr. Dunn, and others—feeling the greatest alarm, showed him every affectionate attention, and spared no effort to preserve a life so precious and so beloved. Mr. Seddon having placed at his disposal West Cliff Bungalow, Birchington-on-Sea, he went thither, accompanied by his mother and sister and Mr. Hall Caine, about nine weeks since, but received no benefit from the change, and, gradually sinking from a complication of disorders, he died on Sunday last at 10 P.M.

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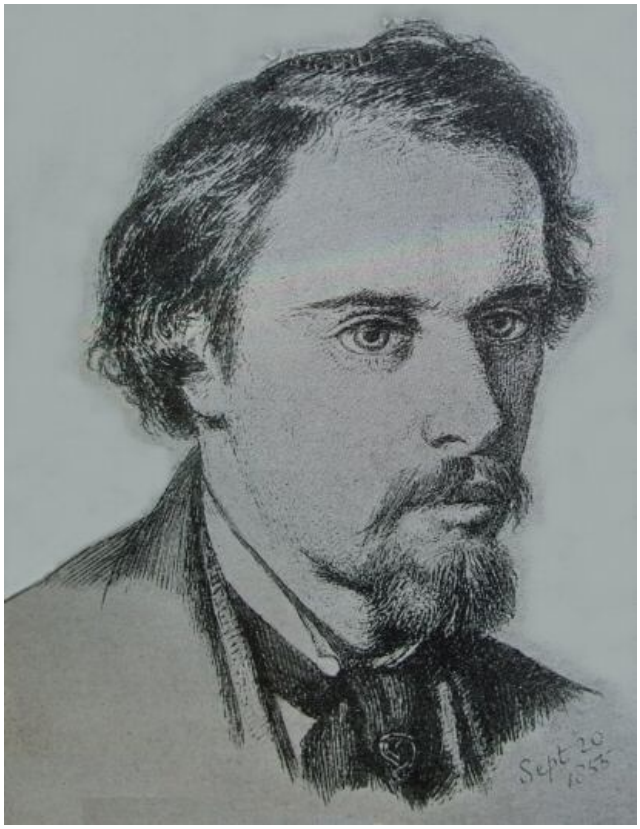

Were I even competent to enter upon the discussion of Rossetti's gifts as a poet and as a painter, it would not be possible to do so here and at this moment. That the quality of romantic imagination informs with more vitality his work than it can be said to inform the work of any of his contemporaries was recognized at first by the few, and is now (judging from the great popularity of his last volume of poetry) being recognized by the many. And the same, I think, may be said of his painting. Those who had the privilege of a personal acquaintance with him knew how "of imagination all compact" he was. Imagination, indeed, was at once his blessing and his bane. To see too vividly—to love too intensely—to suffer and enjoy too acutely—is the doom, no doubt, of all those "lost wanderers from Arden" who, according to the Rosicrucian story, sing the world's songs; and to Rossetti this applies more, perhaps, than to most poets. And when we consider that the one quality in all poetry which really gives it an endurance outlasting the generation of its birth is neither music nor colour, nor even intellectual substance, but the clearness of the seeing; the living breath of imagination—the very qualities, in short, for which such poems as 'Sister Helen' and 'Rose Mary' are so conspicuous—we are driven to the conclusion that Rossetti's poetry has a long and enduring future before it. p. 71

A life more devoted to literature and art than his it is impossible to imagine. Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti was born at 38, Charlotte Street, Portland Place, London, on the 12th of May, 1828. He was the first son and second child of Gabriele Rossetti, the patriotic poet, who, born at Vasto in the Abruzzi, settled in Naples, and took an active part in extorting from the Neapolitan king Ferdinand I. the constitution granted in 1820, which constitution being traitorously cancelled by the king in 1821, Rossetti had to escape for his life to Malta with various other persecuted constitutionalists. From Malta Gabriele Rossetti went to England about 1823, where he married in 1826 Frances Polidori, daughter of Alfieri's secretary and sister of Byron's Dr. Polidori. He became Professor of Italian in King's College, London, became also prominent as a commentator on Dante, and died in April, 1854. His children, four in number—Maria Francesca, Dante Gabriel, William Michael, and Christina Georgina—all turned to literature or to art, or to both, and all became famous. There can, indeed, be no doubt that the Rossetti family will hold a position quite unique in the literary and artistic annals of our time. p. 72

Young Rossetti was first sent to the private school of the Rev. Mr. Paul in Foley Street, Portland Place, where he remained, however, for only three quarters of a year, from the autumn of 1835 to the summer of 1836. He next went to King's College School in the autumn of 1836, where he remained till the summer of 1843, having reached the fourth class, then conducted by the Rev. Mr. Framley.

Having from early childhood shown a strong propensity for drawing and painting, which had thus been always regarded as his future profession, he now left school for ever and received no more school learning. In Latin he was already fairly proficient for his age; French he knew well; he had spoken Italian from childhood, and had some German lessons about 1844–5. On leaving school he went at once to the Art Academy of Cary (previously called Sass's) near Bedford Square, and thence obtained admission to the Royal Academy Antique School in 1844 or 1845. To the Royal Academy Life School he never went, and he was a somewhat negligent art student, but always regarded as one who had a future before him.

In 1849 Rossetti exhibited 'The Girlhood of the Virgin' in the so-called Free Exhibition or Portland Gallery. The artist who had perhaps the strongest influence upon Rossetti's early tastes p. 73

was Ford Madox Brown, who, however, refused from the first to join the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood on the ground that coteries had in modern art no proper function. Rossetti was deeply impressed with the power and designing faculty displayed by Madox Brown's cartoons exhibited in Westminster Hall. When Rossetti began serious work as a painter he thought of Madox Brown as the one man from whom he would willingly receive practical guidance, and wrote to him at random. From this time Madox Brown became his intimate friend and artistic monitor.

In painting, however, Rossetti was during this time exercising only half his genius. From his childhood it became evident that he was a poet. At the age of five he wrote a sort of play called 'The Slave,' which, as may be imagined, showed no noteworthy characteristic save precocity. This was followed by the poem called 'Sir Hugh Heron,' which was written about 1844, and some translations of German poetry. 'The Blessed Damozel' and 'Sister Helen' were produced in their original form so early as 1846 or 1847. The latter of these has undergone more modifications than any other first-class poem of our time. To take even the new edition of the 'Poems' which appeared last year [1881], the stanzas introducing the wife of the luckless hero appealing to the sorceress for mercy are so important in the glamour they shed back over the stanzas that have gone before, that their introduction may almost be characterized as a rewriting of every previous line. p. 74

The translations from the early Italian poets also began as far back as 1845 or 1846, and may have been mainly completed by 1849. Rossetti's gifts as a translator were, no doubt, of the highest. And this arose from his deep sympathy with literature as a medium of human expression: he could enter into the temperaments of other writers, and by sympathy criticize the literary form from the author's own inner standpoint, supposing always that there was a certain racial kinship with the author. Many who write well themselves have less sympathy with the expressional forms adopted by other writers than is displayed by men who have neither the impulse nor the power to write themselves. But this sympathy betrayed him sometimes into a free rendering of locutions such as a translator should be chary of indulging in. Materials for a volume accumulated slowly, but all the important portions of the 'Poems' published in 1870 had been in existence some years before that date. The prose story of 'Hand and Soul' was also written as early as 1848 or 1849.

In the spring of 1860 he married Elizabeth Eleanor Siddall, who being very beautiful was constantly painted and drawn by him. She had one still-born child in 1861, and died in February, 1862. He felt her death very acutely, and for a time ceased to write or to take any interest in his own poetry. Like Prospero, indeed, he literally buried his wand, but for a time only. From this time to his death he continued to produce pictures, all of them showing, as far as technical skill goes, an unfaltering advance in his art. p. 75

Yet wonderful as was Rossetti as an artist and poet, he was still more wonderful, I think, as a man. The chief characteristic of his conversation was an incisiveness so perfect and clear as to have often the pleasurable surprise of wit. It is so well known that Rossetti has been for a long time the most retired man of genius of our day, and so many absurd causes for this retirement have been spoken of, that there is nothing indecorous in the true cause of it being made public by one who of late years has known more of him, perhaps, than has any other person. About 1868 the curse of the artistic and poetic temperament—insomnia—attacked him, and one of the most distressing effects of insomnia is a nervous shrinking from personal contact with any save a few intimate friends. This peculiar kind of nervousness may be aggravated by the use of sleeping draughts, and in his case was thus aggravated.

But, although Rossetti lived thus secluded, he did not lose the affectionate regard of the illustrious men with whom he started in his artistic life. Nor, assuredly, did he deserve to lose it, for no man ever lived, I think, who was so generous as he in sympathizing with other men's work, save only when the cruel fumes of chloral turned him against everything. And his sympathy was as wide as generous. It was only necessary to mention the name of Leighton or Millais or Madox Brown or Burne Jones or G. F. Watts, or, indeed, of any contemporary painter, to get from him a glowing disquisition upon the merits of each—a disquisition full of the subtlest distinctions, and illuminated by the brilliant lights of his matchless fancy. And it was the same in poetry. p. 76

But those who loved Rossetti (that is to say, those who knew him) can realize how difficult it is for me, a friend, to pursue just now such reminiscences as these.

II. p. 77

In his preface Mr. W. M. Rossetti says:—

> "I have not attempted to write a biographical account of my brother, nor to estimate the range or value of his powers and performances in fine art and in literature. I agree with those who think that a brother is not the proper person to undertake a work of this sort. An outsider can do it dispassionately, though with imperfect knowledge of the facts; a friend can do it with mastery, and without much undue bias; but a brother, however equitably he may address himself to the task, cannot perform it so as to secure the prompt and cordial assent of his readers."

These words will serve as a good example of the dignified modesty which is a characteristic of Mr. W. M. Rossetti's, and is one of the best features of this volume. [77] In these days of empty

pretence it is always refreshing to come upon a page written in the spirit of scholarly self-suppression which informs every line this patient and admirable critic writes. And as to the interesting question glanced at in the passage above quoted, though the contents of this volume will, no doubt, form valuable material for the future biography of Rossetti, we wonder whether p. 78
the time is even yet at hand when that biography, whether written by brother, by friend, or by outsider, is needed. That mysterious entity "the public," would, no doubt, like to get one; but we have always shared Rossetti's own opinion that a man of genius is no more the property of the "public" than is any private gentleman; and we have always felt with him that the prevalence in our time of the opposite opinion has fashioned so intolerable a yoke for the neck of any one who has had the misfortune to pass from the sweet paradise of obscurity into the vulgar purgatory of Fame, that it almost behoves a man of genius to avoid, if he can, passing into that purgatory at all.

Can any biography, by whomsoever written, be other than inchoate and illusory—nay, can it fail to be fraught with danger to the memory of the dead, with danger to the peace of the living, until years have fully calmed the air around the dead man's grave? So long as the man to be portrayed cannot be separated from his surroundings, so long as his portrait cannot be fully and honestly limned without peril to the peace of those among whom he moved—in a word, so long as there remains any throb of vitality in those delicate filaments of social life by which he was enlinked to those with whom he played his part—that brother, or that friend, or that outsider who shall attempt the portraiture must feel what heavy responsibilities are his—must not forget that with p. 79
him to trip is to sin against the head. And how shall he decide when the time has at last come for making the attempt? Before the incidents of a man's life can be exploited without any risk of mischief, how much time should elapse? "A month," say the publishers, each one of whom runs his own special "biographical series," and keeps his own special bevy of recording angels writing against time and against each other. "Thirty years," said one whose life-wisdom was so perfect as to be in a world like ours almost an adequate substitute for the morality he lacked—Talleyrand.

Of all forms of literary art biography demands from the artist not only the greatest courage, but also the happiest combination of the highest gifts. To succeed in painting the portrait of Achilles or of Priam, of Hamlet or of Othello, may be difficult, but is it as difficult as to succeed in painting the portrait of Browning or Rossetti? Surely not. In the one case an intense dramatic imagination is needed, and nothing more. If Homer's Achaian and Trojan heroes were falsely limned, not they, but Homer's art, would suffer the injury. If for the purposes of art the poet unduly exalted this one or unduly abased that—if he misread one incident in the mythical life of Achilles, and another in the mythical life of Hector—he did wrong to his art undoubtedly, but p. 80
none to the memory of a dead man, and none to the peace of a living one. But with him who would paint the portrait of Browning or Rossetti how different is the case! Although he requires the poet's vision before he can paint a living picture of his subject, the task he has set himself to do is something more than artistic: before everything else it is fiduciary.

A trustee whose trust fund is biographical truth, he has, after collecting and marshalling all the facts that come to his hand, to decide what is truth as indicated by those generalized facts. But having done this, he has to decide what is the proper time for giving the world the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—what is the proper time? In the biographer's relation to the dead man on the one-hand and to the public on the other should he be so unhappy as to forget that time is of the very "essence of the contract"—should he forget that so inwoven is human life that truth spoken at the wrong moment may be a greater mischief-worker than error—he may, if conscientious, have to remember that forgetfulness of his during the remainder of his days. He who thinks that truth may not be sometimes as mischievous as a pestilence knows but little of this mysterious and wonderful net of human life. But if this is so with regard to truth, how much more is it so with regard to mere matter of fact? Fact-worship, document-worship, is p. 81
at once the crowning folly and the crowning vice of our time. To mistake a fact for a truth, and to give the world that; to throw facts about and documents about heedless of the mischief they may work—wronging the dead and wronging the living—this is actually paraded as a virtue in these days.

Here is a case in point. Down to the very last moment of his life Rossetti's feeling towards his great contemporary Tennyson was that of the deepest admiration, and yet what says the documentary evidence as given to the world by Rossetti's brother? It shows that Rossetti used an extremely unpleasant phrase concerning a letter from Tennyson acknowledging the receipt of Rossetti's first volume of poems in 1870. Those who have heard Tennyson speak of Rossetti know that to use this phrase in relation to any letter of his dealing with Rossetti's poetry was to misunderstand it. Yet here are the unpleasant words of a hasty mood, "rather shabby," in print. And why? Because the public has become so demoralized that its feast of facts, its feast of documents it must have, come what will. But even supposing that the public had any rights whatsoever in regard to a man of genius, which we deny, what are letters as indications of a man's character? Of all modes of expression is not the epistolary mode that in which man's instinct for using language "to disguise his thought" is most likely to exercise itself? There is p. 82
likely to be far more deep sincerity in a sonnet than in a letter. It is no exaggeration to say that the common courtesies of life demand a certain amount of what is called "blarney" in a letter—especially in an eminent man's letter—which would ruin a sonnet. And this must be steadily borne in mind at a time like ours, when private letters are bought and sold like any other article of merchandise, not only immediately after a man's death, but during his lifetime.

With regard to literary men, their letters in former times were simply artistic compositions; hence as indications of character they must be judged by the same canons as literary essays would be judged. In both cases the writer had full space and full time to qualify his statements of opinion; in both cases he was without excuse for throwing out anything heedlessly. Not only in Walpole's case and Gray's, but also in Charles Lamb's, we apply the same rules of criticism to the letters as we apply to the published utterances that appeared in the writer's lifetime. But now, when letters are just the hurried expression of the moment, when ill-considered things—often rash things—are said which either in literary compositions or in conversation would have been, if said at all, greatly qualified—the greatest injustice that can be done to a writer is to print his p. 83
letters indiscriminately. Especially is this the case with Rossetti. All who knew him speak of him as being a superb critic, and a superb critic he was. But his printed letters show nothing of the kind. On literary subjects they are often full of over-statement and of biased judgment. Here is the explanation: in conversation he had a way of perpetrating a brilliant critical paradox for the very purpose of qualifying it, turning it about, colouring it by the lights of his wonderful fancy, until at last it became something quite different from the original paradox, and full of truth and wisdom. But when such a paradox went off in a letter, there it remained unqualified; and they who, not having known him, scoff at his friends who claim for him the honours of a great critic, seem to scoff with reason.

No one was more conscious of the treachery of letters than was Rossetti himself. Comparatively late in his life he realized what all eminent men would do well to realize, that owing to the degradation of public taste, which cries out for more personal gossip and still more every day, the time has fully come when every man of mark must consider the rights of his friends—when it behoves every man who has had the misfortune to pass into fame to burn all letters; and he began the holocaust that duty to friendship demanded of him. But the work of reading through p. 84
such a correspondence as his in order to see what letters must be preserved from the burning took more time and more patience than he had contemplated, and the destruction did not progress further than to include the letters of the early sixties. Business letters it was, of course, necessary to preserve, and very properly it is from these that Mr. W. M. Rossetti has mainly quoted.

The volume is divided into two parts: first, documents relating to the production of certain of Rossetti's pictures and poems; and second, a prose paraphrase of 'The House of Life.'

The documents consist of abstracts of and extracts from such portions of Rossetti's correspondence as have fallen into his brother's hands as executor. Dealing as they necessarily do with those complications of prices and those involved commissions for which Rossetti's artistic career was remarkable, there is a commercial air about the first portion of the book which some will think out of harmony with their conception of the painter, about whom there used to be such a mysterious interest until much writing about him had brought him into the light of common day. In future years a summary so accurate and so judicious as this will seem better worth making than it, perhaps, seems at the present moment; for Mr. W. M. Rossetti's love of facts is accompanied by an equally strong love of making an honest statement of facts—a tabulated p. 85
statement, if possible; and no one writing of Rossetti need hesitate about following his brother to the last letter and to the last figure.

To be precise and perspicuous is, he hints in his preface, better than to be graphic and entertaining; and we entirely agree with him, especially when the subject discussed is Rossetti, about whom so many fancies that are neither precise nor perspicuous are current. Still, to read about this picture being offered to one buyer and that to another, and rejected or accepted at a greatly reduced price after much chaffering, is not, we will confess, exhilarating reading to those to whom Rossetti's pictures are also poems. It does not conduce to the happiness of his admirers to think of such works being produced under such prosaic conditions. One buyer—a most worthy man, to be sure, and a true friend of Rossetti's, but full of that British superstition about the saving grace of clothes which is so wonderful a revelation to the pensive foreigner—had to be humoured in his craze against the nude. After having painted a beautiful partly-draped Gretchen (which, we may remark in passing, had no relation, as Mr. W. M. Rossetti supposes, to the Marguerite alluded to in a letter to Mr. Graham in 1870) from a new model whose characteristics were a superb bosom and arms, he, Rossetti, was obliged to consent to conceal the best portions of the picture under drapery.

That this was a matter of great and peculiar vexation to him may be supposed when it is p. 86
remembered that unequalled as had been his good fortune in finding fine face-models (ladies of position and culture, and often of extraordinary beauty), he had in the matter of figure-models been most unlucky. And this, added to his slight knowledge of anatomy, made all his nude pictures undesirable save those few painted from the beautiful girl who stood for 'The Spirit of the Rainbow' and 'Forced Music.' What his work from the nude suffered from this is incalculable, as may be seen in the crayon called 'Ligeia Siren,' a naked siren playing on a kind of lute, which Rossetti described as "certainly one of his best things." The beauty and value of a crayon which for weird poetry—especially in the eyes—must be among Rossetti's masterpieces are ruined by the drawing of the breasts.

The most interesting feature of the book, however, is not that which deals with the prices Rossetti got for his pictures, but that which tells the reader the place where and the conditions under which they were painted; and no portion of the book is more interesting than that which relates to the work done at Kelmscott:—

> "At the beginning of this year 1874 Rossetti was again occupied with the picture which he had commenced in the preceding spring, entitled, 'The Bower Maiden'—a girl in a room with a pot of marigolds and a black cat. It was painted from 'little Annie' (a cottage-girl and house assistant at Kelmscott), and it 'goes on' (to quote the words of one of his letters) 'like a house on fire. This is the only kind of picture one ought to do —just copying the materials, and no more: all others are too much trouble.' It is not difficult to understand that the painter of a 'Proserpine' and a 'Ghirlandata' would occasionally feel the luxury of a mood intellectually lazy, and would be minded to give voice to it—as in this instance—in terms wilfully extreme; keeping his mental eye none the less steadily directed to a 'Roman Widow' or a 'Blessed Damozel' in the near future. As a matter of fact, my brother painted very few things, at any stage of his career, as mere representations of reality, unimbued by some inventive or ideal meaning: in the rare instances when he did so, he naturally felt an indolent comfort, and made no scruple of putting the feeling into words—highly suitable for being taken *cum grano salis*. Nothing was more alien from his nature or habit than 'tall talk' of any kind about his aims, aspirations, or performances. It was into his work—not into his utterances about his work—that he infused the higher and deeper elements of his spirit. 'The Bower Maiden' was finished early in February, and sold to Mr. Graham for 682*l.*, after it had been offered to Mr. Leyland at a rather higher figure, and declined. It has also passed under the names of 'Fleurs de Marie,' 'Marigolds,' and 'The Gardener's Daughter.' After 'The Bower Maiden' had been disposed of, other work was taken up—more especially 'The Roman Widow,' bearing the alternative title of 'Dîs Manibus,' which was in an advanced stage by the month of May, and was completed in June or July. It was finished with little or no glazing. The Roman widow is a lady still youthful, in a grey fawn-tinted drapery, with a musical instrument in each hand; she is in the sepulchral chamber of her husband, whose stone urn appears in the background. I possess the antique urn which my brother procured, and which he used for the painting. For graceful simplicity, and for depth of earnest but not strained sentiment, he never, I think, exceeded 'The Roman Widow.' The two instruments seem to repeat the two mottoes on the urn, 'Ave Domine—Vale Domine.' The head was painted from Miss Wilding, already mentioned; but it seems to me partly associated with the type of Mrs. Stillman's face as well. There are many roses in this picture—both wild and garden roses; they kept the artist waiting a little after the work was otherwise finished. 'I really think it looks well,' he wrote on one occasion; 'its fair luminous colour seems to melt into the gold frame (which has only just come) like a part of it.' He feared that the picture might be 'too severe and tragic' for some tastes; but could add (not, perhaps, with undue confidence), 'I don't think Géricault or Régnault would have quite scorned it.'"

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The magnificent design here alluded to, 'Dîs Manibus,' entirely suggested by the urn, which had somewhat come into his possession (probably through Howell), and also 'The Bower Maiden,' suggested by his accidentally seeing a pretty cottage-child lifting some marigolds to a shelf, formed part of the superb work produced by Rossetti during his long retirement at Kelmscott Manor—that period never before recorded, which has at this very moment been brought into prominence by his friend Dr. Hake's sonnet-sequence 'The New Day,' just published. As far as literary and artistic work goes, it was, perhaps, the richest period of his life; and that it was also one of the happiest is clear not only from his own words, but also from the following testimony of Dr. Hake, who saw much of him there:—

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> O, happy days with him who once so loved us!
> We loved as brothers, with a single heart,
> The man whose iris-woven pictures moved us
> From nature to her blazoned shadow—Art.
> How often did we trace the nestling Thames
> From humblest waters on his course of might,
> Down where the weir the bursting current stems—
> There sat till evening grew to balmy night,
> Veiling the weir whose roar recalled the Strand
> Where we had listened to the wave-lipped sea,
> That seemed to utter plaudits while we planned
> Triumphal labours of the day to be.

It was at Kelmscott, in the famous tapestried room, that besides painting the 'Proserpine,' 'The Roman Widow,' &c., he wrote many of his later poems, including 'Rose Mary.'

Considering how deep is Mr. W. M. Rossetti's affection for his brother's memory, and how great is his admiration for his brother's work, it is remarkable how judicial is his mind when writing about him. This is what he says about the much discussed 'Venus Astarte':—

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> "Into the 'Venus Astarte' he had put his utmost intensity of thinking, feeling, and method—he had aimed to make it equally strong in abstract sentiment and in physical grandeur—an ideal of the mystery of beauty, offering a sort of combined quintessence of what he had endeavoured in earlier years to embody in the two several types of 'Sibylla Palmifera' and 'Lilith,' or (as he ultimately named them in the respective sonnets) 'Soul's Beauty' and 'Body's Beauty.' It may be well to remark that, by the time when he completed the 'Venus Astarte,' or 'Astarte Syriaca,' he had got into a more

> austere feeling than of old with regard to colour and chiaroscuro; and the charm of the picture has, I am aware, been less, to many critics and spectators of the work, than he would have deemed to be its due, as compared with some of his other performances of more obvious and ostensible attraction."

Though Mr. W. M. Rossetti is right in saying that it was not till the beginning of 1877 that this remarkable picture was brought to a conclusion, the main portions were done during that long sojourn at Bognor in 1876–7, which those who have written about Rossetti have hitherto left unrecorded. Having fallen into ill health after his return to London from Kelmscott, he was advised to go to the seaside, and a large house at Bognor was finally selected. No doubt one p. 91
reason why the preference was given to Bognor was the fact that Blake's cottage at Felpham was close by, for businesslike and unbusiness-like qualities were strangely mingled in Rossetti's temperament, and it was generally some sentiment or unpractical fancy of this kind that brought about Rossetti's final decision upon anything. Blake's name was with him still a word to charm with, and he was surprised to find, on the first pilgrimage of himself and his friends to the cottage, that scarcely a person in the neighbourhood knew what Blake it was that "the Londoners" were inquiring about.

To the secluded house at Bognor—a house so surrounded by trees and shrubs that the murmur of the waves mingling with the whispers of the leaves seemed at one moment the sea's voice, and at another the voice of the earth—Rossetti took not only the cartoon of the 'Astarte Syriaca,' but also the most peculiar of all his pictures, 'The Blessed Damozel,' which had long lain in an incomplete state. But it was not much painting that he did at Bognor. From a cause he tried in vain to understand, and tried in vain to conquer, his thoughts ran upon poetry, and refused to fix themselves upon art. Partly this might have been owing to the fact that now, comparatively late in life, he to whom, as his brother well says, "such words as *sea*, *ship*, and *boat* were generic p. 92
terms admitting of little specific and still less of any individual and detailed distinction," awoke to the fascination that the sea sooner or later exercises upon all truly romantic souls. For deep as is the poetry of the inland woods, the Spirit of Romance, if there at all, is there in hiding. In order for that Spirit to come forth and take captive the soul something else is wanted; howsoever thick and green the trees—howsoever bright and winding the streams—a magical glimmer of sea-light far or near must shine through the branches as they wave.

That this should be a new experience to so fine a poet as Rossetti was no doubt strange, but so it chanced to be. He whose talk at Kelmscott had been of 'Blessed Damozels' and 'Roman Widows' and the like, talked now of the wanderings of Ulysses, of 'The Ancient Mariner,' of 'Sir Patrick Spens,' and even of 'Arthur Gordon Pym' and 'Allan Gordon.' And on hearing a friend recite some tentative verses on a great naval battle, he looked about for sea subjects too; and it was now, and not later, as is generally supposed, that he really thought of the subject of 'The White Ship,' a subject apparently so alien from his genius. Every evening he used to take walks on the beach for miles and miles, delighted with a beauty that before had had no charms for him. Still, the 'Astarte Syriaca' did progress, though slowly, and became the masterpiece that Mr. W. M. p. 93
Rossetti sets so high among his brother's work.

> "From Bognor my brother returned to his house in Cheyne Walk; and in the summer he paid a visit to two of his kindest and most considerate friends, Lord and Lady Mount-Temple, at their seat of Broadlands in Hampshire. He executed there a portrait in chalks of Lady Mount-Temple. He went on also with the picture of 'The Blessed Damozel.' For the head of an infant angel which appears in the front of this picture he made drawings from two children—one being the baby of the Rev. H. C. Hawtrey, and the other a workhouse infant. The former sketch was presented to the parents of the child and the latter to Lady Mount-Temple; and the head with its wings, was painted on to the canvas at Broadlands."

Mr. W. M. Rossetti omits to mention that the landscape which forms the predella to 'The Blessed Damozel,' a river winding in a peculiarly tortuous course through the cedars and other wide-spread trees of an English park, was taken from the scenery of Broadlands—that fairyland of soft beauty which lived in his memory as it must needs live in the memory of every one who has once known it. But the wonder is that such a mass of solid material has been compressed into so small a space.

Mr. W. M. Rossetti's paraphrase of 'The House of Life'—done with so much admiration of his p. 94
brother's genius and affection for his memory—touches upon a question relating to poetic art which has been raised before—raised in connexion with prose renderings of Homer, Sophocles, and Dante: Are poetry and prose so closely related in method that one can ever be adequately turned into the other? Schiller no doubt wrote his dramas in prose and then turned them into rhetorical verse; but then there are those who affirm that Schiller's rhetorical verse is scarcely poetry. The importance of the question will be seen when we call to mind that if such a transmutation of form were possible, translations of poetry would be possible; for though, owing to the tyrannous demands of form, the verse of one language can never be translated into the verse of another, it can always be rendered in the prose of another, only it then ceases to be poetry.

That the intellectual, and even to some extent the emotional, substance of a poem can be seized and covered by a prose translation is seen in Prof. Jebb's rendering of the 'Œdipus Rex'; but, as we have before remarked, the fundamental difference between imaginative prose and poetry is that, while the one must be informed with intellectual life and emotional life, the other has to be

informed with both these kinds of life, and with another life beyond these—rhythmic life. Now, if we wished to show that rhythmic life is in poetry the most important of all, our example would, p. 95
we think, be Mr. W. M. Rossetti's prose paraphrase of his brother's sonnets. The obstacles against the adequate turning of poetry into prose can be best understood by considering the obstacles against the adequate turning of prose into poetry. Prose notes tracing out the course of the future poem may, no doubt, be made, and usefully made, by the poet (as Wordsworth said in an admirable letter to Gillies), unless, indeed, the notes form too elaborate an attempt at a full prose expression of the subject-matter, in which case, so soon as the poet tries to rise on his winged words, his wingless words are likely to act as a dead weight. For this reason, when Wordsworth said that the prose notes should be brief, he might almost as well have gone on to say that in expression they should be slovenly. This at least may be said, that the moment the language of the prose note is so "adequate" and rich that it seems to be what Wordsworth would call the natural "incarnation of the thought," the poet's imagination, if it escapes at all from the chains of the prose expression, escapes with great difficulty. An instance of this occurred in Rossetti's own experience.

During one of those seaside rambles alluded to above, while he was watching with some friends the billows tumbling in beneath the wintry moon, some one, perhaps Rossetti himself, directed p. 96
attention to the peculiar effect of the moon's disc reflected in the white surf, and compared it to fire in snow. Rossetti, struck with the picturesqueness of the comparison, made there and then an elaborate prose note of it in one of the diminutive pocket-books that he was in the habit of carrying in the capacious pocket of his waistcoat. Years afterwards—shortly before his death, in fact—when he came to write 'The King's Tragedy,' remembering this note, he thought he could find an excellent place for it in the scene where the king meets the Spae wife on the seashore and listens to her prophecies of doom. But he was at once confronted by this obstacle: so elaborately had the image of the moon reflected in the surf been rendered in the prose note—so entirely did the prose matter seem to be the inevitable and the final incarnation of the thought—that it appeared impossible to escape from it into the movement and the diction proper to poetry. It was only after much labour—a labour greater than he had given to all the previous stanzas combined—that he succeeded in freeing himself from the fetters of the prose, and in painting the picture in these words:—

> That eve was clenched for a boding storm
> 'Neath a toilsome moon half seen;
> The cloud stooped low and the surf rose high;
> And where there was a line of sky,
> Wild wings loomed dark between.
>
> * * * *
>
> 'Twas then the moon sailed clear of the rack p. 97
> On high on her hollow dome;
> And still as aloft with hoary crest
> Each clamorous wave rang home,
> Like fire in snow the moonlight blazed
> Amid the champing foam.

And the remark was then made to him with regard to Coleridge's 'Wanderings of Cain,' that it is not unlikely the matchless fragment given in Coleridge's poems might have passed nearer towards completion, or at least towards the completion of the first part, had it not been for those elaborate and beautiful prose notes which he has left behind.

And if the attempt to turn prose into poetry is hopeless, the attempt to turn poetry into prose is no less so, and for a like reason—that of the immense difficulty of passing from the movement natural to one mood into the movement natural to another. And this criticism applies especially to the poetry of Rossetti, which produces so many of its best effects by means not of logical statement, but of the music and suggestive richness of rhythmical language. That Rossetti did on some occasions, when told that his sonnets were unintelligible, talk about making such a paraphrase himself is indisputable, because Mr. Fairfax Murray say that he heard him say so. But indisputable also is many another saying of Rossetti's, equally ill-considered and equally impracticable. That he ever seriously thought of doing so is most unlikely.

III. p. 98

In his memoir of his brother, Mr. William Michael Rossetti thus makes mention of a ballad left by the poet which still remains unpublished:—

> "It [the ballad] is most fully worthy of publication, but has not been included in Rossetti's 'Collected Works,' because he gave the MS. to his devoted friend Mr. Theodore Watts, with whom alone now rests the decision of presenting it or not to the public."

And he afterwards mentions certain sonnets on the Sphinx, also in my possession.

With the most generous intentions my dear and loyal friend William Rossetti has here brought me into trouble.

Naturally such an announcement as the above has excited great curiosity among admirers of Rossetti, and I am frequently receiving letters—some of them cordial enough, but others far from cordial—asking, or rather demanding, to know the reason why important poems of Rossetti's have for so long a period been withheld from the public. In order to explain the delay I must first give two extracts from Mr. Hall Caine's picturesque 'Recollections of Rossetti,' published in 1882:—

> "The end was drawing near, and we all knew the fact. Rossetti had actually taken to poetical composition afresh, and had written a facetious ballad (conceived years before), of the length of 'The White Ship,' called 'Jan Van Hunks,' embodying an eccentric story of a Dutchman's wager to smoke against the devil. This was to appear in a miscellany of stories and poems by himself and Mr. Theodore Watts, a project which had been a favourite one of his for some years, and in which he now, in his last moments, took a revived interest, strange and strong." p. 99
>
> "On Wednesday morning, April 5th, I went into the bedroom to which he had for some days been confined, and wrote out to his dictation two sonnets which he had composed on a design of his called 'The Sphinx,' and which he wished to give, together with the drawing and the ballad before described, to Mr. Watts for publication in the volume just mentioned. On the Thursday morning I found his utterance thick, and his speech from that cause hardly intelligible."

As the facts in connexion with this project exhibit, with a force that not all the words of all his detractors can withstand, the splendid generosity of the poet's nature, I only wish that I had made them public years ago, Rossetti (whose power of taking interest in a friend's work Mr. Joseph Knight has commented upon) had for years been urging me to publish certain writings of mine with which he was familiar, and for years I had declined to do so—declined for two simple reasons: first, though I liked writing for its own sake—indulged in it, indeed, as a delightful luxury—to enter formally the literary arena, and to go through that struggle which, as he himself used to say, "had never yet brought comfort to any poet, but only sorrow," had never been an ambition of mine; and, secondly, I was only too conscious how biased must the judgment be of a man whose affections were so strong as his when brought to bear upon the work of a friend. p. 100

In order at last to achieve an end upon which he had set his heart, he proposed that he and I should jointly produce the volume to which Mr. Hall Caine refers, and that he should enrich it with reproductions of certain drawings of his, including the 'Sphinx' (now or lately in the possession of Mr. William Rossetti) and crayons and pencil drawings in my own possession illustrating poems of mine—those drawings, I mean, from that new model chosen by me whose head Leighton said must be the loveliest ever drawn, who sat for 'The Spirit of the Rainbow,' and that other design which William Sharp christened 'Forced Music.'

In order to conquer my most natural reluctance to see a name so unknown as mine upon a title-page side by side with a name so illustrious as his, he (or else it was his generous sister Christina, I forget which) italianized the words Walter Theodore Watts into "Gualtiero Teodoro Gualtieri"—a name, I may add in passing, which appears as an inscription on one at least of the valuable Christmas presents he made me, a rare old Venetian Boccaccio. My portion of the book was already in existence, but that which was to have been the main feature of the volume, a ballad of Rossetti's to be called 'Michael Scott's Wooing' (which had no relation to early designs of his bearing that name), hung fire for this reason: the story upon which the ballad was to have been based was discovered to be not an old legend adapted and varied by the Romanies, as I had supposed when I gave it to him, but simply the Ettrick Shepherd's novelette 'Mary Burnet'; and the project then rested in abeyance until that last illness at Birchington painted so graphically and pathetically by Mr. Hall Caine. p. 101

For some reason quite inscrutable to the late John Marshall, who attended him, and to all of us, this old idea seized upon his brain; so much so, indeed, that Marshall hailed it as a good omen, and advised us to foster it, which we did with excellent results, as will be seen by referring to the very last entry in his mother's touching diary as lately printed by Mr. W. M. Rossetti: "March 28, Tuesday. Mr. Watts came down. Gabriel rallied marvellously."

Though the ballad, in Rossetti's own writing, has ever since remained in my possession, as have also the two sonnets in the MS. of another friend who has since, I am delighted to know, achieved fame for himself, no one who enjoyed the intimate friendship of Rossetti need be told that his death took from me all heart to publish. p. 102

Time, however, is the suzerain before whom every king, even Sorrow himself, bows at last. The rights of Rossetti's admirers can no longer be set at nought, and I am making arrangements to publish within the present year 'Jan Van Hunks' and the 'Sphinx Sonnets,' the former of which will show a new and, I think, unexpected side of Rossetti's genius.

IV. p. 103

It is a sweet and comforting thought for every poet that, whether or not the public cares during his life to read his verses, it will after his death care very much to read his letters to his mistress, to his wife, to his relatives, to his friends, to his butcher, and to his baker. And some letters are by that same public held to be more precious than others. If, for instance, it has chanced that during the poet's life he, like Rossetti, had to borrow thirty shillings from a friend, that is a

circumstance of especial piquancy. The public likes—or rather it demands—to know all about that borrowed cash. Hence it behoves the properly equipped editor who understands his duty to see that not one allusion to it in the poet's correspondence is omitted. If he can also show what caused the poet to borrow those thirty shillings—if he can by learned annotations show whether the friend in question lent the sum willingly or unwillingly, conveniently or inconveniently—if he can show whether the loan was ever repaid, and if repaid when—he will be a happy editor indeed. Then he will find a large and a grateful public to whom the mood in which the poet sat down to write 'The Blessed Damosel' is of far less interest than the mood in which he borrowed thirty shillings. p. 104

We do not charge the editor of this volume [104] with exhibiting unusual want of taste. On the whole, he is less irritating to the poetical student than those who have laboured in kindred "fields of literature." Indeed, we do not so much blame the editors of such books as we blame the public, whose coarse and vulgar mouth is always agape for such pabulum. The writer of this review possesses an old circulating-library copy of a book containing some letters of Coleridge. One page, and one only, is greatly disfigured by thumb marks. It is the page on which appears, not some precious hint as to the conclusion of 'Christabel,' but a domestic missive of Coleridge's ordering broad beans for dinner.

If, then, the name of those readers who take an interest in broad beans is legion compared with the name of those who take an interest in 'Kubla Khan,' is not the wise editor he who gives all due attention to the poet's favourite vegetable? Those who will read with avidity Rossetti's allusion to his wife's confinement in the letter in which he tells Allingham that "the child had been dead for two or three weeks" will laugh to scorn the above remarks, and as they are in the majority the laugh is with them. p. 105

The editor of this volume laments that Allingham's letters to Rossetti are beyond all editorial reach. But who has any right to ask for Allingham's private letters? Rossetti, who was strongly against the printing of private letters, had the wholesome practice of burning all his correspondence. This he did at periodical holocausts—memorable occasions when the coruscations of the poet's wit made the sparks from the burning paper seem pale and dull. He died away from home, or not a scrap of correspondence would have been left for the publishers. Although the "public" acknowledges no duties towards the man of literary or artistic genius, but would shrug up its shoulders or look with dismay at being asked to give five pounds in order to keep a poet from the workhouse, the moment a man of genius becomes famous the public becomes aware of certain rights in relation to him. Strangely enough, these rights are recognized more fully in the literary arena than anywhere else, and among them the chief appears to be that of reading an author's private letters. One advantage—and surely it is a very great one—that the "writing man" has over the man of action is this: that, while the portrait of the man of action has to be painted, if painted at all, by the biographer, the writing man paints his own portrait for himself. p. 106

And as, in a deep sense, every biographer is an inventor like the novelist—as from the few facts that he is able to collect he infers a character—the man of action, after he is dead, is at the mercy of every man who writes his life. Is not Alexander the Great no less a figment of another man's brain than Achilles, or Macbeth, or Mr. Pickwick? But a poet, howsoever artistic, howsoever dramatic, the form of his work may be, is occupied during his entire life in painting his own portrait. And if it were not for the intervention of the biographer, the reminiscence writer, or the collector of letters for publication, our conception of every poet would be true and vital according to the intelligence with which we read his work.

This is why, of all English poets, Shakespeare is the only one whom we do thoroughly know—unless perhaps we should except his two great contemporaries Webster and Marlowe. Steevens did not exaggerate when he said that all we know of Shakespeare's outer life is that he was born at Stratford-on-Avon, married, went to London, wrote plays, returned to Stratford, and died. Owing to this circumstance (and a blessed one it is) we can commune with the greatest of our poets undisturbed. We know how Shakespeare confronted every circumstance of this mysterious life—we know how he confronted the universe, seen and unseen—we know to what degree and in what way he felt every human passion. There is no careless letter of his, thank God! to give us a wrong impression of him. There is no record of his talk at the Mermaid, the Falcon, or the Apollo saloon to make readers doubtful whether his printed utterances truly represent him. Would that the will had been destroyed! then there would have been no talk about the "second-best bed" and the like insane gabble. Suppose, by ill chance, a batch of his letters to Anna Hathaway had been preserved. Is it not a moral certainty that they would have been as uninteresting as the letters of Coleridge, of Scott, of Dickens, of Rossetti, and of Rossetti's sister? p. 107

Why are the letters of literary men apt to be so much less interesting than those of other people? Is it not because, the desire to express oneself in written language being universal, this desire with people outside the literary class has to be of necessity exercised in letter-writing? Is it not because, where there is no other means of written expression than that of letter-writing, the best efforts of the letter-writer are put into the composition, as the best writing of the essayist is put into his essays? However this might have been in Shakespeare's time, the half-conscious, graphic power of the non-literary letter-writer of to-day is often so great that if all the letters written in English by non-literary people, especially letters written from abroad to friends at home in the year 1897, [108] were collected, and the cream of them extracted and printed, the book would be the most precious literary production that the year has to show. If, on the other p. 108

hand, the letters of contemporary English authors were collected in the same way, the poverty of the book would be amazing as compared with the published writings of the authors. With regard to Dickens's letters, indeed, the contrast between their commonplace, colourless style and the pregnancy of his printed utterances makes the writing in his books seem forced, artificial, unnatural.

The same may in some degree be said of such letters of Rossetti as have hitherto been published. The charming family letters printed by his brother come, of course, under a different category. With the exception of these, perhaps the letters in the volume before us are the most interesting Rossetti letters that have been printed. Yet it is astonishing how feeble they are in giving the reader an idea of Rossetti himself. And this gives birth to the question: Do we not live at a time when the unfairness of printing an author's letters is greater than it ever was before? To go no further back than the early years of the present century, the facilities of locomotion were then p. 109
few, friends were necessarily separated from each other by long intervals of time, and letters were a very important part of intercommunication, consequently it might be expected that even among authors a good deal of a man's individuality would be expressed in his letters. But even at that period it was only a quite exceptional nature like that of Charles Lamb which adequately expressed itself in epistolary form. Keats's letters, no doubt, are full of good sense and good criticism, but taking them as a body, including the letters to Fanny Brawne, we think it were better if they had been totally destroyed. As to Byron's letters, they, of course, are admirable in style and full of literary life, but their very excellence shows that his natural mode of expression was brilliant, slashing prose. But if it was unfair to publish the letters of Coleridge and Keats, what shall we say of the publication of letters written by the authors of our own day, when, owing to an entire change in the conditions of life, no one dreams of putting into his letters anything of literary interest?

When Rossetti died he was, as regards the public, owing to his exclusiveness, much in the same position as Shakespeare has always been. The picture of Rossetti that lived in the public mind was that of a poet and painter of extraordinary imaginative intensity and magic, whose personality, as romantic as his work, influenced all who came in contact with him. He was, p. 110
indeed, the only romantic figure in the imagination of the literary and art world of his time. It seemed as if in his very name there was an unaccountable music. The present writer well remembers being at a dinner-party many years ago when the late Lord Leighton was talking in his usual delightful way. His conversation was specially attended to only by his interlocutor, until the name of Rossetti fell from his lips. Then the general murmur of tongues ceased. Everybody wanted to hear what was being said about the mysterious poet-painter. Thus matters stood when Rossetti died. Within forty-eight hours of his death the many-headed beast clamoured for its rights. Within forty-eight hours of his death there was a leading article in an important newspaper on the subject of his suspiciousness as the result of chloral-drinking. And from that moment the romance has been rubbed off the picture as effectually by many of those who have written about him as the bloom is fingered off of a clumsily gathered peach.

But the reader will say, "Truth is great, and must prevail. The picture of Rossetti that now exists in the public mind is the true one. The former picture was a lie." But here the reader will be much mistaken. The romantic picture which existed in the public mind during Rossetti's life was p. 111
the true one; the picture that now exists of him is false.

Does any one want to know what kind of a man was the painter of 'Dante's Dream' and the poet of 'The Blessed Damosel,' let him wipe out of his mind most of what has been written about him, let him forget if he can most of the Rossetti letters that have been published, and let him read the poet's poems and study the painter's pictures, and he will know Rossetti—not, indeed, so thoroughly as we know Shakespeare and Æschylus and Sophocles, but as intimately as it is possible to know any man whose biography is written only in his works.

It must be admitted, however, that for those who had a personal knowledge of Rossetti some of the letters in this volume will have an interest, owing to the evidence they afford of that authorial generosity which was one of his most beautiful characteristics. His disinterested appreciation of the work of his contemporaries sets him apart from all the other poets of his time and perhaps of any other time. To wax eloquent in praise of this and that illustrious name, and thus to claim a kind of kinship with it, is a very different thing from Rossetti's noble championship of a name, whether that of a friend or otherwise, which has never emerged from obscurity. It is perhaps inevitable and in the nature of things that most poets are too much absorbed in their own work to have time to interest themselves in the doings of their fellow-workers. p. 112

But, with regard to Rossetti, he could feel, and often did feel, as deep an interest in the work of another man as in his own. There was no trouble he would not take to aid a friend in gaining recognition. This it was more than anything else which endeared him to all his friends, and made them condone those faults of his which ever since his death have been so freely discussed. The editor of this volume quotes this sentence from Skelton's 'Table-Talk of Shirley':—

> "I have preserved a number of Rossetti's letters, and there is barely one, I think, which is not mainly devoted to warm commendation of obscure poets and painters—obscure at the time of writing, but of whom more than one has since become famous."

Nor was his interest in other men's work confined to that of his personal friends. His discovery of Browning's 'Pauline,' of Charles Wells, and of the poems of Ebenezer Jones may be cited as instances of this. Moreover, he was always looking out in magazines—some of them of the most

obscure kind—for good work. And if he was rewarded, as he sometimes was, by coming upon precious things that might otherwise have been lost, his heart was rejoiced.

One day, having turned into a coffee-house in Chancery Lane to get a cup of coffee, he came upon a number of *Reynolds's Miscellany*, and finding there a poem called 'A Lover's Pastime,' he saw at once its extraordinary beauty, and enclosed it in a letter to Allingham. In this case, however, he unfortunately did not make his usual efforts to discover the authorship of a poem that pleased him; and a pity it is, for the poem is one of the loveliest lyrics that have been written in modern times. We hope it will find a place in the next anthology of lyrical poetry. p. 113

Though his criticisms were not always sure and impeccable, he was of all critics the most independent of authority. Had he chanced to find in the poets' corner of *The Eatanswill Gazette* a lyric equal to the best of Shelley's, he would have recognized its merits at once and proclaimed them; and had he come across a lyric of Shelley's that had received unmerited applause, he would have recognized its demerits for himself, and proclaimed them with equal candour and fearlessness.

Again, certain passages in these letters will surprise the reader by throwing light upon a side of Rossetti's life and character which was only known to his intimate friends. Recluse as Rossetti came to be, he knew more of "London life" in the true sense of the word than did many of those who were supposed to know it well—diners-out like Browning, for instance, and Richard Doyle. That the author of 'The House of Life' knew London on the side that Dickens knew it better than any other poet of his time will no doubt surprise many a reader. His visits to Jamrach's mart for wild animals led him to explore the wonderful world, that so few people ever dream of, which lies around Ratcliffe Highway. He observed with the greatest zest the movements of the East-End swarm. Moreover, his passion for picking up "curios" and antique furniture made him familiar with quarters of London that he would otherwise have never known. And not Dickens himself had more of what may be called the "Haroun al Raschid passion" for wandering through a city's streets at night. It was this that kept him in touch on one side with men so unlike him as Brough and Sala. p. 114

In this volume there is a charming anecdote of his generosity to Brough's family, and Sala always spoke of him as "dear Dante Rossetti." The transpontine theatre, even the penny gaff of the New Cut, was not quite unfamiliar with the face of the poet-painter. Hence no man was a better judge than he of the low-life pictures of a writer like F. W. Robinson, whose descriptions of the street arab in 'Owen, a Waif,' &c., he would read aloud with a dramatic power astonishing to those who associated him exclusively with Dante, Beatrice, and mystical passion.

Frequently in these letters an allusion will puzzle the reader who does not know of Rossetti's love of nocturnal rambling, an allusion, however, which those who knew him will fully understand. Here is a sentence of the kind:— p. 115

> "As I haven't been outside my door for months in the daytime, I should not have had much opportunity of enjoying pastime and pleasaunces."

The editor quotes some graphic and interesting words from Mr. W. M. Rossetti which explain this passage.

In summer, as in winter, he rose very late in the day and made a breakfast, as he used to say, which was to keep him in fuel for something under twelve hours. He would then begin to paint, and scarcely leave his work till the daylight waned. Then he would dine, and afterwards start off for a walk through the London streets, which to him, as he used to say, put on a magical robe with the lighting of the gas lamps. After walking for miles through the streets, either with a friend or alone, loitering at the windows of such shops as still were open, he would turn into an oyster shop or late restaurant for supper. Here his frankness of bearing was quite irresistible with strangers whenever it pleased him to approach them, as he sometimes did. The most singular and bizarre incidents of his life occurred to him on these occasions—incidents which he would relate with a dramatic power that set him at the head of the *raconteurs* of his time. One of these *rencontres* in the Haymarket was of a quite extraordinary character. p. 116

In the latter years of his life, when he lived at Cheyne Walk, he would often not begin his perambulations until an hour before midnight. It will be a pity if some one who accompanied him in his nocturnal rambles—the most remarkable man of our time—does not furnish the world with reminiscences of them.

Another point of interest upon which these letters will throw light is that connected with his method of work. He himself, like Tennyson, used to say that those who are the most curious as to the way in which a poem was written are precisely those who have the least appreciation of the beauties of the poem itself. If this is true, the time in which we live is not remarkable, perhaps, for its appreciation of poetry. These letters, at any rate, will be appreciated, for the light that some of them throw upon Rossetti at work is remarkable. When a subject for a poem struck him, it was his way to make a prose note of it, then to cartoon it, then to leave it for a time, then to take it up again and read it to his friends, and then to finish it. In a letter to Allingham, dated July 18th, 1854, enclosing the first form of the sonnet called 'Lost on Both Sides'—which sonnet did not appear in print till 1881—Rossetti says: "My sonnets are not generally finished till I see them again after forgetting them; and this is only two days old. When between the first form of a sonnet and the second an interval of twenty-seven years elapses, no student of poetry can fail to compare one form with the other. p. 117

And so with regard to that poem which is, on the whole, Rossetti's masterpiece—'Sister Helen'—sent as early as 1854 to Mrs. Howitt for the German publication the *Düsseldorf Annual*; the changes in it are extremely interesting. Never did it appear in print without suffering some important variation. Sometimes, indeed, the change of a word or two in a line would entirely transfigure the stanza. As to the new stanzas added to the ballad just before Rossetti's death, these turned the ballad from a fine poem into a great one.

Equally striking are the changes in 'The Blessed Damosel.' But the most notable example of the surety of his hand in revising is seen in regard to a poem several times mentioned in this volume, called originally 'Bride's Chamber Talk.' It was begun as early as 'Jenny,' read by Allingham in 1860, but not printed till more than a quarter of a century later. The earliest form is still in existence in MS., and although some of the lines struck out are as poetry most lovely, the poem on the whole is better without them. It was a theory of Rossetti's, indeed, that the very riches of p. 118
the English language made it necessary for the poet who would achieve excellence to revise and manipulate his lines. And in support of this he would contrast the amazing passion for revision disclosed by Dr. Garnett's 'Relics of Shelley,' in which sometimes scarcely half a dozen of the original words are left on a page, with Scott's metrical narratives, which were sent to the printer in cantos as they were written, like one of the contemporary novels thrown off for the serials. The fact seems to be, however, that the poet's power of reaching, as Scott reached, his own ideal expression *per saltum*, or reaching it slowly and tentatively, is simply a matter of temperament. For whose verses are more loose-jointed than Byron's? whose diction is more commonplace than his? And yet this is what the greatest of Byron specialists, Mr John Murray, says in his extremely interesting remarks upon Byron's autograph:—

> "If we except Byron's dramatic pieces and 'Don Juan,' the first draft of Byron's longer poems formed but a nucleus of the work as it was printed. For example, 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers' grew out of the 'British Bards,' while 'The Giaour,' by constant additions to the manuscript, the proofs, and even to the work after publication, was expanded to nearly twice its original size. . . . When the inspiration was on him, the p. 119
> printer had to be kept at work the greater part of the night, and fresh 'copy' and fresh revises were crossing one another hour by hour."

The conclusion is that poets cannot be classified according to their methods of work, but only in relation to the result of those methods, and that our two great elaborators, Byron and Rossetti, may still be more unlike each other in essentials than are any other two nineteenth-century poets.

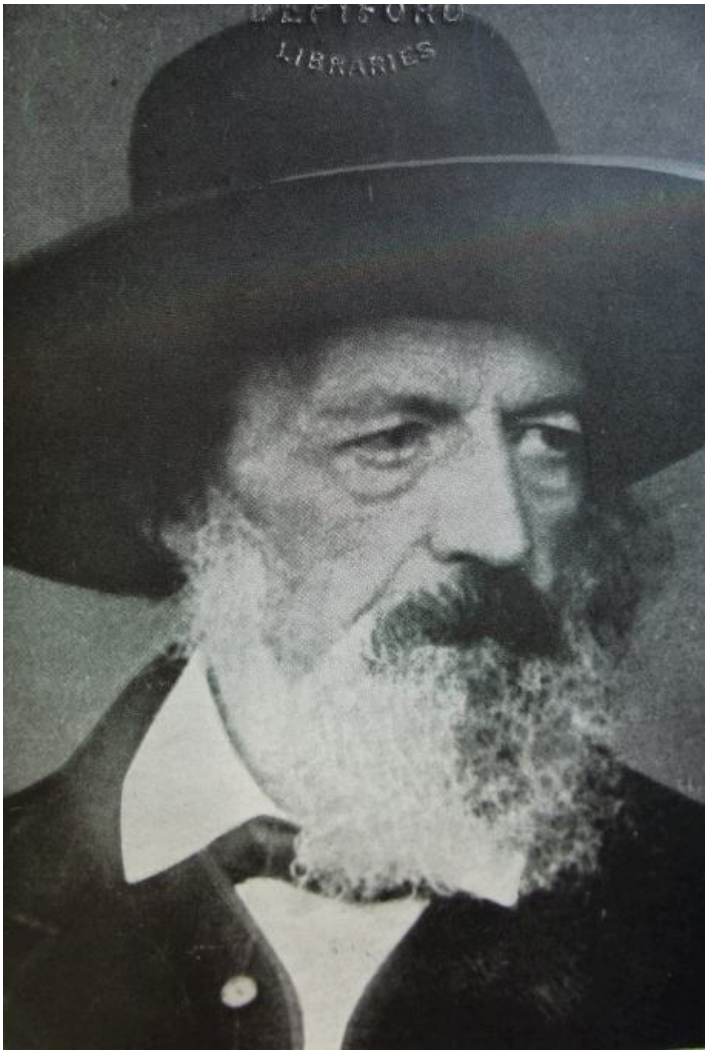
On the whole, we cannot help closing this book with kindly feelings towards the editor, inasmuch as it aids in the good work of restoring the true portrait of the man who has suffered more than any other from the mischievous malignity of foes and the more mischievous indiscretion of certain of his friends.

III. ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON. 1809–1892. p. 120

I.

Charles Lamb was so paralyzed, it is said, by Coleridge's death, that for weeks after that event, he was heard murmuring often to himself, "Coleridge is dead, Coleridge is dead." In such a mental condition at this moment is an entire country, I think. "Tennyson is dead! Tennyson is dead!" It will be some time before England's loss can really be expressed by any words so powerful in pathos and in sorrow as these. And if this is so with regard to English people generally, what of those few who knew the man, and knowing him, must needs love him—must needs love him above all others?—those, I mean, who, when speaking of him, used to talk not so much about the poetry as about the man who wrote it—those who now are saying, with a tremor of the voice, and a moistening of the eye:—

> There was none like him—none.



To say wherein lies the secret of the charm of anything that lives is mostly difficult. Especially is it so with regard to a man of poetic genius. All are agreed, for instance, that D. G. Rossetti possessed an immense charm. So he did, indeed. But who has been able to define that charm? I, too, knew Rossetti well, and loved him well. Sometimes, indeed, the egotism of a sorrowing memory makes me think that outside his own most affectionate and noble-tempered family, including that old friend in art at whose feet he sat as a boy, no man loved Rossetti so deeply and so lastingly as I did; unless, perhaps, it was the poor blind poet, Philip Marston, who, being so deeply stricken, needed to love and to be loved more sorely than I, to whom Fate has been kind. And yet I should find it difficult to say wherein lay the charm of Rossetti's chameleon-like personality. So with other men and women I could name. This is not so in regard to the great man now lying dead at Aldworth. Nothing is easier than to define the charm of Tennyson. p. 121

It lay in a great veracity of soul—in a simple-mindedness so childlike that, unless you had known him to be the undoubted author of his exquisitely artistic poems, you would have supposed that even the subtleties of poetic art must be foreign to a nature so devoid of all subtlety as his. "Homer," you would have said, "might have been such a man as this, for Homer worked in a language which is Poetry's very voice. But Tennyson works in a language which has to be moulded into harmony by a myriad subtleties of art. How can this great inspired child, who yet has the simple wisdom of Bragi, the poetry-smith of the Northern Olympus, be the delicate-fingered artist of 'The Princess,' 'The Palace of Art,' 'The Day-Dream,' and 'The Dream of Fair Women'?" p. 122

As deeply as some men feel that language was given to men to disguise their thoughts did Tennyson feel that language was given to *him* to declare his thoughts without disguise. He knew of but one justification for the thing he said, viz., that it was the thing he thought. *Arrière pensée* was with him impossible. But, it may be asked, when a man carries out-speaking to such a pass as this, is he not apt to become a somewhat troublesome and discordant thread in the complex web of modern society? No doubt any other man than Tennyson would have been so. But the honest ring in the voice—which, by-the-by, was strengthened and deepened by the old-fashioned Lincolnshire accent—softened and, to a great degree, neutralized the effect of the bluntness. Moreover, behind this uncompromising directness was apparent a noble and a splendid courtesy; for, above all things, Tennyson was a great and forthright English gentleman. As he stood at the porch at Aldworth, meeting a guest or bidding him good-bye—as he stood there, tall, far beyond the height of average men, his naturally fair skin showing dark and tanned by the sun and wind—as he stood there no one could mistake him for anything but a great gentleman, who was also much more. Up to the last a man of extraordinary presence, he showed, I think, the beauty of old age to a degree rarely seen. p. 123

A friend of his who, visiting him on his birthday, discovered him thus standing at the door to

welcome him, has described his unique appearance in words which are literally accurate at least: —

A poet should be limned in youth, they say,
  Or else in prime, with eyes and forehead beaming
  Of manhood's noon—the very body seeming
To lend the spirit wings to win the bay;
But here stands he whose noontide blooms for aye,
  Whose eyes, where past and future both are gleaming
  With lore beyond all youthful poets' dreaming,
Seem lit from shores of some far-glittering day.

Our master's prime is now—is ever now;
  Our star that wastes not in the wastes of night
  Holds Nature's dower undimmed in Time's despite;
Those eyes seem Wisdom's own beneath that brow,
Where every furrow Time hath dared to plough
  Shines a new bar of still diviner light.

This, then, was the secret of Tennyson's personal charm. And if the reader is sceptical as to its magnetic effect upon his friends, let me remind him of the amazing rarity of these great and guileless natures; let me remind him also that this world is comprised of two classes of people—
the bores, whose name is legion, and the interesting people, whose name is *not* legion—the p. 124
former being those whose natural instinct of self-protective mimicry impels them to move about among their fellows hiding their features behind a mask of convention, the latter being those who move about with uncovered faces just as Nature fashioned them. If guilelessness lends interest to a dullard, it is still more so with the really luminous souls. So infinite is the creative power of nature that she makes no two individuals alike. If we only had the power of inquiring into the matter, we should find not only that each individual creature that once inhabited one of the minute shells that go to the building of England's fortress walls of chalk was absolutely unlike all the others, but that even the poor microbe himself, who in these days is so maligned, is also very intensely an individual.

Some time ago the old discussion was revived in *The Athenæum* as to whether the nightingale's song was joyful or melancholy. And, perhaps, if the poems of the late James Thomson and the poems of Mr. Austin Dobson were recited by their authors to a congregation of nightingales, the question would at once be debated amongst them, "Is the note of the human songster joyful or melancholy?" The truth is that the humidity or the dryness of the atmosphere in the various habitats of the nightingale modifies so greatly the *timbre* of the voice that, while a nightingale
chorus at Fiesole may seem joyous, a nightingale chorus in the moist thickets along the banks of p. 125
the Ouse may seem melancholy. Nay, more, as I once told Tennyson at Aldworth, I, when a truant boy wandering along the banks of the Ouse (where six nightingales' nests have been found in the hedge of a single meadow), got so used to these matters that I had my own favourite individuals, and could easily distinguish one from another. That rich climacteric swell which is reached just before the "jug, jug, jug," varies amazingly, if the listener will only give the matter attention. And if this infinite variety of individualism is thus seen in the lower animals, what must it be in man?

There is, however, in the entire human race, a fatal instinct for marring itself. To break down the exterior signs of this variety of individualism in the race by mutual imitation, by all sorts of affectations, is the object not only of the civilization of the Western world, but of the very negroes on the Gaboon River. No wonder, then, that whensoever we meet, as at rarest interval we do meet, an individual who is able to preserve his personality as Nature meant it to live, we feel an attraction towards him such as is irresistible. Now I would challenge those who knew him to say whether they ever knew any other man so free from this great human infirmity as Tennyson. The
way in which his simplicity of nature would manifest itself was, in some instances, most p. 126
remarkable. Though, of course, he had his share of that egoism of the artist without which imaginative genius may become sterile, it seemed impossible for him to realize what a transcendent position he took among contemporary writers all over the world. "Poets," he once said to me, "have not had the advantage of being *born* to the purple." Up to the last he felt himself to be a poet at struggle more or less with the Wilsons and the Crokers who, in his youth, assailed him. I, and a very dear friend of his, a family connexion, tried in vain to make him see that when a poet had reached a position such as he had won, no criticism could injure him or benefit him one jot.

What has been called his exclusiveness is entirely mythical. He was the most hospitable of men. It was very rare, indeed, for him to part from a friend at his hall door, or at the railway station without urging him to return as soon as possible, and generally with the words, "Come whenever you like." The fact is, however, that for many years the strangest notions seem to have got abroad as to the claims of the public upon men of genius. There seems now to be scarcely any one who does not look upon every man who has passed into the purgatory of fame as his or her common property. The unlucky victim is to be pestered by letters upon every sort of foolish
subject, and to be hunted down in his walks and insulted by senseless adulation. Tennyson p. 127
resented this, and so did Rossetti, and so ought every man who has reached eminence and respects his own genius. Neither fame nor life itself is worth having on such terms as these.

One day, Tennyson when walking round his garden at Farringford, saw perched up in the trees

that surrounded it, two men who had been refused admittance at the gate—two men dressed like gentlemen. He very wisely gave the public to understand that his fame was not to be taken as an abrogation of his rights as a private English gentleman. For my part, whenever I hear any one railing against a man of eminence with whom he cannot possibly have been brought into contact, I know at once what it means: the railer has been writing an idle letter to the eminent one and received no reply.

Tennyson's knowledge of nature—nature in every aspect—was very great. His passion for "star-gazing" has often been commented upon by readers of his poetry. Since Dante no poet in any land has so loved the stars. He had an equal delight in watching the lightning; and I remember being at Aldworth once during a thunderstorm, when I was alarmed at the temerity with which he persisted, in spite of all remonstrances, in gazing at the blinding lightning. For moonlight effects he had a passion equally strong, and it is especially pathetic to those who know this to p. 128
remember that he passed away in the light he so loved—in a room where there was no artificial light—nothing to quicken the darkness but the light of the full moon (which somehow seems to shine more brightly at Aldworth than anywhere else in England); and that on the face of the poet, as he passed away, fell that radiance in which he so loved to bathe it when alive.

If it is as easy to describe the personal attraction of Tennyson as it is difficult to describe that of any one of his great contemporaries, we do not find the same relations existing between him and them as regards his place in the firmament of English poetry. In a country with a composite language such as ours, it may be affirmed with special emphasis, that there are two kinds of poetry; one appealing to the uncultivated masses, whose vocabulary is of the narrowest; the other appealing to the few who, partly by temperament, and partly by education, are sensitive to the true beauties of poetic art. While in the one case the appeal is made through a free and popular use of words, partly commonplace and partly steeped in that literary sentimentalism which in certain stages of an artificial society takes the place of the simple utterances of simple passion of earlier and simpler times; in the other case the appeal is made very largely through what Dante calls the "use of the sieve for noble words."

Of the one perhaps Byron is the type, the exemplars being such poets as those of the Mrs. p. 129
Hemans school in England, and of the Longfellow school in America. Of the other class of poets, the class typified by Milton, the most notable exemplars are Keats, Shelley, and Coleridge. Wordsworth partakes of the qualities of both classes. The methods of the first of these two groups are so cheap—they are so based on the wide severance between the popular taste and the poetic temper (which, though in earlier times it inspired the people, is now confined to the few)—that one may say of the first group that their success in finding and holding an audience is almost damnatory to them as poets. As compared with the poets of Greece, however, both groups may be said to have secured only a partial success in poetry; for not only Æschylus and Sophocles, but Homer too, are as satisfying in the matter of noble words as though they had never tried to win that popular success which was their goal. In this respect—as being, I mean, the compeer of the great poets of Greece—Shakespeare takes his peculiar place in English poetry. Of all poets he is the most popular, and yet in his use of the "sieve for noble words" his skill transcends that of even Milton, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. His felicities of diction in the great passages seem
little short of miraculous, and they are so many that it is easy to understand why he is so often p. 130
spoken of as being a kind of inspired improvisatore. That he was *not* an improvisatore, however, any one can see who will take the trouble to compare the first edition of 'Romeo and Juliet' with the received text, the first sketch of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' with the play as we now have it, and the 'Hamlet' of 1603 with the 'Hamlet' of 1604, and with the still further varied version of the play given by Heminge and Condell in the Folio of 1623. If we take into account, moreover, that it is only by the lucky chapter of accidents that we now possess the earlier forms of the three plays mentioned above, and that most likely the other plays were once in a like condition, we shall come to the conclusion that there was no more vigilant worker with Dante's sieve than Shakespeare. Next to Shakespeare in this great power of combining the forces of the two great classes of English poets, appealing both to the commonplace sense of a commonplace public and to the artistic sense of the few, stands, perhaps, Chaucer; but since Shakespeare's time no one has met with anything like Tennyson's success in effecting a reconciliation between popular and artistic sympathy with poetry in England.

The biography of such a poet, one who has had such an immense influence upon the literary
history of the entire Victorian epoch—indeed, upon the nineteenth century, for his work covers p. 131
two-thirds of the century—will be a work of incalculable importance. There is but one man who is fully equipped for such an undertaking, and fortunately that is his own son—a man of great ability, of admirable critical acumen, and of quite exceptional accomplishments. His son's filial affection was so precious to Tennyson that, although the poet's powers remained undimmed to the last day of his life, I do not believe that we should have had all the splendid work of the last ten years without his affectionate and unwearied aid.

II. p. 132

All emotion—that of communities as well as that of individuals—is largely governed by the laws of ebb and flow. It is immediately after a national mourning for the loss of a great man that a wave of reaction generally sets in. But the eagerness with which these volumes [132] have been awaited shows that Tennyson's hold upon the British public is as strong at this moment as it was on the day of his death. This very popularity of his, however, has sometimes been spoken of by critics as though it were an impeachment of him as a poet. "The English public is commonplace,"

they say, “and hence the commonplace in poetry suits it.” And no doubt this is true as a general saying, otherwise what would become of certain English poetasters who are such a joy to the many and such a source of laughter to the few? But a hardy critic would he be who should characterize Tennyson’s poetry as commonplace—that very poetry which, before it became popular, was decried because it was merely “poetry for poets.” Still that poetry so rich and so rare as his should find its way to the heart of a people like the English, who have “not sufficient poetic instinct in them to give birth to vernacular poetry,” is undoubtedly a striking fact. With regard to the mass of his work, he belonged to those poets whose appeal is as much through their mastery over the more subtle beauties of poetic art as through the heat of the poetic fire; and such as these must expect to share the fate of Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley. Every true poet must have an individual accent of his own—an accent which is, however, recognizable as another variation of that large utterance of the early gods common to all true poets in all tongues. Is it not, then, in the nature of things that, in England at least, “the fit though few” comprise the audience of such a poet until the voice of recognized Authority proclaims him? But Authority moves slowly in these matters; years have to pass before the music of the new voice can wind its way through the convolutions of the general ear—so many years, indeed, that unless the poet is blessed with the sublime self-esteem of Wordsworth he generally has to die in the belief that his is another name “written in water.” And was it always so? Yes, always. p. 133

England having, as we have said, no vernacular song, her poetry is entirely artistic, even such poetry as ‘The May Queen,’ ‘The Northern Farmer,’ and the idyls of William Barnes. And it would be strange indeed if, until Authority spoke out, the beauties of artistic poetry were ever apparent to the many. Is it supposable, for instance, that even the voice of Chaucer—is it supposable that even the voice of Shakspeare—would have succeeded in winning the contemporary ear had it not been for that great mass of legendary and romantic material which each of these found ready to his hand, waiting to be moulded into poetic form? The fate, however, of Moore’s poetical narratives (perhaps we might say of Byron’s too) shows that if any poetry is to last beyond the generation that produced it, there is needed not only the romantic material, but also the accent, new and true, of the old poetic voice. And these volumes show why in these late days, when the poet’s inheritance of romantic material seemed to have been exhausted, there appeared one poet to whom the English public gave an acceptance as wide almost as if he had written in the vernacular like Burns or Béranger. p. 134

It is long since any book has been so eagerly looked forward to as this. The main facts of Tennyson’s life have been matter of familiar knowledge for so many years that we do not propose to run over them here once more. Nor shall we fill the space at our command with the biographer’s interesting personal anecdotes. So fierce a light had been beating upon Aldworth and Farringford that the relations of the present Lord Tennyson to his father were pretty generally known. In the story of English poetry these relations held a place that was quite unique. What the biographer says about the poet’s sagacity, judgment, and good sense—especially what he says about his insight into the characters of those with whom he was brought into contact—will be challenged by no one who knew him. Still, the fact remains that Tennyson’s temperament was poetic entirely. And the more attention the poet pays to his art, the more unfitted does he become to pay attention to anything else. For in these days the mechanism of social life moves on grating wheels that need no little oiling if the poet is to bring out the very best that is within him. Not that all poets are equally vexed by the special infirmity of the poetic temperament. Poets like Wordsworth, for instance, are supported against the world by love of Nature and by that “divine arrogance” which is sometimes a characteristic of genius. Tennyson’s case shows that not even love of Nature and intimate communings with her are of use in giving a man peace when he has not Wordsworth’s temperament. No adverse criticism could disturb Wordsworth’s sublime self-complacency. p. 135

“Your father,” writes Jowett, with his usual wisdom, to Lord Tennyson, “was very sensitive, and had an honest hatred of being gossiped about. He called the malignant critics and chatterers ‘mosquitos.’ He never felt any pleasure at praise (except from his friends), but he felt a great pain at the injustice of censure. It never occurred to him that a new poet in the days of his youth was sure to provoke dangerous hostilities in the ‘genus irritabile vatum’ and in the old-fashioned public.” p. 136

It might almost be said, indeed, that had it not been for the ministrations, first of his beloved wife, and then of his sons, Tennyson’s life would have been one long warfare between the attitude of his splendid intellect towards the universe and the response of his nervous system to human criticism. From his very childhood he seems to have had that instinct for confronting the universe as a whole which, except in the case of Shakespeare, is not often seen among poets. Star-gazing and speculation as to the meaning of the stars and what was going on in them seem to have begun in his childhood. In his first Cambridge letter to his aunt, Mrs. Russell, written from No. 12, Rose Crescent, he says, “I am sitting owl-like and solitary in my room, nothing between me and the stars but a stratum of tiles.” And his son tells us of a story current in the family that Frederick, when an Eton schoolboy, was shy of going to a neighbouring dinner-party to which he had been invited. “Fred,” said his younger brother, “think of Herschel’s great star-patches, and you will soon get over all that.” He had Wordsworth’s passion, too, for communing with Nature alone. He was one of Nature’s elect who knew that even the company of a dear and intimate friend, howsoever close, is a disturbance of the delight that intercourse with her can afford to the true devotee. In a letter to his future wife, written from Mablethorpe in 1839, he says:— p. 137

> "I am not so able as in old years to commune *alone* with Nature . . . Dim mystic sympathies with tree and hill reaching far back into childhood, a known landskip is to me an old friend, that continually talks to me of my own youth and half-forgotten things, and indeed does more for me than many an old friend that I know. An old park is my delight, and I could tumble about it for ever."

Moreover, he was always speculating upon the mystery and the wonder of the human story. "The far future," he says in a letter to Miss Sellwood, written from High Beech in Epping Forest, "has been my world always." And yet so powerless is reason in that dire wrestle with temperament which most poets know, that with all these causes for despising criticism of his work, Tennyson was as sensitive to critical strictures as Wordsworth was indifferent. "He fancied," says his biographer, "that England was an unsympathetic atmosphere, and half resolved to live abroad in p. 138
Jersey, in the South of France, or in Italy. He was so far persuaded that the English people would never care for his poetry, that, had it not been for the intervention of his friends, he declared it not unlikely that after the death of Hallam he would not have continued to write." And again, in reference to the completion of 'The Sleeping Beauty,' his son says, "He warmed to his work because there had been a favourable review of him lately published in far-off Calcutta."

We dwell upon this weakness of Tennyson's—a weakness which, in view of his immense powers, was certainly a source of wonder to his friends—in order to show, once for all, that without the tender care of his son he could never in his later years have done the work he did. This it was which caused the relations between Tennyson and the writer of this admirable memoir to be those of brother with brother rather than of father with son. And those who have been eagerly looking forward to these volumes will not be disappointed. In writing the life of any man there are scores and scores of facts and documents, great and small, which only some person closely acquainted with him, either as relative or as friend, can bring into their true light; and this it is which makes documents so deceptive. Here is an instance of what we mean. In writing to Thompson, Spedding says of Tennyson on a certain occasion: "I could not get Alfred to Rydal p. 139
Mount. He would and would not (sulky one!), although Wordsworth was hospitably minded towards him." This remark would inevitably have been construed into another instance of that churlishness which is so often said (though quite erroneously) to have been one of Tennyson's infirmities. But when we read the following foot-note by the biographer, "He said he did not wish to intrude himself on the great man at Rydal," we accept the incident as another proof of that "humility" which the son alludes to in his preface as being one of his father's characteristics. And of such evidence that had not the poet's son written his biography the loss to literature would have been incalculable the book is full. Evidence of a fine intellect, a fine culture, and a sure judgment is afforded by every page—afforded as much by what is left unsaid as by what is said.

The biographer has invited a few of the poet's friends to furnish their impressions of him. These could not fail to be interesting; it is pleasant to know what impression Tennyson made upon men of such diverse characters as the Duke of Argyll, Jowett, Tyndall, Froude, and others. But so far as a vital portrait of the man is concerned they were not needed, so vigorously does the man live in the portrait painted by him who knew the poet best of all.

"For my own part," says the biographer, "I feel strongly that no biographer could so truly give p. 140
him as he gives himself in his own works; but this may be because, having lived my life with him, I see him in every word which he has written; and it is difficult for me so far to detach myself from the home circle as to pourtray him for others. There is also the impossibility of fathoming a great man's mind; his deeper thoughts are hardly ever revealed. He himself disliked the notion of a long, formal biography, for

> None can truly write his single day,
> And none can write it for him upon earth.

"However, he wished that, if I deemed it better, the incidents of his life should be given as shortly as might be without comment, but that my notes should be final and full enough to preclude the chance of further and unauthentic biographies.

"For those who cared to know about his literary history he wrote 'Merlin and the Gleam.' From his boyhood he had felt the magic of Merlin—that spirit of poetry—which bade him know his power and follow throughout his work a pure and high ideal, with a simple and single devotedness and a desire to ennoble the life of the world, and which helped him through doubts and difficulties to 'endure as seeing Him who is invisible.'

> Great the Master,
> And sweet the Magic,
> When over the valley,
> In early summers,
> Over the mountain, p. 141
> On human faces,
> And all around me,
> Moving to melody,
> Floated the Gleam.

"In his youth he sang of the brook flowing through his upland valley, of the 'ridged wolds' that rose above his home, of the mountain-glen and snowy summits of his early dreams, and of the

beings, heroes and fairies, with which his imaginary world was peopled. Then was heard the ‘croak of the raven,’ the harsh voice of those who were unsympathetic—

The light retreated,
The Landskip darken’d,
The melody deaden’d,
The Master whisper’d,
‘Follow the Gleam.’

“Still the inward voice told him not to be faint-hearted but to follow his ideal. And by the delight in his own romantic fancy, and by the harmonies of nature, ‘the warble of water,’ and ‘cataract music of falling torrents,’ the inspiration of the poet was renewed. His Eclogues and English Idyls followed, when he sang the songs of country life and the joys and griefs of country folk, which he knew through and through,

Innocent maidens,
Garrulous children,
Homestead and harvest,
Reaper and gleaner,
And rough-ruddy faces
Of lowly labour.

“By degrees, having learnt somewhat of the real philosophy of life and of humanity from his own experience, he rose to a melody ‘stronger and statelier.’ He celebrated the glory of ‘human love and of human heroism’ and of human thought, and began what he had already devised, his epic of King Arthur, ‘typifying above all things the life of man,’ wherein he had intended to represent some of the great religions of the world. He had purposed that this was to be the chief work of his manhood. Yet the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, and the consequent darkening of the whole world for him made him almost fail in this purpose; nor any longer for a while did he rejoice in the splendour of his spiritual visions, nor in the Gleam that had ‘waned to a wintry glimmer.’ p. 142

Clouds and darkness
Closed upon Camelot;
Arthur had vanish’d
I knew not whither,
The King who loved me,
And cannot die.

“Here my father united the two Arthurs, the Arthur of the Idylls and the Arthur ‘the man he held as half divine.’ He himself had fought with death, and had come out victorious to find ‘a stronger faith his own,’ and a hope for himself, for all those in sorrow and for universal human kind, that never forsook him through the future years.

And broader and brighter
The Gleam flying onward,
Wed to the melody,
Sang thro’ the world.

* * *

I saw, wherever
In passing it glanced upon
Hamlet or city,
That under the Crosses
The dead man’s garden, p. 143
The mortal hillock,
Would break into blossom;
And so to the land’s
Last limit I came.

“Up to the end he faced death with the same earnest and unfailing courage that he had always shown, but with an added sense of the awe and the mystery of the Infinite.

I can no longer,
But die rejoicing,
For thro’ the Magic
Of Him the Mighty,
Who taught me in childhood,
There on the border
Of boundless Ocean,
And all but in Heaven
Hovers the Gleam.

“That is the reading of the poet’s riddle as he gave it to me. He thought that ‘Merlin and the Gleam’ would probably be enough of biography for those friends who urged him to write about himself. However, this has not been their verdict, and I have tried to do what he said that I might

do."

There are many specialists in Tennysonian bibliography who take a pride (and a worthy pride) in their knowledge of the master's poems. But the knowledge of all of these specialists put together is not equal to that of him who writes this book. Not only is every line at his fingers' ends, but he knows, either from his own memory or from what his father has told him, where and when and why every line was written. He, however, shares, it is evident that dislike—rather let us say that passionate hatred—which his father, like so many other poets, had of that well-intentioned but vexing being whom Rossetti anathematized as the "literary resurrection man." Rossetti used to say that "of all signs that a man was devoid of poetic instinct and poetic feeling the impulse of the literary resurrectionist was the surest." Without going so far as this we may at least affirm that all poets writing in a language requiring, as English does, much manipulation before it can be moulded into perfect form must needs revise in the brain before the line is set down, or in manuscript, as Shelley did, or partly in manuscript and partly in type, as Coleridge did. But the rakers-up of the "chips of the workshop," to use Tennyson's own phrase, seem to have been specially irritating to him, because he belonged to those poets who cannot really revise and complete their work till they see it in type. "Poetry," he said, "looks better, more convincing in print." p. 144

"From the volume of 1832," says his son, "he omitted several stanzas of 'The Palace of Art' because he thought that the poem was too full. 'The artist is known by his self-limitation' was a favourite adage of his. He allowed me, however, to print some of them in my notes, otherwise I should have hesitated to quote without his leave lines that he had excised. He 'gave the people of his best,' and he usually wished that his best should remain without variorum readings, 'the chips of the workshop,' as he called them. The love of bibliomaniacs for first editions filled him with horror, for the first editions are obviously in many cases the worst editions, and once he said to me: 'Why do they treasure the rubbish I shot from my full-finish'd cantos?' p. 145

> νηπιοι ουδε ισασιν οσω πλέον ημισυ παντος.

For himself many passages in Wordsworth and other poets have been entirely spoilt by the modern habit of giving every various reading along with the text. Besides, in his case, very often what is published as the latest edition has been the original version in his first manuscript, so that there is no possibility of really tracing the history of what may seem to be a new word or a new passage. 'For instance,' he said, 'in "Maud" a line in the first edition was 'I will bury myself in *my books*, and the Devil may pipe to his own,' which was afterwards altered to 'I will bury myself *in myself*, &c.': this was highly commended by the critics as an improvement on the *original* reading—but it was actually in the first MS. draft of the poem."

Again, it is important to get a statement by one entitled to speak with authority as to what Tennyson did and what he did not believe upon religious matters. He had in 'In Memoriam' and other poems touched with a hand so strong and sometimes so daring upon the teaching of modern science, and yet he had spoken always so reverently of what modern civilization reverences, that the most opposite lessons were read from his utterances. To one thinker it would seem that Tennyson had thrown himself boldly upon the very foremost wave of scientific thought. To another it would seem that Wordsworth (although, living and writing when he did, before the birth of the new cosmogony, he believed himself to be still in trammels of the old) was by temperament far more in touch with the new cosmogony than was Tennyson, who studied evolution more ardently than any poet since Lucretius. While Wordsworth, notwithstanding a conventional phrase here and there, had an apprehension of Nature without the ever-present idea of the Power behind her, Spinosa himself was not so "God-intoxicated" a man as Tennyson. His son sets the question at rest in the following pregnant words:— p. 146

"Assuredly Religion was no nebulous abstraction for him. He consistently emphasized his own belief in what he called the Eternal Truths; in an Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and All-loving God, Who has revealed Himself through the human attribute of the highest self-sacrificing love; in the freedom of the human will; and in the immortality of the soul. But he asserted that 'Nothing worthy proving can be proven,' and that even as to the great laws which are the basis of Science, 'We have but faith, we cannot know.' He dreaded the dogmatism of sects and rash definitions of God. 'I dare hardly name His Name,' he would say, and accordingly he named Him in 'The Ancient Sage' the 'Nameless.' 'But take away belief in the self-conscious personality of God,' he said, 'and you take away the backbone of the world.' 'On God and God-like men we build our trust.' A week before his death I was sitting by him, and he talked long of the Personality and of the Love of God, 'That God, Whose eyes consider the poor,' 'Who catereth, even for the sparrow.' 'I should,' he said, 'infinitely rather feel myself the most miserable wretch on the face of the earth with a God above, than the highest type of man standing alone.' He would allow that God is unknowable in 'his whole world-self, and all-in-all,' and that, therefore, there was some force in the objection made by some people to the word 'Personality' as being 'anthropomorphic,' and that, perhaps 'Self-consciousness' or 'Mind' might be clearer to them: but at the same time he insisted that, although 'man is like a thing of nought' in 'the boundless plan,' our highest view of God must be more or less anthropomorphic: and that 'Personality,' as far as our intelligence goes, is the widest definition and includes 'Mind,' 'Self-consciousness,' 'Will,' 'Love,' and other attributes of the Real, the Supreme, 'the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, Whose name is Holy.'" p. 147

And then Lord Tennyson quotes a manuscript note of Jowett's in which he says:—

"Alfred Tennyson thinks it ridiculous to believe in a God and deny his consciousness, and was amused at some one who said of him that he had versified Hegelianism." p. 148

He notes also an anecdote of Edward Fitzgerald's which speaks of a week with Tennyson, when the poet, picking up a daisy, and looking closely at its crimson-tipped leaves, said, "Does not this look like a thinking Artificer, one who wishes to ornament?"

Here is a paragraph which will be read with the deepest interest, not only by every lover of poetry, but by every man whose heart has been rung by the most terrible of all bereavements—the loss of a beloved friend. Close as the tie of blood relationship undoubtedly is, it is based upon convention as much as upon nature. It may exist and flourish vigorously when there is little or no community of taste or of thought:—

"It may be as well to say here that all the letters from my father to Arthur Hallam were destroyed by his father after Arthur's death: a great loss, as these particular letters probably revealed his inner self more truly than anything outside his poems."

We confess to belonging to those who always read with a twinge of remorse the private letters of a man in print. But if there is a case where one must needs long to see the letters between two intimate friends, it is that of Tennyson and Arthur Hallam. They would have been only second in interest to Shakespeare's letters to that mysterious "Mr. W. H." whose identity now can never be traced. For, notwithstanding all that has recently been said, and ably said, to the contrary, the man to whom many of the sonnets were addressed was he whom "T. T." addresses as "Mr. W. H." p. 149

But for an intimacy to be so strong as that which existed between Tennyson and Arthur H. Hallam there must be a kinship of soul so close and so rare that the tie of blood relationship seems weak beside it. It is then that friendship may sometimes pass from a sentiment into a passion. It did so in the case of Shakespeare and his mysterious friend, as the sonnets in question make manifest; but we are not aware that there is in English literature any other instance of friendship as a passion until we get to 'In Memoriam.' So profound was the effect of Hallam's death upon Tennyson that it was the origin, his son tells us, of 'The Two Voices; or, Thoughts of a Suicide.' What was the secret of Hallam's influence over Tennyson can never be guessed from anything that he has left behind either in prose or verse. But besides the creative genius of the artist there is that genius of personality which is irresistible. With a very large gift of this kind of genius Arthur Hallam seems to have been endowed.

"In the letters from Arthur Hallam's friends," says Lord Tennyson, "there was a rare unanimity of opinion about his worth. Milnes, writing to his father, says that he had a 'very deep respect' for Hallam, and that Thirlwall, in after years the great bishop, for whom Hallam and my father had a profound affection, was 'actually captivated by him.' When at Cambridge with Hallam he had written: 'He is the only man here of my own standing before whom I bow in conscious inferiority in everything.' Alford writes: 'Hallam was a man of wonderful mind and knowledge on all subjects, hardly credible at his age. . . . I long ago set him down for the most wonderful person I ever knew. He was of the most tender, affectionate disposition.'" p. 150

Lord Tennyson's remarks upon the 'Idylls of the King,' and upon the enormous success of the book have a special interest, and serve to illustrate our opening remarks upon the popularity of his father's works. Popular as Tennyson had become through 'The Gardener's Daughter,' 'The Miller's Daughter,' 'The May Queen,' 'The Lord of Burleigh,' and scores of other poems—endeared to every sorrowing heart as he had become through 'In Memoriam'—it was the 'Idylls of the King' that secured for him his unique place. Many explanations of the phenomenon of a true poet securing the popular suffrages have been offered, one of them being his acceptance of the Laureateship. But Wordsworth, a great poet, also accepted it; and he never was and never will be popular. The wisdom of what Goethe says about the enormous importance of "subject" in poetic art is illustrated by the story of Tennyson and the 'Idylls of the King.' p. 151

For what was there in the 'Idylls of the King' that brought all England to Tennyson's feet—made English people re-read with a new seeing in their eyes the poems which they once thought merely beautiful, but now thought half divine? Beautiful these 'Idylls' are indeed, but they are not more beautiful than work of his that went before. The rich Klondyke of Malory and Geoffrey of Monmouth had not escaped the eyes of previous prospectors. All his life Milton had dreamed of the mines lying concealed in the "misty mid-region" of King Arthur and the Round Table, but, luckily for Tennyson, was led away from it into other paths. With Milton's immense power of sensuous expression—a power that impelled him, even when dealing with the spirit world, to flash upon our senses pictures of the very limbs of angels and fiends at fight—we may imagine what an epic of King Arthur he would have produced. Dryden also contemplated working in this mine, but never did; and until Scott came with his Lyulph's Tale in 'The Bridal of Triermain,' no one had taken up the subject but writers like Blackmore. Then came Bulwer's burlesque. Now no prospector on the banks of the Yukon has a keener eye for nuggets than Tennyson had for poetic ore, and besides 'The Lady of Shalott' and 'Launcelot and Guinevere,' he had already printed the grandest of all his poems—the 'Morte d'Arthur.' It needed only the 'Idylls of the King,' where episode after episode of the Arthurian cycle was rendered in poems which could be understood by all—it needed only this for all England to be set reading and re-reading all his poems, some of them more precious than any of these 'Idylls'—poems whose familiar beauties shone out now with a new light. p. 152

Ever since then Tennyson's hold upon the British public seemed to grow stronger and stronger up to the day of his death, when Great Britain, and, indeed, the entire English-speaking race,

went into mourning for him; nor, as we have said, has any weakening of that hold been perceptible during the five years that have elapsed since.

The volumes are so crammed with interesting and important matter that to discuss them in one article is impossible. But before concluding these remarks we must say that the good fortune which attended Tennyson during his life did not end with his death. Fortunate, indeed, is the famous man who escapes the catchpenny biographer. No man so illustrious as Tennyson ever before passed away without his death giving rise to a flood of books professing to tell the story of p. 153
his life. Yet it chanced that for a long time before his death a monograph on Tennyson by Mr. Arthur Waugh—which, though of course it is sometimes at fault, was carefully prepared and well considered—had been in preparation, as had also a second edition of another sketch of the poet's life by Mr. Henry Jennings, written with equal reticence and judgment. These two books, coming out, as far as we remember, in the very week of Tennyson's funeral, did the good service of filling up the gap of five years until the appearance of this authorized biography by his son. Otherwise there is no knowing what pseudo-biographies stuffed with what errors and nonsense might have flooded the market and vexed the souls of Tennysonian students. For the future such pseudo-biographies will be impossible.

III. p. 154

Notwithstanding the apparently fortunate circumstances by which Tennyson was surrounded, the record of his early life produces in the reader's mind a sense of unhappiness. Happiness is an affair of temperament, not of outward circumstances. Happy, in the sense of enjoying the present as Wordsworth enjoyed it, Tennyson could never be. Once, no doubt, Nature's sweetest gift to all living things—the power of enjoying the present—was man's inheritance too. Some of the human family have not lost it even yet; but poets are rarely of these. Give Wordsworth any pittance, enough to satisfy the simplest physical wants—enough to procure him plain living and leisure for "high thinking"—and he would be happier than Tennyson would have been, cracking the finest "walnuts" and sipping the richest "wine" amidst a circle of admiring and powerful friends. As to opinion, as to criticism of his work—what was that to Wordsworth? Had he not from the first the good opinion of her of whom he was the high priest elect. Natura Benigna herself? Nay, had he not from the first the good opinions of Wordsworth himself and Dorothy? Without this faculty of enjoying the present, how can a bard be happy? For the present alone p. 155
exists. The past is a dream; the future is a dream; the present is the narrow plank thrown for an instant from the dream of the past to the dream of the future. And yet it is the poet (who of all men should enjoy the raree show hurrying and scrambling along the plank)—it is he who refuses to enjoy himself on his own trembling little plank in order to "stare round" from side to side.

Spedding, speaking in a letter to Thompson in 1835 of Tennyson's visit to the Lake country, lets fall a few words that describe the poet in the period before his marriage more fully than could have been done by a volume of subtle analysis:—

"I think he took in more pleasure and inspiration than any one would have supposed who did not know his own almost personal dislike of the present, whatever it might be."

This is what makes us say that by far the most important thing in Tennyson's life was his marriage. He began to enjoy the present: "The peace of God came into my life before the altar when I wedded her." No more beautiful words than these were ever uttered by any man concerning any woman. And to say that the words were Tennyson's is to say that they expressed the simple truth, for his definition of human speech as God meant it to be would have been "the breath that utters truth." It would have been wonderful, indeed, if he, whose capacity of loving a p. 156
friend was so great had been without an equal capacity of loving a woman.

"Although as a son," says the biographer, "I cannot allow myself full utterance about her whom I loved as perfect mother and 'very woman of very woman'—'such a wife' and true helpmate she proved herself. It was she who became my father's adviser in literary matters; 'I am proud of her intellect,' he wrote. With her he always discussed what he was working at; she transcribed his poems: to her and to no one else he referred for a final criticism before publishing. She, with her 'tender, spiritual nature,' [156] and instinctive nobility of thought, was always by his side, a ready, cheerful, courageous, wise, and sympathetic counsellor. It was she who shielded his sensitive spirit from the annoyances and trials of life, answering (for example) the innumerable letters addressed to him from all parts of the world. By her quiet sense of humour, by her selfless devotion, by 'her faith as clear as the heights of the June-blue heaven,' she helped him also to the utmost in the hours of his depression and of his sorrow."

There are some few people whose natures are so noble or so sweet that how rich soever may be their endowment of intellect, or even of genius, we seem to remember them mainly by what St. p. 157
Gregory Nazianzen calls "the rhetoric of their lives." And surely the knowledge that this is so is encouraging to him who would fain believe in the high destiny of man—surely it is encouraging to know that, in spite of "the inhuman dearth of noble natures," mankind can still so dearly love moral beauty as to hold it more precious than any other human force. And certainly one of those whose intellectual endowments are outdazzled by the beauty of their qualities of heart and soul was the sweet lady whose death I am recording.

Among those who had the privilege of knowing Lady Tennyson (and they were many, and these many were of the best), some are at this moment eloquent in talk about the perfect helpmate she was to the great poet, and the perfect mother she was to his children, and they quote those lovely

lines of Tennyson which every one knows by heart:—

> Dear, near and true—no truer Time himself
> Can prove you, tho' he make you evermore
> Dearer and nearer, as the rapid of life
> Shoots to the fall—take this and pray that he
> Who wrote it, honouring your sweet faith to him,
> May trust himself;—and after praise and scorn,
> As one who feels the immeasurable world,
> Attain the wise indifference of the wise;
> And after autumn past—if left to pass
> His autumn into seeming leafless days—
> Draw toward the long frost and longest night,
> Wearing his wisdom lightly, like the fruit
> Which in our winter woodland looks a flower.

Others dwell on the unique way in which those wistful blue eyes of hers and that beautiful face p. 158
expressed the "tender spiritual nature" described by the poet—expressed it, indeed, more and more eloquently with the passage of years, and the bereavements the years had brought. The present writer saw her within a few days of her death. She did not seem to him then more fragile than ordinary. For many years she whose fragile frame seemed to be kept alive by the love and sweet movements of the soul within had seemed as she lay upon her couch the same as she seemed when death was so near—intensely pale, save when a flush as slight as the pink on a wild rose told her watchful son that the subject of conversation was interesting her more than was well for her. As a matter of fact, however, Lady Tennyson was no less remarkable as an intelligence than as the central heart of love and light that illumined one of the most beautiful households of our time.

Though her special gift was no doubt music, she had, as Tennyson would say with affectionate pride, a "real insight into poetical effects"; and those who knew her best shared his opinion in this matter. Whether, had her life not been devoted so entirely to others, she would have been a noticeable artistic producer it is hard to guess. But there is no doubt that she was born to hold a high place as a conversationalist, brilliant and stimulating. Notwithstanding the jealous p. 159
watchfulness of her family lest the dinner talk should draw too heavily upon her small stock of physical power, the fascination of her conversation, both as to subject-matter and manner, was so irresistible that her friends were apt to forget how fragile she really was until warned by a sign from her son or, daughter-in-law, who adored her, that the conversation should be brought to a close.

Her diary, upon which her son has drawn for certain biographical portions of his book shows how keen and how persistent was her interest in the poetry of her husband; it also shows how thorough was her insight into its principles. As a rule, diaries, professing as they do to give portraitures of eminent men, are mostly very much worse than worthless. The points seized upon by the diarist are almost never physiognomic, and even if the diarist does give some glimpse of the character he professes to limn, the picture can only be partially true, inasmuch as it can never be toned down by other aspects of the character unseen by the diarist and unknown to him.

Very different, however, is the record kept by Lady Tennyson. As an instance of her power of selecting really luminous points for preservation in her diary, let me instance this. Many a student of the 'Idylls of the King' has been struck by a certain difference in the style between p. 160
'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Passing of Arthur' and the other idylls. Indeed, more than once this difference has been cited as showing Tennyson's inability to fuse the different portions of a long poem. This fact had not escaped the eye of the loving wife and critic, and two days before her death she said to her son, "He said 'The Coming of Arthur' and 'The Passing of Arthur' are purposely simpler in style than the other idylls as dealing with the awfulness of birth and death," and wished this remark of the poet's to be put on record in the book.

It is needless to comment on the value of these few words and the light they shed upon Tennyson's method.

Those who saw Lady Tennyson in middle life and in advanced age, and were struck by that spiritual beauty of hers which no painter could ever render, will not find it difficult to imagine what she was at seventeen, when Tennyson suddenly came upon her in the "Fairy Wood," and exclaimed, "Are you an Oread or a Dryad wandering here?" And yet her beauty was only a small part of a charm that was indescribable. An important event for English literature was that meeting in the "Fairy Wood." For, from the moment of his engagement, "the current of his mind was no longer and constantly in the channel of mournful memories and melancholy forebodings," says his son. And speaking of the year, 1838, the son tells us that, on the whole, he was happy in p. 161
his life. "When I wrote 'The Two Voices,'" he used to say, "I was so utterly miserable, a burden to myself and my family, that I said, 'Is life worth anything?' and now that I am old, I fear that I shall only live a year or two, for I have work still to do."

The hostile manner in which 'Maud' was received vexed him, and would, before his marriage, have deeply disturbed him. A right view of this fine poem seems to have been taken by George Brimley, an admirable critic, who in the 'Cambridge Essays,' had already pointed out with great acumen many of the more subtle beauties of Tennyson.

There are few more pleasant pages in this book than those which record Tennyson's relations with another poet who was blessed in his wife—Browning. Although the two poets had previously met (notably in Paris in 1851), the intimacy between them would seem to have been cemented, if not begun, during one of Tennyson's visits to his and Browning's friends, Mr. and Mrs. Knowles at the Hollies, Clapham Common. Here Tennyson read to Browning the 'Grail' (which the latter pronounced to be Tennyson's "best and highest"); and here Browning came and read his own new poem 'The Ring and the Book,' when Tennyson's verdict on it was, "Full of strange vigour and remarkable in many ways, doubtful if it will ever be popular." p. 162

The record of his long intimacy with Coventry Patmore and Aubrey de Vere takes an important place in the biography, and the reminiscences of Tennyson by the latter poet form an interesting feature of the volumes. In George Meredith's first little book Tennyson was delighted by the 'Love in a Valley,' and he had a full appreciation of the great novelist all round. With the three leading poets of a younger generation, Rossetti, William Morris, and Swinburne, he had slight acquaintance. Here, however, is an interesting memorandum by Tennyson recording his first meeting with Swinburne:

"I may tell you, however, that young Swinburne called here the other day with a college friend of his, and we asked him to dinner, and I thought him a very modest and intelligent young fellow. Moreover I read him what you vindicated ['Maud'], but what I particularly admired in him was that he did not press upon me any verses of his own."

Of contemporary novels he seems to have been a voracious and indiscriminate reader. In the long list here given of novelists whose books he read—good, bad, and indifferent—it is curious not to find the name of Mrs. Humphry Ward. With Thackeray he was intimate; and he was in cordial relations with Dickens, Douglas Jerrold, and George Eliot. Among the poets, besides p. 163
Edward Fitzgerald and Coventry Patmore, he saw much of William Allingham. Though he admired parts of '*Festus*' greatly, we do not gather from these volumes that he met the author. Dobell he saw much of at Malvern in 1846. The letter-diary from Tennyson during his stay in Cornwall with Holman Hunt, Val. Prinsep, Woolner, and Palgrave, shows how exhilarated he could be by wind and sea. The death of Lionel was a sad blow to him. 'Demeter, and other Poems,' was dedicated to Lord Dufferin, "as a tribute," says his son, "of affection and of gratitude; for words would fail me to tell the unremitting kindness shown by himself and Lady Dufferin to my brother Lionel during his fatal illness."

Tennyson's critical insight could not fail to be good when exercised upon poetry. Here are one or two of his sayings about Burns, which show in what spirit he would have read Henley's recent utterances about that poet:—

"Burns did for the old songs of Scotland almost what Shakespeare had done for the English drama that preceded him."

"Read the exquisite songs of Burns. In shape each of them has the perfection of the berry, in light the radiance of the dew-drop: you forget for its sake those stupid things his serious poems."

Among the reminiscences and impressions of the poet which Lord Tennyson has appended to his p. 164
second volume, it is only fair to specialize the admirable paper by F. T. Palgrave, which, long as it is, is not by one word too long. That Jowett would write wisely and well was in the nature of things. The only contribution, however, we can quote here is Froude's, for it is as brief as it is emphatic:—

> "I owe to your father the first serious reflexions upon life and the nature of it which have followed me for more than fifty years. The same voice speaks to me now as I come near my own end, from beyond the bar. Of the early poems, 'Love and Death' had the deepest effect upon me. The same thought is in the last lines of the last poems which we shall ever have from him.
>
> "Your father in my estimate, stands, and will stand far away by the side of Shakespeare above all other English Poets, with this relative superiority even to Shakespeare, that he speaks the thoughts and speaks *to* the perplexities and misgivings of his own age.
>
> "He was born at the fit time, before the world had grown inflated with the vanity of Progress, and there was still an atmosphere in which such a soul could grow. There will be no such others for many a long age."
>
> "Yours gratefully,
> "J. A. Froude."

This letter is striking evidence of the influence Tennyson had upon his contemporaries. Comparisons, however, between Shakespeare and other poets can hardly be satisfactory. A p. 165
kinship between him and any other poet can only be discovered in relation to one of the many sides of the "myriad-minded" man. Where lies Tennyson's kinship? Is it on the dramatic side? In a certain sense Tennyson possessed dramatic power undoubtedly; for he had a fine imagination of extraordinary vividness, and could, as in 'Rizpah,' make a character live in an imagined situation. But to write a vital play requires more than this: it requires a knowledge—partly instinctive and partly acquired—of men as well as of man, and especially of the way in which one individual acts and reacts upon another in the complex web of human life. To depict the workings of the soul of man in a given situation is one thing—to depict the impact of ego upon ego is another. When we consider that the more poetical a poet is the more oblivious we expect

him to be of the machinery of social life, it is no wonder that poetical dramatists are so rare. In drama, even poetic drama, the poet must leave the “golden clime” in which he was born, must leave those “golden stars above” in order to learn this machinery, and not only learn it, but take a pleasure in learning it.

In honest admiration of Tennyson’s dramatic work, where it is admirable, we yield to none, at the time when ‘The Foresters’ was somewhat coldly accepted by the press on account of its “lack of virility,” we considered that in the class to which it belonged, the scenic pastoral plays, it held a very worthy place. That Tennyson’s admiration for Shakespeare was unbounded is evident enough. p. 166

“There was no one,” says Jowett in his recollections of Tennyson, “to whom he was so absolutely devoted, no poet of whom he had a more intimate knowledge than Shakespeare. He said to me, and probably to many others, that there was one intellectual process in the world of which he could not even entertain an apprehension—that was the plays of Shakespeare. He thought that he could instinctively distinguish between the genuine and the spurious in them, *e.g.*, between those parts of ‘King Henry VIII.,’ which are generally admitted to be spurious, and those that are genuine. The same thought was partly working in his mind on another occasion, when he spoke of two things, which he conceived to be beyond the intelligence of man, and it was certainly not repeated by him from any irreverence; the one, the intellectual genius of Shakespeare—the other, the religious genius of Jesus Christ.”

And in the pathetic account of Tennyson’s last moments we find it recorded that on the Tuesday before the Wednesday on which he died, he called out, “Where is my Shakespeare? I must have my Shakespeare”; and again on the day of his death, when the breath was passing out of his body, he asked for his Shakespeare. All this, however, makes it the more remarkable that of poets Shakespeare had the least influence upon Tennyson’s art. There was a fundamental unlikeness between the genius of the two men. The only point in common between them is that each in his own way captivated the suffrages both of the many and of the fit though few, notwithstanding the fact that their methods of dramatic approach in their plays are absolutely and fundamentally different. Even their very methods of writing verse are entirely different. Tennyson’s blank verse seems at its best to combine the beauties of the Miltonic and the Wordsworthian line; while nothing is so rare in his work as a Shakespearean line. Now and then such a line as p. 167

> Authority forgets a dying king

turns up, but very rarely. We agree with all Professor Jebb says in praise of Tennyson’s blank verse.

“He has known,” says he, “how to modulate it to every theme, and to elicit a music appropriate to each; attuning it in turn to a tender and homely grace, as in ‘The Gardener’s Daughter ‘; to the severe and ideal majesty of the antique, as in ‘Tithonus’; to meditative thought, as in ‘The Ancient Sage,’ or ‘Akbar’s Dream’; to pathetic or tragic tales of contemporary life, as in ‘Aylmer’s Field,’ or ‘Enoch Arden’; or to sustained romance narrative, as in the ‘Idylls.’ No English poet has used blank verse with such flexible variety, or drawn from it so large a compass of tones; nor has any maintained it so equably on a high level of excellence.” p. 168

But we fail to see where he touched Shakespeare on the dramatic side of Shakespeare’s immense genius.

Tennyson had the yearning common to all English poets to write Shakespearean plays, and the filial piety with which his son tries to uphold his father’s claims as a dramatist is beautiful; indeed, it is pathetic. But the greatest injustice that can be done to a great poet is to claim for him honours that do not belong to him. In his own line Tennyson is supreme, and this book makes it necessary to ask once more what that line is. Shakespeare’s stupendous fame has for centuries been the candle into which all the various coloured wings of later days have flown with more or less of disaster. Though much was said in praise of ‘Harold’ by one of the most accomplished critics and scholars of our time, Dr. Jebb, [168] the play could not keep the stage, nor does it live as a drama as any one of Tennyson’s lyrics can be said to live. ‘Becket,’ to be sure, was a success on the stage. A letter to Tennyson in 1884 from so competent a student of Shakespeare as Sir Henry Irving declares that ‘Becket’ is a finer play than ‘King John.’ Still, the ‘Morte d’Arthur,’ ‘The Lotos-Eaters,’ ‘The Gardener’s Daughter,’ outweigh the five-act tragedy in the world of literary art. Of acted drama Tennyson knew nothing at all. To him, evidently, the word *act* in a printed play meant *chapter*; the word *scene* meant *section*. In his early days he had gone occasionally to see a play, and in 1875 he went to see Irving in Hamlet and liked him better than Macready, whom he had seen in the part. Still later he went to see Lady Archibald Campbell act when ‘Becket’ was given “among the glades of oak and fern in the Canizzaro Wood at Wimbledon.” But handicapped as he was by ignorance of drama as a stage product how could he write Shakespearean plays? p. 169

But let us for a moment consider the difference between the two men as poets. It is hard to imagine the master-dramatist of the world—it is hard to imagine the poet who, by setting his foot upon allegory, saved our poetry from drying up after the invasion of gongorism, euphuism, and allegory—it is, we say, hard to imagine Shakespeare, if he had conceived and written such lovely episodes as those of the ‘Idylls of the King,’ so full of concrete pictures, setting about to turn his flesh-and-blood characters into symbolic abstractions. There is in these volumes a curious

document, a memorandum of Tennyson's presented to Mr. Knowles at Aldworth in 1869, in which an elaborate scheme for turning into abstract ideas the characters of the Arthurian story is sketched:— p. 170

> K.A. Religious Faith.
>
> King Arthur's three Guineveres.
>
> The Lady of the Lake.
>
> Two Guineveres, ye first prim Christianity. 2d Roman Catholicism: ye first is put away and dwells apart, 2d Guinevere flies. Arthur takes to the first again, but finds her changed by lapse of Time.
>
> Modred, the sceptical understanding. He pulls Guinevere, Arthur's latest wife, from the throne.
>
> Merlin Emrys, the Enchanter. Science. Marries his daughter to Modred.
>
> Excalibur, War.
>
> The Sea, the people / The Saxons, the people } the S. are a sea-people and it is theirs and a type of them.
>
> The Round Table: liberal institutions.
>
> Battle of Camlan.
>
> 2d Guinevere with the enchanted book and cup.

And Mr. Knowles in a letter to the biographer says:—

"He encouraged me to write a short paper, in the form of a letter to *The Spectator*, on the inner meaning of the whole poem, which I did, simply upon the lines he himself indicated. He often said, however, that an allegory should never be pressed too far." Are all the lovely passages of human passion and human pathos in these 'Idylls' allegorical—that is to say—make-believe? The reason why allegorical poetry is always second-rate, even at its best, is that it flatters the reader's intellect at the expense of his heart. Fancy "the allegorical intent" behind the parting of Hector and Andromache, and behind the death of Desdemona! Thank Heaven, however, p. 171
Tennyson's allegorical intent was a destructive afterthought. For, says the biographer, "the allegorical drift here marked out was fundamentally changed in the later schemes in the 'Idylls.'" According to that delicate critic, Canon Ainger, there is a symbolical intent underlying 'The Lady of Shalott':—

"The new-born love for something, for some one in the wide world from whom she has been so long secluded, takes her out of the region of shadows into that of realities."

But what concerns us here is the fact that when Shakespeare wrote, although he yielded too much now and then to the passion for gongorism and euphuism which had spread all over Europe, it was against the nature of his genius to be influenced by the contemporary passion for allegory. That he had a natural dislike of allegorical treatment of a subject is evident, not only in his plays, but in his sonnets. At a time when the sonnet was treated as the special vehicle for allegory, Shakespeare's sonnets were the direct outcome of emotion of the most intimate and personal kind—a fact which at once destroys the ignorant drivel about the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's plays, for what Bacon had was fancy, not imagination, and Fancy is the mother of Allegory, Imagination is the mother of Drama. The moment that Bacon essayed imaginative p. 172
work, he passed into allegory, as we see in the 'New Atlantis.'

It might, perhaps, be said that there are three kinds of poetical temperament which have never yet been found equally combined in any one poet—not even in Shakespeare himself. There is the lyric temperament, as exemplified in writers like Sappho, Shelley, and others; there is the meditative temperament—sometimes speculative, but not always accompanied by metaphysical dreaming—as exemplified in Lucretius, Wordsworth, and others; and there is the dramatic temperament, as exemplified in Homer, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare. In a certain sense the Iliad is the most dramatic poem in the world, for the dramatic picture lives undisturbed by lyrism or meditation. In Æschylus and Sophocles we find, besides the dramatic temperament, a large amount of the lyrical temperament, and a large amount of the meditative, but unaccompanied by metaphysical speculation. In Shakespeare we find, besides the dramatic temperament, a large amount of the meditative accompanied by an irresistible impulse towards metaphysical speculation, but, on the whole, a moderate endowment of the lyrical temperament, judging by the few occasions on which he exercised it. For fine as are such lyrics as "Hark, hark, the lark," "Where the bee sucks," &c., other poets have written lyrics as fine.

In a certain sense no man can be a pure and perfect dramatist. Every ego is a central sun found p. 173
which the universe revolves, and it must needs assert itself. This is why on a previous occasion, when speaking of the way in which thoughts are interjected into drama by the Greek dramatists, we said that really and truly no man can paint another, but only himself, and what we call character-painting is at the best but a poor mixing of painter and painted—a third something between these two, just as what we call colour and sound are born of the play of undulation upon organism. Very likely this is putting the case too strongly. But be this as it may, it is impossible

to open a play of Shakespeare's without being struck with the way in which the meditative side of Shakespeare's mind strove with and sometimes nearly strangled the dramatic. If this were confined to 'Hamlet,' where the play seems meant to revolve on a philosophical pivot, it would not be so remarkable. But so hindered with thoughts, reflections, meditations, and metaphysical speculations was Shakespeare that he tossed them indiscriminately into other plays, tragedies, comedies, and histories, regardless sometimes of the character who uttered them. With regard to metaphysical speculation, indeed, even when he was at work on the busiest scenes of his dramas, it would seem—as was said on the occasion before alluded to—that Shakespeare's instinct for actualizing and embodying in concrete form the dreams of the metaphysician often arose and baffled him. It would seem that when writing a comedy he could not help putting into the mouth of a man like Claudio those words which seem as if they ought to have been spoken by a metaphysician of the Hamlet type, beginning, p. 174

Ay, but to die and go we know not where.

It would seem that he could not help putting into the mouth of Macbeth those words which also seem as if they ought to have been spoken on the platform at Elsinore, beginning,

To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow.

And if it be said that Macbeth was a philosopher as well as a murderer, and might have thought these thoughts in the terrible strait in which he then was, surely nothing but this marvellous peculiarity of Shakespeare's temperament will explain his making Macbeth stop at Duncan's bedroom door, dagger in hand, to say,

Now o'er the one half world Nature seems dead, &c.

And again, though Prospero was very likely a philosopher too, even he steals from Hamlet's mouth such words of the metaphysician as these:—

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

That this is one of Shakespeare's most striking characteristics will not be denied by any competent student of his works. Nor will any such student deny that, exquisite as his lyrics are, they are too few and too unimportant in subject-matter to set beside his supreme wealth of dramatic picture, and his wide vision as a thinker and a metaphysical dreamer. p. 175

Now on which of these sides of Shakespeare does Tennyson touch? Is it on the lyrical side? Shakespeare's fine lyrics are so few that they would be lost if set beside the marvellous wealth of Tennyson's lyrical work. On one side only of Shakespeare's genius Tennyson touches, perhaps, more closely than any subsequent poet. As a metaphysician none comes so near Shakespeare as he who wrote these lines:—

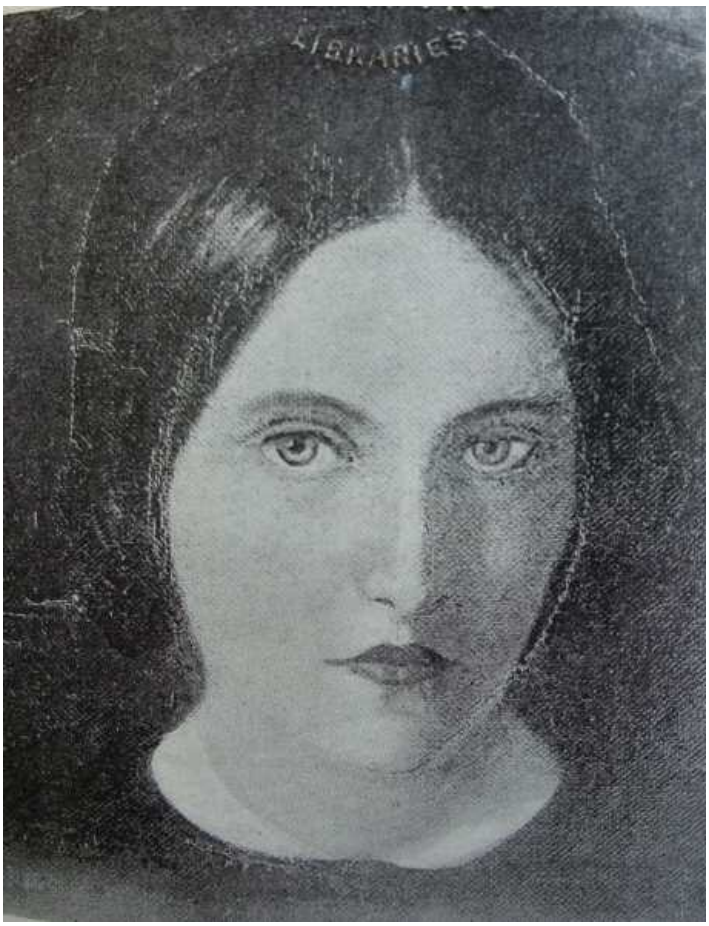
And more, my son! for more than once when I
Sat all alone, revolving in myself
The word that is the symbol of myself,
The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,
And passed into the Nameless, as a cloud
Melts into Heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange not mine—and yet no shade of doubt,
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of Self.
The gain of such large life as match'd with ours
Were Sun to spark—unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow-world.

Here, then, seems to be the truth of the matter: while Shakespeare had immense dramatic power, and immense meditative power with moderate lyric power, Tennyson had the lyric gift and the meditative gift without the dramatic. His poems are more full of reflections, meditations, and generalizations upon human life than any poet's since Shakespeare. But then the moment that Shakespeare descended from those heights whether his metaphysical imagination had borne him, he became, not a lyrist, as Tennyson became, but a dramatist. And this divides Shakespeare as far from Tennyson as it divides him from any other first-class writer. We admirers of Tennyson must content ourselves with this thought, that, wonderful as it is for Shakespeare to have combined great metaphysical power with supreme power as a dramatist, it is scarcely less wonderful for Tennyson to have combined great metaphysical power with the power of a supreme lyrist. Nay, is it not in a certain sense more wonderful for a lyrical impulse such as Tennyson's to be found combined with a power of philosophical and metaphysical abstraction such as he shows in some of his poems? p. 176

IV. CHRISTINA GEORGINA ROSSETTI. 1830–1894. p. 177

I.

Although the noble poet and high-souled woman we have just lost had been ill and suffering from grievous pain for a long time, Death came at last with a soft hand which could but make him welcome. Since early in August, when she took to her bed, she was so extremely weak and otherwise ill that one scarcely expected her (at any time) to live more than a month or so, and for the last six weeks or thereabouts—say from the 15th of November—one expected her to die almost from day to day. My dear friend William Rossetti, who used to go to Torrington Square every afternoon, saw her on the afternoon of December 28th [1894]. He did not, he told me, much expect to find her alive in the afternoon of the 29th, and intended, therefore, to make his next call earlier. She died at half-past seven in the morning of the 29th, in the presence only of her faithful nurse Mrs. Read. It was through her sudden collapse that she missed at her side, when she passed away, that brother whose whole life has been one of devotion to his family, and whose tireless affection for the last of them was one of the few links that bound Christina's sympathy to the earth. p. 178



Her illness was of a most complicated kind: two years and a half ago she was operated on for cancer: functional malady of the heart, accompanied by dropsy in the left arm and hand, followed. Although on Friday the serious symptoms of her case became, as I have said, accentuated, she was throughout the day and night entirely conscious; and so peaceful and apparently so free from pain was she that neither the medical man nor the nurse supposed the end to be quite so near as it was. During all this time, up to the moment of actual dissolution, her lips seemed to be moving in prayer, but, of course, this with her was no uncommon sign: duty and prayer ordered her life. Her sufferings, I say, had been great, but they had been encountered by a fortitude that was greater still. Throughout all her life, indeed, 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. p. 179

A certain irritability of temper, which was, perhaps, natural to her, had, when I first became acquainted with her family (about 1872), been overcome, or at least greatly chastened, by religion (which with her was a passion) and by a large acquaintance with grief, resulting in a long meditation over the mystery of pain. In wordly matters her generosity may be described as boundless; but perhaps it is not difficult for a poet to be generous in a worldly sense—to be free in parting with that which can be precious only to commonplace souls. What, however, is not so easy is for one holding such strong religious convictions as Christina Rossetti held to cherish such generous thoughts and feelings as were hers about those to whom her shibboleths meant nothing. This was what made her life so beautiful and such a blessing to all. The indurating effects of a selfish religiosity never withered her soul nor narrowed it. With her, indeed, religion was very love—

A largess universal like the sun.

It is always futile to make guesses as to what might have been the development of a poet's genius and character had the education of circumstances been different from what it was, and perhaps it is specially futile to guess what would have been the development under other circumstances of her, the poet of whom her friends used to speak with affection and reverence as "Christina." p. 180

On the death of her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti (or as his friends used to call him Gabriel) in 1882, I gave that sketch of the family story which has formed the basis of most of the biographical notices of him and his family; it would, therefore, be superfluous to reiterate what I said and what is now matter of familiar knowledge. It may, however, be as well to remind the reader that, owing to the peculiar position in London of the father Gabriele Rossetti, the family were during childhood and partly during youth as much isolated from the outer English world as were the family between whom and themselves there were many points of resemblance—the Brontës. The two among them who were not in youth of a retiring disposition were he who afterwards became the most retiring of all, Gabriel, and Maria, the latter of whom was in one sense retiring, and in another expansive. In her dark brown, or, as some called them, black eyes, there would suddenly come up and shine an enthusiasm, a capacity of poetic and romantic fire, to the quelling of which there must have gone an immensity of religious force. As to Gabriel, during a large portion of his splendid youth he exhibited a genial breadth of front that affined him to Shakespeare and Walter Scott. The English strain in the family found expression in him, and in him alone. There was a something in the hearty ring of his voice that drew Englishmen to him as by a magnet. p. 181

While it was but little that the others drew from the rich soil of merry England, he drew from it half at least of his radiant personality—half at least of his incomparable genius. Though he was in every way part and parcel of that marvellous little family circle of children of genius in Charlotte Street, he had also the power of looking at it from the outside. It would be strange, indeed, if this or any other power should be found lacking in him. I have often heard Rossetti—by the red flicker of the studio fire, when the gas was turned down to save his eyesight—give the most graphic and fascinating descriptions of the little group and the way in which they grew up to be what they were under the tuition of a father whose career can only be called romantic, and a mother whose intellectual gifts were so remarkable that, had they not been in some great degree stifled by the exercise of an entire self-abnegation on behalf of her family, she, too, must have become an important figure in literature.

The father died in 1854, many years before I knew the family; but Gabriel's description of him; his conversations with his brother-refugees and others who visited the house—conversations in which the dreamy and the matter-of-fact were oddly blent; his striking skill as an improvisatore of Italian poetry, and also as a master of pen-and-ink drawing; his great musical gift—a gift which none of his family seemed to have inherited; his fine tenor voice; his unflinching courage and independence of character (qualities which made him refuse, in a Protestant country, to make open abjuration of the creed in which the Rossettis had been reared, though he detested the Pope and all his works, and was, if not an actual freethinker, thoroughly latitudinarian)—Gabriel's pictures of this poet and father of poets were so vivid—so amazingly and incredibly vivid—that I find it difficult to think I never met the father in the flesh: not unfrequently I find myself talking of him as if I had known him. What higher tribute than this can be made to a narrator's dramatic power? Those who have seen the elder Rossetti's pen-and-ink drawings (the work of a child) will p. 182

agree with me that Gabriel did not over-estimate them in the least degree. All the Rossettis inherited from their father voices so musical that they could be recognized among other voices in any gathering, and no doubt that clear-cut method of syllabification which was so marked a characteristic of Christina's conversation, but which gave it a sort of foreign tone, was inherited p. 183
from the father. Her affinity to the other two members of the family was seen in that intense sense of duty of which Gabriel, with all his generosity, had but little. There was no martyrdom she would not have undertaken if she thought that duty called upon her to undertake it, and this may be said of the other two.

In most things, however, Christina Rossetti seemed to stand midway between Gabriel and the other two members of her family, and it was the same in physical matters. She had Gabriel's eyes, in which hazel and blue-grey were marvellously blent, one hue shifting into the other, answering to the movements of the thoughts—eyes like the mother's. And her brown hair, though less warm in colour than his during his boyhood, was still like it. When a young girl, at the time that she sat for the Virgin in the picture now in the National Gallery, she was, as both her mother and Gabriel have told me, really lovely, with an extraordinary expression of pensive sweetness. She used to have in the little back parlour a portrait of herself at eighteen by Gabriel, which gives all these qualities. Even then, however, the fullness in the eyes was somewhat excessive. Afterwards her ill health took a peculiar form, the effect of which was that the eyes were, in a manner of speaking, pushed forward, and although this protuberance was never p. 184
disagreeable, it certainly took a good deal of beauty from her face.

Dominant, however, as was the father's personality among his friends, the mother's influence upon the children was stronger than his; and no wonder, for I think there was no beautiful charm of woman that Mrs. Rossetti lacked. She did not seem at all aware that she was a woman of exceptional gifts, yet her intellectual penetration and the curious exactitude of her knowledge were so remarkable that Gabriel accepted her dicta as oracles not to be challenged. One of her specialities was the pronunciation of English words, in which she was an authority. I cannot resist giving one little instance, as it illustrates a sweet feature of Gabriel's character. It occurred on a lovely summer's day in the old Kelmscott manor house in 1873, when Mrs. Rossetti, Christina, and myself were watching Gabriel at work upon 'Proserpine.' I had pronounced the word *aspirant* with the accent upon the middle syllable. "Pardon me, my dear fellow," said he, without looking from his work, "that word should be pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, as a purist like you ought to know." On my challenging this, he said, in a tone which was meant to show that he was saying the last word upon the subject, "My mother always says *áspirant*, and she is always right upon matters of pronunciation." "Then I shall p. 185
always say *áspirant*," I replied. And I may add that I now do say *áspirant*, and, right or wrong, intend to say *áspirant* so long as this breath of mine enables me to say *áspirant* at all. Afterwards Christina, as we were strolling by the weir, watching Gabriel and George Hake pounding across the meadows at the rate of five miles an hour, said to me, "I think you were right about *aspírant*." "No," I said, "it is a dear, old-fashioned way. Your mother says *áspirant*; I now remember that my own mother said *áspirant*. I shall stick to *áspirant* till the end of the chapter." And Christina said, "Then so will I."

Among Mrs. Rossetti's accomplishments was reading aloud, mainly from imaginative writers, and I cannot recall without a thrill of mingled emotions a delightful stay of mine at Kelmscott in the summer of '73, when she, whose age then was seventy-three, used to read out to us all sorts of things. And writing these words makes me hear those readings again—makes me hear, through the open casement of the quaint old house, the blackbirds from the home field trying in vain to rival the music of that half-Italian, half-English voice. To have been admitted into such a charmed circle I look upon as one of the greatest privileges of my life. It is something for a man to have lived within touch of Christina Rossetti and her mother. From her father, however, p. 186
Christina took, either by the operation of some law of heredity or from early association with the author of 'Il Mistero dell' Amor Platonico del Medio Evo' and 'La Beatrice di Dante,' that passion for symbolism which is one of the chief features of her poetry. There is, perhaps, no more striking instance of the inscrutable lines in which ancestral characteristics descend than the way in which the passion for symbolism was inherited by Christina and Gabriel Rossetti from their father.

While Christina's poetical work may be described as being all symbolical, she was not much given, like her brother, to read symbols into the every-day incidents of life. Gabriel, on the contrary, though using symbolism in his poetry in only a moderate degree, allowed his instinct for symbolizing his own life to pass into positive superstition. When a party of us—including Mrs. Rossetti, Christina, the two aunts, Dr. Hake, with four of his sons, and myself—were staying for Christmas with Gabriel near Bognor, a tree fell in the garden during a storm. While Gabriel seemed inclined to take it as a sign of future disaster, Christina, whose poetry is so full of symbolism, would smile at such a notion. Yet Gabriel could speak of his father's symbolizing (as in 'La Beatrice di Dante') as being absolutely and hopelessly eccentric and worthless. This is remarkable, for one would have thought that it was impossible to read those extraordinary works p. 187
of the elder Rossetti's without being impressed by the rare intellectual subtlety of the Italian scholar.

Of course the opportunities of brother and sister of studying Nature were identical. Both were born in London, and during childhood saw Nature only as a holiday scene. Christina would talk with delight of her grandfather's cottage retreat about thirty miles from London, to which she used to go for a holiday in a stage coach, and of the beauty of the country around. But these

expeditions were not numerous, and came to an end when she was a child of seven or eight, and it was very little that she saw outside London before girlhood was past. I have myself heard her speak of what she has somewhere written about—the rapture of the sight of some primroses growing in a railway cutting. It is, of course, a great disadvantage to any poet not to have been born in the country; learned in Nature the city-born poet can never be, as we see in the case of Milton, who loved Nature without knowing her. It is here that Jean Ingelow has such an advantage over Christina Rossetti. Her love of flowers, and birds, and trees, and all that makes the earth so beautiful, is not one whit stronger than Christina's own, but it is a love born of an exhaustive detailed knowledge of Nature's life.

On a certain occasion when walking with a friend at Hunter's Forestall, near Herne Bay, where p. 188
she and her mother were nursing Gabriel through one of his illnesses, the talk ran upon Shelley's 'Skylark,' a poem which she adored. She was literally bewildered because the friend showed that he was able to tell, from a certain change of sound in the note of a skylark that had risen over the lane, the moment when the bird had made up its mind to cease singing and return to the earth. It seemed to her an almost supernatural gift, and yet an ignorant ploughman will often be able to do the same thing. This kind of intimacy with Nature she coveted. With the lower animals, nevertheless, she had a strange kind of sympathy of her own. Young creatures especially understood the playful humour of her approach. A delightful fantastic whim was the bond between her and puppies and kittens and birds. 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 p. 189
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.

Perhaps for strength both of subject and of treatment, Christina Rossetti's masterpiece is 'Amor Mundi.' 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. Herein 'An Apple Gathering' is quite perfect. It is, however, if I may venture to say so, a mistake to speak of Christina Rossetti as being a great poetic artist. Exquisite as her best things are, no one had a more uncertain hand than she when at work. Here, as in so many things, she was like Blake, whose influence upon her was very great.

Of self-criticism she had almost nothing. On one occasion, many years ago now, she expressed a wish to have some of her verses printed in *The Athenæum*, and I suggested her sending them to 16, Cheyne Walk, her brother's house, where I then used to spend much time in a study that I occupied there. I said that her brother and I would read them together and submit them to the p. 190
editor. She sent several poems (I think about six), not one of which was in the least degree worthy of her. This naturally embarrassed me, but Gabriel, who entirely shared my opinion of the poems, wrote at once to her and told her that the verses sent were, both in his own judgment and mine, unworthy of her, and that she "had better buckle to at once and write another poem." She did so, and the result was an exquisite lyric which appeared in *The Athenæum*. Here is where she was wonderfully unlike Gabriel, whose power of self-criticism in poetry was almost as great as Tennyson's own. But in the matter of inspiration she was, I must think, above Gabriel—above almost everybody.

If English rhymed metres had been as easy to work in as Italian rhymed metres, her imagination was so vivid, her poetic impulse was so strong, and, indeed, her poetic wealth so inexhaustible, that she would have stood in the front rank of English poets. But the writer of English rhymed measures is in a very different position as regards improvisatorial efforts from the Italian who writes in rhymed measures. He has to grapple with the metrical structure—to seize the form by the throat, as it were, and force it to take in the enormous wealth at the English poet's command. Fine as is the 'Prince's Progress,' for instance (and it would be hard to find its p. 191
superior in regard to poetic material in the whole compass of Victorian poetry), the number of rugged lines the reader has to encounter weighs upon and distresses him until, indeed, the conclusion is reached: then the passion and the pathos of the subject cause the poem to rise upon billows of true rhythm. On the other hand, however, it may be said that a special quality of her verse is a *curiosa felicitas* which makes a metrical blemish tell as a kind of suggestive grace. But I must stop; I must bear in mind that he who has walked and talked with Christina Rossetti, burdened with a wealth of remembered beauty from earth and heaven, runs the risk of becoming garrulous.

II. p. 192

In regard to unpublished manuscripts which a writer has left behind him, the responsibilities of his legal representatives are far more grave than seems to be generally supposed. In deciding what posthumous writings an executor is justified in giving to the public it is important, of course, to take into account the character, the idiosyncrasy of the writer in regard to all his relations towards what may be called the mechanism of every-day life. Some poets are so methodical that the mere fact of anything having been left by them in manuscript unaccompanied

by directions as to its disposal is *primâ facie* evidence that it was intended to be withheld from the public, either temporarily for revision or finally and absolutely. And, of course, the representative, especially if he is also a relative or a friend, has to consider primarily the intentions of the dead. If loyalty to living friends is a duty, what shall be said of loyalty to friends who are dead? This, indeed, has a sanction of the deepest religious kind.

No doubt, in the philosophical sense, the aspiration of the dead artist for perfect work and the honour it brings is a delusion, a sweet mockery of the fancy. But then so is every other aspiration p. 193
which soars above the warm circle of the human affections, and if this delusion of the dead artist was held worthy of respect during the artist's life, it is worthy of respect—nay, it is worthy of reverence—after he is dead. Now every true artist when at work has before him an ideal which he would fain reach, or at least approach, and if he does not himself know whether in any given exercise he has reached that ideal or neared it, we may be pretty sure that no one else does. Hence, whenever there is apparent in the circumstances under which the MS. has been found the slightest indication that the writer did not wish it to be given to the public, the representative who ignores this indication sins against that reverence for the dead which in all forms of civilization declares itself to be one of the deepest instincts of man.

That the instinct we are speaking of is really one of the primal instincts is the very first fact that archæology vouches for. Of many lost races, such as the Aztecs and Toltecs, for instance, we have no historical traces save those which are furnished by testimonials of their reverence for the dead. But that this fine instinct is now dying out in the Western world—that it will soon be eliminated from the human constitution of races that are generally considered to be the most advanced—is made manifest by the present attitude of England and America towards their p. 194
illustrious dead. In the literary arena of both countries, indeed, so entire is the abrogation of this most beautiful of all feelings—so recklessly and so shamefully are not only raw manuscripts, but private letters, put up to auction for publication—that at last the great writers of our time, confronted by this new terror, are wisely beginning to take care of themselves and their friends by a holocaust of every scrap of paper lying in their desks.

So demoralized has the literary world become by the present craze for notoriety and for personal details of prominent men that an executor who in regard to the disposal of his testator's money would act with the most rigid scrupulousness will, in regard to the MSS. he finds in his testator's desk, commit, "for the benefit of the public," an outrage that would have made the men of a less vulgar period shudder. The "benefit of the public," indeed! Who is this "public," and what are its rights as against the rights of the dead poet, whose heartstrings are woven into "copy" by the disloyal friend he trusted? The inherent callousness of man's nature is never so painfully seen as in the relation of this ogre, "the public," to dead genius. Without the smallest real reverence for genius—without the smallest capacity of distinguishing the poetaster it always adores from the p. 195
true poet it always ignores—the public can still fall down before the pedestal upon which genius has been placed by the select few—fall down with its long ears wide open for gossip about genius, or anything else that is talked about.

It was with such thoughts as these that we opened the present somewhat bulky volume [195]—not, however, with many misgivings; for Christina Rossetti, before she made her brother executor, knew what were his views as to the rights of the public as against the rights of genius. And if he has printed here every poem he could lay hands upon, he may fairly be assumed to have done so with the consent of a sister whom he loved so dearly and by whom he was so dearly loved. Fortunately there are not many of these relics that are devoid of a deep interest, some from the biographical point of view, some from the poetical.

Again, what is to be said about such part of a dead author's writing as, having appeared in print, has afterwards passed through the author's crucible of artistic revision? What about the executor's duty here, where the case between the author and the public stands on a different footing? At the present time, when newspapers and novels alone are read, it is not the poet's verses which most people read, but paragraphs about what the author and his wife and children p. 196
"eat and drink and avoid": a time when, if the poet's verses are read at all, it is the accidents rather than the essentials of the work that seem primarily to concern the public. At such a time an editor is not entirely master of his actions. Doubtless, there is much reason in the wrath of Tennyson and other great poets against the "literary resurrection man," who, though incapable of understanding the beauties of a beautiful work, can take a very great interest in poring over the various stages through which that work has passed on its way to perfection. These poets, however, are apt to forget that, after a poem or line has once passed into print, its final suppression is impossible. And perhaps there are other reasons why, in this matter, an editor should be allowed some indulgence.

Here, for instance, is a puzzling case to be tried *in foro conscientiæ*. In the first edition of 'Goblin Market,' published in 1862, appeared three poems of more breadth of treatment than any of the others: 'Cousin Kate,' a ballad, 'Sister Maude,' a ballad, and 'A Triad,' a sonnet. In subsequent issues of the book these were all omitted. Mr. W. M. Rossetti, speaking of 'Sister Maude,' says: "I presume that my sister, with overstrained scrupulosity, considered its moral tone to be somewhat open to exception. In such a view I by no means agree, and I therefore reproduce it." p. 197
If Christina's objection was valid when she raised it, it is, of course, valid now, when the beloved poet is in the "country beyond Orion," and knows what sanctions are of man's imagining, and what sanctions are more eternal than the movements of the stars.

The question here is, What were Christina Rossetti's wishes? not whether her brother "agrees"

with them. Hence, if it were not certain that some one would soon have restored them, would Mr. W. M. Rossetti have hesitated before doing so? For they are among the most powerful things Christina Rossetti ever wrote, and it was a subject of deep regret to her friends that she suppressed them. Yet she withdrew them from conscientious motives. In 'Sister Maude' she showed how great was her power in the most difficult of all forms of poetic art—the romantic ballad. Splendid as are Gabriel Rossetti's 'Sister Helen' and 'Rose Mary,' the literary *aura* surrounding them prevents them from seeming—as the best of the Border ballads seem—Nature's very voice muttering in her dreams of the pathos and the mystery of the human story. It was not, perhaps, given even to Rossetti to get very near to that supreme old poet (not forgotten, because never known) who wrote "May Margaret's" appeal to the ghost of her lover Clerk Saunders:—

Is there ony room at your head, Saunders? p. 198
  Is there ony room at your feet?
Is there ony room at your side, Saunders,
  Where fain, fain I wad sleep?

where the very imperfections of the rhymes seem somehow to add to the pathos and the mystery of the chant. But if, indeed, it has been given to any modern poet to get into this atmosphere, it has been given to Christina Rossetti. And so with the ballad of simple human passion no modern writer has quite done what Christina Rossetti has done in one of the poems here restored:—

SISTER MAUDE.

Who told my mother of my shame,
  Who told my father of my dear?
Oh who but Maude, my sister Maude,
  Who lurked to spy and peer.

Cold he lies, as cold as stone,
  With his clotted curls about his face:
The comeliest corpse in all the world,
  And worthy of a queen's embrace.

You might have spared his soul, sister,
  Have spared my soul, your own soul too:
Though I had not been born at all,
  He'd never have looked at you.

My father may sleep in Paradise,
  My mother at Heaven-gate:
But sister Maude shall get no sleep
  Either early or late.

My father may wear a golden gown,
  My mother a crown may win;
If my dear and I knocked at Heaven-gate
  Perhaps they'd let us in:
But sister Maude, O sister Maude,
  Bide *you* with death and sin.

But it is for the personal poems that this volume will be prized most dearly by certain readers. p. 199

Mr. W. M. Rossetti speaks of "the very wide and exceedingly strong outburst of eulogy" of his sister which appeared in the public press after her death. Yet that outburst was far from giving adequate expression to what was felt by some of her readers—those between whom and herself there was a bond of sympathy so sacred and so deep as to be something like a religion. It is not merely that she was the acknowledged queen in that world (outside the arena called "the literary world") where poetry is "its own exceeding great reward," but to other readers of a different kind altogether—readers who, drawing the deepest delight from such poetry as specially appeals to them, never read any other, and have but small knowledge of poetry as a fine art—her verse was, perhaps, more precious still. They feel that at every page of her writing the beautiful poetry is only the outcome of a life whose almost unexampled beauty fascinates them.

Although Christina Rossetti had more of what is called the unconsciousness of poetic inspiration than any other poet of her time, the writing of poetry was not by any means the chief business of her life. She was too thorough a poet for that. No one felt so deeply as she that poetic art is only at the best the imperfect body in which dwells the poetic soul. No one felt so deeply as she that p. 200
as the notes of the nightingale are but the involuntary expression of the bird's emotion, and, again, as the perfume of the violet is but the flower's natural breath, so it is and must be with the song of the very poet, and that, therefore, to write beautifully is in a deep and true sense to live beautifully. In the volume before us, as in all her previously published writings, we see at its best what Christianity is as the motive power of poetry. The Christian idea is essentially feminine, and of this feminine quality Christina Rossetti's poetry is full.

In motive power the difference between classic and Christian poetry must needs be very great. But whatever may be said in favour of one as against the other, this at least cannot be controverted, that the history of literature shows no human development so beautiful as the ideal

Christian woman of our own day. She is unique, indeed. Men of science tell us that among all the fossilized plants we find none of the lovely family of the rose, and in the same way we should search in vain through the entire human record for anything so beautiful as that kind of Christian lady to whom self-abnegation is not only the first of duties, but the first of joys. Yet, no doubt, the Christian idea must needs be more or less flavoured by each personality through which it is expressed. With regard to Christina Rossetti, while upon herself Christian dogma imposed
infinite obligations—obligations which could never be evaded by her without the risk of all the penalties fulminated by all believers—there was in the order of things a sort of ether of universal charity for all others. She would lament, of course, the lapses of every soul, but for these there was a forgiveness which her own lapses could never claim. There was, to be sure, a sweet egotism in this. It was very fascinating, however. This feeling explains what seems somewhat to puzzle the editor, especially in the poem called 'The End of the First Part,' written April 18th, 1849, of which he says, "'Tears for guilt' is in reference to Christina a very exaggerated phrase": —

THE END OF THE FIRST PART.

My happy dream is finished with,
  My dream in which alone I lived so long.
My heart slept—woe is me, it wakeneth;
  Was weak—I thought it strong.

Oh, weary wakening from a life-true dream!
  Oh pleasant dream from which I wake in pain!
I rested all my trust on things that seem,
  And all my trust is vain.

I must pull down my palace that I built,
  Dig up the pleasure-gardens of my soul;
Must change my laughter to sad tears for guilt,
  My freedom to control.

Now all the cherished secrets of my heart,
  Now all my hidden hopes, are turned to sin.
Part of my life is dead, part sick, and part
  Is all on fire within.

The fruitless thought of what I might have been,
  Haunting me ever, will not let me rest.
A cold North wind has withered all my green,
  My sun is in the West.

But, where my palace stood, with the same stone
  I will uprear a shady hermitage;
And there my spirit shall keep house alone,
  Accomplishing its age.

There other garden beds shall lie around,
  Full of sweet-briar and incense-bearing thyme:
There I will sit, and listen for the sound
  Of the last lingering chime.

It was the beauty of her life that made her personal influence so great, and upon no one was that influence exercised with more strength than upon her illustrious brother Gabriel, who in many ways was so much unlike her. In spite of his deep religious instinct and his intense sympathy with mysticism, Gabriel remained what is called a free thinker in the true meaning of that much-abused phrase. In religion as in politics he thought for himself, and yet when Mr. W. M. Rossetti affirms that the poet was never drawn towards free thinking women, he says what is perfectly true. And this arose from the extraordinary influence, scarcely recognized by himself, that the beauty of Christina's life and her religious system had upon him.

This, of course, is not the place in which to say much about him; nor need much at any time and in any place be said, for has he not written his own biography—depicted himself more faithfully
than Lockhart could depict Walter Scott, more faithfully than Boswell could depict Dr. Johnson? Has he not done this in the immortal sonnet-sequence called 'The House of Life'? What poet of the nineteenth century do we know so intimately as we know the author of 'The House of Life'?

Christina Rossetti's peculiar form of the Christian sentiment she inherited from her mother, the sweetness of whose nature was never disturbed by that exercise of the egoism of the artist in which Christina indulged and without whose influence it is difficult to imagine what the Rossetti family would have been. The father was a poet and a mystic of the cryptographic kind, and it is by no means unlikely that had he studied Shakespeare as he studied Dante he would in these days have been a disciple of the Baconians, and, of course, his influence on the family in the matter of literary activity and of mysticism must have been very great. And yet all that is noblest in Christina's poetry, an ever-present sense of the beauty and power of goodness, must surely have come from the mother, from whom also came that other charm of Christina's, to which Gabriel was peculiarly sensitive, her youthfulness of temperament.

Among the many differences which exist between the sexes this might, perhaps, be mentioned, p. 204
that while it is beautiful for a man to grow old—grow old with the passage of years—a woman to retain her charm must always remain young. In a deep sense woman may be said to have but one paramount charm, youth, and when this is gone all is gone. The youthfulness of the body, of course, soon vanishes, but with any woman who can really win and retain the love of man this is not nearly so important as at first it seems. It is the youthfulness of the soul that, in the truly adorable woman, is invulnerable. It is one of the deep misfortunes of the very poor of cities that as a rule the terrible struggle with the wolf at the door is apt to sour the nature of women and turn them into crones at the age when in the more fortunate classes the true beauty of woman often begins; and even where the environment is not that of poverty, but of straitened means, it is as a rule impossible for a woman to retain this youthfulness.

In the case of the Rossettis, in the early period they were in a position of straitened means. Nor was this all: the children, Gabriel alone excepted, felt themselves to be by nationality aliens. Christina, though she made only one visit to Italy, felt herself to be an Italian, and would smile when any one talked to her of the John Bullism of her brother Gabriel, and yet, with these powerful causes working against their natural elasticity of temperament, both mother and p. 205
daughter retained that juvenility which Gabriel Rossetti felt to be so refreshing. So strong was it in the mother that it had a strange effect upon the mere physique, and at eighty the expression in the eyes, and, indeed, on the face throughout, retained so much of the winsomeness of youth that she was more beautiful than most young women:—

1882.

My blessed mother dozing in her chair
  On Christmas Day seemed an embodied Love,
A comfortable Love with soft brown hair
  Softened and silvered to a tint of dove;
A better sort of Venus with an air
  Angelical from thoughts that dwell above;
A wiser Pallas in whose body fair
  Enshrined a blessed soul looks out thereof.
Winter brought holly then, now Spring has brought
  Paler and frailer snowdrops shivering;
And I have brought a simple humble thought—
  I her devoted duteous Valentine—
A lifelong thought which thrills this song I sing,
  A lifelong love to this dear saint of mine.

Although this was not so with Christina, upon whose face ill-health worked its ravages, her temperament, as we say, remained as young as ever. The lovely relations—sometimes staid and sometimes playful—between mother and daughter, are seen throughout the book before us. But especially are they seen in one little group of poems—"The Valentines to her Mother"—in regard to which Christina left the following pencilled note:—

"These Valentines had their origin from my dearest mother's remarking that she had never p. 206
received one. I, her C. G. R., ever after supplied one on the day; and (so far as I recollect) it was a surprise every time, she having forgotten all about it in the interim."

Mrs. Rossetti's first valentine was received when she was nearly seventy-six years of age, and she continued every year to receive a valentine until 1886, when she died. Surely there is not in the history of English poetry anything more fascinating than these valentines.

It is pleasing to see the book open with the following dedication by Mr. W. M. Rossetti:—

"To Algernon Charles Swinburne, a generous eulogist of Christina Rossetti, who hailed his genius and prized himself the greatest of living British poets, my old and constant friend, I dedicate this book."

V. DR. GORDON HAKE. 1809–1895.

p. 207

I little thought when I recently quoted from Dr. Hake's account of that Christmas gathering of the Rossettis at Bognor in 1875—a gathering which he has made historic—that to-day I should be writing an obituary notice of the "parable-poet" himself. It is true that, having fractured a leg in a lamentable accident which befell him, he had for the last few years been imprisoned in one room and compelled during most of the time to lie in a horizontal position. But notwithstanding this, and notwithstanding his great age, his mental faculties remained so unimpaired that it was hard to believe his death could be so near.

Although, owing to his intimacy with George Borrow, Hake was associated in the public mind with the Eastern Counties, he was not an East Anglian. It was at Leeds (in 1809) that he first saw the light. His mother was a Gordon of the Huntly stock, and came of "the Park branch" of that house. The famous General Gordon was his first cousin, and it was owing to this fact that Hake's son, Mr. Egmont Hake, was entrusted with the material for writing his authoritative books upon p. 208
the heroic Christian soldier. Between Hake's eldest son, Mr. T. St. E. Hake, a rising novelist, and the General the likeness was curiously strong. Nominated by one of his uncles to Christ's Hospital, Hake entered that famous school. He gives in his 'Memoirs of Eighty Years' a very vivid picture of it and also a really vital portrait of himself. From his very childhood he was haunted by a literary ambition which can only be called an insatiable passion. It lasted till the very hour of his death. When eleven years of age he became acquainted with that one poet whose immensity of fame has for more than three centuries been the flame into which the myriad Shakespeare moths of English literature have been flying. The Shakespearean of eleven summers did not, like so many Shakespeare enthusiasts from Davenant down to those latest Shakespeares, Homers, and Miltons of our contemporary paragraphists, get himself up to look like the Stratford bust. The only man who ever really looked like that bust was the late Dion Boucicault, who did so without trying. But Shakespeare's wonderful work acted on the imagination of the child of eleven in an equally humorous way. "Shakespeare's perfection," he says in his memoirs, "not only made me envious of the greatest of writers, but it depressed me in turn with the feeling that I could never equal it howsoever long I might live." p. 209

Yet although this passion never passed away, but waxed with his years, it must not be supposed that Hake suffered from what in the "new criticism" is sweetly and appropriately called "modernity"—in other words, that vulgar greed for notoriety that in these days, when literature to be listened to must be puffed like quack medicine and patent soap, has made the atmosphere of the literary arena somewhat stifling in the nostrils of those who turn from "modernity" to poetic art. Nor was Hake's feeling akin to that fine despair

> Before the foreheads of the gods of song

which true poets, great or small, know—that fine despair which, while it will sometimes stop the breath of one of the true sons of Apollo, as it actually did strike mute Charles Wells, and as at one time it threatened to stop the breath of Rossetti, will lead others to write, and write, and write. It is, however, life's illusions that in most cases make life tolerable. When in old age calamity came upon Hake, and he was shut out from life as by a prison wall, his one solace, the one thing that really bound him to life, was this ambitious dream which came upon the Bluecoat boy of eleven.

His mother was in easy circumstances, and when a youth Hake travelled a good deal on the Continent, where his success in the "great world" of that time was swift and complete. If this p. 210
success was owing as much to his exceptionally striking personal appearance and natural endowment of style as to his intellectual equipments—high as these were—that is not surprising to those who knew him. Of course he was well advanced in years before I was old enough to call him my friend; but even then he was so extremely handsome a man that I can well believe the stories I have got from his family connexions (such as his wife's sisters) of his appearance in youth. With the single exception of Tennyson, he was the most poetical-looking poet I have ever seen. And circumstances put to the best uses his natural gift of style; for it was in the plastic period of his life that he met the best people on the Continent and in England. I suspect, indeed, that after the plastic period in a man's life is passed it is not of much use for him to come into contact with what used to be called "the great world." To be, or to seem to be, unconscious of

one's own bearing towards the world, and unconscious of the world's bearing towards oneself, is, I fancy, impossible to a man—even though he have the genius and intellectual endowment of a Browning—who is for the first time brought into touch with society after the plastic period is passed.

I have told elsewhere the whimsical story of Hake and Rossetti, of Rossetti's delightful account of his reading as a boy, in a coffee-house in Chancery Lane, Hake's remarkable romance 'Vates,' afterwards called 'Valdarno,' in a magazine; his writing a letter about it to the unknown author, and getting no reply until many years had passed. Hake's relations towards Rossetti were of the deepest and most sacred kind. Rossetti had the highest opinion of Hake's poetical genius, and also felt towards him the greatest love and gratitude for services of an inestimable kind rendered to him in the direst crisis of his life. To enter upon these matters, however, is obviously impossible in a brief and hurried obituary notice; and equally impossible is it for me to enter into the poetic principles of a writer whose very originality has been a barrier to his winning a wide recognition. p. 211

Hake's best work is that, I think, contained in the volume called 'New Symbols,' in which there is disclosed an extraordinary variety of poetic power. In execution, too, he is at his best in that volume. Christina Rossetti has often told me that 'Ecce Homo' impressed her more profoundly than did any other poem of her own time. Also its daring startled her. It was, however, the previous volume, 'Madeline, and other Poems,' which brought him into contact with Rossetti—the great event of his literary life.

If the man ever lived who could take as much interest in another man's work as his own, Dr. Hake in finding Rossetti found that man. Although at that time Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, William Morris, and Swinburne were running abreast of each other, there was no poet in England who would not have felt honoured by having his work reviewed by Rossetti. But Dr. Hake, whose name was absolutely unknown, had made his way into Rossetti's affections—as, indeed, he made his way into the affections of all who knew him—and this was quite enough to induce Rossetti to ask Dr. Appleton for leave to review 'Madeline' in '71 in *The Academy*—a request which Appleton, of course, was delighted to grant. And again, when in 1873 'Parables and Tales' appeared, Mr. John Morley, we may be sure, was something more than willing to let Rossetti review the book in *The Fortnightly Review*; and, again, when 'New Symbols' appeared, there was some talk about Rossetti's reviewing it in *The Fortnightly Review*; but this, for certain reasons which Rossetti explained to me—reasons which have been misunderstood, but which were entirely adequate—was abandoned. Down to the period when Dr. Hake went to live in Germany he and his son Mr. Gordon Hake were among the most intimate friends of the great poet-painter. Mr. Gordon Hake, indeed, a man of admirable culture and abilities, lived with Rossetti, who certainly benefited much by contact with his bright and lively companion. The portrait of Dr. Hake prefixed to Mrs. Meynell's selections from his works is one of Rossetti's finest crayons. It is, however, too heavy in expression for Hake. p. 212 p. 213

Full of fine qualities as is his best poetry, full of intellectual subtlety, imagination, and a rare combination of subjective with objective power, there is apparently in it a certain *je ne sais quoi* which has prevented him at present from winning his true meed of fame. His hand, no doubt, is uncertain; but so is the hand of many a successful poet—that of Christina Rossetti, for instance. For sheer originality of conception and of treatment what recent poems surpass or even equal 'Old Souls' and the 'Serpent Charmer'? Then take the remarkable mastery over colour exhibited by 'Ortrud's Vision.' His volume of pantheistic sonnets in the Shakespearean form, 'The New Day,' written in his eighty-first year, is on the whole, however, his most remarkable work. The kind of Sufeyistic nature ecstasy displayed therein by a man of so advanced an age is nothing less than wonderful. And as to knowledge of nature, not even Wordsworth or Tennyson knew nature so completely as did Hake, for he had a thorough training as a naturalist. In looking at a flower he could enjoy not only its beauty, but also the delight of picturing to himself the flower's inherited beauty and the ancestors from which the flower got its inheritance. And as regards the lyrical flow imported into so monumental a form as the sonnet, every student of this form must needs study the book with the greatest interest. His very latest work, however, is in prose. I find it extremely difficult to write about 'Memoirs of Eighty Years.' It is full of remarkable qualities: wit, humour, an ebullience of animal spirits that is Rabelaisian. What it lacks (and in some portions of it greatly lacks) is delicacy, refinement of tone. And surely this is remarkable when we realize the kind of man he was who wrote it. p. 214

It has been my privilege to go about with him not only in London, but also in Rome, in Paris, in Venice, in Florence, Pisa, &c.; and no matter what might be the quality of the society with which he was brought into contact, it always seemed to me that he was distinguished by his very lack of that accentuated movement which the *littérateur* generally displays. I merely dwell upon this to show how inscrutable are the mental processes in the crowning puzzle of the great humourist Nature, the writing man. Just as the most angular and *gauche* man in a literary gathering may possibly turn out to be the poet whose lyrics have been compared to Shelley, or the prose writer whose mellifluous periods have been compared to those of Plato, so the most dignified man in the room may turn out to be the writer of a book whose defect is a noticeable lack of dignified style. It was hard, indeed, for those who knew Hake in the flesh to believe that the 'Memoirs of Eighty Years' was written by him. I suppose I shall be expected to say a word about the famous intimacy between Hake and Borrow. After Hake went to live in Germany, Borrow told me a good deal about this intimacy and also about his own early life; for reticent as he naturally was, he and I got to be confidential and intimate. His friendship with Hake began when Hake was practising as a p. 215

physician in Norfolk. It lasted during the greater part of Borrow's later life. When Borrow was living in London, his great delight was to walk over on Sundays from Hereford Square to Coombe End, call upon Hake, and take a stroll with him over Richmond Park. They both had a passion for herons and for deer. At that time Hake was a very intimate friend of my own, and having had the good fortune to be introduced by him to Borrow, I used to join the two in their walks. Afterwards, when Hake went to live in Germany, I used to take these walks with Borrow alone. Two more interesting men it would be impossible to meet. The remarkable thing was that there was between them no sort of intellectual sympathy. In style, in education, in experience, whatever Hake was Borrow was not. Borrow knew almost nothing of Hake's writings, either in p. 216
prose or in verse. His ideal poet was Pope, and when he read, or rather looked into, Hake's 'World's Epitaph,' he thought he did Hake the greatest honour by saying, "There are lines here and there that are nigh as good as Pope's." On the other hand, Hake's acquaintance with Borrow's works was far behind that of some Borrovians who did not know Lavengro in the flesh, such as Mr. Saintsbury and Mr. Birrell.

Borrow was shy, eccentric, angular, rustic in accent and in locution, but with a charm for me, at least, that was irresistible. Hake was polished, easy, and urbane in everything, and, although not without prejudice and bias, ready to shine gracefully in any society. As far as Hake was concerned, the sole link between them was that of reminiscence of earlier days and adventures in Borrow's beloved East Anglia. Among many proofs that I could adduce of this, I will give one. I am the possessor of the manuscript of Borrow's 'Gypsies in Spain,' written partly in a Spanish note-book as he moved about Spain in his colporteur days. It was my wish that Hake would leave behind him some memorial of Borrow more worthy of himself and his friend than those brief reminiscences contained in 'Memoirs of Eighty Years.' I took to Hake this precious relic of one of the most wonderful men of the nineteenth century in order to discuss with him differences p. 217
between the MS. and the printed text. Hake was sitting in his invalid chair, writing verses. "What does it all matter?" he said. "I do not think you understand Lavengro," said I. Hake replied, "And yet Lavengro had an advantage over me, for *he* understood *nobody*. Every individuality with which he was brought into contact had, as no one knows better than you, to be tinged with colours of his own before he could see it at all."

This, of course, was true enough; and Hake's asperities when speaking of Borrow in 'Memoirs of Eighty Years'—asperities which have vexed a good many Borrovians—simply arose from the fact that it was impossible for two such men to understand each other. When I told him of Andrew Lang's angry onslaught upon Borrow, in his notes to the "Waverley Novels," on account of his attacks upon Scott, he said, "Well, and does he not deserve it?" When I told him of Miss Cobbe's description of Borrow as a *poseur*, he said to me, "I told you the same scores of times. But I saw that Borrow had bewitched you during that first walk under the rainbow in Richmond Park. It was that rainbow, I think, that befooled you." Borrow's affection for Hake, however, was both strong and deep, as I saw after Hake had gone to Germany and in a way dropped out of Borrow's ken. Yet Hake was as good a man as ever Borrow was, and for certain others with whom he was p. 218
brought in contact as full of a genuine affection as Borrow was himself.

JOHN LEICESTER WARREN, LORD DE TABLEY. 1835–1895.

p. 219

I.

In the death of Lord de Tabley, the English world of letters has lost a true poet and a scholar of very varied accomplishments. His friends have lost much more. Since his last attack of influenza, those who knew him and loved him had been much concerned about him. The pallor of his complexion had greatly increased; so had his feebleness. As long ago as May last, when I called upon him at the Athenæum Club in order to join him at a luncheon he was giving at the Café Royal, I found that he had engaged a four-wheeled cab to take us over those few yards. The expression in his kind and wistful blue-grey eyes showed that he had noted the start of surprise I gave on seeing the cab waiting for us. "You know my love of a growler," he said; "this is just to save us the bother of getting across the Piccadilly cataracts." I thought to myself, "I wish it were only the bother of crossing the cataracts which accounts for the growler."

Another sign that the physical part of him was in the grip of the demon of decay was that, instead p. 220
of coming to the Pines to luncheon, as had been his wont, he preferred of late to come to afternoon tea, and return to Elm Park before dinner. And on the occasion when he last came in this way it seemed to us here that he had aged still more; yet his intellectual forces had lost nothing of their power. And as a companion he was as winsome as ever. That fine quality with which he was so richly endowed, the quality which used to be called "urbanity," was as fresh when I saw him last as when I first knew him. That sweet sagacity, mellowed and softened by a peculiarly quiet humour, shone from his face at intervals as he talked of the pleasant old days when he was my colleague on *The Athenæum*, and when I used to call upon him so frequently on my way to Rossetti in Cheyne Walk to chat over "the walnuts and the wine" about poetry.

My own friendship with him began at my first meeting him, and this was long ago. Being at that time a less-known man of letters than I am now, supposing that to be possible, I was astonished

one day when my friend Edmund Gosse told me that his friend Leicester Warren had expressed a wish to meet me on account of certain things of mine which he had read in *The Examiner* and *The Athenæum*. I accepted with alacrity Mr. Gosse's invitation to one of those charming *salons* of his p. 221
on the banks of Westbournia's Grand Canal which have become historic. I was surprised to find Warren, who was then scarcely above forty, looking so old, not to say so old-fashioned. At that time he did not wear the moustache and beard which afterwards lent a picturesqueness to his face. There was a kind of rural appearance about him which had for me a charm of its own; it suited so well with his gentle ways, I thought. This being the impression he made upon me, it may be imagined how delighted I was shortly afterwards to see him come to the door of Ivy Lodge, Putney, where I was then living alone. Nor was I less surprised than delighted to see him. On realizing at Gosse's *salon* that my new acquaintance was a botanist, I had fraternized with him on this point, and had described to him an extremely rare and lovely little tree growing in the centre of my garden, which some unknown lover of trees had imported. I had given Warren a kind of general invitation to come some day and see it. So early a call as this I had not hoped to get. Perhaps I thought so reclusive a man as he even then appeared would never come at all.

After having duly admired the tree he turned to the Rossetti crayons on the walls of the rooms; but although he talked much about 'The Spirit of the Rainbow' and the design from the same beautiful model which William Sharp has christened 'Forced Music,' the loveliness of which p. 222
attracted him not a little, I perceived that he had something else that he wanted to talk about, and allowed him to lead the conversation up to it. To my surprise I found that, so far from having perceived how much he had interested me, he had imagined that my attitude towards him was constrained, and had explained it to his own discomfort after the following fashion: "Watts has an intimate friend of whose poetry I am a deep admirer—so deep indeed that some people, and not without reason, have said that my own poetry is unduly influenced by it. But an article by me in *The Fortnightly* goes out of its way to dub as a 'minor poet' the very writer to whose influence I have succumbed. It is the incongruity between my dubbing my idol a 'minor poet' and my real and most obvious admiration of his work that makes Watts, in spite of an external civility, feel unfriendly towards me. Yet there is no real incongruity, for it was the editor, G. H. Lewes, who, after my proof had been returned for press, interpolated the objectionable words about the minor poet."

This was how he had been reasoning. When I laughed and told him to recast his syllogism—told him that I had never seen the article in question, and doubted whether my friend had—matters became very bright between us. He stayed to luncheon; we walked on the Common; I showed p. 223
him our Wimbledon sun-dews; in a word, I felt that I had discovered a richer gold mine than the richest in the world, a new friend. Had I then known him as well as I afterwards did, I should have been aware that he had a strong dash of the sensitive, not to say the morbid, in his nature. He had a habit of submitting almost every incident of his life to such an analysis as that I have been describing.

On another occasion, when years later he had a difference with a friend, I reminded him of the incident recorded above, and made him laugh by saying, "My dear Warren, you are so afraid of treading on people's corns that you tread upon them."

On first visiting him, as on many a subsequent occasion, I was struck by the variety of his intellectual interests, and the thoroughness with which he pursued them all. I have lately said in print what I fully believe—that he was the most learned of English poets, if learning means something more than mere scholarship. He was a skilled numismatist, and in 1862 published, through the Numismatic Society, 'An Essay on Greek Federal Coinage,' and an essay 'On Some Coins of Lycia under Rhodian Domination and of the Lycian League.' He even took an interest in book-plates, and actually, in 1880, published 'A Guide to the Study of Book-Plates.' I should not have been at all surprised to learn that he was also writing a guide for the collectors of postage p. 224
stamps.

At this time he had published a good deal of verse; for instance, 'Eclogues and Monodramas' in 1865; 'Studies in Verse' in 1866; 'Orestes' in 1867; a collection of poems called 'Rehearsals' in 1873; another collection, called 'The Searching Net,' in 1876. From this time, during many years, I saw him frequently, although, for a reason which it is not necessary to discuss here, he became seized with a deep dislike of the literary world and its doings, and I am not aware that he saw any literary man save myself and the late W. B. Scott, the bond between whom and himself was "book-plates"! Then he took to residing in the country. As a poet he seemed to be quite forgotten, save by students of poetry, until his name was revived by means of Mr. Miles's colossal anthology 'The Poets and the Poetry of the Nineteenth Century,' Mr. Miles, it seems, was a great admirer of Lord de Tabley's poetry, and managed to reach the hermit in his cell. In the sixth volume of his work Mr. Miles gave a judicious selection from Lord de Tabley's poems and an admirable essay upon them. The selection attracted a good deal of attention.

On finding that the public would listen to him, I urged him to bring out a volume of selected pieces from all his works, an idea which for some time he contested with his usual pessimistic p. 225
vigour. Having, however, set my heart upon it, I spoke upon the subject to Mr. John Lane, who at once saw his way to bring out such a volume at his own risk. To the poet's astonishment the book was a success, and it at once passed into a second edition. In the spring of this year he was emboldened to bring out another volume of new poems, and his name became firmly re-established as a poet. It was after the success of the first book that he consulted me upon a question which was then upon his mind: Should he devote his future energies to literature or to

making himself a position as a speaker in the Lords? He had lately had occasion to speak both in the country and in the Lords upon some local matter of importance, and his success had in some slight degree revived an old aspiration to plunge into the world of politics. He was a Liberal, and in 1868 he had contested—but unsuccessfully—Mid-Cheshire. This was on the first election for that division after the Reform Act of 1867. His support in a county so Conservative as Cheshire had really been very strong, but he never made another effort to get into Parliament. "You know my way," he used to say. "I can make one spring—perhaps a pretty good spring—but not more than one."

On the whole, he leaned towards the idea of going into politics. The way in which he put the case to me was thoroughly characteristic of him: "Even if my verse were strong and vital, which I fear p. 226
it is not, there is almost no chance for men of my generation receiving more than a slight attention at the present day. Things have altogether changed since the sixties and seventies, when I published my most important work—at a time when the prominent names were Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. The old critical oracles are now dumb; the reviewers are all young men whose knowledge of poetry does not go back so far as the sixties. Those who reviewed the selection from my work in Miles's book showed themselves to be entirely unconscious of the name of Leicester Warren, and treated the poems there selected as being the work of a new writer; and even when the poems published by Lane came out, no one seemed to be aware that they were by a writer who was very much to the fore a quarter of a century ago. That book has had a flutter of success, but in how large a degree was the success owing to the curiosity excited by the book of a man of my generation being brought out now, and by the publisher of the men of this? With all my sympathy with the work of the younger men and my admiration of some of it, things, I say, have changed since those days."

I did not share these pessimistic views. Moreover, knowing as I did how extremely sensitive he p. 227
was, I knew that his figuring in Parliament would result in the greatest pain to him, and if I gave a somewhat exaggerated expression with regard to my hopes of him in the literary world, it was a kindly feeling towards himself that impelled me to do so. He took my advice and proceeded to gather material for another volume.

To define clearly the impression left upon one by intercourse with any man is difficult. In De Tabley's case it is almost impossible. His remarkable modesty, or rather diffidence, was what, perhaps, struck me most. It was a genuine lack of faith in his own powers; it had nothing whatever to do with "mock-modesty." I had a singular instance of this diffidence in the autumn of last year. Lord de Tabley, who was staying at Ryde, having learnt that I was staying with a friend near Niton Bay, wrote to me there saying that he somewhat specially wanted to see me, and proposed our lunching together at an hotel at Ventnor. I was delighted to accede to this, for, like all who fully knew Lord de Tabley, I was thoroughly and deeply attached to him. He was so genuine and so modest and so genial—unsoured by the great and various sorrows of which he used sometimes to talk to me by the cosy study fire—nay, sweetened by them, as I often thought
—so grateful for the smallest service rendered in an arena where ingratitude sometimes seems to p. 228
be the *vis motrix* of life—a truly lovable man, if ever there was one.

I drove over to Ventnor. As I chanced to reach the hotel somewhat before the appointed time, and he had not arrived, I drove on to Bonchurch along the Shanklin road. On my way back, I passed a four-wheel cab; but not dreaming that his love of the "growler" reached beyond London, I never thought of him in connexion with it until I saw the well-known face with its sweet thoughtful expression looking through the cab window. On this occasion it looked so specially thoughtful that I imagined something serious had occurred. At the hotel I found that he had secured a snug room and a luxurious luncheon. An ominous packet of writing-paper peering from his overcoat pocket convinced me that it was a manuscript brought for me to read, and feeling that I should prefer to get it over before luncheon, I asked him to show it to me. He then told me its history. Having sent by special invitation a poem to *The Nineteenth Century*, the editor had returned it—returned it with certain strictures upon portions of it. This incident he had at once subjected to the usual analysis, and had come to the conclusion that certain outside influences of an invidious kind had been brought to play upon the editor.

Time was when I should have shrunk with terror from so thankless a task as that of reading a p. 229
manuscript with such a frightful history, but it is astonishing what a long experience in the literary world will do for a man in perplexities of this kind. I read the manuscript and the editor's courteous but sagacious comments, and I found that the poet had undertaken a subject which was utterly and almost inconceivably alien to his genius. As I read I felt the wistful gaze fixed upon me while the waiter was moving in and out of the room, preparing the luncheon table. "Well," said he, as I laid the manuscript down, "what do you think? do you agree with the editor?" "Not entirely," I said. "Not entirely!" he exclaimed; then turning to the waiter, he said, "You can leave the soup, and I will ring when we are ready." "Not entirely," I repeated. "With all the editor's strictures I entirely agree, but he says that by working upon it you may make it into a worthy poem: there I disagree with him. I consider it absolutely hopeless. I regret now that we did not leave the matter until after luncheon, but we will not let it spoil our appetites."

I am afraid it did spoil our appetites nevertheless, for I felt that I had been compelled, for his own sake, to give him pain. He was much depressed, declared that the success of his late book was entirely factitious, and vowed that nothing should ever persuade him to write another line of verse, and that he would now devote his attention to a peer's duties in the House of Lords. I was p. 230
so disturbed myself at thus paining so lovable a friend that next day I wrote to him, trying to soften what I had said, and urged him to do as the editor of *The Nineteenth Century* had

suggested, write another poem—a poem upon some classical subject, which he would deal with so admirably. The result of it all was that he found the editor's strictures on the unlucky poem to be absolutely well grounded, and wrote for *The Nineteenth Century* 'Orpheus,' one of the finest of his later poems.

I think these anecdotes of Lord de Tabley will show why we who knew him were so attached to him.

II.

Can it be claimed for Lord de Tabley that in the poetical firmament which hung over the days of his youth—when the heavens were bright with such luminaries as Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Rossetti, Swinburne, and Morris—he had a place of his own? We think it can. And in saying this we are fully conscious of the kind of praise we are awarding him. Whatever may be said for or against the artistic temper of the present hour, it must certainly be said of the time we are alluding to that it was great as regards its wealth of poetic genius, and as regards its artistic temper greater still. It was a time when "the beauteous damsel Poesy, honourable and retired," whom Cervantes described, dared still roam the English Parnassus, "a friend of solitude," disturbed by no clash of Notoriety's brazen cymbals, "where fountains entertained her, woods freed her from *ennui*, and flowers delighted her"—delighted her for their own sakes. In order to write such verses as the following from the concluding poem of the volume before us [231] a man must really have passed into that true mood of the poet described by the great Spanish humourist:—

How idle for a spurious fame
To roll in thorn-beds of unrest;
What matter whom the mob acclaim,
If thou art master of thy breast?

If sick thy soul with fear and doubt,
And weary with the rabble din,—
If thou wouldst scorn the herd without,
First make the discord calm within.

If we are lords in our disdain,
And rule our kingdoms of despair,
As fools we shall not plough the main
For halters made of syren's hair.

We need not traverse foreign earth
To seek an alien Sorrow's face.
She sits within thy central hearth,
And at thy table has her place.

So with this hour of push and pelf,
Where nought unsordid seems to last,
Vex not thy miserable self,
But search the fallows of the past.

In Time's rich track behind us lies
A soil replete with root and seed;
There harvest wheat repays the wise,
While idiots find but charlock weed.

Between the writer of the above lines and those great poets who in his youth were his contemporaries there is this point of affinity: like them his actual achievements do not strike the reader so forcibly as the potentialities which those achievements reveal. In the same way that Achilles was suggested by his "spear" in the picture in the chamber of Lucrece, the poet who writes not for fame, but writes to please himself, suggests unconsciously his own portrait by every touch:—

For much imaginary work was there;
Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind,
That for Achilles' image stood his spear
Grip'd in an armèd hand; himself behind
Was left unseen save to the eye of mind:
A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head,
Stood for the whole to be imaginèd.

Poets, indeed, have always been divisible into those whose poetry gives the reader an impression that they are greater than their work, and those whose poetry gives the reader a contrary impression. There have always been poets who may say of themselves, like the "Poet" in 'Timon of Athens,'

Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes
From whence 'tis nourished: the fire i' the flint
Shows not till it be struck.

And there have always been poets whose verse, howsoever good it may be, shows that, although they have been able to mould into poetic forms the riches of the life around them, and also of the literature which has come to them as an inheritance, they are simply working for fame, or rather for notoriety, in the markets of the outer world. The former can give us an impression of personal greatness such as the latter cannot.

With regard to the originality of Lord de Tabley's work, it is obvious that every poet must in some measure be influenced by the leading luminaries of his own period. But at no time would it have p. 234
been fair to call Lord de Tabley an imitator; and in the new poems in this volume the accent is, perhaps, more individual than was the accent of any of his previous poetry. The general reader's comparatively slight acquaintance with Greek poetry may become unfortunate for modern poets. Often and often it occurs that a poet is charged with imitating another poet of a more prominent position than his own when, as a matter of fact, both poets have been yielding to the magic influence of some poet of Greece. Such a yielding has been held to be legitimate in every literature of the modern world. Indeed, to be coloured by the great classics of Greek and Roman literature is the inevitable destiny and the special glory of all the best poetry of the modern world, as it is the inevitable destiny and the special glory of the far-off waters of the Nile to be enriched and toned by the far-off wealth of Ruwenzori and the great fertilizing lakes from which they have sprung. But in drawing from the eternal fountains of beauty Lord de Tabley's processes were not those of his great contemporaries; they were very specially his own, as far removed from the severe method of Matthew Arnold on the one hand as from Tennyson's method on the other.

His way of work was always to illustrate a story of Hellenic myth by symbols and analogies drawn p. 235
not from the more complex economies of a later world, as was Tennyson's way, but from that wide knowledge of the phenomena of nature which can be attained only by a poet whose knowledge is that of the naturalist. His devotion to certain departments of natural science has been running parallel with his devotion to poetry, and if learning is something wider than scholarship, he is the most learned poet of his time. While Tennyson's knowledge of natural science, though wide, was gathered from books, Lord de Tabley's knowledge, especially in the department of botany, is derived largely from original observation and inquiry. And this knowledge enables him to make his poetry alive with organic detail such as satisfies the naturalist as fully as the other qualities in his works satisfy the lover of poetry. The leading poem of the present volume, 'Orpheus in Hades,' is full of a knowledge of the ways of nature beyond the reach of most poets, and yet this knowledge is kept well in governance by his artistic sense; it is never obtruded—never more than hinted at, indeed:—

> Soon, soon I saw the spectral vanguard come,
> Coasting along, as swallows, beating low
> Before a hint of rain. In buoyant air,
> Circling thy poise, and hardly move the wing,
> And rather float than fly. Then other spirits,
> Shrill and more fierce, came wailing down the gale;
> As plaintive plovers came with swoop and scream
> To lure our footsteps from their furrowy nest, p. 236
> So these, as lapwing guardians, sailed and swung
> To save the secrets of their gloomy lair.

* * * * *

> I hate to watch the flower set up its face.
> I loathe the trembling shimmer of the sea,
> Its heaving roods of intertangled weed
> And orange sea-wrack with its necklace fruit;
> The stale, insipid cadence of the dawn,
> The ringdove, tedious harper on five tones,
> The eternal havoc of the sodden leaves,
> Rotting the floors of Autumn.

'The Death of Phaëthon' is another poem in which Lord de Tabley succeeds in mingling a true poetic energy with that subtle dignity of utterance which can never really be divorced from true poetry, whether the poet's subject be lofty or homely.

The line

> With sudden ray and music across the sea

and the opening line of the poem,

> Before him the immeasurable heaven,

cause us to think that Lord de Tabley has paid but little attention to the question of elision in English poetry. In the second of the lines above quoted elision is impossible, in the first elision is demanded. The reason why elision is sometimes demanded is that in certain lines, as in the one which opens 'Orpheus in Hades,' the hiatus which occurs when a word ending with a vowel is followed by a vowel beginning the next word may be so great as to become intolerable. The p. 237
reason why elision is sometimes a merely allowable beauty is that when a word ends with *w*, *r*, or

l, to elide the liquids is to secure a kind of billowy music of a peculiarly delightful kind. Now elision is very specially demanded in a line like that which opens ‘Orpheus in Hades,’ where the pause of the line fall upon *the*. To make the main pause of the line fall upon *the* is extremely and painfully bad, even when the next word begins with a consonant; but when the word following *the* begins with a vowel, the line is absolutely immetrical; it has, indeed, no more to do with English prosody than with that prosody of Japan upon which Mr. Basil Chamberlain discourses so pleasantly. On the other hand, the elision of the second syllable of the word *music* in the other line quoted above is equally faulty in another direction. But as we said when reviewing Mr. Bridges’s treatise on Milton’s prosody, nothing is more striking than the helplessness of most recent poets when confronted with the simple question of elision.

In an ‘Ode to a Star’ there is great beauty and breadth of thought and expression. Its only structural blemish, that of an opening stanza whose form is not distinctly followed, can be so easily put right that it need only be mentioned here in order to emphasize the canon that it is only in irregular odes that variation of stanza is permissible. Keats, no doubt, in one at least of p. 238
his unequalled odes, does depart from the scheme of structure indicated by the opening stanza, and without any apparent metrical need for so doing. But the poem does not gain by the departure. Besides, Keats is now a classic, and has a freedom in regard to irregularities of metre which Lord de Tabley would be the last to claim for himself. Another blemish of a minor kind in the ‘Ode to a Star’ is that of rhyming “meteor” with “wheatear.”

If the poetry in Lord de Tabley’s volume answers as little to Milton’s famous list of the poetic requirements, “simple, sensuous, and passionate,” as does Milton’s own poetry, which answers to only the second of these demands, very high poetry might be cited which is neither sensuous nor passionate. The so-called coldness displayed by ‘Lycidas’ arises not, it may well be supposed, from any lack on Milton’s part of sorrow for his friend, but from his determination that simple he would not be, and yet his method is justified of its own beauty and glory. Of course poetry may be too ornate, but in demanding a simplicity of utterance from the poet it is easy for the critic to forget how wide and how various are poetry’s domains. For if in one mood poetry is the simple and unadorned expression of nature, in another it is the woof of art,

> Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes
> As are the tiger-moth’s deep-damasked wings.

In the matter of poetic ornament, all that the reader has any right to demand is that the p. 239
decoration should be poetical and not rhetorical. Now, as a matter of fact, there is no surer sign of the amount of the poetical endowment of any poet than the insight he shows into the nature of poetry as distinguished from rhetoric when working on ornate poetry. It is a serious impeachment of latter-day criticism that in very many cases, perhaps in most cases, the plaudits given to the last new “leading poet” of the hour are awarded to “felicitous lines,” every felicity of which is rhetorical and not poetical.

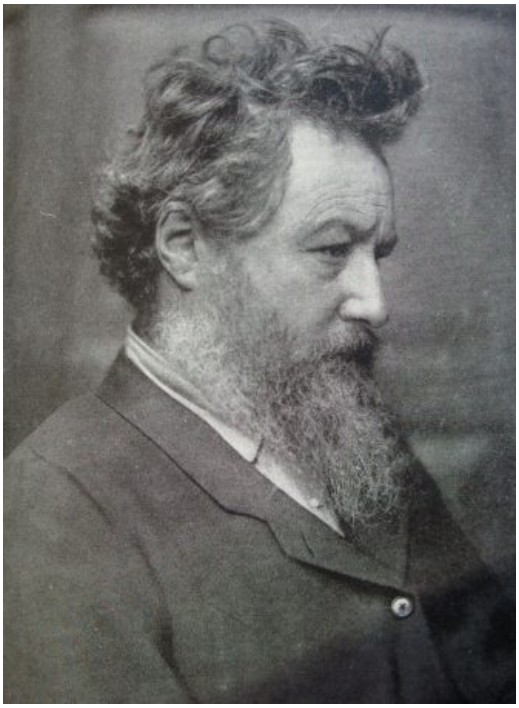
VII. WILLIAM MORRIS. 1834–1896.

p. 240

I.

The news of the grave turn suddenly taken by William Morris’s illness prepared the public for the still worse news that was to follow.

The certificate of the immediate cause of death affirms it to have been phthisis, but one would suppose that almost every vital organ had become exhausted. Each time that I saw him he declared, in answer to my inquiries, that he suffered no pain whatever. And a comforting thought this is to us all—that Morris suffered no pain. To Death himself we may easily be reconciled—nay, we might even look upon him as Nature’s final beneficence to all her children, if it were not for the cruel means he so often employs in fulfilling his inevitable mission. The thought that Morris’s life had ended in the tragedy of pain—the thought that he to whom work was sport and generosity the highest form of enjoyment, suffered what some men suffer in shuffling off the p. 241
mortal coil—would have been intolerable almost. For among the thousand and one charms of the man, this, perhaps, was the chief, that Nature had endowed him with an enormous capacity of enjoyment, and that Circumstance, conspiring with Nature, said to him, “Enjoy.”



Born in easy circumstances, though not to the degrading trouble of wealth—cherishing as his sweetest possessions a devoted wife and two daughters, each of them endowed with intelligence so rare as to understand a genius such as his—surrounded by friends, some of whom were among the first men of our time, and most of whom were of the very salt of the earth—it may be said of him that Misfortune, if she touched him at all, never struck home. If it is true, as Mérimée affirms, that men are hastened to maturity by misfortune, who wanted Morris to be mature? Who wanted him to be other than the radiant boy of genius that he remained till the years had silvered his hair and carved wrinkles on his brow, but left his blue-grey eyes as bright as when they first opened on the world? Enough for us to think that the man must, indeed, be specially beloved by the gods who in his sixty-third year dies young. Old age Morris could not have borne with patience. Pain would not have developed him into a hero. This beloved man, who must have died some day, died when his marvellous powers were at their best—and died without pain. The scheme of life and death does not seem so much awry, after all. p. 242

At the last interview but one that ever I had with him—it was in the little carpetless room from which so much of his best work was turned out—he himself surprised me by leading the conversation upon a subject he rarely chose to talk about—the mystery of life and death. The conversation ended with these words of his: “I have enjoyed my life—few men more so—and death in any case is sure.”

It is difficult not to think that the cause of causes of his death was excessive exercise of all his forces, especially of the imaginative faculty. When I talked to him, as I often did, of the peril of such a life of tension as his, he pooh-poohed the idea. “Look at Gladstone,” he would say; “look at those wise owls your chancellors and your judges. Don’t they live all the longer for work? It is rust that kills men, not work.” No doubt he was right in contending that in intellectual efforts such as those he alluded to, where the only faculty drawn upon is the “dry light of intelligence,” a prodigious amount of work may be achieved without any sapping of the sources of life. But is this so where that fusion of all the faculties which we call genius is greatly taxed? I doubt it. In all true imaginative production there is, as De Quincey pointed out many years ago, a movement not of “the thinking machine” only, but of the whole man—the whole “genial” nature of the worker—his imagination, his judgment, moving in an evolution of lightning velocity from the whole of the work to the part, from the part to the whole, together with every emotion of the soul. Hence when, as in the case of Walter Scott, of Charles Dickens, and presumably of Shakespeare too, the emotional nature of Man is overtaxed, every part of the frame suffers, and cries out in vain for its share of that nervous fluid which is the true *vis vitæ*. p. 243

We have only to consider the sort of work Morris produced and its amount to realize that no human powers could continue to withstand such a strain. Many are of opinion that ‘The Lovers of Gudrun’ is his finest poem; he worked at it from four o’clock in the morning till four in the afternoon, and when he rose from the table he had produced 750 lines! Think of the forces at work in producing a poem like ‘Sigurd.’ Think of the mingling of the drudgery of the Dryasdust with the movements of an imaginative vision unsurpassed in our time; think, I say, of the collaborating of the ‘Völsunga Saga’ with the ‘Nibelungenlied,’ the choosing of this point from the Saga-man, and of that point from the later poem of the Germans, and then fusing the whole by imaginative heat into the greatest epic of the nineteenth century. Was there not work enough here for a considerable portion of a poet’s life? And yet so great is the entire mass of his work that ‘Sigurd’ is positively overlooked in many of the notices of his writings which have appeared since his death in the press, while in the others it is alluded to in three words, and this simply because the mass of other matter to be dealt with fills up all the available space of a newspaper. p. 244

Then, again, take his translation of the Odyssey. Some competent critics are dissatisfied with

this; yet in a certain sense it is a triumph. The two specially Homeric qualities—those, indeed, which set Homer apart from all other poets—are eagerness and dignity. Never again can they be fully combined, for never again will poetry be written in the Greek hexameters and by a Homer. That Tennyson could have given us the Homeric dignity his magnificent rendering of a famous fragment of the Iliad shows. Chapman's translations show that the eagerness also can be caught. Morris, of course, could not have given the dignity of Homer, but then, while Tennyson has left us only a few lines speaking with the dignity of the Iliad, Morris gave us a translation of the entire Odyssey, which, though it missed the Homeric dignity, secured the eagerness as completely as Chapman's free-and-easy paraphrase, and in a rendering as literal as Buckley's prose crib, which lay frankly by Morris's side as he wrote.

This, with his much less satisfactory translation of Virgil, where he gives us an almost word-for- p. 245
word translation, and yet throws over the poem a glamour of romance which brings Virgil into the sympathy of the modern reader, would have occupied years with almost any other poet. But these two efforts of his genius are swamped by the purely original poems, such as 'The Defence of Guenevere,' 'Jason,' 'The Earthly Paradise,' 'Love is Enough,' 'Poems by the Way,' &c. And then come his translations from the Icelandic. Mere translation is, of course, easy enough, but not such translation as that in the "Saga Library." Allowing for all the aid he got from Mr. Magnússon, what a work this is! Think of the imaginative exercise required to turn the language of these Saga-men into a diction so picturesque and so concrete as to make each Saga an English poem, for poem each one is, if Aristotle is right in thinking that imaginative substance and not metre is the first requisite of a poem.

And this brings me to those poems without metre which he invented for himself in the latter portion of his career. There is in these delightful stories, leaving out of consideration the exquisite lyrics interspersed, enough poetic wealth adequately to endow a dozen poets. The last of all of them—the one of which the last two chapters, when he could no longer hold a pen, he p. 246
dictated to his friend Mr. Cockerell, in the determination, as he said to me, that he would finish it before he died—will be found to be finer than any hitherto published. It is called 'The Sundering Flood,' and was written after the story 'The Water of the Wondrous Isles.' It ('The Sundering Flood') is as long as 'The Wood beyond the World,' but has lyrics interspersed.

But evidently it is as an inventor in the fine arts that he is chiefly known to the general public. "Had he written no poetry at all, he would have been as famous," we are told, "as he is now." Anyhow, there is no household of any culture among the English-speaking races in which the name of William Morris does not at once call up that great revival in decorative art for which the latter part of the nineteenth century will be famous. In his designs for tapestry and other textures, in his designs for wall-papers and furniture, there is an expenditure of imaginative force which alone might make the fame of an artist. Then his artistic printing, in which he invented his own decorations, his own type, and his own paper—think of the energy he put into all that! The moment that this new interest seized him he made a more thorough study of the various specimens of black-letter printing than had ever been made before save by specialists. But even this could not "fatigue an appetite" for the joy of work "which was insatiable." He started as an p. 247
apostle of Socialism. He edited *The Commonweal*, and wrote largely in it, sank money in it week by week with the greatest glee, stumped the country as a Socialist orator, and into that cause alone put the energy of three men. Is it any wonder, then, that those who loved him were appalled at this prodigious output? Often and often have I tried to bring this matter before him. It was all of no use. "For me to rest from work," he would say, "means to die."

When not absorbed in some occupation that he loved—and in no other would he move—his restlessness was that of a young animal. In conversation he could rarely sit still for ten consecutive minutes, but must needs spring from his seat and walk round the room, as if every limb were eager to take part in the talk. His boisterous restlessness was the first thing that struck strangers. During the period when the famous partnership of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. was being dissolved I saw him very frequently at Queen's Square, for I took a very active part in the arrangement of that matter, and after our interviews at Queen Square he and I used often to lunch together at the "Cock" in Fleet Street. He liked a sanded floor and quaint old-fashioned settles. Moreover, the chops were the finest to be had in London.

On the day following our first forgathering at the "Cock," I was lunching there with another poet p. 248
—a friend of his—when the waiter, who knew me well, said, "That was a loudish gent a-lunching with you yesterday, sir. I thought once you was a-coming to blows." Morris had merely been declaiming against the Elizabethan dramatists, especially Cyril Tourneur. He shouted out, "You ought to know better than to claim any merit for such work as 'The Atheist's Tragedy'"; and wound up with the generalization that "the use of blank verse as a poetic medium ought to be stopped by Act of Parliament for at least two generations." On another occasion, when Middleton (another fine spirit, who "should have died hereafter") and I were staying with him at Kelmscott Manor, the passionate emphasis with which he declared that the curse of mankind was civilization, and that Australia ought to have been left to the blacks, New Zealand to the Maoris, and South Africa to the Kaffirs, startled even Middleton, who knew him so well.

It was this boisterous energy and infinite enjoyment of life which made it so difficult for people on meeting him for the first time to associate him with the sweet sadness of 'The Earthly Paradise.' How could a man of such exuberant animal spirits as Morris—so hearty, so noisy often, and often so humorous—have written those lovely poems, whose only fault was an occasional languor and a p. 249
lack of humour often commented on when the critic compares him with Chaucer? This subject of Chaucer's humour and Morris's lack of it demands, however, a special word even in so brief a

notice as this. No man of our time—not even Rossetti—had a finer appreciation of humour than Morris, as is well known to those who heard him read aloud the famous “Rainbow Scene” in ‘Silas Marner’ and certain passages in Charles Dickens’s novels. These readings were as fine as Rossetti’s recitations of ‘Jim Bludso’ and other specimens of Yankee humour. And yet it is a common remark, and one that cannot be gainsaid, that there is no spark of humour in the published poems of either of these two friends. Did it never occur to any critic to ask whether the anomaly was not explicable by some theory of poetic art that they held in common? It is no disparagement to say of Morris that when he began to write poetry the influence of Rossetti’s canons of criticism upon him was enormous, notwithstanding the influence upon him of Browning’s dramatic methods. But while Rossetti’s admiration of Browning was very strong, it was a canon of his criticism that humour was, if not out of place in poetry, a disturbing element of it.

What makes me think that Morris was greatly influenced by this canon is the fact that Morris could and did write humorous poetry, and then withheld it from publication. For the splendid poem of ‘Sir Peter Harpdon’s End,’ printed in his first volume, Morris wrote a humorous scene of the highest order, in which the hero said to his faithful fellow captive and follower John Curzon that as their deaths were so near he felt a sudden interest in what had never interested him before—the story of John’s life before they had been brought so close to each other. The heroic but dull-witted soldier acceded to his master’s request, and the incoherent, muddle-headed way in which he gave his autobiography was full of a dramatic and subtle humour—was almost worthy of him who in three or four words created the foolish fat scullion in ‘Tristram Shandy.’ This he refused to print, in deference, I suspect, to a theory of poetic art. p. 250

In criticizing Morris, however, the critic is apt to forget that among poets there are those who, treating poetry simply as an art, do not press into their work any more of their own individual forces than the work artistically demands, while another class of poets are impelled to give full expression to themselves in every poem they write. It is to the former class of poets that Morris belongs.

Whatever chanced to be Morris’s goal of the moment was pursued by him with as much intensity as though the universe contained no other possible goal, and then, when the moment was passed, another goal received all his attention. I was never more struck with this than on the memorable day when I first met him, and was blessed with a friendship that lasted without interruption for nearly a quarter of a century. It was shortly after he and Rossetti entered upon the joint occupancy of Kelmscott Manor on the Thames, where I was staying as Rossetti’s guest. On a certain morning when we were walking in the fields Rossetti told me that Morris was coming down for a day’s fishing with George Hake, and that “Mouse,” the Icelandic pony, was to be sent to the Lechlade railway station to meet them. “You are now going to be introduced to my fellow partner,” Rossetti said. At that time I only knew of the famous firm by name, and I asked Rossetti for an explanation, which he gave in his usual incisive way. p. 251

“Well,” said he, “one evening a lot of us were together, and we got talking about the way in which artists did all kinds of things in olden times, designed every kind of decoration and most kinds of furniture, and some one suggested—as a joke more than anything else—that we should each put down five pounds and form a company. Fivers were blossoms of a rare growth among us in those days, and I won’t swear that the table bristled with fivers. Anyhow, the firm was formed, but of course there was no deed, or anything of that kind. In fact, it was a mere playing at business, and Morris was elected manager, not because we ever dreamed he would turn out a man of business, but because he was the only one among us who had both time and money to spare. We had no idea whatever of commercial success, but it succeeded almost in our own despite. Here comes the manager. You must mind your *p’s* and *q’s* with him; he is a wonderfully stand-off chap, and generally manages to take against people.” p. 252

“What is he like?” I said.

“You know the portraits of Francis I. Well, take that portrait as the basis of what you would call in your metaphysical jargon your ‘mental image’ of the manager’s face, soften down the nose a bit, and give him the rose-bloom colour of an English farmer, and there you have him.”

“What about Francis’s eyes?” I said.

“Well, they are not quite so small, but not big—blue-grey, but full of genius.”

And then I saw, coming towards us on a rough pony so diminutive that he well deserved the name of “Mouse,” the figure of a man in a wideawake—a figure so broad and square that the breeze at his back, soft and balmy as it was, seemed to be using him as a sail, and blowing both him and the pony towards us.

When Rossetti introduced me, the manager greeted him with a “H’m! I thought you were alone.” This did not seem promising. Morris at that time was as proverbial for his exclusiveness as he afterwards became for his expansiveness. p. 253

Rossetti, however, was irresistible to everybody, and especially to Morris, who saw that he was expected to be agreeable to me, and most agreeable he was, though for at least an hour I could still see the shy look in the corner of his eyes. He invited me to join the fishing, which I did. Finding every faculty of Morris’s mind and every nerve in his body occupied with one subject, fishing, I (coached by Rossetti, who warned me not to talk about ‘The Defence of Guenevere’) talked about nothing but the bream, roach, dace, and gudgeon I used to catch as a boy in the

Ouse, and the baits that used to tempt the victims to their doom. Not one word passed Morris's lips, as far as I remember at this distance of time, which had not some relation to fish and baits. He had come from London for a few hours' fishing, and all the other interests which as soon as he got back to Queen's Square would be absorbing him were forgotten. Instead of watching my float, I could not help watching his face with an amused interest at its absorbed expression, which after a while he began to notice, and the following little dialogue ensued, which I remember as though it took place yesterday:—

"How old were you when you used to fish in the Ouse?"

"Oh, all sorts of ages; it was at all sorts of times, you know." p. 254

"Well, how young then?"

"Say ten or twelve."

"When you got a bite at ten or twelve, did you get as interested, as excited, as I get when I see my float bob?"

"No."

The way in which he said, "I thought not," conveyed a world of disparagement of me as a man who could care to gaze upon a brother angler instead of upon his own float.

II. p. 255

In whatsoever William Morris does or says the hand or the voice of the poet is seen or heard: in his house decorations no less than in his epics, in his illuminated manuscripts no less than in his tapestries, in his philippics against "restoration" no less than in his sage-greens, in his socialism no less than in his samplers. And first a word as to his poetry. Any critic who, having for contemporaries such writers as Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, and William Morris, fails to see that he lives in a period of great poets may rest assured that he is a critic born—may rest assured that had he lived in the days of the Elizabethans he would have joined the author of 'The Returne from Parnassus' in despising the unacademic author of 'Hamlet' and 'Lear.' Among this band of great contemporary poets what is the special position held by him who, having set his triumphant hand to everything from the sampler up to the epic, has now, by way of recreation, or rather by way of opening a necessary safety-valve to ease his restless energies, invented a system of poetic socialism and expounded it in a brand-new kind of prose fiction?

A special and peculiar position Morris holds among his peers—on that we are all agreed; but p. 256
what is that position? We must not talk too familiarly about the Olympian gods; but is it that, without being the greatest where all are great, Morris is the one who on all occasions produces pure poetry and nothing else? Without affirming that it is so, we may at least ask the question. If other poets of our time show more intellectual strength than he, are they, perchance, given sometimes to adulterating their poetry with ratiocination and didactic preachments such as were better left to the proseman? Without affirming that it is so, we may at least ask the question. If other poets of our time can reach a finer frenzy than he and give it voice with a more melodious throat, are they, perchance, apt to forget that "eloquence is heard while poetry is overheard"? Without affirming that it is so, we may at least ask the question. If others, again, are more picturesque than he (though these it might be difficult to find), are they, perchance, a little too self-conscious in their word-pictures, and are they, perchance, apt to pass into those flowery but uncertain ways that were first discovered by Euphues? Without affirming that it is so, we may at least ask the question.

But supposing that we really had to affirm all these things about the other Olympians, where then would be the position of him about whose work such questions could not even be asked? Where p. 257
would then be the place of him who never passes into ratiocination or rhetoric, never passes into excessive word-painting or into euphuism, never speaks so loud as to be heard rather than overheard, but, on the contrary, gives us always clear and simple pictures, and always in musical language? Where would then be the place of him who is the very ideal, if not of the poet as *vates*, yet of the poet as "maker"—the poet who always looks out upon life through a poetic atmosphere which, if sometimes more attenuated than suits some readers, is as simple and as clear as the air of a May morning? A question which would be variously answered according to the various temperaments of those who answer—of those who define poetry to be "making," or those who define it to be "prophesying," or those who define it to be "singing."

Exception has, no doubt, been taken to certain archaisms in which Morris indulges not only in the epic of 'Sigurd,' but also, and in a greater degree, in his translations, especially in that rendering of the Odyssey. It is not our business here to examine into the merits and demerits of Morris as a translator; but if it were, this is what we should say on his behalf. While admitting that now and again his diction is a little too Scandinavian to be in colour, we should point to Matthew Arnold's dictum that in a versified translation a poet is no longer recognizable, and then we should ask p. 258
whether it is given to any man in any kind of diction to translate Homer. One Homeric quality only can any one translator secure, it seems; and if he can secure one, is not his partial failure better than success in less ambitious efforts? To Chapman it was given to secure in the Iliad a measure of the Homeric eagerness—but what else? To Tennyson (in one wonderful fragment) it was given to secure a measure of the Homeric dignity and also a measure of the Homeric picture —but what else? There was still left one of the three supreme Homeric qualities—the very

quality which no one ever supposed could be secured for our literature, or, indeed, for any other —Homer's quality of *naïf* wonder. There is no witchery of Homer so fascinating as this; and did any one suppose that it could ever be caught by any translator? And could it ever have been caught had not Nature in one of her happiest moods bethought herself of evolving, in a late and empty day, the industrious tapestry weaver of Merton and idle singer of 'Sigurd,' 'The Earthly Paradise,' 'Love is Enough,' and ten thousand delightful verses besides?

But can a writer be called *naïf* who works in a diction belonging rather to a past age than to his own? Morris has proved that he could. Imagination is the basis upon which all other human p. 259
faculties rest. In the deep sense, indeed, one possession only have we "fools of nature," our imagination. What we fondly take for substance is the very shadow; what we fondly take for shadow is the very substance. And day by day is Science herself endorsing more emphatically than ever Hamlet's dictum, that "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." By the aid of imagination our souls confront the present, and, as a rule, the present only. But Morris is an instance, and not a solitary one, of a modern writer's inhaling so naturally the atmosphere of the particular past period his imagination delights in as to belong spiritually to that period rather than his own. To deny sincerity of accent to Morris because of his love of the simple old Scandinavian note—the note which to him represents every other kind of primitive simplicity—would be as uncritical as to deny sincerity of accent to Charles Lamb because of his sympathy with Elizabethan and Jacobean times, or to Dante Rossetti because of his sympathy with the period of his great Italian namesake.

So much for the poetry of our many-handed poet. As to his house decorations, his illuminated manuscripts, his "anti-scrape" philippics, his sage-greens, his tapestries, his socialism, and his samplers: to deal with the infinite is far beyond the scope of an article so very finite as this, or we p. 260
could easily show that in them all there is seen the same *naïf* genius of the poet, the same rare instinct for beautiful expression, the same originality as in the epics and the translations. Let him who is rash enough to suppose that even the socialism of a great poet is like the socialism of common folk read 'John Ball.' Let him observe how like Titania floating and dancing and playing among the Athenian clowns seems the Morrisian genius floating and dancing and playing among the surroundings in which at present it pleases him to disport. What makes the ordinary socialistic literature to many people unreadable is its sourness. What the Socialists say may be true, but their way of saying it sets one's teeth on edge. They contrive to state their case with so much bitterness, with so much unfairness—so much lack of logic—that the listener says at once, "For me, *any* galley but this! Things *are* bad; but, for Heaven's sake, let us go on as we are!"

By the clever competition of organisms did Nature, long before socialism was thought of, contrive to build up a world—this makeshift world. By the teeth of her very cats did she evolve her succulent clover. But whether the Socialists are therefore wrong in their views of society and its ultimate goal is not a question we need discuss. What they want is more knowledge and less zeal. It is possible to see, and see clearly, that the social organism is far from being what it ought p. 261
to be, and at the same time to remember that man is a creature of slow growth, and that even in reaching his present modest stage of development the time he required was long—long indeed unless we consider his history in relation to the history of the earth, and then he appears to have been very commendably expeditious. If there is any truth in what the geologists tell us of the vast age of the earth, it seems only a few years ago that man succeeded, after much heroic sitting down, in wearing off an appendage which had done him good service in his early tree-climbing days, but which, with new environments and with trousers in prospect, had ceased to be useful or ornamental. An anthropoid Socialist would have advised him to "cut it off," and had he done so he would have bled to death.

That among all her children Man is really Nature's prime favourite seems pretty evident, though no one can say why. It is to him that the Great Mother is ever pointing and saying, "A poor creature, but mine own. I shall do something with him some day, but I must not try to force him." Here, indeed, is the mistake of the Socialists. They think they can force the very creature who above all others cannot be forced. They think they can turn him into something rich and strange—turn him in a single generation—even as certain ingenious experimentalists turned what p. 262
Nature meant for a land-salamander into a water-salamander, with new rudder-tail and gills instead of lungs and feet suppressed, by feeding him with water animals in oxygenated water and cajoling his functions. Competition, that evolved Shakespeare from an ascidian, may be a mistake of Nature's—M. Arsène Houssaye declares that she never was so wise and artistically perfect as we take her to be—but her mistakes are too old to be rectified in a single generation. A little more knowledge, we say, and a little less zeal would save the Socialist from being considered by the advanced thinker—who, studying the present by the light of the past, sees that all civilization is provisional—as the most serious obstructive whom he has to encounter.

As to Morris, we have always felt that, take him all round, he is the richest and most varied in artistic endowments of any man of our time. On whichsoever of the fine arts he had chanced to concentrate his gifts and energies the result would have been the same as in poetry. In the front rank he would always have been. But it is not until we come to deal with his socialism that we see how entirely aestheticism is the primal source from which all his energies spring. That he has a great and generous heart—a heart that must needs sympathize with every form of distress —no one can doubt who reads these two books, [263] and yet his socialism comes from an entirely p. 263
æsthetic impulse. It is the vulgarities of civilization, it is the ugliness of contemporary life—so unlike that Earthly Paradise of the poetic dream—that have driven him from his natural and proper work. He cannot take offence at our saying this, for he has said it himself in 'Signs of

Change':—

> "As I strove to stir up people to this reform, I found that the causes of the vulgarities of civilization lay deeper than I had thought, and little by little I was driven to the conclusion that all these uglinesses are but the outward expression of the innate moral baseness into which we are forced by our present form of society, and that it is futile to attempt to deal with them from the outside. Whatever I have written, or spoken on the platform, on these social subjects is the result of the truths of socialism meeting my earlier impulse, and giving it a definite and much more serious aim; and I can only hope, in conclusion, that any of my readers who have found themselves hard-pressed by the sordidness of civilization, and have not known where to turn to for encouragement, may receive the same enlightenment as I have, and that even the rough pieces in this book may help them to that end."

With these eloquent words no one can more fully agree than we do, so far as they relate to the unloveliness of Philistine rule. But though the bad features of the present time [264] are peculiar to itself, when were those paradisal days of which Morris dreams? when did that merry England exist in which the general sum of human happiness and human misery was more equally distributed than now? p. 264

Those "dark ages" beloved of the author of 'John Ball' may not have been quite so dark as Swinburne declares them to have been; but in this matter of the equalization of human happiness were they so very far in advance of the present time? Those who have watched the progress of Morris's socialism know that, so far from being out of keeping with the "anti-scrape" philippics and the tapestry weaving, it is in entire harmony with them. Out of a noble anger against the "jerry builder" and his detestable doings sprang this the last of the Morrisian epics, as out of the wrath of Achilles sprang the Iliad. That the picturesqueness of the John Ball period should lead captive the imagination of Morris was, of course, inevitable. Society is at least picturesque wheresoever the classes are so sharply demarcated as they were in the dark ages, when the difference as to quality of flesh and blood between the lord and the thrall was greater than the difference between the thrall and the swine he tended. But what about the condition of this same picturesque thrall who (as the law books have it) "clothed the soil"—whose every chance of happiness, whose every chance of comfort, depended upon the arbitrary will of some more or less brutal lord? What was the condition of the English lower orders—the orders for whom many bitter social tears are now being shed? What about the condition of the thralls in dark ages so dark that even an apostle of Wyclif's (this same John Ball, Morris's hero) preached the doctrine—unless he has been belied—that no child had a soul that could be saved who had been born out of wedlock? The Persian aphorism that warns us to beware of poets, princes, and women must have had a satirical reference to the fact that their governance of the world is by means of picturesqueness. Always it has been the picturesqueness of tyranny that has kept it up. It was the picturesqueness of the *auto de fe* that kept up the Spanish Inquisition, but we may rest assured that the most picturesque actors in that striking tableau would have preferred a colourless time of jerry builders to a picturesqueness like that. To find a fourteenth-century pothouse parlour painted by a modern Socialist with a hand more loving than Walter Scott's own is indeed touching:— p. 265

> "I entered the door and started at first with my old astonishment, with which I had woke up, so strange and beautiful did this interior seem to me, though it was but a pothouse parlour. A quaintly carved sideboard held an array of bright pewter pots and dishes and wooden and earthen bowls; a stout oak table went up and down the room, and a carved oak chair stood by the chimney-corner, now filled by a very old man dim-eyed and white-bearded. That, except the rough stools and benches on which the company sat, was all the furniture. The walls were panelled roughly enough with oak boards to about six feet from the floor, and about three feet of plaster above that was wrought in a pattern of a rose stem running all round the room, freely and roughly done, but with (as it seemed to my unused eyes) wonderful skill and spirit. On the hood of the great chimney a huge rose was wrought in the plaster and brightly painted in its proper colours. There were a dozen or more of the men I had seen coming along the street sitting there, some eating and all drinking; their cased bows leaned against the wall, their quivers hung on pegs in the panelling, and in a corner of the room I saw half a dozen bill-hooks that looked made more for war than for hedge-shearing, with ashen handles some seven foot long. Three or four children were running about among the legs of the men, heeding them mighty little in their bold play, and the men seemed little troubled by it, although they were talking earnestly and seriously too. A well-made comely girl leaned up against the chimney close to the gaffer's chair, and seemed to be in waiting on the company: she was clad in a close-fitting gown of bright blue cloth, with a broad silver girdle, daintily wrought, round her loins, a rose wreath was on her head, and her hair hung down unbound; the gaffer grumbled a few words to her from time to time, so that I judged he was her grandfather." p. 266 p. 267

"Morris's 'Earthly Paradise'!" the reader will exclaim. Yes; and here we come upon that feature of originality which, as has been before said, distinguishes Morris's socialism from the socialism of the prosaic reformer.

Political opinions almost always spring from temperament. The conservative temper of such a poet as Sir Walter Scott leads him to idealize the past, and to concern himself but little about the

future. The rebellious temperament of such a poet as Shelley leads him to idealize the future, and concern himself but little about the past. But by contriving to idealize both the past and the future, and mixing the two idealizations into one delicious amalgam, the poet of the 'Earthly Paradise' gives us the Morrisian socialism, the most charming, and in many respects the most marvellous product of "the poet's mind" that has ever yet been presented to an admiring world.

The plan of 'John Ball' is simplicity itself. The poet in a dream becomes a spectator of the insurrection of the Kentish men at the time when Wat Tyler rebelled against the powers that were; and the hero, John Ball, who is mainly famous as having preached a sermon from the text

> Wan Adam dalf and Eve span
> Wo was thanne a gentilman?

is made to listen to the poet-dreamer's prophecy of the days of *bourgeois* rule and the jerry builder. p. 268

If we take into account the perfect truth and beauty of the literary form in which the story is presented, we do not believe that anything to surpass it could be found in historic fiction; indeed, we do not know that anything could be found to equal it. The difficulty of the imaginative writer who attempts, whether in prose or verse, to vivify the past seems to be increasing, as we have before said, every day with the growth of the scientific temper and the reverence of the sacredness of mere documents. The old-fashioned theory—the theory which obtained from Shakespeare's time down to Scott's and even down to Kingsley's—that the facts of history could be manipulated for artistic purposes with the same freedom that the artist's own inventions can be handled, gave the artist power to produce vital and flexible work at the expense of the historic conscience—a power which is being curtailed day by day. The instinct for vivifying by imaginative treatment the records of the past is too universal and too deeply inwoven in the very texture of the human mind to be other than a true and healthy instinct. But so oppressive has become the tyranny of documents, so fettered by what a humourist has called "factology" have become the wings of the romancer's imagination, that one wonders at his courage in dealing with historic subjects at all. p. 269

A bold writer would he be who in the present day should make Shakespeare figure among the Kenilworth festivities as a famous player (after the manner of Scott), or who should (after the manner of Kingsley) give Elizabeth credit for Winter's device of using the fire-ships before Calais. Even the poet—he who, dealing as he does with essential and elemental qualities only, is not so hampered as the proseman in these matters—is beginning also to feel the tyranny of documents, as we see notably in Swinburne's 'Bothwell,' which consists very largely of documents transfigured into splendid verse. But more than even this: the mere literary form has now to be as true to the time depicted as circumstances will allow. If Scott's romances have a fault it is that, as he had no command over, and perhaps but little sympathy with, the beautiful old English of which Morris is such a master, his stories lack one important element of dramatic illusion. But it is in the literary form of his story that Morris is especially successful. Where time has dealt most cruelly with our beloved language is in robbing it of that beautiful cadence which fell from our forefathers' lips as sweetly and as unconsciously as melody falls from the throat of the mavis. One of the many advantages that Morris has reaped from his peculiar line of study is that he can write like this—he, and he alone among living men:— p. 270

> "'Surely thou goest to thy death.' He smiled very sweetly, yet proudly, as he said: 'Yea, the road is long, but the end cometh at last. Friend, many a day have I been dying; for my sister, with whom I have played and been merry in the autumntide about the edges of the stubble-fields; and we gathered the nuts and bramble-berries there, and started thence the missel-thrush, and wondered at his voice and thought him big; and the sparrow-hawk wheeled and turned over the hedges, and the weasel ran across the path, and the sound of the sheep-bells came to us from the downs as we sat happy on the grass; and she is dead and gone from the earth, for she pined from famine after the years of the great sickness; and my brother was slain in the French wars, and none thanked him for dying save he that stripped him of his gear; and my unwedded wife with whom I dwelt in love after I had taken the tonsure, and all men said she was good and fair, and true she was and lovely; she also is dead and gone from the earth; and why should I abide save for the deeds of the flesh which must be done? Truly, friend, this is but an old tale that men must die; and I will tell thee another, to wit, that they live: and I live now and shall live. Tell me then what shall befall."

Note the music of the cadence here—a music that plays about the heart more sweetly than any verse, save the very highest. And here we touch upon an extremely interesting subject.

Always in reading a prose story by a writer whose energies have been exercised in other departments of letters there is for the critic a special interest. If this exercise has been in fields outside imaginative literature—in those fields of philosophical speculation where a logical method and a scientific modulation of sentences are required—the novelist, instead of presenting us with those concrete pictures of human life demanded in all imaginative art, is apt to give us disquisitions "about and about" human life. Forgetting that it is not the function of any art to prove, he is apt to concern himself deeply in showing why his actors did and said this or that—apt to busy himself about proving his story either by subtle analyses or else by purely scientific generalizations, instead of attending to the true method of convincement that belongs to his art—the convincement that is effected by actual pictorial and dramatic illustration of how his actors p. 271

really did the things and said the things vouched for by his own imagination. That the quest of a scientific, or supposed scientific, basis for a novelist's imaginative structure is fatal to true art is seen not only in George Eliot and the accomplished author of 'Elsie Venner,' but also in writers of another kind—writers whose hands cannot possibly have been stiffened by their knowledge of science.

Among the many instances that occur to us we need point to only one, that of a story recently p. 272
published by one of our most successful living novelists, in which the writer endeavours to prove that animal magnetism is the acting cause of spiritualistic manifestations so called. Setting out to show that a medium is nothing more than a powerful mesmerist, to whose manipulations all but two in a certain household are unconsciously succumbing, he soon ignores for plot purposes the nature of the dramatic situation by making those very two sceptics at a séance hear the same music, see the same spiritually conveyed newspaper, as the others hear and see. That the writer should mistake, as he seems to do, the merely directive force of magnetism for a motive force does not concern the literary critic. But when two sceptics, who are to expose a charlatan's tricks by watching how the believers are succumbing to mesmeric hallucinations, are found succumbing to the same hallucinations themselves—succumbing because the story-teller needs them as witnesses of the phenomena—then the literary critic grows pensive, for he sees what havoc the scientific method will work in the flower-garden of art.

On the other hand, should the story-teller be a poet—one who, like the writer of 'John Ball,' has been accustomed to write under the conditions of a form of literary art where the diction is always and necessarily concrete, figurative, and quintessential, and where the movement is p. 273
metrical—his danger lies in a very different direction. The critic's interest then lies in watching how the poet will comport himself in another field of imaginative literature—a field where no such conditions as these exist—a field where quintessential and concrete diction, though meritorious, may yet be carried too far, and where those regular and expected bars of the metricist which are the first requisites of verse are not only without function, but are in the way—are fatal, indeed, to that kind of convincement which, and which alone, is the proper quest of prose art. No doubt it is true, as we have before said, that literature being nothing but the reflex of the life of man, or else of the life of nature, the final quest of every form of literature is that special kind of convincement which is inherently suitable to the special form. For the analogy between nature and true art is not a fanciful one, and the relation of function to organism is the same in both. But what is the difference between the convincement achieved by poetic and the convincement achieved by prose art? Is it that the convincement of him who works in poetic forms is, though not necessarily, yet most perfectly achieved by a faithful record of the emotion aroused in his own soul by the impact upon his senses of the external world, while the convincement of the proseman is, though not necessarily, yet most perfectly achieved by a p. 274
faithful record and picture of the external world itself?

All such generalizations as this are, no doubt, to be taken with many and great qualifications; but, roughly speaking, would not this seem to be the fundamental difference between that kind of imaginative literature which expresses itself in metrical forms and that kind of imaginative literature in which metrical form is replaced by other qualities and other functions? Not but that these two methods may meet in the same work, not but that they may meet and strengthen each other, as we have before said when glancing at the interesting question, How much, or how little, of realism can poetry capture from the world of prose and weave into her magic woof, and how much of music can prose steal from poetry? But in order to do all that can be done in the way of enriching poetry with prose material without missing the convincement of poetic art, the poet must be Homer himself; in order to do all that can be done in the way of vivifying prose fiction with poetic fire without missing the convincement of prose art, the story-teller must be Charlotte Brontë or Emily, her sister, in whose work we find for once the quintessential strength and the concrete and figurative diction of the poet—indeed, all the poetical requisites save metre alone. Had 'Jane Eyre,' 'Villette,' and 'Wuthering Heights' existed in Coleridge's time he would, we may p. 275
be sure, have taken these three prose poems as illustrations of the truth of his axiom that the true antithesis of poetry is not prose, but science.

What the prose poet has to avoid is metrical movement on the one side and scientific modulation of sentences on the other. And perhaps in no case can it be achieved save in the autobiographic form of fiction, where and where alone the work is so subjective that it may bear even the poetic glow of 'Jane Eyre' and 'Villette.' What makes us think this to be so is the fact that in 'Shirley'—a story written in the epic method—the only passages of the poetic kind which really convince are those uttered by the characters in their own persons. And as to 'Wuthering Heights,' a story which could not, of course, be told in one autobiography, the method of telling it by means of a group of autobiographies, though clumsy enough from the constructor's point, was yet just as effective as a more artistic method. And it was true instinct of genius that led Emily Brontë to adopt the autobiographic method even under these heavy conditions.

Still the general truth remains that the primary function of the poet is to tell his story steeped in his own emotion, while the primary function of the prose fictionist is to tell his story in an objective way. Hence it is that in a general way the difficulty of the poet who turns to prose p. 276
fiction lies, like that of philosophical or scientific writers, in suppressing certain intellectual functions which he has been in the habit of exercising. And the case of Scott, which at first sight might seem to show against this theory, may be adduced in support of it. For Scott's versified diction, though concrete, is never more quintessential than that of prose; and his method being always objective rather than subjective, when he turned to prose fiction he seemed at once to be

writing with his right hand where formerly he had been writing with his left.

VIII. FRANCIS HINDES GROOME. (THE TARNO RYE.) 1851–1902.

I.

I have been invited to write about my late friend and colleague Francis Hindes Groome, who died on the 24th ult., and was buried among his forefathers at Monk Soham in Suffolk. I find the task extremely difficult. Though he died at fifty, he, with the single exception of Borrow, had lived more than any other friend of mine, and perhaps suffered more. Indeed, his was one of the most remarkable and romantic literary lives that, since Borrow's, have been lived in my time.

The son of an Archdeacon of Suffolk, he was born in 1851 at Monk Soham Rectory, where, I believe, his father and his grandfather were born, and where they certainly lived; for—as has been recorded in one of the invaluable registry books of my friend Mr. F. A. Crisp—he belonged to one of the oldest and most distinguished families in Suffolk. He was sent early to Ipswich School, where he was a very popular boy, but never strong and never fond of athletic exercises. His early taste for literature is shown by the fact that with his boy friend Henry Elliot Maiden he originated a school magazine called the *Elizabethan*. Like many an organ originated in the outer world, the *Elizabethan* failed because it would not, or could not, bring itself into harmony with the public taste. The boys wanted news of cricket and other games: Groome and his assistant editor gave them literature as far as it was in their power to do so.

The Ipswich School was a very good one for those who got into the sixth, as Groome did. The head master, Dr. Holden, was a very fine scholar; and it is no wonder that Groome throughout his life showed a considerable knowledge of and interest in classical literature. That he had a real insight into the structure of Latin verse is seen by a rendering of Tennyson's 'Tithonus,' which Mr. Maiden has been so very good as to show me—a rendering for which he got a prize. In 1869 he got prizes for classical literature, Latin prose, Latin elegiacs, and Latin hexameters. But if Dr. Holden exercised much influence over Groome's taste, the assistant master, Mr. Sanderson, certainly exercised more, for Mr. Sanderson was an enthusiastic student of Romany. The influence of the assistant master was soon seen after Groome went up to Oxford. He was ploughed for his "Smalls," and, remaining up for part of the "Long," he went one night to a fair at Oxford at which many gipsies were present—an incident which forms an important part of his gipsy story 'Kriegspiel.' Groome at once struck up an acquaintance with the gipsies at the fair. It occurred also that Mr. Sanderson, after Groome had left Ipswich School, used to go and stay at Monk Soham Rectory every summer for fishing; and this tended to focus Groome's interest in Romany matters. At Göttingen, where he afterwards went, he found himself in a kind of Romany atmosphere, for, owing perhaps to Benfey's having been a Göttingen man, Romany matters were still somewhat rife there in certain sets.

The period from his leaving Göttingen to his appearance in Edinburgh in 1876 as a working literary man of amazing activity, intelligence, and knowledge is the period that he spent among the gipsies. And it is this very period of wild adventure and romance that it is impossible for me to dwell upon here. But on some future occasion I hope to write something about his adventures as a Romany Rye. His first work was on the 'Globe Encyclopædia,' edited by Dr. John Ross. Even at that time he was very delicate and subject to long wearisome periods of illness. During his work on the 'Globe' he fell seriously ill in the middle of the letter *S*. Things were going very p. 280
badly with him; but they would have gone much worse had it not been for the affection and generosity of his friend and colleague Prof. H. A. Webster, who, in order to get the work out in time, sat up night after night in Groome's room, writing articles on Sterne, Voltaire, and other subjects.

Webster's kindness, and afterwards the kindness of Dr. Patrick, endeared Edinburgh and Scotland to the "Tarno Rye." As Webster was at that time on the staff of 'The Encyclopædia Britannica,' I think, but I do not know, that it was through him that Groome got the commission to write his article 'Gypsies' in that stupendous work. I do not know whether it is the most important, but I do know that it is one of the most thorough and conscientious articles in the entire encyclopædia. This was followed by his being engaged by Messrs. Jack to edit the 'Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland,' a splendid work, which on its completion was made the subject of a long and elaborate article in *The Athenæum*—an article which was a great means of directing attention to him, as he always declared. Anyhow, people now began to inquire about Groome. In 1880 he brought out 'In Gypsy Tents,' which I shall describe further on. In 1885 he was chosen to join the staff of Messrs. W. & R. Chambers. It is curious to think of the "Tarno Rye," perhaps the most variously equipped literary man in Europe, after such adventures as his, p. 281
sitting from 10 to 4 every day on the sub-editorial stool. He was perfectly content on that stool, however, owing to the genial kindness of his colleague. As sub-editor under Dr. Patrick, and also as a very copious contributor, he took part in the preparation of the new edition of 'Chambers's Encyclopædia.' He took a large part also in preparing 'Chambers's Gazetteer' and 'Chambers's Biographical Dictionary.' Meanwhile he was writing articles in the 'Dictionary of National Biography,' articles in *Blackwood's Magazine* and *The Bookman*, and also reviews upon special subjects in *The Athenæum*.

This was followed in 1887 by a short Border history, crammed with knowledge. In 1895 his name became really familiar to the general reader by his delightful little volume 'Two Suffolk Friends'—sketches of his father and his father's friend Edward FitzGerald—full of humour and admirable character-drawing.

In 1896 he published his Romany novel 'Kriegspiel,' which did not meet with anything like the success it deserved, although I must say he was himself in some degree answerable for its comparative failure. The origin of the story was this. Shortly after our intimacy I told him that I had written a gipsy story dealing with the East Anglian gipsies and the Welsh gipsies, but that it had been so dinned into me by Borrow that in England there was no interest in the gipsies that I p. 282
had never found heart to publish it. Groome urged me to let him read it, and he did read it, as far as it was then complete, and took an extremely kind view of it, and urged me to bring it out. But now came another and a new cause for delay in my bringing out 'Aylwin': Groome himself, who at that time knew more about Romany matters than all other Romany students of my acquaintance put together, showed a remarkable gift as a *raconteur*, and I felt quite sure that he could, if he set to work, write a Romany story—*the* Romany story of the English language. He strongly resisted the idea for a long time—for two or three years at least—and he was only persuaded to undertake the task at last by my telling him that I would never bring out my story until he brought out one himself. At last he yielded, told me of a plot, a capital one, and set to work upon it. When it was finished he sent the manuscript to me, and I read it through with the greatest interest, and also the greatest care. I found, as I expected to find, that the gipsy chapters were simply perfect, and that it was altogether an extremely clever romance; but I felt also that Groome had given no attention whatever to the structure of a story. Incidents of the most striking and original kind were introduced at the wrong places, and this made them interesting no longer. So persuaded was I that the story only needed recasting to prove a real success that I p. 283
devoted days, and even weeks, to going through the novel, and indicating where the transpositions should take place. Groome, however, had got so entirely sick of his novel before he had completed it that he refused absolutely to put another hour's work into it; for, as he said, "the writing of it had already been a loss to the pantry."

He sent it, as it was, to an eminent firm of publishers, who, knowing Groome and his abilities, would have willingly taken it if they had seen their way to do so. But they could not, for the very reasons that had induced me to recast it, and they declined it. The book was then sent round to publisher after publisher with the same result; and yet there was more fine substance in this novel than in five ordinary stories. It was at last through the good offices of Mr. Coulson Kernahan that it was eventually taken by Messrs. Ward & Lock; and, although it won warm eulogies from such great writers as George Meredith, it never made its way. Its failure distressed me far more than it distressed Groome, for I loved the man, and knew what its success would have been to him. Amiable and charming as Groome was, there was in him a singular vein of dogged obstinacy after he had formed an opinion; and he not only refused to recast his story, but refused to abandon the absurd name of 'Kriegspiel' for a volume of romantic gipsy p. 284
adventure. I suspect that a large proportion of people who asked for 'Kriegspiel' at Mudie's and Smith's consisted of officers who thought that it was a book on the German war game.

I tried to persuade him to begin another gipsy novel, but found it quite impossible to do so. But even then I waited before bringing out my own prose story. I published instead my poem in which was told the story of Rhona Boswell, which, to my own surprise and Groome's, had a success, notwithstanding its gipsy subject. Then I brought out my gipsy story, and accepted its success rather ungratefully, remembering how the greatest gipsy scholar in the world had failed in this line. In 1899 he published 'Gypsy Folk-Tales,' in which he got the aid of the first Romany scholar now living, Mr. John Sampson. And this was followed in 1901 by his edition of 'Lavengro,' which, notwithstanding certain unnecessary carpings at Borrow—such, for instance, as the assertion that the word "dook" is never used in Anglo-Romany for "ghost"—is beyond any doubt the best edition of the book ever published. The introduction gives sketches of all the Romany Ryes and students of Romany, from Andrew Boorde (*c.* 1490–1549) down to Mr. G. R. Sims and Mr. David MacRitchie. During this time it was becoming painfully perceptible to me p. 285
that his physical powers were waning, although for two years that decadence seemed to have no effect upon his mental powers. But at last, while he was working on a book in which he took the deepest interest—the new edition of 'Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature'—it became manifest that the general physical depression was sapping the forces of the brain.

But it is personal reminiscences of Groome that I have been invited to write, and I have not yet even begun upon these. Our close friendship dated no further back than 1881—the year in which died the great Romany Rye. Indeed, it was owing to Borrow's death, coupled with Groome's interest in that same Romany girl Sinfi Lovell, whom the eloquent Romany preacher "Gipsy Smith" has lately been expiating upon to immense audiences, that I first became acquainted with Groome. Although he has himself in some magazine told the story, it seems necessary for me to retell it here, for I know of no better way of giving the readers of *The Athenæum* a picture of Frank Groome as he lives in my mind.

It was in 1881 that Borrow, who some seven years before went down to Oulton, as he told me, "to die," achieved death. And it devolved upon me as the chief friend of his latest years to write an obituary notice of him in *The Athenæum*. Among the many interesting letters that it brought me p. 286
from strangers was one from Groome, whose name was familiar to me as the author of the article 'Gypsies' in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.' But besides this I had read 'In Gypsy Tents,' a picture of the very kind of gipsies I knew myself, those of East Anglia—a picture whose photographic truth had quite startled me. Howsoever much of matter of fact may be worked into 'Lavengro' (and to no one did Borrow talk with so little reticence upon this delicate subject as to me during many a stroll about Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park), I am certain that his first-hand knowledge of gipsy life was quite superficial compared with Groome's during the nine years or so that he was brought into contact with them in Great Britain and on the Continent. Hence a book like 'In Gypsy Tents' has for a student of Romany subjects an interest altogether different from that which Borrow's books command; for while Borrow, the man of genius, throws by the very necessities of his temperament the colours of romance around his gipsies, the characters of 'In Gypsy Tents,' depicted by a man of remarkable talent merely, are as realistic as though painted by Zola, while the wealth of gipsy lore at his command is simply overwhelming.

At that time—with the exception of Borrow and the late Sir Richard Burton—the only man of letters with whom I had been brought into contact who knew anything about the gipsies was Tom p. 287
Taylor, whose picture of Romany life in an anonymous story called 'Gypsy Experiences,' which appeared in *The Illustrated London News* in 1851, and in his play 'Sir Roger de Coverley,' is not only fascinating, but on the whole true. By-the-by, this charming play might be revived now that there is a revived interest in Romany matters. George Meredith's wonderful 'Kiomi' was a picture, I think, of the only Romany chi he knew; but genius such as his needs little straw for the making of bricks. The letter I received from Groome enclosed a ragged and well-worn cutting from a forgotten anonymous *Athenæum* article of mine, written as far back as 1877, in which I showed acquaintance with gipsydom and described the ascent of Snowdon in the company of Sinfi Lovell, which was afterwards removed bodily to 'Aylwin.' Here is the cutting:—

> "We had a striking instance of this some years ago, when crossing Snowdon from Capel Curig, one morning, with a friend. She was not what is technically called a lady, yet she was both tall and, in her way, handsome, and was far more clever than many of those who might look down upon her; for her speculative and her practical abilities were equally remarkable: besides being the first palmist of her time, she had the reputation of being able to make more clothes-pegs in an hour, and sell more, than any p. 288
> other woman in England. The splendour of that 'Snowdon sunrise' was such as we can say, from much experience, can only be seen about once in a lifetime, and could never be given by any pen or pencil. 'You don't seem to enjoy it a bit,' was the irritated remark we could not help making to our friend, who stood quite silent and apparently deaf to the rhapsodies in which we had been indulging, as we both stood looking at the peaks, or rather at the vast masses of billowy vapours enveloping them, as they sometimes boiled and sometimes blazed, shaking, whenever the sun struck one and then another, from amethyst to vermilion, 'shot' now and then with gold. 'Don't injiy it, don't I?' said she, removing her pipe. '*You* injiy talking about it, *I* injiy lettin' it soak in.'"

Groome asked whether the gipsy mentioned in the cutting was not a certain Romany chi whom he named, and said that he had always wondered who the writer of that article was, and that now he wondered no longer, for he knew him to be the writer of the obituary notice of George Borrow. Interested as I was in his letter, it came at a moment when the illness of a very dear

friend of mine threw most other things out of my mind, and it was a good while before I answered it, and told him what I had to tell about my Welsh gipsy experiences and the adventure on Snowdon. I got another letter from him, and this was the beginning of a charming correspondence. After a while I discovered that there were, besides Romany matters, other points of attraction between us. Groome was the son of Edward FitzGerald's intimate friend Robert Hindes Groome, Archdeacon of Suffolk. Now long before the great vogue of Omar Khayyam, and, of course, long before the institution of the Omar Khayyam Club, there was a little group of Omarians of which I was a member. I need not say here who were the others of that group, but it was to them I alluded in the 'Toast to Omar Khayyam,' which years afterwards I printed in *The Athenæum*, and have since reprinted in a volume of mine.

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After a while it was arranged that he was to come and visit us for a few days at The Pines. When it got wind in the little household here that another Romany Rye, a successor to George Borrow, was to visit us, and when it further became known that he had travelled with Hungarian gipsies, Roumanian gipsies, Roumelian gipsies, &c., I don't know what kind of wild and dishevelled visitor was not expected. Instead of such a guest there appeared one of the neatest and most quiet young gentlemen who had ever presented themselves at the door. No one could possibly have dared to associate Bohemia with him. As a friend remarked who was afterwards invited to meet him at luncheon, "Clergyman's son—suckling for the Church, was stamped upon him from head to foot." I will not deny that so respectable a looking Romany Rye rather disappointed The Pines at first. At that time he was a little over thirty, but owing to his slender, graceful figure, and especially owing to his lithe movements and elastic walk, he seemed to be several years younger.

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The subject of Welsh gipsies, and especially of the Romany chi of Swindon, made us intimate friends in half an hour, and then there were East Anglia, Omar Khayyàm, and Edward FitzGerald to talk about!—a delightful new friend for a man who had so lately lost the only other Romany Rye in the world. Owing to his youthful appearance, I christened him there and then the "Tarno Rye," in remembrance of that other "Tarno Rye" whom Rhona Boswell loved. I soon found that, great as was the physical contrast between the Tarno Rye and the original Romany Rye, the mental contrast was greater still. Both were shy—very shy; but while Borrow's shyness seemed to be born of wariness, the wariness of a man who felt that he was famous and had a part to play before an inquisitive world, Groome's shyness arose from a modesty that was unique.

As a philologist merely, to speak of nothing else, his equipment was ten times that of Borrow, whose temperament may be called anti-academic, and who really knew nothing thoroughly. But while Borrow was for ever displaying his philology, and seemed always far prouder of it than of his fascinating powers as a writer of romantic adventures, Groome's philological stores, like all his other intellectual riches, had to be drawn from him by his interlocutor if they were to be recognized at all. Whenever Borrow enunciated anything showing, as he thought, exceptional philological knowledge or exceptional acquaintance with matters Romany, it was his way always to bring it out with a sort of rustic twinkle of conscious superiority, which in its way, however, was very engaging. From Groome, on the contrary, philological lore would drop, when it did come, as unconsciously as drops of rain that fall. It was the same with his knowledge of Romany matters, which was so vast. Not once in all my close intercourse with him did he display his knowledge of this subject save in answer to some inquiry. The same thing is to be noticed in 'Kriegspiel.' Romany students alone are able by reading between the lines to discover how deep is the hidden knowledge of Romany matters, so full is the story of allusions which are lost upon the general reader—lost, indeed, upon all readers except the very few. For instance, the gipsy villain of the story, Perun, when telling the tale of his crime against the father of the hero who married the Romany chi whom Perun had hoped to marry, makes allusion thus to the dead woman: "And then about her as I have named too often to-day." Had Borrow been alluding to the Romany taboo of the names of the dead, how differently would he have gone to work! how eager would he have been to display and explain his knowledge of this remarkable Romany superstition! The same remark may be made upon the gipsy heroine's sly allusion in 'Kriegspiel' to "Squire Lucas," the Romany equivalent of Baron Munchausen, an allusion which none but a Romany student would understand.

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Before luncheon Groome and I took a walk over the common, and along the Portsmouth Road, through the Robin Hood Gate and across Richmond Park, where Borrow and I and Dr. Hake had so often strolled. I wondered what the Gryengroes whom Borrow used to foregather with would have thought of my new friend. In personal appearance the two Romany Ryes were as unlike as in every point of character they were unlike. Borrow's giant frame made him stand conspicuous wherever he went, Groome's slender, slight body gave an impression of great agility; and the walk of the two great pedestrians was equally contrasted. Borrow's slope over the ground with the loose, long step of a hound I have, on a previous occasion, described; Groome's walk was springy as a gipsy lad's, and as noiseless as a cat's.

Of course, the talk during that walk ran very much upon Borrow, whom Groome had seen once or twice, but whom he did not in the least understand. The two men were antipathetic to each other. It was then that he told me how he had first been thrown across the gipsies, and it was then that he began to open up to me his wonderful record of experiences among them. The talk during that first out of many most delightful strolls ran upon Benfey, and afterwards upon all kinds of Romany matters. I remember how warm he waxed upon his pet aversion, "Smith of Coalville," as he called him, who, he said, for the purposes of a professional philanthropist, had done infinite mischief to the gipsies by confounding them with all the wandering cockney raff from the slums of London. On my repeating to him what, among other things, the Romany chi

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before mentioned said to me during the ascent of Snowdon from Capel Curig, that “to make *kairengroes* (house-dwellers) of full-blooded Romanies was impossible, because they were the cuckoos of the human race, who had no desire to build nests, and were pricked on to move about from one place to another over the earth,” Groome’s tongue became loosened, and he launched out into a monologue on this subject full of learning and full, as it seemed to me, of original views upon the Romanies.

As an instance of the cuckoo instincts of the true Romany, he told me that in North America—for p. 294
which land, alas! so many of our best Romanies even in Borrow’s time were leaving Gypsey Dell and the grassy lanes of old England—the gipsies have contracted a habit, which is growing rather than waning, of migrating southward in autumn and northward again in spring. He then launched out upon the subject of the wide dispersion of the Romanies not only in Europe—where they are found from almost the extreme north to the extreme south, and from the shores of the Bosphorus to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean—but also from north to south and from east to west in Asia, in Africa, from Egypt to the very south of the Soudan, and in America from Canada to the River Amazon. And he then went on to show how intensely migratory they were over all these vast areas.

So absorbing had been the gipsy talk that I am afraid the waiting luncheon was spoilt. The little luncheon party was composed of fervent admirers of Sir Walter Scott—bigoted admirers, I fear, some of our present-day critics would have dubbed us; and it chanced that we all agreed in pronouncing ‘Guy Mannering’ to be the most fascinating of all the Wizard’s work. Of course Meg Merrilies became at once the centre of the talk. One contended that, great as Meg was as a woman, she was as a gipsy a failure; in short, that Scott’s idea of the Scottish gipsy woman was conventional—a fancy portrait in which are depicted some of the loftiest characteristics of the p. 295
Highland woman rather than of the Scottish gipsy. The true romany chi can be quite as noble as Meg Merrilies, said one, but great in a different way. From Meg Merrilies the talk naturally turned upon Jane Gordon of Kirk Yetholm, Meg’s prototype, who, when an old woman, was ducked to death in the River Eden at Carlisle. Then came the subject of Kirk Yetholm itself, the famous headquarters of the Scotch Romanies; and after this it naturally turned to Kirk Yetholm’s most famous inhabitant, old Will Faas, the gipsy king, whose corpse was escorted to Yetholm by three hundred and more donkeys. And upon all these subjects Groome’s knowledge was like an inexhaustible fountain; or rather it was like a tap, ready to supply any amount of lore when called upon to do so.

But it was not merely upon Romany subjects that Groome found points of sympathy at The Pines during that first luncheon; there was that other subject before mentioned, Edward FitzGerald and Omar Khayyàm. We, a handful of Omarians of those antediluvian days, were perhaps all the more intense in our cult because we believed it to be esoteric. And here was a guest who had been brought into actual personal contact with the wonderful old Fitz. As a child of eight he had seen him—talked with him—been patted on the head by him. Groome’s father, the Archdeacon of p. 296
Suffolk, was one of FitzGerald’s most intimate friends. This was at once a delightful and a powerful link between Frank Groome and those at the luncheon table; and when he heard, as he soon did, the toast to “Omar Khayyàm,” none drank that toast with more gusto than he. The fact is, as the Romanies say, that true friendship, like true love, is apt to begin at first sight. But I must stop. Frequently when the “Tarno Rye” came to England his headquarters were at The Pines. Many and delightful were the strolls he and I had together. One day we went to hear a gipsy band supposed to be composed of Roumelian gipsies. After we had listened to several well-executed things Groome sauntered up to one of the performers and spoke to him in Roumelian Romany. The man, although he did not understand Groome, knew that he was speaking Romany of some kind, and began speaking in Hungarian Romany, and was at once responded to by Groome in that variety of the Romany tongue. Groome then turned to another of the performers, and was answered in English Romany. At last he found one, and one only, in the band who was a Roumelian gipsy, and a conversation between them at once began.

This incident affords an illustration of the width as well as the thoroughness of Groome’s knowledge of Romany matters. I have affirmed in ‘Aylwin’ that Sinfi Lovell—a born linguist who p. 297
could neither read nor write—was the only gipsy who knew both English and Welsh Romany. Groome was one of the few Englishmen who knew the most interesting of all varieties of the Romany tongue. But latterly he talked a great deal of the vast knowledge of the Welsh gipsies, both as to language and folklore, possessed by Mr. John Sampson, University Librarian at Liverpool, the scholar who did so much to aid Groome in his last volume on Romany subjects, called ‘Gypsy Folk-Tales.’ It therefore gives me the greatest pleasure to end these very inadequate words of mine with a beautiful little poem in Welsh Romany by Mr. Sampson upon the death of the “Tarno Rye.” In a very few years Welsh Romany will become absolutely extinct, and then this little gem, so full of the Romany feeling, will be greatly prized. I wish I could have written the poem myself, but no man could have written it save Mr. Sampson:—

STANYAKERÉSKI.

Romano ráia, prala, jinimángro,
  Konyo chumeráva to chīkát,
Shukar java mangi, ta mukáva
  Tut te ’jâ kamdóm me—kushki rat!

Kamli, savimáski, sas i sarla,
  Baro zī sas tut, sar, tarno rom,

Lhatián i jivimáski patrin,
  Ta līán o purikeno drom.

Boshadé i chiriklé veshténdi; p. 298
  Sanilé ’pre tuti chal ta chai;
Mūri, pūv ta pāni tu kamésas
  Dudyerás o sonakó lilaí.

Palla ’vena brishin, shil, la baval:
  Sa’o divés tu murshkinés pīrdán:
Ako kino ’vesa, rat avéla,
  Chēros sī te kesa tiro tan.

Parl o tamlo merimásko pāni
  Dava tuki miro vast, ta so
Tu kamésas tire kokoréski
  Mai kamáva—“Te sovés mīstō!”

Translation.

TO FRANCIS HINDES GROOME.

Scholar, Gypsy, Brother, Student,
  Peacefully I kiss thy forehead,
Quietly I depart and leave
  Thee whom I loved—“Good night.”

Sunny, smiling was the morning;
  A light heart was thine, as, a youth,
Thou dids’t strike life’s trail
  And take the ancient road.

The birds sang in the woods,
  Man and maid laughed on thee,
The hills, field, and water thou didst love
  The golden summer illuminated.

Then come the rain, cold, and wind,
  All the day thou hast tramped bravely.
Now thou growest weary, night comes on.
  It is time to make thy tent.

Across death’s dark stream
  I give thee my hand; and what
Thou wouldst have desired for thyself
  I wish thee—mayst thou sleep well.

II. p. 299

Although novelists, dramatists, and poets are particularly fond of trying to paint the gipsies, it cannot be said that many of them have been successful in their delineations. And this is because the inner and the outer life of a proscribed race must necessarily be unlike each other. Meg Merrilies is no more a gipsy than is Borrow’s delightful Isopel Berners. Among the characteristic traits of the Romany woman, Meg does no doubt exhibit two: a wild poetic imagination and a fearlessness such as women rarely display. But no one who had been brought into personal contact with gipsy women could ever have presented Meg Merrilies as one of them. In the true Romany chi poetic imagination is combined with a homeliness and a positive love of respectability which are very curious. Not that Meg, noble as she is, is superior to the kind of heroic woman that the Romany race is capable of producing. Indeed, the great speciality of the Romanies is the superiority of the women to the men—a superiority which extends to everything, unless, perhaps, we except that gift of music for which the gipsies are noticeable. Even in Eastern Europe—Russia alone excepted—where gipsy music is so universal that, according to p. 300 some writers, every Hungarian musician is of Romany extraction, it is the men and not, in general, the women who excel. This, however, may simply be the result of opportunity and training.

It is not merely in intelligence, in imagination, in command over language, in breadth of view regarding the “Gorgio” world around them, that the Romany women, in Great Britain at least, leave the men far behind. In character this superiority is equally noticeable. To imagine a gipsy hero is not easy. The male gipsy is not without a certain amount of courage, but it soon gives way, and in a physical conflict between a gipsy and an Englishman it always seems as though ages of oppression have damped its virility. Although some of our most notable prizefighters have been gipsies, it used to be well known in times when the ring was fashionable that a gipsy could not be relied upon “to take punishment” with the stolid indifference of an Englishman or a negro, partly, perhaps, because his more highly strung nervous system makes him more sensitive to pain. The courage of a gipsy woman, on the other hand, has passed into a proverb; nothing seems to daunt her, and yet she will allow her husband, a cowardly ruffian himself, perhaps, to strike her without returning the blow. Wife-beating, however, is not common among the gipsies.

It may possibly be the case that some of the fine qualities of the gipsy woman are the result of that very barrenness of fine qualities among the men of which we have been speaking. The lack of masculine chivalry among the men may in some measure account for the irresistible impulse among the women for taking their own part without appealing to the men for aid. Also this may account for the strong way in which a gipsy woman is often drawn to the "Tarno Rye," the young English gentleman of whom Matthew Arnold was thinking when he wrote the 'Scholar-Gipsy,' and her fidelity to whom is so striking. It is often in such relations as these with the Tarno Rye that the instinct of monogamy in the Romany woman is seen. The unconquerable virtue of the Romany chi was often commented upon by Borrow; and, indeed, every observer of gipsy life is struck by it. p. 301

Seeing that the moment the Romanies are brought into contact with the Gorgio world they adopt a method of approach entirely different from the natural method—natural to them in intercourse with each other—it is perhaps no wonder that the popular notion of the gipsy girl, taken mainly from the tradition of the stage, is so fantastically wrong. With regard to the stage, no characters in the least like gipsies ever appeared on the boards, save the characters in Tom Taylor's 'Sir Roger de Coverley.' In the eyes of the novelist, as well as in the eyes of the playwright, devilry seems to be the chief characteristic of the gipsy woman. The fact is, however, that in the average gipsy woman as she really exists there is but little devilry. "Romany guile," which is well defined in the gipsy phrase as "the lie for the Gorgios," does not prevent gipsy women from retaining some of the most marked characteristics of childhood throughout their lives. This, indeed, is one of their special charms. In his desire to depict the supposed devilry of the Romany woman, Prosper Mérimée has perpetrated in 'Carmen' the greatest of all caricatures of the gipsy girl. A mere incarnation of lust and bloodthirstiness is more likely to exist in any other race than in the Romanies, who have a great deal of love as a sentiment and comparatively very little of love as a movement of animal desire. p. 302

In G. P. R. James's 'Gipsy' (1835) there are touches which certainly show some original knowledge of Romany life and character. The same may, perhaps, be said of Sheridan Le Fanu's 'Bird of Passage,' but the pictures of gipsy life in these and in all other novels are the merest daubs compared with the Kiomi of George Meredith's story 'Harry Richmond.' Not even Borrow and Groome, with all their intimate knowledge of gipsy life, ever painted a more vigorous picture of the Romany chi than this. The original was well known in the art circles of London at one time, and was probably known to Meredith, but this does not in any way derogate from the splendour of the imaginative achievement of painting in a few touches a Romany girl who must, one would think, live for ever. p. 303

Between some Englishmen and gipsy women there is an extraordinary attraction—an attraction, we may say in passing, which did not exist between Borrow and the gipsy women with whom he was brought into contact. Supposing Borrow to have been physically drawn to any woman, she would have been of the Scandinavian type; she would have been what he used to call a Brynhild. It was tall blondes he really admired. Hence, notwithstanding his love of the economies of gipsy life, his gipsy women are all mere "scenic characters"—they clothe and beautify the scene; they are not dramatic characters. When he comes to delineate a heroine, Isopel Berners, she is physically the very opposite of the Romany chi—a Scandinavian Brynhild, in short.

THE END

Footnotes:

[15] Mr. Coulson Kernahan.

[17] The writer is much indebted to Mr. Coulson Kernahan for this story and much other information of life at "The Pines."

[18] 'My Reminiscences,' by Lord Ronald Gower.

[25] Of August 13, 1881. By Mr. A. Egmont Hake.

[32] Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, art-critic, who poisoned a number of his relatives for their money, a contributor to *The London Magazine* and exhibitor at the Royal Academy. He died a convict in Tasmania in 1852.

[33] C. G. Leland ("Hans Breitmann"), on whom Borrow's books had "an incredible influence," and caused him to take up the study of things Romany.

[34] Louis Jeremiah Abershaw, better known as Jerry Abershaw, 1773?-1795, a notorious highwayman, who was the terror of the roads from London to Wimbledon and Kingston. Borrow with characteristic perversity persisted in regarding the redoubtable Jerry as a hero, in spite of the fact that he justly met his death on the gallows.

[50] 'Life, Writings, and Correspondence of George Borrow.' Derived from Official and other Authentic Sources. By William I. Knapp, Ph.D. With Portrait and Illustrations. 2 vols. (Murray.)

[60] The "reader" was Richard Ford, author of the 'Handbook for Travellers in Spain,' &c. He

subsequently became Burrow's warm admirer and friend.

[77] 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti, as Designer and Writer.' Notes by William Michael Rossetti. (Cassell and Co.)

[104] 'Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, 1854–1870.' By George Birkbeck Hill. (Fisher Unwin.)

[108] The year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

[132] 'Alfred, Lord Tennyson: a Memoir.' By his Son. 2 vols. (Macmillan).

[156] "My father's words."

[168] *The Times*, October 18, 1876.

[195] 'New Poems.' By Christina Rossetti. Edited by William Michael Rossetti. (Macmillan & Co.)

[231] 'Poems, Dramatic and Lyrical.' By Lord de Tabley. Second Series. (Lane.)

[263] 'A Dream of John Ball and a King's Lesson.' 'Signs of Change.'

[264] Written in 1888.

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