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ESSAYS

OTHER WORKS BY Mr. A. C. BENSON

In Verse

POEMS, 1893 LYRICS, 1895

In Prose

MEMOIRS OF
ARTHUR HAMILTON, 1886
ARCHBISHOP LAUD: A STUDY,
1887
MEN OF MIGHT (in conjunction
with H. F. W. TATHAM), 1890

ESSAYS

BY
ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON
OF ETON COLLEGE

Post aliquot, mea regna videns, mirabor aristas!

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1896

To

HENRY JAMES

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED

BY

HIS AFFECTIONATE FRIEND

THE AUTHOR

PREFACE

IT would be easy, if need were, to devise a theory of coherence for the Essays here selected for re-publication, but the truth is that they are fortuitous. The only claim that I can consistently make, is that I have always chosen, for biographical and critical study, figures whose personality or writings have seemed to me to possess some subtle, evasive charm, or delicate originality of purpose or view. Mystery, inexplicable reticence, haughty austerity, have a fascination in life and literature, that is sometimes denied to sanguine strength and easy volubility. I am well aware that vitality and majesty are the primary qualities to demand both in life and literature. I have nothing but rebellious horror for the view that languor, if only it be subtle and serpentine, is in itself admirable. But there are two kinds of languor. Just as the poverty of a man born needy, and incapable of acquiring wealth, is different in kind from the poverty of one who has sacrificed wealth in some noble cause, so the deliberate, the self-conscious languor "about three degrees on this side of faintness," of which Keats wrote in his most voluptuous mood, is a very different thing from the languor of Hamlet, the fastidious despair of ever realising some lofty conception, the prostrate indifference of one who has found the world too strong. I do not say that the note of failure is a characteristic of all the figures in my narrow gallery of portraits. But I will say that they were most of them persons about whom hung an undefined promise of greater strength than ever issued in performance. The causes of their comparative failure are difficult to disentangle. With one perhaps it was the want of a sympathetic *entourage*; with another a dreamy or mystical habit of thought; with this one, the immersion in uncongenial pursuits; with that a certain failure in physical vitality; with another, the work, accomplished in dignified serenity, has fallen too swiftly into neglect, and we must endeavour to divine the cause: and yet in no case can we trace any inherent weakness, any moral obliquity, any degrading or enervating concession.

Perhaps one of the greatest mistakes we make in literature and art is the passionate individualism into which we are betrayed. We cannot bring ourselves to speak or think very highly of the level of a man's work, unless the positive and tangible results of that work are in themselves very weighty and pure. We forget all about the inspirers and teachers of poets and artists. How often does the poet, and the artist too, in autobiographical allusion, speak with absorbing gratitude and devotion of some humble name of which we take no note, as the "fons et origo" to himself of enthusiasm and proficiency.

It is with no affectation of fastidious superiority, but with a frank confession of conscious pettiness, that I say that this book will only appeal to a few. The critic is no hero: he is at best but a skipping peltast, engaged as often as not in inglorious flight. To flounder in images, criticism is nothing but a species of mistletoe, sprouting in a sleek bunch in the chink of a lofty forest tree. I had rather have been Lovelace than Sainte-Beuve, and write one immortal lyric than thirty-five volumes of the acutest discrimination. But a minority has a right to its opinions, and may claim to be amused: a man who thinks the Rhine vulgar, and the Jungfrau exaggerated, may be foolishly delighted with a backwater on the Thames, and a view of the Berkshire downs. In fact, the only kind of criticism of which one may be impatient is the criticism which abuses an author for not writing something else. What critics can do, what I have

attempted to do, is to strengthen and define the impression that a casual reader may derive from a book, a reader who wishes to see what is good, but has not the knack described by the poet, who says "what is best he firmly lights upon, as birds on sprays."

On the other hand we may reasonably doubt what is the exact worth of the cultivation, of the point of view which we meekly accept at the hands of a convincing critic. Does it not require a special insight to understand even criticism? After all, we agree with, we do not accept criticism: we select from it some preference, strongly and convincingly stated, which jumps with our own preconceived ideas. If we merely swallow it down, like the camel, to be reproduced in fetid stagnation, whenever a necessity for it arises, are we so much higher after all? The delicate psychologist who has accepted my dedication, speaks in one of his latest stories of the expression on the face of a Royal Princess, who had been *told* everything in the world, and had never *perceived* anything. Culture, criticism, in certain sterile natures, are like Sheridan's famous apophthegm: they lie "like lumps of marl on a barren moor, encumbering what it is not in their power to fertilise."

In art, in literature, it is the periods of republicanism that have left their mark on the world: the periods that have been very conscious of, and very deferential to authority, have been invariably retrograde. What a dreary period in English literature was the reign of Dr. Johnson. The chief legacies of that era to literature are the letters of Gray and Horace Walpole, and the life of the Dictator himself. But these are not creative literature at all. Gray, as a poet, was comparatively sterile. Imagination, the jewel of the soul, had fallen from its elaborate setting. But the more that literature declined, the more sententious grew the critics. Nowadays, when literature is very active, and not very profound—impressionist, journalistic, supremely content if it can produce lively and superficial sensations—the bludgeoning of the early part of the century has gone out: no longer does the critic feel it a duty, as the oracle said to Oenomaus, to "draw the bow and slaughter the innumerable geese that graze upon the green." Indeed would not some have us believe that criticism of contemporaries is all a matter of private interest, apart from any just or earnest conviction?

But there is still a class of readers, not very large or important perhaps, haunted by a native instinct for literature, a relish for fine phrases, a hankering for style—to whom the manner of saying a thing is as important, or more important than the matter, readers, who are not satisfied with fiction, unless it be combined, as by Robert Louis Stevenson, with a wealth, a curiousness, a preciosity of phrase, to which in criticism only Walter Pater can lay claim, and which may secure for these two a station in literature to which the majority of our busy, voluble, graphic writers must aspire in vain.

A. C. B.

ETON, *July, 1895*.

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Eight of these Essays have appeared in "Macmillan's Magazine," viz.: "The Ever-Memorable John Hales," "A Minute Philosopher," "Andrew Marvell." "Vincent Bourne," "Thomas Gray," "Elizabeth Barrett Browning," "Henry Bradshaw," "The Late Master of Trinity"; two in the

"Contemporary Review," viz.: "Henry More, the Platonist" and the "Poetry of Keble"; one in the "National Review," "Christina Rossetti"; and one in the "New Review," the "Poetry of Edmund Gosse." My acknowledgements and thanks are due to the proprietors and editors of these periodicals for the leave kindly accorded me to republish them. The Study, "William Blake," is now printed for the first time.

I desire also to record my gratitude to F. E. B. Duff, Esq., of King's College, Cambridge, who has revised the book throughout, and made many valuable suggestions.

THE EVER-MEMORABLE JOHN HALES

THE churchyard at Eton is a triangular piece of ground, converging into a sharp remote angle, bordered on one side by the Long Walk, and screened from it by heavy iron railings. On the second side it is skirted and overlooked by tall irregular houses, and on the third side by the deep buttressed recesses of the chapel, venerable with ivy and mouldering grey stone.

It is a strangely quiet place in the midst of bustling life; the grumbling of waggons in the road, the hoarse calling of the jackdaws, awkwardly fluttering about old red-tiled roofs, the cracked clanging of the college clock, the voices of boys from the street, fall faintly on the ear: besides, it has all the beauty of a deserted place, for it is many years since it has been used for a burial-ground: the grass is long and rank, the cypresses and yews grow luxuriantly out of unknown vaults, and push through broken rails; the gravestones slant and crumble; moss grows into the letters of forgotten names, and creepers embrace and embower monumental urns; here and there are heaps of old carven, crumbling stones; on early summer mornings a resident thrush stirs the silence with flute-notes marvellously clear; and on winter evenings when wet, boisterous winds roll steadily up, and the tall chapel windows flame, the organ's voice is blown about the winding overgrown paths, and the memorials of the dead.

Just inside the gate, visible from the road among the dark evergreens, stands a tall, conspicuous altar-tomb, conspicuous more for the miserable way in which a stately monument has been handled, than for its present glories. It has been patched and slobbered up with grey stucco; and the inscription scratched on the surface is three-quarters obliterated. Let into the sides are the grey stone panels of the older tomb, sculptured with quaint emblems of life and death, a mattock and an uncouth heap of bones, an hourglass and a skull, a pot of roses and lily-flowers—such is the monument of one of Eton's gentlest servants and sons. "I ordain," runs the quaint conclusion of his will, "that at the time of the next evensong after my departure (if conveniently it may be), my body be laid in the churchyard of the town of Eton (if I chance to die there), as near as may be [a strangely pathetic touch of love from the childless philosopher, the friend of courtiers and divines], to the body of my little godson, Jack Dickenson the elder; and this to be done in plain and simple manner, without any sermon or ringing the bell, or calling the people together; without any unseasonable commessation or compotation, or other solemnity on such occasions usual; *for as in my life I have done the church no service, so I will not that in my death the church do me any honour*."

And the prophecy is fulfilled to the letter; in such a tomb he rests; and by a strange irony of fate, the pompous title claiming so universal and perennial a fame—the "ever-memorable"—is the only single fact which is commonly mentioned about him—he has even been identified with Sir Matthew Hale of just memory.

John Hales was neither an Etonian nor a Kingsman: he was of a Somersetshire family; and was educated at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he spent no less than six years before taking his degree (in 1603), from the age of thirteen to the age of nineteen.

The Warden of Merton at that time was Sir Henry Savile, Queen Elizabeth's Greek tutor, supposed the most learned savant of the time, founder of the Savilian professorships for astronomy and geometry, a severe, clear-headed student. It is recorded of him that he had a great dislike for brilliant instinctive abilities, and only respected the slow cumulative processes. "Give me the plodding student," he said: "if I would look for wits, I would go to Newgate: there be the wits." He was not popular among the rising young men in consequence; John Earle, the author of the *Microcosmography*, that delightful gallery of characters that puts Theophrastus into the shade, was the only man he ever admitted, on his reputation as a wit, into the sacred society of Merton. For such intellects as he desired, he made search in a way that was then described as "hedge-beating."

Savile was attracted by Hales; he found in him a mind which, young as it was, showed signs of profundity. Savile's choice is a great testimony to the *depth* of Hales' attainments; for his later reputation was acquired more by his grace and originality of mind than for his breadth of learning. Savile was then at work on his *Chrysostom*, printed privately at Eton in the grave collegiate house in Weston's Yard, now the most inconvenient residence of the Præcentor. Hales became a congenial fellow-labourer, and in 1613 was moved to a fellowship at Eton, of which College Savile had for seventeen years been Provost.

A Fellow of Eton is now a synonym for a member of the Governing Body, that is to say, a gentleman in some public

position, who is willing to give up a fraction of his time to the occasional consideration and summary settlement of large educational problems. Twenty years ago a Fellowship meant a handsome competence, light residence, a venerable house, and a good living in the country. In Hales's time it meant a few decent rooms, a small dividend, home-made bread and beer at stated times, a constant attendance at the church service, and the sustaining society of some six or seven earnest like-minded men, grave students,—at least under Savile,—mostly celibates. To such the life was dignified and attractive. Early rising, and a light breakfast. A long, studious morning, with Matins, an afternoon dinner, a quiet talk round the huge fire, or a stroll in the stately college garden with perhaps some few promising boys from the school—then merely an adjunct of the more reverend college, not an absorbing centre of life—more quiet work and early to bed. Busy, congenial monotony! There is no secret like that for a happy life!

After three years, this was broken into by a piece of vivid experience—Hales accompanied Sir Dudley Carleton, Ambassador to Holland, as his chaplain, and was despatched by him in 1618 to the Synod of Dort.

It must be clearly borne in mind that theological and religious problems then possessed a general interest for the civilised world, and for Englishmen in particular, which it cannot be pretended that they possess now. Political gossip has taken the place of theological discussion. Then, contemporary writers thought fit to lament the time that common folk wasted in such disputes; when the Trinitarian controversy could be discussed on the benches of an alehouse, and apprentices neglect their work to argue the question of prevenient grace, we feel that we are in an atmosphere which if not religious, was at any rate theological.

Hales went to Dort a Calvinist—that, in those days, is equivalent to saying that he had never given his theological position much attention. What he heard there is uncertain, for a more unbusinesslike meeting was never held; "ignorance, passion, animosity, injustice," said Lord Clarendon, were its characteristics. There was no one to whose ruling speakers deferred. No one knew what subject was to be discussed next, often hardly what was under discussion. A third of the members disappeared, after what an eye-witness called a "pondering speech" from the President. Such a theological schooling is too severe for a reflective mind. Hales came home what was called a Latitudinarian, having, as he quaintly says, at the "well pressing" of St. John iii. 16, by Episcopius (a divine, present at the Synod), "bid John Calvin good-night." A Latitudinarian translated into modern English would be a very broad churchman indeed. For it is evident that Haley's native humour, which was very strong, prevented him from even considering religious differences in a serious light; "theological scarecrows!" he said, half bitterly, half humorously. When in later years he was found reading one of Calvin's books, he said playfully, "Formerly I read it to reform myself, but now I read it to reform him." And the delightful comparison which he makes in one of his tracts is worth quoting, as showing the natural bent of his mind to the ludicrous side of these disputes; he compares the wound of sin and the supposed remedy of confession, to Pliny's cure for the bite of a scorpion—to go and whisper the fact into the ear of an ass.

Only once did he encounter the little restless, ubiquitous, statesman-priest, who so grievously mistook and under-rated the forces with which he had to deal, and the times in which he had fallen—Laud.

The whole incident is dramatic and entertaining in the highest degree. Hales, for the edification of some weak-minded friends, wrote out his views on schism, treating the whole subject with a humorous contempt for Church authority. This little tract got privately printed, and a copy fell into Laud's hands (as indeed, what dangerous matter did not?), which he read and marked. He instantly sent for his recalcitrant subaltern, to be rated and confuted and silenced. The matter is exquisitely characteristic of Laud, both in the idea and in the method of carrying it out. "Mr. Hales came," says Heylyn, "about nine o'clock to Lambeth on a summer morning," with considerable heart-sinking no doubt. The Archbishop had him out into the garden, giving orders that they were on no account to be disturbed. The bell rang for prayers, to which they went by the garden door into the chapel, and out again till dinner was ready—hammer and tongs all the time: then they fell to again, but Lord Conway and several other persons of distinction having meantime arrived, the servants were obliged to go and warn the disputants how the time was going. It was now about four in the afternoon. "So in they came," says Heylyn, "high coloured and almost panting for want of breath; enough to show that there had been some heats between them not then fully cooled." The two little cassocked figures (both were very small men), with their fresh complexions, set off by tiny mustachios and imperials such as churchmen then wore, pacing up and down under the high elms of the garden, and arguing to the verge of exhaustion, form a wonderful picture.

Hales afterwards confessed that the interview had been dreadful. "He had been ferreted," he said, "from one hole to another, till there was none left to afford him any further shelter; that he was now resolved to be orthodox, and declare himself a true son of the Church of England both for doctrine and discipline."

Laud evidently saw the mettle of the man with whom he had to deal, and what a very dangerous, rational opponent he was, so he made him his own chaplain, and got the king to offer him a canonry at Windsor in such a way that refusal, much to Hales's distaste, was out of the question thus binding him to silence in a manner that would make further speech ungracious. "And so," said Hales, quietly grumbling at his wealthy loss of independence, "I had a hundred and fifty more pounds a year than I cared to spend."

During all these years Hales was a member of the celebrated Mermaid Club, so called from the tavern of that name in Friday Street. Thither Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Donne, and many more repaired. There he must have seen the coarse, vivacious figure of Ben Jonson, the presiding genius of the place, drinking his huge potations of canary, and warming out of his native melancholy into wit and eloquence, merging at last into angry self-laudation, and then into drunken silence, till at last he tumbled home with his unwieldy body, rolling feet, and big, scorbutic face, to sleep and sweat and write far into the night; a figure strangely similar down to the smallest characteristics, in his gloom, his greediness, his disputatious talk, to the great Samuel of that ilk, in all but the stern religious fibre that is somehow the charm of the latter.

It was in London, at one of these convivial gatherings, that Suckling, Davenant, Endymion Porter, Ben Jonson, and Hales were talking together; Jonson, as was his wont, railing surlily at Shakespeare's fame, considering him to be much overrated,—"wanting art," as he told Drummond at Hawthornden.

Suckling took up the cudgels with great warmth, and the dispute proceeded; Hales in the background, sitting meekly, with the dry smile which he affected—deliberately dumb, not from want of enthusiasm or knowledge, but of choice. Ben Jonson, irritated at last beyond the bounds of patience, as men of his stamp are wont to be, by a silent humorous listener, turned on him suddenly and began to taunt him with "a want of Learning, and Ignorance of the Ancients." Hales at last emerged from his shell, and told Jonson, with considerable warmth, that if Mr. Shakespeare had not read the ancients, he had likewise not stolen anything from them—"a fault," adds the biographer, "the other made no conscience of—and that if he would produce any one topic finely treated of by any of them, he would undertake to show something upon the same subject, at least as well written by Shakespeare."

This is an extraordinary instance of perspicuity of literary judgment; that Hales should draw a favourable comparison between Shakespeare and his contemporaries, would not be surprising; but to find him, classicist as he was, deliberately putting Shakespeare above all writers of any date is a very notable proof of critical acumen.

Neither did the combat end here. The enemies of Shakespeare would not give in: so it came to a trial of skill. The place agreed on for these literary jousts was Hales's rooms at Eton; a number of books were sent down, and on the appointed day Lord Falkland and Suckling, and several other persons of wit and quality came down; the books were opened, and Shakespeare was arraigned before antiquity, and unanimously (except for Sir John) awarded the palm. We may be sure it would have been different if old Ben Jonson had been present; there would have been less unanimity and more heat; but he was much troubled with symptoms of an old, recurrent paralysis, of which he had only partly got the better, and he was melancholic and therefore kept away. Still it is a scene to think of with envy—little Lord Falkland with his untuneable voice, brisk wit, and sweet manner, moderating the assembly; the summer afternoon, the stately collegiate room, overlooking the studious garden, girdled about by the broad and even-flowing Thames, among sedge and osier-beds, and haunted by no human presence. This period was probably the happiest time of Hales's life; he was at the height of his social reputation.

He was a man of an inveterately companionable disposition. He disliked being alone, except for study—in congenial company a sympathetic talker; once a year for a short time he used to resort to London for the polite conversation which he so much enjoyed, and when the Court was at Windsor he was greatly in request, being not only a good talker, but a better listener, as his biographer says; not only divines and scholars resorting to the rooms of this *bibliotheca ambulans*, as Provost Wotton called him, but courtiers, sprightly wits, and gay sparks from the castle. This it was that earned him his soubriquet. He was familiar with, or corresponded with, all the ablest men of the day, counting as he did, Davenant, Suckling, Ben Jonson, and Lord Falkland, and all that brilliant circle, among his intimate friends.

He was made Canon of Windsor in 1639. In two years the whole pleasant life breaks up before our eyes, never to be restored. Laud's death showed him that as his chaplain, he was in a dangerous position. Besides, the event itself was a frightful shock to him. He left his lodging in college, and went for a quarter of a year in utter secrecy to a private house at Eton, next door to the old Christopher Inn, the house of Mrs. Dickenson to whose lad he was godfather. Search was made for him unsuccessfully, though he says that his hiding place was so close that if he had eaten garlic he could have been nosed out. Here he subsisted for three months entirely on bread and beer (strange diet), fasting—as he appears to have done from mistaken medical notions—from Tuesday night to Thursday night. The reason for this retirement was the fear that certain documents and keys, entrusted to him as Bursar, should fall into the adversary's hands—for it is probable that at first he shared the belief with other enthusiastic royalists that the troubles would speedily blow over. He was, of course, ejected from fellowship and canonry, refusing with some spirit a proposal made to him by Mr. Penwarren, who succeeded him, that he should retain half—"All or none is mine,"—though he was reduced to the greatest poverty. He sold his library, which was large and valuable, for £700, devoting a large proportion to others suffering from deprivation. The account of his conversation with Faringdon, an intimate friend, is absolutely heartrending.

Mr. Faringdon coming to see Hales some few months before his death found him in very mean lodgings at Eton, but in a temper gravely cheerful, and well becoming a good man under such circumstances. After a slight and homely dinner, suitable to their situation, some discourse passed between them concerning their old friends and the black and dismal aspect of the times; and at last Hales asked Faringdon to walk out with him to the churchyard. There this unhappy man's necessities pressed him to tell his friend that he had been forced to sell his whole library, save a few volumes which he had given away, and six or eight little books of devotion which lay in his chamber; and that for money, he had no more than what he then showed him, which was about seven or eight shillings; and "besides" says he, "I doubt I am indebted for my lodgings." Faringdon had not imagined that it had been so very low with Hales and presently offered him fifty pounds, in part payment of the many sums he and his wife had received of him in their great necessities. But Hales replied, "No, you don't owe me a penny, or if you do, I here forgive you, for you shall never pay me a penny, but if you know any other friend that hath too full a purse and will spare me some of it I will not refuse that."

For a few months he went as nominal chaplain and tutor to the children of a lady living at Richings Park, near West Drayton, where there was a little college of deprived priests, among them being Bishop King of Chichester. But when this society was declared treasonous, he retired again to Eton to the same faithful friends, the Dickensons, the house being called his own lest the accusation of harbouring malignants should fall on the real owner.

A charming contemporary description of him at this date is left by John Aubrey, the antiquary, who went to see him.

"I saw him, a prettie little man, sanguin [*i.e.*, fresh-coloured], of a chearful countenance, very gentele and courteous. I was received by him with much humanity; he was in a kind of violet-coloured cloth gowne with buttons and loopes (he wore not a black gowne), and he was reading Thomas à Kempis. It was within a year before he deceased. He loved Canarie, but moderately, to refresh his spirits; he had a bountiful mind."

At last the end came very quietly. He was in his seventy-third year, "weary of this uncharitable world," as he said. Only a fortnight ill, and then dying so quietly that Mr. Montague, who had been talking to him, left the room for half-an-hour and found him dead on his return.

He was one of those great men who have a genuine dislike of publicity. He could not be induced to publish anything in his lifetime except a Latin funeral oration—not that it mattered, as one of his contemporaries hinted, "for he was so communicative that his chair was a pulpit and his chamber a church." In fact it became so much a matter of habit that his friends should propound questions on which he should discourse, that he is recorded to have made a laughing refusal; "he sets up tops," he said, in his allusive way "and I am to whip them for him." But it is plain that he had a genuine contempt for his own written style: he says that on the one side he errs by being "overfamiliar and subrustic;" on the other as "sour and satyrical." He evidently had the ironical quality in great perfection; his writings and recorded conversation abound in quaint little unexpected turns and capricious illustrations; he had one of those figurative minds that love to express one idea in the terms of another, and see unexpected and felicitous connections. His sermons are strange compositions; they straggle on through page after page of thickly printed octavos, "he being a great preacher according to the taste of those times," says an antique critic of them, going on to object that they keep the reader in a "continued twitter throughout." He must have been very light of heart who could have "twittered" continuously through the good hour that the very shortest of them must have taken to deliver. Quotations from Homer, mystically interpreted, strange mythological stories, well worn classical jests; perhaps the sense of humour was as different among the men of that era from ours as their sense of theology undoubtedly was—more discursive if not deeper!

It has struck more than one writer about John Hales, that the following is a curious trait: he was a remarkably good man of business: he was bursar of Eton for many years, and his precise, formal signature may still be seen in the audit books, and it is told of him that he was accustomed to throw into the river at the bottom of the college garden any base or counterfeit coin that he chanced to receive on behalf of the college, paying the loss out of his own pocket.

Pure-minded, simple-hearted little man, reading Thomas-à-Kempis in his violet gown; poor, degraded, but not dishonoured; what a strong, grave protest your quiet, exiled life, self-contained and serious, is, against the crude follies, the boisterous energies of the revolution seething and mantling all about you! the clear-sighted soul can adopt no party cries, swears allegiance to no frantic school; enlightened, at the mercy of no tendency or prejudice, it resigns all that gave dignity to blessed quiet, and takes the peace without the pomp; with unobstrusive, unpretentious hopes and prospects shattered in the general wreck, the true life-philosopher still finds his treasures in the old books, the eternal thoughts and the kindly offices of retired life. This is a gentle figure that Eton's sons may well be glad to connect with her single street, her gliding waters and her immemorial groves; though as yet the reverence of antiquity sate lightly upon her, though she was not yet in the forefront of the loud educational world, yet in her sequestered peace there was a cloistral stateliness that she somewhat misses now. Not that we grudge her the glory of a nobler mission, a wider field of action, a more extended influence, in days when the race and battle are more than ever for the fleet and strong. But we lament over the nooks that the ancient years so jealously guarded and fenced about from the world and its incisive voice, where among some indolence and some luxury and much littleness the storage of great forces was accomplished, and the tones of a sacred voice not rarely heard. Ah! it is an ideal that this century has lost the knack of sympathising with! Perhaps she is but creating the necessity for its imperious recall.

A MINUTE PHILOSOPHER

AT Lord Falkland's court of intellect at Great Tew,—that delightful manor thrown open like a perpetual *salon* to worthy visitors, where Oxford scholars would arrive, order their bedroom, give notice of their intention to be present at dinner, and betake themselves to the library to read or talk,—there was at one time a constant and an honoured guest.

This was a certain Fellow of Merton, by name John Earles,[A] some ten years older than his host, and so devoted to his lordship that, as he himself tells us, he gave all the time that he could make his own to cultivating his society. And at first this was a good deal, for Earles was not a busy man; besides his Fellowship at Merton, he was merely chaplain to Lord Pembroke, and vicar of a distant Wiltshire parish to which he paid but few visits. Between him and Lord Falkland there was a kind of intellectual bargain; they read Greek together, and John said that he learnt more than he taught, and that he was amply repaid for his exertion by the fresh, lively light which that sympathetic mind cast upon the great variety of subjects which passed under review in that high argumentative atmosphere.

[A] The name seems to have been spelt quite indifferently, Earl, Earle, or Earles. John Earles' father was Registrar of the Archbishop's Court at York; John Earles seems to have matriculated at Christ Church, on June 4, 1619. But, according to Wood's Fasti, he took his B.A. degree on July 8, 1619, at Merton, and obtained a Fellowship there in the same year.

John was known to his friends as a singularly sweet-tempered, amiable man, one who could count no enemies—with the faults of a scholar, it is true, his hair tangled, his canonical coat dusty, slovenly and negligent in his habits; a bad man of business, and a forgetful, absent-minded fellow. But they condoned these faults as being so unconscious, the externals of a character which could afford to dispense with social ornament; the habit of a dreamy yet active mind, so bent upon reverie and so strenuous in thought, that it could not bear to waste time and trouble upon things that were undeniably unimportant. Genuine absent-mindedness has a great charm for thoughtful men; when it is the index of deliberate abstraction, they are apt to look upon it almost enviously, as the sign of a high aloofness from ordinary sublunary anxieties, an aloofness which they are themselves unable to command.

John was in the habit of thinking a great deal about his fellow-men; he was not philosophising nor calculating nor

recording in those ruminating periods. He had keen eyes, this untidy, peering scholar, and when others talked he listened. He examined their features curiously; he dwelt with inward delight upon their instinctive gestures—the tones of their voices, the twinkling of their brows, the twitching of their hands; he did not brood and generalise; his taste was for the special, the particular, the individual, the characteristic. And every now and then, when pen and paper lay in his way, he would scribble off a rough sketch, as an artist jots down heads and limbs, towers and copses on his blotting-paper, a mental caricature of one of the strange fellows that he was for ever encountering in the world. Written on loose sheets, sometimes lying in his desk, sometimes left on the table, sometimes dropped over a friend's shoulder, he set no store on these fragments; he did not hand them round with affected carelessness, and come down with his candlestick to search for them when all the world was upstairs. He had no idea of rushing into print, no ambition connected with the publisher. The figure with all its oddities had risen in his mind, and he had the whim to describe it. Done for the moment, he had but a momentary interest in it; and, like the Sibyl, he saw the wind whirl the leaves about, without regard to the precious characters they bore.

Once or twice the humour took him to sketch himself, to outline such lineaments of his own as he had seen reflected in the looks and welcomes of his friends; to recall for his own amusement a humorous situation or two over which he had often made secret merriment. In words too intimate not to be autobiographical he had written of the downright scholar, whose "perplexitye of mannerliness will not let him feed, and he is sharp set at an argument when he should cut his meate." With a twinkling eye, thinking of the stable-gate at Tew and the big horse-block, he says how such an one "ascends a horse somewhat sinisterly, though not on the left side, and they both goe jogging in grief together;" he tells how he "cannot speak to a Dogge in his own dialect, and understands Greeke better than the language of a Falconer."

But like the squire who excuses trespassing and yet draws the line at poaching, he had suddenly to show his hand. To have his witty distinctions quoted, to see them go to form another's stock-in-trade—that he could put up with; it was merely another grotesque turn among the oddities of humanity that he was never tired of observing. But when, without his leave, those fly-sheets, those scrawls and sketches on which he had set so little store, suddenly appeared in print, garnered by some careful hand, then he flung himself into the world with a kind of challenge. Like Virgil he dared them to finish what they had professed to begin, and for himself he proceeded to finish what some one else had begun for him.

He did not set his name to the book, but allowed the world to know who was the author. It was published in 1628 by Edward Blount, stationer and translator, with a preface signed by the latter, but almost certainly inspired by Earles himself, in which he professes to bring forth to the light, as it were, infants which the father would have smothered; but the preface is so void of partiality, it makes so little attempt to compliment the book, or to insist, as even the most judicial friend would have done, on the merits of the work, that it is evidently by the hand of the author—and the author is no less evidently a modest man.

Authors have only been able to wake and find themselves famous since the days of improved communication; yet John Earles found himself famous as soon as the little ripple of delight could permeate to the outskirts of society. The book was so new and bright, the humour was so penetrating and yet so kind, and it was above all so innocent in its wisdom, that the reading world seized upon it with delight.

This fame resulting from so slender and nugatory a performance was a strange surprise to Earles, and had he not been a man who was apt all through his life to be surprised at his own successes, it might have turned his brain; but he broke off and wrote no more, at least in that manner. In five years the book ran through eight editions; and with the exception of adding a score of pieces to one of the editions—pieces which at his friends' earnest solicitation he gathered out of accumulated papers—he wrote nothing else in that kind. Nay, he was so austere, that he had suppressed many sheets in the first edition, because there was a dash of coarseness which had somehow invaded their fibre.

He rose quickly in the world after this, and no one envied him or would have detracted from him; he bore his greatness so quietly and salted it so well with gratitude that it never was anything but pure and fragrant.

The Earl of Pembroke was Lord Chamberlain, and took his chaplain to Court, where he conciliated so many, and showed himself of such even and gracious temper, and possessed of so genial an authority, that when Dr. Duppa was made Bishop of Sarum, John Earles stepped quickly into the post of tutor to the Prince of Wales, afterwards that most gracious monarch, Charles II.

When kings were kings, Arsenius was something of a potentate. A prince's tutor might without absurdity reflect that he held a high and solemn charge. The education of any human being is that; and the education of one born to rank and greatness will always be a serious undertaking, just because he is capable of being such a power in the world, and of influencing so large a number of people; but the education of a king had something national about it, and a tutor who could really affect such a pupil's character might hope to react upon a large section of the community.

Charles II. was undeniably a clever man, and made the most of a very difficult position. He was not a high-minded man in any sense of the word, and he was hopelessly, irretrievably frivolous. If he had been ambitious or serious, terrible complications might have ensued; he would either have fretted himself into madness, or the country into civil war. Fortunately he did neither, but stood in a spectatorial attitude, watching the world through wicked, humorous eyes, living a low kind of life among lazy friends, and sauntering through difficulties which would have wrecked an earnest man. A character like this is sure to have appreciated such a tutor, but Charles was probably far too cold and careless for Earles to have deeply influenced him. Charles II. must have been a hopeless case from the beginning. A clever man in a very great position, without a touch of generosity or affection in his nature, is for the educational experimentalist an impossible pupil; but though we cannot trace any good strain in Charles to the effect of Earles' influence, yet it was something to have conciliated such a prince's liking and to retain his esteem.

John had been made Chancellor of Sarum Church, and had just taken possession of one of those sweet gabled and mullioned houses of grey stone, where gardens run down to the placid, clear chalk-stream, wandering through its

water-meadows,—when the troubles began. A man such as John had never a doubt as to his policy: he had no sort of sympathy with the Puritans; their total lack of humour and delicacy disgusted him as much as anything human could disgust him; and he was not a man who clung with any hankering to houses and lands. He threw up all his appointments and went across the sea to his master; and at one time or another gave him in instalments all the scanty fortune he had put aside.

He lived to be rewarded; no one was so eminently in his master's eye. At the Restoration he was made Dean of Westminster, then Bishop of Worcester, and then, on the death of Bishop Henchman, Duppa's successor, in 1663, he went back to Sarum as its Bishop; and he remained through it all the most simple-minded ecclesiastic that ever sat upon a throne. An easy task enough nowadays, when priests move among statesmen as a lamb moves among wolves,—so far as worldly prospects are concerned. If a Body has to face the possibility of disendowment within a few decades, that anticipation will preserve humility under worldly trappings, like the skull-beaker at Norwegian feasts; but in those days, when a bishop was in reality a petty prince, when he and his brethren made up nearly a third of the House of Peers, when their title to Church revenues was held (as it was in the first flush of the Restoration) as safer than many a country gentleman's, and as rather more sacred than the king's,—a courtier and a scholar, clad in pomp, dignified by secular observance and sanctified by heavenly authority, may be excused if he is a little elated by the flush of dignity; and to be gentle and natural and simple-minded under such an accession of respect signifies an unfailing plenitude of humility's saving spring.

Perhaps ill-health may have contributed a little to this balance and sanity of mind; it is a wonderful tonic in the midst of riotous prosperity. At any rate the Bishop died of a very painful disease which had long troubled him, in the sixty-fifth year of his age; he died at his own dear Oxford, and was buried in the chapel of his college, where he had first practised the piety that made his life so wholesome all along. A quaint and pompous epitaph there describes him as "Angel of the Church of Worcester, afterwards Angel of the Church of Sarum, and now Angel of the Church Triumphant. (*Ecclesiæ Angelus Vigornensis, postmodo Sarisburiensis, jam Triumphantis.*)"

At Salisbury, in the Palace, there is no portrait of him, but there is one at Westminster; and in a Wiltshire farmhouse, not far from Sarum, there are portraits, rude and ill-drawn, of himself and his wife. This lady is buried in a little churchyard, Stratford-sub-Castle, that lies below the huge embanked mound of Old Sarum, overshadowed by a pleasant avenue of limes. It was still rather an unpopular thing for a bishop to marry. Hardly more than half a century before, Abbot, a predecessor of Earles at Sarum, had been soundly scolded and threatened by his actual as well as spiritual brother, the Primate for marrying when in Episcopal Orders. Earles was not so severely handled: we hear little of the marriage, except that he was happy in it. His wife lived and died unnoticed: in those days bishops' wives were made even less of than they are now. He himself took no prominent place; it is probable that he was unconsciously drawn into the tide of practical affairs. At any rate for some reason he left next to nothing behind him besides the little book aforesaid; he wrote a few epitaphs and dedications, translated the *Icon Basilike* into Latin, and had nearly finished translating Hooker's *Polity* into the same language, when he died. The latter was lost through the carelessness of servants, who threw it into a waste-paper bin, and used it to wrap up butter and cheese. And perhaps one may be excused for saying that it was not a very inappropriate ending for it; why a man of brisk and original mind should ever have engaged in this dismal hack-work is the real problem. His contemporaries echo the loss with a howl of dismay that could hardly have been greater had Hooker's original manuscript itself been lost. Perhaps the Bishop wished to correct the impression he had created by his earlier book,—as Maurice used to buy up copies of *Eustace Conway,*—and so engaged in a graver and more appropriate work; he could hardly have selected one which could have been at once so decorous and so dull. Anyhow, the destruction of this document will be received by the modern student with, to say the least, equanimity.

We may now turn to a closer study of the book by which he still deserves to be well known, *The Microcosmography*, or, to give a free rendering, "Jottings from the Note-book of a Minute Philosopher."

This kind of writing was a favourite with the age; men were beginning to turn from the solemn impersonalities of chivalry and from the restricted limitations of the drama, to a more minute analysis of character, to a spectatorial interest in the more unpleasing types of which humanity affords such numerous instances. It was the foreshadowing of the modern novel; but it remained of course a somewhat elementary form of delineation of character. Its elementariness consists in the fact that the characters are labelled and classified: there can be no mistake about the effects intended to be produced, and the success of such work must depend upon the humour, the verisimilitude, the liveliness of the portraiture. There is consequently a great want of that complexity which is at once the delight and the despair of the draughtsman of human character, and such sketches are therefore as inferior to fine creations of character, as studies of expression like Le Brun's, where the whole skill of the artist is directed to the production of a single effect, are inferior to a noble portrait.

The aim of the Microcosmographist is to add touch after touch, every one of which shall indicate in different phases, from different points of view, the same actual characteristic; just as the physiognomist in imaginary portraits endeavours to make eyes, ears, mouth and brow all bear the same stamp, and illustrate the same expression. It is a concentration of effects as opposed to a combination of causes. Theophrastus, of course, and Aristotle are the fathers of the art; besides Earles, Hall and Overbury are the best of the English School.

What will at once strike the reader is the exceedingly miscellaneous and at the same time humorous nature of the contents. Under the general designation of character we have "A Childe, a meere dull Physitian, an Alderman, a younger Brother, a Tavern, an old College Butler, a Pot-poet, a Baker, The Common Singing Man, a Bowle-alley, a She-precise Hypocrite, a Trumpeter, a meere Complemental man, Paul's Walk, a Stayed Man," &c.; still the character-sketches formed by far the most considerable parts of these.

As instances of Earles' humour take the following extract:

"The Antiquary.—Hee will go you forty miles to see a Saint's well, or ruined Abbey; and if there be but a Crosse or a stone footstool in the way, hee'll be considering it so long till he forget his journey.... His very attire is that which is the eldest out of fashion, and you may pick a criticism out of his Breeches. He never looks upon himself till he is grey-haired, and then he is pleased at his own antiquity. His grave does not fright him, because he has been us'd to

sepulchers, and he likes Death the better, because it gathers him to his fathers."

Or the following, from "A Plaine Country-Fellow":

"He seems to have the judgment of Nebuchadnezar; for his conversation is among beasts, and his tallons none of the shortest, only he eats not grasse, because he loves not Sallets [salads]. He expostulates with his Oxen very understandingly, and speaks Gee and Ree better than English. His mind is not much distracted with objects, but if a good Fat Cow come in his way, he stands dumb and astonisht, and though his haste be never so greate, will fix here half an houre's contemplation."

Or this, from "A Universitie Dunne":

"He is like a rejected acquaintance, hunts those that care not for his company, and he knows it well enough; yet he will not away. The sole place to supply him is the Buttery, where he takes grievous use upon your name, and he is one much wrought upon with good Beere and Rhetorick."

This may illustrate Earles' penetration and sagacity of observation:

"A Suspicious Man.—It shall goe hard but you must abuse him whether you will or no. Not a word can be spoke but nips him somewhere.... You shall have him go fretting out of company with some twenty quarrels to every man, stung and gall'd, and no man knows less the occasion than they that have given it."

Or this, from "The Blunt Man":

"He is exceedingly in love with his Humour, which makes him always profess and proclaim it; and you must take what he says patiently, because he is a plaine man; his nature is his excuse still, and other men's Tyrant, for he must speake his mind, and that is his worst, though he love to teach others he is teaching himself."

"The Scepticke in Religion," a habit of mind with which Earles had little sympathy, is well drawn:

"The Fathers jostle him from one side to the other; now Sosinas and Vorstius afresh torture him, and he agrees with none worse than himself. He puts his foot into Heresies tenderly, as a cat in the water, and pulls it out again, and still something unanswered delays him; yet he bears away some parcell of each, and you may sooner pick all Religions out of him than one. He cannot think so many wise men can be in error, nor so many honest men out of the way, and his wonder is doubled when he sees these oppose one another. In summer his whole life is a question and his salvation a greater, which death only concludes, and then he is resolved."

But there is, beside these sharp stinging sentences, a lovely vein of gentle tenderness in his writing. "A Childe," which opens the series, is one of the most exquisite and feeling delineations in literature:

"His father has writ him as his own little story, wherein he reads those days of his life that he cannot remember; and sighs to see what innocence he has outlived. The elder he grows he is a stair lower from God, and like his first parent much worse in his breeches. Could he put off his body with his little coat, he had got eternity without a burthen, and exchanged one heaven for another."

But it would be easy to quote and quote, yet give no real idea of the fertility, the wit, the pathos of the man. All humanity is before him, and must be handled tenderly because he is a part of it himself, and because faults, like ugly features, are sent us to be modified, perhaps; to be eradicated, no!

The one strain in character which throughout afflicts him most, and for which he reserves his most distilled contempt, is the strain of unreality—the affectation whose sin is always to please, and which fails so singularly of its object. Hypocrisy, pretension, falseness—against everything which has that lack of simplicity so fatal to true life he sets his face. For the rest he can hardly read the enigma; he only states it reverently. Like the old Persian poet, he seems to say:

Oh Thou, who Man of baser earth didst make,
And e'en with Paradise devise the Snake,
  For all the Sin wherewith the face of Man
Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take,

HENRY MORE, THE PLATONIST

ABOUT the middle of the seventeenth century, Hobbes and Descartes, clear-headed and unprejudiced thinkers, caused a kind of panic in the devotional world: they resolved that they would not take anything for granted. Starting from a Socratic ignorance, they determined to verify, to try (and it was time) if they could not find a little firm ground among the vast and bewildering mass of rash dogmas and unsupported assertions that lumbered the scene of thought. Such an attempt cut very hard at Revelation. The religious fabric was so perilously elaborate—the removal of a brick was likely to set so much tumbling—its defenders felt themselves bound to believe that the part was as important, if not more so, than the whole; and they had pledged themselves so widely and rashly that they made no attempt at organised rational resistance, but attempted to overwhelm the rough intruders with torrents of solemn imprecations.

But there were in many places earnest-minded, faithful thinkers, profoundly attached to the revealed truths, who

saw another way open. Authorities and ancient names were being called into court; philosophers who had written from a Christian point of view were supposed to speak professionally; a daring thought struck them: what if they could trace a connection between the earlier sources of Revelation and the noblest name that philosophy had ever enrolled? What if they could show that Plato himself owed his highest ideas to the transient influence of that teaching—the Law of Moses—which they themselves possessed in the entirety of a broad development? Pythagoras was said to have sojourned on Carmel and interviewed the priests of Jehovah; the Cabbala—the Law embroidered by metaphysical and mystical minds—was in their hands, and even their adversaries would "allow to Plato the spiritual insight that they denied to St. Paul."

At Cambridge this idea took shape in four remarkable minds: Dr. Cudworth, Master of Clare and afterwards of Christ's, Dr. Whichcote, Provost of King's, John Smith, Fellow of Queen's, and Dr. Henry More, Fellow of Christ's, applied themselves to the solution of the problem.

The interest of the situation lies in the fact that these men were pure and devoted beyond measure in life as well as in thought. Smith did more by direct influence and personal weight than even by his "Select Discourses." Dr. Patrick at his death preached on the cry of Elisha, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horses thereof:" he said that a light had been extinguished in Israel. Cudworth had perhaps the most logical mind. He wrote an "Intellectual System" that was supposed to give Hobbes a death-blow. Whichcote wrote discourses delivered at St. Laurence, Jewry, and originated an immense mass of aphorisms, afterwards published.

But, of the four, More was the man of genius: he was divinely gifted in body and mind; with passionate earnestness he combined humour and delicacy of thought, a trick of suggestive style, and a personality at once genial and commanding. The following pages profess to give a slight account of him.

The movement had unhappily no coherence. We class the four together as Cambridge Platonists because they were possessed by the same idea and worked it out on individual lines; but they did not write or think in concert. They were acquaintances—More and Cudworth close friends, and Whichcote died in Cudworth's house—but it can never have occurred to them that their names would have been connected in later times, because they had no scheme of concerted action,—they originated no movement.

Their unique interest lies in this—that, in an age when both religion and philosophy were making huge strides into materialism, they discerned and strove to indicate this truth,—that the capacity in the human soul of conceiving ideals, and in part transfusing them into life, is at once its highest boast and the most potent factor of its eternal quest.

Henry More was the son of a gentleman who lived near Grantham on a small estate of his own. The principles of the family were those of the straitest Calvinism, though sufficiently cultivated for the father to read the "Faerie Queene" aloud in the evenings; and the boy, after being carefully trained in a private school, kept by a master of this persuasion, was sent to Eton, with strict injunctions from his father and uncle to hold to the faith delivered by Calvin to the Saints.

But the boy's instinct for philosophy was greater than his loyalty to family principles. He had, moreover, none of that gloomy and business-like habit of mind that demanded an accurate and severe disposal of the future of the entire human race as the basis for a creed. Though melancholy as a boy, he had the beginnings of that serene and even temperament, that afterwards was so conspicuous. He was immaturely an optimist: the beauty and kindliness of the world occupied a large share in his thoughts; and, when his elder brother came down to see him at Eton, he maintained the brutal inadequacy of Predestinarianism so strongly, that his uncle, to whom this scandalous position was reported, fell back upon threats of personal chastisement.

He gives us a strange picture of himself at Eton, walking slowly in the Playing Fields while his comrades were at their games, with his head on one side, kicking the stones with his feet, while he murmured to himself the lines of Claudian:

> Saepe mihi dubiam traxit sententia mentem;
> Curarent Superi terras; an nullus inesset
> Rector, et incerto fluerent mortalia casu.

Such a precocious, anxious childhood is generally, alas! only a sign of deficient vitality—a disposition to embrace a religious life and die early; but the event proved a singular contradiction to this.

More was, it seems, a lovable lad—very simple-minded and sweet; resolving that, should the horrid phantom of inevitable destruction be true, should he be destined to that bitter place, yet that he would even there behave himself with such submissive patience that God should not have the heart to keep him there. In his studies he made great progress, troubled more than elated by success, because he was too diffident to believe anything in his triumphs but that he would break down next time.

The Provost of Eton at that time was Sir Henry Wotton—ambassador, courtier, poet, and philosopher. It was an encouraging and stimulating time to be at the school, for Sir Henry, with his romantic past and his courtly, affectionate manners, must have been a fascinating figure for the boys; and he was, moreover, fond of their society; had constantly one or two about him; put up pictures of great orators and statesmen in their schoolroom; and used frequently to walk in to their lessons, never leaving the room without dropping some aphorism or epigram worthy of a place in the memory of a growing scholar.

At the age of seventeen More went up to Christ's College, Cambridge, just at the time when Milton was leaving it; and at his earnest desire was entered under a tutor that was not a Calvinist. On getting established at Cambridge he found himself in an atmosphere, which then, at least, teemed with inducements to study, for the studious. There was little of the social life of a modern university—hours were longer, earlier, and more regularly kept; there was no prejudice in favour of bodily exercise as a means of improving health: for the more absorbed students a turn in the cloisters as a remedy for cold feet was deemed sufficient—the fen invaded Cambridge on every side; the wild birds screamed in the pools, and snipe were snared where Downing now stands. The high-road to Ely was fenced from the

marsh by a few farms, and the ruins—still ugly—of a religious house; beyond Ely lay the interminable lagoons, with here and there an island farm.

In going to Cambridge, a scholar who meant to use the place, did not go with any idea of enjoying life in ordinary ways, of finding society, of amusing himself: no, he went where there were honest, silent, like-minded men, too intent on study to do more than occasionally discuss the subjects with which they were grappling, or give the young student a word of encouragement—*alere flammam*; and besides this, a plain but adequate living, food and shelter, books and lectures—and all not without a certain severe grace and dignity—grace thrown over life by the stately courts of grey stone, retired gardens full of grassy butts and old standard trees, grave parlours and venerable halls, talks in galleries or cloisters; and for the young hearts that gathered there the unvarying march of the seasons: the orchards whitening and blushing over the stately stone walls of college gardens; the plunge of the water in the fountain, the snow on the ground throwing up mysterious light on to the ceilings of studious chambers, and choking the familiar street sounds; or there was some great preacher to hear; my lord of Ely travelling post-haste through the town with his long train of servants and gentlemen, and just stopping for compliments and refreshment at a Lodge, or the grave figures of the doctors, passing through the street, to be watched with bated breath and whispered names; some scholar, with worn spiritual aspect, stealing from his rooms, some nobleman with his flourishing following; or, best of all, the quiet services in the dark chapel, the droning bell ceasing high in the roof, the growing thunder of the organ, the flickering lights, and the master moving to his stall, accompanied by some scholar or writer of mighty name; and then the liturgy, the reviving in prayer and meditation of the old ideals, the thankful consciousness that God could so easily be sought and found.

Into this quiet society More was lovingly received, and it gave him deep content. He plunged into his studies with a kind of fury, like a man transported, digging for treasure; and one day it happened that his father came upon him unexpectedly as he sat with all his books about him, and, being rapturously delighted with the serious intentness of the young man, used a curious phrase about him, suggested no doubt by a certain glory, hardly human, transfiguring the boy's face, "That he spent his time in an angelical way," and then this old Puritan, to mark his sense of satisfaction by some practical testimony, went home and wrote the lad down for a handsome legacy in his will, in token of complete reconciliation: and this legacy was never revoked; but it moved Henry's heart when he discovered it, as the surest sign that he had been forgiven, knowing his father's concrete mode of thought as he did.

He tells us that his tutor, when he first arrived, received him kindly, and asked him, after some talk, observing the boy's melancholy and thoughtful disposition, whether he had a discernment of things good and evil, to which he replied in a low voice, "I hope I have." He says that as he uttered this he was all the time conscious of being the possessor of a singularly sensitive discrimination in these matters, and besides of an insatiable and burning curiosity after all kinds of knowledge. This, however, his diffidence did not allow him to confess. The tutor seems to have watched him carefully, for not long after, seeing his intense and unflagging zeal in study, he asked him rather brusquely why he was so intent on his work, hinting that mere ambition, if that were the motive, was too low an end. On this he confessed that his only aim was knowledge, an aim in itself. The mere consciousness of knowledge was exquisitely pleasurable to him.

Until he took his B.A. in 1635 he occupied himself chiefly in the works of the natural philosophers—Aristotle, Cardan, and Julius Scaliger; but they were a bitter disappointment to him. Their acute and solid observations pleased him, but they seemed to make hasty and obscure assertions on very trivial grounds; and he became a complete sceptic. Not, says Tulloch, as he carefully tells us, regarding the existence of God, or the duties of morality—"for of these he never had the least doubt"—but regarding the origin and end of life. This step he recorded, as his habit was, in a double quatrain of elegiacs, a metre to which he more than once resorted to summarise the turning-points of his career.

Being now able to please himself, he attacked the Platonists—not only Plato himself, but Plotinus and his followers—and gradually he was led to doubt the serious value of mere knowledge. Down into the valley of humiliation he stept; in the bitterness of the fruit of the intellect he could presume to believe, for he had tasted of it and strenuously bruised the savour from it,—and he came to see that it is not the origin and method of life, but life itself that it behoves the true man to know.

That was the point at which so many of his contemporaries were stopping all round him; they, too, had penetrated the secrets of the mind. A few of them, more enthusiastic, continued to pursue it: the others, mistaking the sensuous region for the higher way, fell back on life in its grosser forms; they ate and drank, they buried themselves in local politics and temporary interests. Such things had no charm for More; he pushed through and out into a purer air.

The mysterious and fascinating doctrine of the divine illumination opened before him—uncleanness of spirit, not distance of place, he said, divide men from God: to purge the mind from vice and impurity and the subtle temptations of sense, so as to leave the spiritual eye clear and undimmed—this holy art of life became his dream.

There fell into his hands Tauler's "Theologia Germanica," that precious treatise that, through similitudes, spoke so clearly of God; the work that had been so beloved of Luther. It spoke of the surrender of the will to God—the loosing it from selfish impulses to sail like a ship upon the free sea—the nameless but unerring instinct that falls upon the soul if such a course is faithfully pursued.

He awoke like a man out of sleep, and the conflict began. The old man, which, like Proteus, assumes so many and so bewildering shapes, stood revealed: but the struggle was a matter of time, though sharp at first, so clearly was the truth grasped; and this growing purity and simplicity of mind which he discovered, together with a superhuman assurance, which began to stir and rise within him, constitute what may be called his conversion. Another quatrain records this:

I come from Heaven, am an immortal ray
  Of God; O joy! and back to God shall go.
And here sweet love on wings me up doth stay.
  I live, I'm sure; and joy this life to know.
Night and vain dreams begone—Father of lights,

We live, as Thou, clad with eternal day.
Faith, wisdom, love, fixed joy, free winged might—
This is true life: all else death and decay.

He wrote also to record this a long mystical poem, called *Psychozoia* (Life of the Soul), in 1640, at the age of twenty-six. He was flooded with a perpetual content.

In the pursuit of mysticism there are often several painful facts to record. In the first place, it is common to find a mystical temperament in those whose physical nature is not very strong or passionate. It seems as if certain natures, by the very fact that the ties which hold them to the earth are more than half-loosened already, have a strong affinity to the world of abstractions—as if the very weakness of their corporeal organisation held open a door through which strange shapes are seen moving, and airy voices heard to call; and again the mystical life is, more than any other, subject to deep depressions of spirit, dumb insensibilities, and heavy overshadowings from the towers of death. In the history of More's life no trace of either of these failings can be even faintly discovered. In the first place, he was of a strong and sound constitution; he did not know what it was to be languid or out of health; he was gifted with an extraordinary spring and plenty of pure animal spirits—"a rich ethereal sort of body, for what was inward," to use his own Pythagorean phrase; he says of himself that his body seemed built for a hundred years; that he had a high warmth and activity of thought that never flagged—notably too, that, after a long day of incessant thought, when he came to sleep he had a strange sort of narcotic power; and he was no sooner in a manner laid on his bed, that the falling of a house would scarce wake him, and that he woke in the morning to an inexpressible life and vigour, so that his thoughts and notions "rayed" about him.

There would seem to be little of the visionary here; and yet he confesses to a consciousness of what he calls "Enthusiasm"—which we should almost call madness: he could summon up a material object with such distinctness—visualise it, as it is now called—that it produced on him all the sensations of being seen with the outward eye: that is, he could at any moment, with his eyes open, command a scene or a person, so that the vision passed before and effaced the furniture of his room or the page of his book: and he says that all his life he could, with an almost inconsiderable effort of the will, fix his mind so intently on any subject or line of thought that he could spend as much as three hours in an intent uninterrupted reverie.

Such a man would be sure to fling himself with rapture into ascetic and mortifying practices—and so he did: the result was a prolonged exaltation of soul, apparently unaccompanied by any symptoms of exhaustion and depression, which is almost miraculous. One reverie, which he records, lasted for fifteen days, during which he slept and rose, ate and drank, went about his ordinary business, without, he asserts, any one suspecting that he was all the time occupied in a serene and rapturous contemplation. In this "lazy activity," he said, "he passed from notion to notion without any perceptible images or words in the mind;" as he walked in the street he could have fallen, he said, and kissed the stones for joy; when playing the theorbo, for he had considerable musical talent, he says that he sometimes became almost mad with pleasure—so overcome that he was forced to desist.

"I am not out of my wits [as he writes in a touching passage in one of his mystical dialogues] in this divine freedom, for God does not ride me as a horse, and guide me I know not whither, but converseth with me as a friend: I sport with the beasts of the earth; the lion licks my hand like a spaniel; the serpent sleeps upon my lap and stings me not. I play with the fowls of heaven, and the birds of air sit singing upon my fist. Thou canst call down the moon so near thee by thy magic charm that thou mayst kiss her, as she is said to have kissed Endymion—or control and stop the course of the sun; or, with one stamp of thy foot, stay the motion of the earth.

"He that is come hither, God hath taken him to be His own familiar friend; and though He speaks to others aloof off, in outward religions and parables, yet He leads this man by the hand, teaching him intelligible documents upon all the objects of His providence: speaks to him plainly in His own language, sweetly insinuates Himself and possesseth all his faculties, understanding, reason, and memory. This is the darling of God, and a prince among men, far above the dispensation of either miracle or prophet."

There is no figure in literature that comes very close to this, except the solemn form of Prospero in the enchanted land:

The isle is full of noises.
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.

Henry More's life was a very simple one. His private means were large; we hear of his possessing the advowson of a living in Lincolnshire, Ingoldsby, to which he presented Mr. Ward, who wrote his life, and a large farm in the same county; he had also other sources of income. Thus he had no temptation to seek for wealth, or for preferment for the sake of wealth, since his tastes were extraordinarily simple. He did, as a matter of fact, give very largely in charity; his door, it was said, was like the door of an hospital; indeed, he was so liberal with his money, that in later life he made over to a nephew, Gabriel More, who had fallen into misfortunes through no fault of his own, not only his Lincolnshire estates, but a large legacy which he received from Lady Conway.

He was elected a Fellow of Christ's soon after taking his M.A. degree: his solitary and contemplative habits, his ascetic practices—for these, though not marked, were sure to be discussed in so small and intimate a society as a college—and the slight suspicion of fanaticism that he incurred, led some to doubt whether he would not be a melancholy addition to the Combination Room; but those who knew him better assured the authorities that, though he was studious and serious, yet he was a very pleasant companion, and in his way one of the merriest Greeks they were acquainted with.

He was offered several important posts. Great efforts were made to get him over to Ireland. On one occasion he was offered the Deanery of Christ Church, Dublin, and on another occasion the Provostship of Trinity College combined with the Deanery of St. Patrick's; as he never even considered these for a moment, he was offered two Irish Bishoprics in succession, the Lord-Lieutenant writing to him to press his acceptance of the latter. "Pray be not so morose or humoursome," he wrote, "as to refuse all things you have not known so long as Christ's College."

Once even he was offered an English Bishopric, and his friends got him as far as Whitehall to kiss hands, but they

concealed the real object of their designs, and when he understood it, he was not on any account to be persuaded.

Late in life he accepted a prebend at Gloucester, urgently pressed on him by Heneage Finch, Earl of Nottingham, the Lord Chancellor, brother of an old pupil, but he resigned it almost immediately in favour of one of his friends; and once, too, the Fellows offered to elect him to the Mastership of Christ's, when it fell vacant, but this also he declined.

He was tutor of the College for a time, and was brought thus into close relations with Sir John Finch, afterwards Ambassador to Turkey, younger brother of Lord Nottingham, then an undergraduate. Finch's sister, Lady Conway, had been converted to the tenets of the Quakers, and Henry More, whose interest in his pupil extended itself to his pupil's sister, laboured to reclaim her for several years; he was thus brought into contact with Penn and the leaders of the Quietist party.

Lady Conway, the original of Lady Cardiff in "John Inglesant," was afflicted by mysterious and incurable pains in the head, and not only travelled to consult physicians, but was accustomed to assemble quacks and specialists in her house at Ragley; there More spent most of his time, and composed several books at her ladyship's special request. There, too, he met the faith-healer Greatrakes, a moody man who had lived for some time in seclusion at his own ruined castle of Capperquin in Ireland; as well as the famous Van Helmont, Baron of Austria, Quaker and physician, son of the famous chemist of the same name. This man was all that Greatrakes was not; he had considerable medical skill, and a quiet pious character. To us the union of the preacher and physician is somewhat repugnant. We take it to mean that a man supplies the gaps in his practical knowledge by the pretensions of spiritual insight; we believe him to be proficient in neither. Van Helmont, however, seems to have been a genuine man, and to suffer from an undeserved contempt. As a matter of fact the possession of keen moral insight and sympathy is one of the most powerful instruments that a physician can claim; the physical and mental constitution react so invariably, that without it a man must be at a loss; the healing art need not necessarily halt at the threshold of hypochondria.

As I have touched on Lady Conway and Van Helmont, I may as well follow out the part that Henry More plays in that fascinating romance—*John Inglesant*. The life and works, down even to the style and mode of expression, of Henry More have interested and influenced Mr. Shorthouse very strongly. I have heard the conversation between John Inglesant and Dr. More, which is said to have taken place at Oulton, instanced as an admirable *tour de force* of Mr. Shorthouse's style. The fact is that Henry More speaks there, not in character, but actually; nearly three-quarters of the conversation being sentences and aphorisms extracted straight from More's works. It is very ingeniously done, though a little too elaborate to be lifelike when regarded as conversation.

But the effects of Henry More's writings are traceable in several other parts of *John Inglesant*. In the conversation to which I have alluded, More is made to sketch what he considers to be Inglesant's character and physical constitution. He says:

"There would seem to be some that by a divine sort of fate are virtuous and good to a great and heroical degree, and fall into the drudgery of the world rather for the good of others, or by a divine force, than through their own fault or any necessity of Nature; as Plato says, they descend hither to declare the being and nature of God, and for the greater health, purity, and perfection of the lower world."

He goes on to describe the "luciform vehicle" in which such a soul as this is apt to display itself; and the great need of scrupulous temperance and purity to keep it undimmed.

Now these passages are, in the places where they occur in Henry More's works, undoubtedly and in reality autobiographical: they are extracted word for word from passages where he is obviously referring to himself.

The fact thus remains that, though Inglesant and More are represented as holding converse together, it is in reality More talking to himself—himself, that is, differently circumstanced and developed by other fortunes and influences. The figure of More was not quite romantic enough for Mr. Shorthouse, and his religious system lacked the vivid sense of the personal presence of Christ that is so marked a feature in Inglesant's career; but there is no reasonable doubt that Dr. More affords in the main outlines of his character and temperament the basis for that delicately drawn, laborious book which has made such a mark upon our late literature.

After Lady Conway's death, More was so far identified with her family and friends, as to write a preface, in the character of Van Helmont, for her *Remains*. At one time he thought of abandoning his collegiate life for his rectory of Ingoldsby in Lincolnshire; he intended to settle there with some friend as curate, and spend his time in quiet parochial work and study—but the scheme came to nothing. It may be doubted whether even he would have been proof against the trials of a country rectory; at Cambridge, indeed, he had quiet as much as he wished, but he had stimulus too: at Ingoldsby he would have had enforced quiet without the stimulus.

He was elected into the Royal Society, before its establishment by charter, in order to add lustre to it; for, though he never aimed at it, he had acquired long before his death a great reputation by his writings, which, as Mr. Chishull, the eminent bookseller of the day, said, ruled all the other booksellers in London.

He was a very laborious writer; his works fill folio volumes, and are full of curious learning, with a strange streak of humour, descending at times to a coarseness of expression which would not be tolerated now.

His voice, as was said, was somewhat inward, and not suited to the pulpit; and so he determined to give the world his thoughts in writing.

The *Divine Dialogues* are the *Mystery of Godliness* and the *Mystery of Iniquity*; the first of these being an exhaustive inquiry, in many books, into the nature and spirit of heathen religions. It may be said at once that his method of treating the subject is unjust; he is far too anxious, in his zeal for the Truth, to attribute to them a licentious or contemptible origin and obscene or meaningless ceremonies. The "Mysteries of Eleusis," which, according to Socrates, had much symbolism of a strangely exalted type, are treated by More as both superstitious and dissolute—even Apollonius of Tyana, who, whether he existed actually or not, at least exhibits a high type of the Stoic ideal, is a solemn puppet in his eyes. When he has, then, to his satisfaction demonstrated the worthless and

debasing character of these rites—which is surely to shut the eyes to the inextinguishable hunger for the holy expression of life, in worship, that has never really deserted the human race—he proceeds to bring the Christian faith upon the stage, and to show how it satisfies the deepest and highest instincts of humanity.

But More cannot be said to have been a Christian in the sense that Thomas-à-Kempis or Francis of Assisi were Christians; he did not hunger for the personal relation with Christ which is so profoundly essential to the true conception of the Christian ideal. He was a devout, a passionate Deist; he realised the in-dwelling of God's spirit in the heart, and the divine excellence of the Son of Man. But it was as a pattern, and not as a friend, that he gazed upon Him; the light that he followed was the uncovenanted radiance. For it is necessary to bear in mind that More and the Cambridge Platonists taught that the Jewish knowledge of the mysteries of God had passed through some undiscovered channel into the hands of Pythagoras and Plato; and that the divinity of their teaching was directly traceable to their connection with Revelation. They looked upon Plato and Pythagoras as predestined vehicles of God's spirit, appointed to prepare the heathen world for the reception of the true mysteries, though not admitted themselves to full participation in the same.

Besides these books, which are profound and logical, and composed in a style which is admirable by comparison to the ordinary writing of the times. More drilled away into some rather grotesque speculations on the subject of Apocalyptical interpretation; of this, he says, humorously, himself, that while he was writing it "his nag was over free, and went even faster than he desired, but he thought it was the right way"—and there is something pathetic indeed in the mode in which the passionate seekers after truth of those times beat their heads against the various theories of the direct communication of God with man, such as warning dreams and visions, and the face of the heavens by night. The idea is beautifully presented in *John Inglesant*, where the hero says to his brother, who has produced a false horoscope of himself: "I would have you think no more of this, with which a wicked man has tried to make the heavens themselves speak falsely.... Father St. Clare taught it me among other things, and I have seen many strange answers that he has known himself—but it is shameful that the science should be made a tool of by designing men."

This is said so naturally, with so simple and melancholy a faith, that it seems to me to reproduce the feeling of even the more refined and cultivated men of the time about such things in an infinitely affecting way.

Besides these there are published letters of Henry More's, prolix for the general reader, but interesting enough if the man's own personality appeals to you: some very disappointing hymns and didactic poems, stiff and unlovely to a strange degree for so deep and graceful a writer; and many other scattered works, such as the *Enchiridion Ethicum*, which it is impossible to analyse here.

More had a very facile style: he used to say that his friends had been always wanting him to go up upon a stall and speak to the people; but that was not his way: he should not have known what to have done in the world if he could not have preached at his fingers' ends. He said that when he sat down to write, though his thoughts were perfectly clear, yet they were too numerous; and that he had to cut his way through them as through a wood. However, he would never correct: the thing must go as he first wrote it; "if he saw any faults in the first draft, he could correct them, though it was not easy to him—that this correction went against the grain and seldom seemed to him so savoury as the rest." He was not inclined to overvalue his work. "Like the ostrich," he said, "I lay my eggs in the sand, and hope they will prove vital and prolific in time."

Though he produced very voluminous writings, yet he sometimes manifested a strong and healthy repugnance to the task of expressing himself: he had none of the gloomy laboriousness that is never satisfied with its performance, and yet never takes a lively pleasure in it. When he had finished one of his more lengthy works, he said pleasantly to a friend, as he threw down his pen: "Now for three months I will neither think a wise thought, nor speak a wise word, nor do a wise thing." Once in the middle of some troublesome work he said, with considerable irritation, to a friend who was sitting with him, "When I once get my hands out of the fire, I shall not very suddenly thrust them in afresh." In a letter to Dr. Worthington, Master of Jesus, he says: "I am infinitely pleased that I find my obligation of writing books not too fierce in me, and myself left free to my own more private meditations. I have lived the servant of the public hitherto: it is a great ease to me to be manumitted thus and left to the polishing of myself, and licking myself whole of the wounds I have received in these hot services;" adding, that as soon as he was free from his present business, his purpose was to recoil into that dispensation he was in before he wrote or published anything to the world—in which he says he very sparingly so much as read any books, but sought a more near union with a certain life and sense (the sixth sense), "which I infinitely prefer before the dryness of mere reason or the wantonness of the trimmest imagination."

He had no turn for dry and laborious criticism: he studied things more than words: of his own skill in dead languages, though it was in reality very considerable, he spoke jestingly, in that depreciating ironical way that he always used of himself—that he was like the man that passed by a garrison with a horseshoe hanging at his belt, when a bullet being shot at him struck right upon it, upon which he remarked, "that a little armour was sufficient, if well placed;"—and he often said, in writing his books, that when he came to criticism and quotation, it was "like going over ploughed lands."

I subjoin a few extracts from an ode by the "Ingenious and Learned" Mr. Norris, which is prefixed to Ward's *Life of More*. The composition has great merit; it is in Cowley's manner, but is the precursor of the art of Gray. It serves, I think, to emphasize both the opinion which his contemporaries deliberately held of him, as well as the points in his life and work which seem most worthy of our attention.

Norris writes:

> Truth's outer courts were trod before,
> Sacred was her recess: that was reserved for More.
>
> Thou our great catholic professor art,
> All science is annexed to thy unerring chair.

Some lesser synods of the wise
The Muses kept in Universities;
But never yet till in thy soul
Had they a council œcumenical.

And again:

Strange restless curiosity!
Adam himself came short of thee:
He tasted of the fruit, thou bear'st away the tree.

And this is a well-conceived epigram:

How calm thy life, how easy, how secure
Thou intellectual epicure.

The conclusion is:

Thy stage of learning ends ere that of life be done;
There's now no work for thy accomplished mind
But to survey thy conquests, and inform mankind.

More was a tall, spare man, well-proportioned and graceful; his face was noted for its serene and lively air. He was of ruddy complexion, which grew pale in later life, though always clear and spirited; and "his eye," says a friend who was often with him, "was hazel," and as vivid as an eagle's. He had luxurious tastes in dress, and the air of a courtier: none of the clownishness of the retired scholar was in the least perceptible in his motions, words, or general bearing.

His portrait represents him in his later years as much such a man as we should have imagined: he wears his hair, which was light and long, over his shoulders, and a faint streak of moustache upon his upper lip; the face is grave but not displeasing; it has the broad arched forehead, strongly indented, that is characteristic of masculine intellect; very high and prominent cheek-bones, big firm lips, and a massive chin; the cheek is healthy and not attenuated; the eyes clear and steady, the right eyelid being somewhat drooped, thus conveying a humorous look to the face; he wears the black gown, with girded cassock, and a great silk scarf—the *amussis dignitatis*—over his shoulders; the gown is tied at the neck by strings; and the broad white bands give a precise and quiet air to the whole.

Though temperate and abstemious in life and diet, he was not in the least what we should call an ascetic: he tried some experiments in diet in early life, such as vegetarianism, which he practised for a whole year, but found it did not suit him, and came back to meat; in fact, though he usually dined in Hall, yet he absented himself on Friday, when fish was eaten, and dined in his own rooms, eating meat because he found it more wholesome; and he was not an abstainer—his regular drink was small beer, of which he uttered an enthusiastic panegyric, saying that it was a divine drink. He loved the open air; he said he would always be in it if possible; that he studied best in an arbour without his hat, so that the air might play on his temples. He was very sensitive to weather, and found that the autumn brought with it a melancholy which distressed him.

At the age of sixty-six he wrote his last book, and returned to the quiet contemplative life which suited him so well, and he says that he never had enjoyed so long a period of serene light and inward happiness; but clouds began to gather in his mind—in reality it was the failing body, but he attributed it to the mind, and was rather unhappy about himself. He was then attacked by a kind of low fever, and fainted one evening in the Combination Room after supper: however, as a healthy man is apt to do, he paid no attention to this, but he found himself growing weaker. Once pathetically, as he sat talking in his room, he spread out his hands in the sun; they were thin and delicate with growing weakness. "My body," he said, "is strangely run out." He then began to suffer from sleeplessness; for weeks together he could get no rest. "I thought I should have died laughing," he said to Dr. Ward, "but I find myself like a fish out of its element, that lies tumbling in the dust of the street." Then, after a pause: "I am but the remains of an ordinary man." His mind began to fail him; he could no longer read or think. He said to Dr. Davies, an old friend, that some one had said to him that this, if known, might prejudice his writings; "but," he added, "I have read of a person, an excellent mathematician, who at last came to dote, but none will say that any of his former demonstrations were any the worse for that."

At last he got very weary of the weakness and the long strain. "Never any person," he said, "ever thirsted more after his meat and drink than I do for a release from the body. Yet," he added, "I deserved greater afflictions from the hand of God than those I have met with."

He dwelt much on the next world. "I am glad to think when I am gone," he said, "that I shall still converse with this world in my writings. But it is a greater satisfaction to me that I am going to those with whom I shall be as well acquainted in a quarter of an hour as if I had known them many years."

The day before he died an old friend came to see him. Henry More was very silent, but at last broke out: "Doctor, I have marvellous things to tell you." "Sir," said the other, "you are full, I suppose, of Divine joy." "Full," he said, with tears in his eyes. The other saw he was so extremely weak that he forebore to question him further. When his nephew came to see him in the evening, he said that he should soon be gone. "I am going to play you no tricks," he added; "I am not going to trot and loll and hang on."

The next morning he understood that he had only a few hours to live. "O praeclarum illum diem!" he said, quoting from Cicero. They were almost his last words. He died as the day was dawning, so quietly that the nurse who sat by him did not know when the passage was. He was laid to rest in the College Chapel, having just entered upon his seventy-third year.

The great and singular charm of such a life is its union of mystical tendencies with such perfect sanity. For nearly half a century Henry More lived in a light which he did not invent, but found. He cannot be suspected of fanaticism or weakness; from the day that he found peace in life to the day that he entered into rest, he lived in the strength of a magnificent ideal. His great discovery burst upon him like a flash of light—the nearness and accessibility of God,

whom he had been seeking so far off and at such a transcendent height; his realization of the truth that the kingdom of God does not dwell in great sublimities, and, so to speak, upon the mountain tops, but that it is within each one of us. But this very simplicity he saw was the cause of the unpopularity of the greatest ideals. Men prefer their own Abana and Pharpar to the little river rushing in desolate places. A doctrine does not recommend itself to the busy thinkers of the world unless it be huge and arduous; and thus he made up his mind to be lonely in the world, to face and support the isolation of greatness. "At first, indeed," he said, "the truth appeared so very clear, as well as glorious to me, that I fancied I should have carried all before me; but a little experience served to cure me of this vanity. I quickly perceived that I was not likely to be over-popular."

And yet, by facing and adopting this difficulty, he gained the very thing on which he had turned his back. He made a success of life. He was not for ever dying to the world; he lived in it. Though diseased and shattered moralists may talk of the vanity of human aims and the worthlessness of this world, life surely has its meaning. We are not thrust into a pit from which our only duty is to escape. Something of the greatness and glory of the higher region dwells in the grace and beauty of the nether world. Shadows they may be of far-off transcendent realities, but the very shadows of divine things are from their origin divine. To gain a true standard; to trace the permanent elements; to fight the darkness at every inch: this is to live life to the uttermost—not to slink out of it, not to despise it, not to make light of it. These are the resources of the cynic, the disappointed man, the involuntary saint; but to live in the world and not be of it—this is the secret of the light that emanates from but is not confined to heaven.

ANDREW MARVELL

FEW poets are of sufficiently tough and impenetrable fibre to be able with impunity to mix with public affairs. Even though the spring of their inspiration be like the fountain in the garden of grace, "drawn from the brain of the purple mountain that stands in the distance yonder," that stream is apt to become sullied at the very source by the envious contact of the world. Poets conscious of their vocation have generally striven sedulously, by sequestering their lives somewhat austerely from the current of affairs, to cultivate the tranquillity and freshness on which the purity of their utterance depends. If it be hard to hear sermons and remain a Christian, it is harder to mix much with men and remain an idealist. And if this be true of commerce in its various forms, law, medicine, and even education, it seems to be still more fatally true of politics. Of course the temptation of politics to a philosophical mind is very great. To be at the centre of the machine, to be able perhaps to translate a high thought into a practical measure; to be able to make some closer reconciliation between law and morality, as the vertical sun draws the shadow nearer to the feet,—all this to a generous mind has an attraction almost supreme.

And yet the strain is so great that few survive it. Sophocles was more than once elected general, and is reported to have kept his colleagues in good humour by the charm of his conversation through a short but disagreeable campaign. Dante was an ardent and uncompromising revolutionary. Goethe and Lamartine were statesmen. Among our own poets, the lives of Spenser and Addison might perhaps be quoted as fairly successful compromises; but of poets of the first rank Milton is the only one who deliberately abandoned poetry for half a lifetime, that he might take an active part in public life.

It is perhaps to Milton's example, and probably to his advice, that we owe the loss of a great English poet. It seems to have been, if not at Milton's instigation, at any rate by his direct aid, that Andrew Marvell was introduced to public life. The acquaintance began at Rome; but Marvell was introduced into Milton's intimate society, as his assistant secretary, at a most impressionable age. He had written poetry, dealing like *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* mainly with country subjects, and was inclined no doubt to hang on the words of the older poet as on an oracle of light and truth. We can imagine him piecing out his aspirations and day-dreams, while the poet of sterner stuff, yet of all men least insensible to the delights of congenial society, points out to him the more excellent way, bidding him to abjure Amaryllis for a time. He has style, despatches will give it precision; knowledge of men and life will confirm and mature his mind; the true poet must win a stubborn virility if he is to gain the world. The younger and more delicate mind complies; and we lose a great poet, Milton gains an assistant secretary, and the age a somewhat gross satirist.

At a time like this, when with a sense of sadness we can point to more than one indifferent politician who might have been a capable writer, and so very many indifferent writers who could have been spared to swell the ranks of politicians, we may well take the lesson of Andrew Marvell to heart.

The passion for the country which breathes through his earlier poems, the free air which ruffles the page, the summer languors, the formal garden seen through the casements of the cool house, the close scrutiny of woodland sounds, such as the harsh laughter of the woodpecker, the shrill insistence of the grasshopper's dry note, the luscious content of the drowsy, croaking frogs, the musical sweep of the scythe through the falling swathe; all these are the work of no town-bred scholar like Milton, whose country poems are rather visions seen through the eyes of other poets, or written as a man might transcribe the vague and inaccurate emotions of a landscape drawn by some old uncertain hand and dimmed by smoke and time. Of course Milton's *Il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro* have far more value even as country poems than hundreds of more literal transcripts. From a literary point of view indeed the juxtapositions of half a dozen epithets alone would prove the genius of the writer. But there are no sharp outlines; the scholar pauses in his walk to peer across the watered flat, or raises his eyes from his book to see the quiver of leaves upon the sunlit wall; he notes an effect it may be; but his images do not come like treasures lavished from a secret storehouse of memory.

With Andrew Marvell it is different, though we will show by instances that even his observation was sometimes at fault. Where or when this passion came to him we cannot tell; whether in the great walled garden at the back of the old school-house at Hull, where his boyish years were spent; at Cambridge, where the oozy streams lapped and green fens crawled almost into the heart of the town, where snipe were shot and wild-duck snared on the site of some of its now populous streets; at Meldreth perhaps, where doubtless some antique kindred lingered at the old manor-house that still bears his patronymic, "the Marvells."—Wherever it was,—and such tastes are rarely formed in later years—the delicate observation of the minute philosopher, side by side with the art of intimate expression, grew and bloomed.

We see a trace of that leaning nature, the trailing dependence of the uneasy will of which we have already spoken, in a story of his early years. The keen-eyed boy, with his fresh colour and waving brown hair, was thrown on the tumultuous world of Cambridge, it seems, before he was thirteen years of age; a strange medley no doubt,—its rough publicity alone saving it, as with a dash of healthy freshness, from the effeminacy and sentimentalism apt to breed in more sheltered societies. The details of the story vary; but the boy certainly fell into the hands of Jesuits, who finally induced him to abscond to one of their retreats in London, where, over a bookseller's shop, after a long and weary search, his father found him and persuaded him to return. Laborious Dr. Grosart has extracted from the Hull Records a most curious letter relating to this incident, in which a man whose son has been inveigled away in similar circumstances, asks for advice from Andrew Marvell's father.

Such an escapade belongs to a mind that must have been ardent and daring beyond its fellows; but it also shows a somewhat shifting foundation, an imagination easily dazzled, and a pliability of will that cost us, we may believe, a poet. After Cambridge came some years of travel, which afforded material for some of his poems, such as the satire on Holland, of which the cleverness is still apparent, though its elaborate coarseness and pedantic humour make it poor pasture to feed the mind upon.

But the period to which we owe almost all the true gold among his poems, is the two years which he spent at Nunappleton House, 1650-1652, as tutor to the daughter of the great Lord Fairfax, the little Lady Mary Fairfax, then twelve years old. Marvell was at this time twenty-nine; and that exquisite relation which may exist between a grown man, pure in heart, and a young girl, when disparity of fortune and circumstance forbids all thought of marriage, seems to have been the mainspring of his song. Such a relation is half tenderness which dissembles its passion, and half worship which laughs itself away in easy phrases. The lyric "Young Love," which indubitably though not confessedly refers to Mary Fairfax, is one of the sweetest poems of pure feeling in the language.

Common beauties stay fifteen;
  Such as yours should swifter move,
Whose fair blossoms are too green
  Yet for lust, but not for love.

Love as much the snowy lamb,
  Or the wanton kid, doth prize
As the lusty bull or ram,
  For his morning sacrifice.

Now then love me; Time may take
  Thee before thy time away;
Of this need we'll virtue make,
  And learn love before we may.

It is delightful in this connection to think of the signet-ring with the device of a fawn,—which he used in early life and may still be seen on his papers,—as a gift of his little pupil, earned doubtless by his poem on the Dying Fawn, which is certainly an episode of Lady Mary's childhood.

In this group of early poems, which are worth all the rest of Marvell's work put together, several strains predominate. In the first place there is a close observation of Nature, even a grotesque transcription, with which we are too often accustomed only to credit later writers. For instance, in "Damon the Mower" he writes:

The grasshopper its pipe gives o'er,
And hamstringed frogs can dance no more;
But in the brook the green frog wades,
And grasshoppers seek out the shades.

The second line of this we take to refer to the condition to which frogs are sometimes reduced in a season of extreme drought, when the pools are dry. Marvell must have seen a frog with his thighs drawn and contracted from lack of moisture making his way slowly through the grass in search of a refreshing swamp; this is certainly minute observation, as the phenomenon is a rare one. Again, such a delicate couplet as,

And through the hazels thick espy
The hatching throstle's shining eye,

is not the work of a scholar who walks a country road, but of a man who will push his way into the copses in early spring, and has watched with delight the timorous eye and the upturned beak of the thrush sunk in her nest. Or again, speaking of the dwindled summer stream running so perilously clear after weeks of drought that the fish are languid:

The stupid fishes hang, as plain
As flies in crystal overta'en,

Or of the hayfield roughly mown, into which the herd has been turned to graze:

And what below the scythe increast,
Is pinched yet nearer by the beast.

The mower's work, begun and ended with the dews, in all its charming monotony, seems to have had a peculiar attraction for Marvell; he recurs to it in more than one poem.

I am the mower Damon, known
Through all the meadows I have mown;
On me the morn her dew distils
Before her darling daffodils.

And again, of the mowers,

Who seem like Israelites to be
Walking on foot through a green sea.
To them the grassy deeps divide
And crowd a lane to either side.

The aspects of the country on which he dwells with deepest pleasure—and here lies the charm—are not those of Nature in her sublimer or more elated moods, but the gentler and more pastoral elements, that are apt to pass unnoticed at the time by all but the true lovers of the quiet country side, and crowd in upon the mind when surfeited by the wilder glories of peak and precipice, or where tropical luxuriance side by side with tropical aridity blinds and depresses the sense, with the feeling that made Browning cry from Florence,

Oh, to be in England, now that April's there!

Marvell's lines, "On the Hill and Grove at Billborow," are an instance of this; there is a certain fantastic craving after antithesis and strangeness, it is true, but the spirit underlies the lines. The poem however must be read in its entirety to gain the exact impression.

Again, for simple felicity, what could be more airily drawn than the following from "The Garden"?—

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,
Or at some fruit-tree's mossy root,
Casting the body's vest aside,
My soul into the boughs doth glide,
There like a bird it sits and sings,
Then whets and claps its silver wings.

Or this, from the Song to celebrate the marriage of Lord Fauconberg and the Lady Mary Cromwell, of the undisturbed dead of night?—

The astrologer's own eyes are set,
And even wolves the sheep forget;
Only this shepherd, late and soon,
Upon this hill outwakes the moon.
Hark! how he sings with sad delight
Through the clear and silent night.

Other poems, such as the "Ode on the Drop of Dew" and the "Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn," too long to be quoted here, are penetrated with the same essence.

At the same time it must be confessed that Marvell's imagery is sometimes at fault—it would be strange if it were not so; he falls now and then, the wonder is how rarely, to a mere literary conceit. Thus the mower Damon sees himself reflected in his scythe; the fawn feeds on roses till its lip "seems to bleed," not with a possibly lurking thorn, but with the hue of its pasturage. With Hobbinol and Tomalin for the names of swain and nymph unreality is apt to grow. When the garden is compared to a fortress and its scents to a salvo of artillery—

Well shot, ye firemen! O how sweet
And round your equal fires do meet—

and,

Then in some flower's beloved hut
Each bee as sentinel is shut,
And sleeps so, too—but if once stirred,
She runs you through, nor asks the word—

here, in spite of a certain curious felicity, we are in the region of false tradition and rococo expression. The poem of "Eyes and Tears," again (so whimsically admired by Archbishop Trench), is little more than a string of conceits; and when in "Mourning" we hear that

She courts herself in amorous rain,
Herself both Danae and the shower;

when we are introduced to Indian divers who plunge in the tears and can find no bottom, we think of Macaulay's "Tears of Sensibility," and Crashaw's fearful lines on the Magdalene's eyes—

Two walking baths, two weeping motions,
Portable and compendious oceans.

Nevertheless Marvell's poems are singularly free as a rule from this strain of affectation. He has none of the morbidity that often passes for refinement. The free air, the wood-paths, the full heat of the summer sun—this is his scenery; we are not brought into contact with the bones beneath the rose-bush, the splintered sun-dial, and the stagnant pool. His pulses throb with ardent life, and have none of the "inexplicable faintness" of a deathlier school. What would not Crashaw have had to say of the "Nuns of Appleton" if he had been so unfortunate as to have lighted on them? But Marvell writes:

Our orient breaths perfumed are

With incense of incessant prayer,
And holy water of our tears
Most strangely our complexion clears;
Not tears of Grief, but such as those
With which calm Pleasure overflows.

And passing by a sweet and natural transition to his little pupil, the young Recluse of Nunappleton—

I see the angels, in a crown,
On you the lilies showering down,
And, round about you, glory breaks,
That something more than human speaks

The poems contain within themselves the germ of the later growth of satire in the shape of caustic touches of humour, as well as a certain austere philosophy that is apt to peer behind the superficial veil of circumstance, yet without dreary introspection. There is a Dialogue between Soul and Body, which deals with the duality of human nature which has been the despair of all philosophers and the painful axiom of all religious teachers. Marvell makes the Soul say:

Constrained not only to endure
Diseases, but what's worse, the cure,
And ready oft the port to gain,
Am shipwrecked into health again.

In the same connection in "The Coronet," an allegory of the Ideal and the Real, he says:

Alas! I find the serpent old,
Twining in his speckled breast,
About the flowers disguised doth fold,
With wreaths of fame and interest.

Much of Marvell's philosophy however has not the same vitality, born of personal struggle and discomfiture, but is a mere echo of stoical and pagan views of life and its vanities drawn from Horace and Seneca, who seem to have been his favourite authors. Such a sentiment as the following, from "Appleton House"—

But he, superfluously spread,
Demands more room alive than dead;
What need of all this marble crust,
To impart the wanton mole of dust?—

and from "The Coy Mistress"—

The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, methinks, do there embrace—

are mere pagan commonplaces, however daintily expressed.

But there is a poem, an idyll in the form of a dialogue between Clorinda and Damon, which seems to contain an original philosophical motive. Idylls in the strict sense of the word are not remarkable for including a moral; or if they do include one it may be said that it is generally bad, and is apt to defend the enjoyment of an hour against the conscience of centuries; but in "Clorinda and Damon," the woman is the tempter, and Damon is obdurate. She invites him to her cave, and describes its pleasures.

CLO. ..... A fountain's liquid bell
Tinkles within the concave shell.

DA. Might a soul bathe there and be clean,
Or slake its drought?

CLO. What is't you mean?

D. Clorinda, pastures, caves, and springs,
These once had been enticing things.

CLO. And what late change?—

DA. The other day
Pan met me.

CLO. What did great Pan say?

DA. Words that transcend poor shepherds' skill.

This poem seems a distinct attempt to make of the sickly furniture of the idyll a vehicle for the teaching of religious truth. Is it fanciful to read in it a poetical rendering of the doctrine of conversion, the change that may come to a careless and sensuous nature by being suddenly brought face to face with the Divine light? It might even refer to some religious experience of Marvell's own: Milton's "mighty Pan," typifying the Redeemer, is in all probability the original.

The work then on which Marvell's fame chiefly subsists—with the exception of one poem which belongs to a different class, and will be discussed later, the Horatian Ode—may be said to belong to the regions of nature and feeling, and to have anticipated in a remarkable degree the minute observation of natural phenomena characteristic of a modern school, even to a certain straining after unusual, almost bizarre effects. The writers of that date, indeed, as Green points out, seem to have become suddenly and unaccountably modern, a fact which we are apt to overlook owing to the frigid reaction of the school of Pope. Whatever the faults of Marvell's poems may be, and they are

patent to all, they have a strain of originality. He does not seem to imitate, he does not even follow the lines of other poets; never,—except in a scattered instance or two, where there is a faint echo of Milton,—does he recall or suggest that he has a master.

At the same time the lyrics are so short and slight that any criticism upon them is apt to take the form of a wish that the same hand had written more, and grown old in his art. There is a monotony, for instance, about their subjects, like the song of a bird, recurring again and again to the same phrase; there is an uncertainty, an incompleteness not so much of expression as of arrangement, a tendency to diverge and digress in an unconcerned and vagabond fashion. There are stanzas, even long passages, which a lover of proportion such as Gray (who excised one of the most beautiful stanzas of the Elegy because it made too long a parenthesis) would never have spared. It is the work of a young man trying his wings, and though perhaps not flying quite directly and professionally to his end, revelling in the new-found powers with a delicious ecstasy which excuses what is vague and prolix; especially when over all is shed that subtle, precious quality which makes a sketch from one hand so unutterably more interesting than a finished picture from another,—which will arrest with a few commonplace phrases, lightly touched by certain players, the attention which has wandered throughout a whole sonata.

The strength of Marvell's style lies in its unexpectedness. You are arrested by what has been well called a "pre-destined" epithet, not a mere otiose addition, but a word which turns a noun into a picture; the "hook-shouldered" hill "to abrupter greatness thrust," "the sugar's uncorrupting oil," "the vigilant patrol of stars," "the squatted thorns," "the oranges like golden lamps in a green night," "the garden's fragrant innocence,"—these are but a few random instances of a tendency that meets you in every poem. Marvell had in fact the qualities of a consummate artist, and only needed to repress his luxuriance and to confine his expansiveness. In his own words,

> Height with a certain grace doth bend,
> But low things clownishly ascend.

Before passing on to discuss the satires I may be allowed to say a few words on a class of poems largely represented in Marvell's works, which may be generally called Panegyric.

Quite alone among these—indeed, it can be classed with no other poem in the language—stands the Horatian Ode on Cromwell's return from Ireland. Mr. Lowell said of it that as a testimony to Cromwell's character it was worth more than all Carlyle's biographies; he might without exaggeration have said as much of its literary qualities. It has force with grace, originality with charm, in almost every stanza. Perhaps the first quality that would strike a reader of it for the first time is its quaintness; but further study creates no reaction against this in the mind—the usual sequel to poems which depend on quaintness for effect. But when Mr. Lowell goes on to say that the poem shows the difference between grief that thinks of its object and grief that thinks of its rhymes (referring to Dryden), he is not so happy. The pre-eminent quality of the poem is its art; and its singular charm is the fact that it succeeds, in spite of being artificial, in moving and touching the springs of feeling in an extraordinary degree. It is a unique piece in the collection, the one instance where Marvell's undoubted genius burned steadily through a whole poem. Here he flies *penna metuente solvi*. It is in completeness more than in quality that it is superior to all his other work, but in quality too it has that lurking divinity that cannot be analysed or imitated.

> 'Tis madness to resist or blame
> The force of angry heaven's flame,
> And if we would speak true,
> Much to the man is due
> Who from his private gardens, where
> He lived reservèd and austere,
> (As though his highest plot
> To plant the bergamot,)
> Could by industrious valour climb
> To ruin the great work of Time,
> And cast the kingdoms old
> Into another mould.

This is the apotheosis of tyrants; it is the bloom of republicanism just flowering into despotism. But the Ode is no party utterance; the often-quoted lines on the death of Charles, in their grave yet passionate dignity, might have been written by the most ardent of Royalists, and have often done service on their side. But, indeed, the whole Ode is above party, and looks dearly into the heart and motives of man. It moves from end to end with the solemn beat of its singular metre, its majestic cadences, without self-consciousness or sentiment, austere, but not frigid.

Marvell's other panegyrics are but little known, though the awkward and ugly lines on Milton have passed into anthologies, owing to their magnificent exordium, "When I beheld the poet blind yet old." But no one can pretend that such lines as these are anything but prosaic and ridiculous to the last degree—

> Thou hast not missed one thought that could be fit,
> And all that was improper dost omit;
> . . . . . .
> At once delight and horror on us seize,
> Thou sing'st with so much gravity and ease—

though the unfortunate alteration in the meaning of the word *improper* makes them now seem even more ridiculous than they are. The poems on the "First Anniversary of the Government of the Lord Protector," on the "Death of the Lord Protector," and on "Richard Cromwell," are melancholy reading though they have some sonorous lines.

> And as the angel of our Commonweal
> Troubling the waters, yearly mak'st them heal,

may pass as an epigram. But that a man of penetrating judgment and independence of opinion should descend to a vein of odious genealogical compliment, and speak of the succeeding of

> Rainbow to storm, Richard to Oliver,

and add that

A Cromwell in an hour a prince will grow,

by way of apology for the obvious deficiencies of his new Protector, makes us very melancholy indeed. Flattery is of course a slough in which many poets have wallowed; and a little grovelling was held to be even more commendable in poets in that earlier age; but we see the pinion beginning to droop, and the bright eye growing sickly and dull. Milton's poisonous advice is already at work.

But we must pass through a more humiliating epoch still. The poet of spicy gardens and sequestered fields seen through the haze of dawn is gone, not like the Scholar Gipsy to the high lonely wood or the deserted lasher, but has stepped down to jostle with the foulest and most venal of mankind. He becomes a satirist, and a satirist of the coarsest kind. His pages are crowded with filthy pictures and revolting images; the leaves cannot be turned over so quickly but some lewd epithet or vile realism prints itself on the eye. His apologists have said that it is nothing but the overflowing indignation of a noble mind when confronted with the hideous vices of a corrupt court and nation; that this deep-seated wrath is but an indication of the fervid idealistic nature of the man; that the generous fire that warmed in the poems, consumed, in the satires; that the true moralist does not condone but condemn. To this we would answer that it is just conceivable that a satirist may be primarily occupied by an immense moral indignation, and no doubt that indignation must bear a certain part in all satires; but it is not the attitude of a hopeful or generous soul. The satirist is after all only destructive; he has not learned the lesson that the only cure for old vices is new enthusiasms. Nor if a satirist is betrayed into the grossest and most unnecessary realism can we acquit him entirely of all enjoyment of his subject. It is impossible to treat of vice in the intimate and detailed manner in which Marvell treats of it without having, if no practical acquaintance with your subject, at least a considerable conventional acquaintance with it, and a large literary knowledge of the handling of similar topics; and when one critic goes so far as to call Marvell an essentially pure-minded man, or words to that effect, we think he would find a contradiction on almost every page of the satires.

They were undoubtedly popular. Charles II. was greatly amused by them; and their reputation lasted as late as Swift, who spoke of Marvell's genius as pre-eminently indicated by the fact that though the controversies were forgotten, the satires still held the mind. He started with a natural equipment. That he was humorous his earlier poems show, as when for instance he makes Daphne say to Chloe:

Rather I away will pine
In a manly stubbornness,
Than be fatted up express,
For the cannibal to dine.

And he shows, too, in his earlier poems, much of the weightier and more dignified art of statement that makes the true satirist's work often read better in quotations than entire; as for instance—

Wilt thou all the glory have,
That war or peace commend?
Half the world shall be thy slave,
The other half thy friend.

But belonging as they do to the period of melancholy decadence of Marvell's art, we are not inclined to go at any length into the question of the satires. We see genius struggling like Laocoon in the grasp of a power whose virulence he did not measure, and to whom sooner or later the increasing languor must yield. Of course there are notable passages scattered throughout them. In "Last Instructions to a Painter," the passage beginning, "Paint last the king, and a dead shade of night," where Charles II. sees in a vision the shapes of Charles I. and Henry VIII. threatening him with the consequences of unsympathetic despotism and the pursuit of sensual passion, has a tragic horror and dignity of a peculiar kind; and the following specimen from "The Character of Holland" gives on the whole a good specimen of the strength and weakness of the author:

Holland, that scarce deserves the name of land,
As but the off-scouring of the British sand,
And so much earth as was contributed
By English pilots when they heaved the lead,
Or what by the Ocean's slow alluvion fell
Of shipwrecked cockle and the mussel-shell,
This undigested vomit of the sea,
Fell to the Dutch by just propriety.

Clever beyond question; every couplet is an undeniable epigram, lucid, well-digested, elaborate; pointed, yet finikin withal,—it is easy to find a string of epithets for it. But to what purpose is this waste? To see this felicity spent on such slight and intemperate work is bitterness itself; such writing has, it must be confessed, every qualification for pleasing except the power to please.

Of the remainder of Marvell's life, there is little more to be said. He was private tutor at Eton to a Master Dutton, a relative of Cromwell's, and wrote a delightful letter about him to the Protector; but the serious business of his later life was Parliament. Of his political consistency we cannot form a high idea. He seems, as we should expect him to have been, a Royalist at heart and by sympathy all along; "Tis God-like good," he wrote, "to save a falling king." Yet he was not ashamed to accept Cromwell as the angel of the Commonweal, and to write in fulsome praise of Protector Richard; and his bond of union with the extreme Puritans was his intense hatred of prelacy and bishops which is constantly coming up. In "The Loyal Scot" he writes:

The friendly loadstone has not more combined,
Than Bishops cramped the commerce of mankind.

And in "The Bermudas" he classes the fury of the elements with "Prelates' rage" as the natural enemies of the human race. Such was not the intermeddling in affairs that Milton had recommended. To fiddle, while Rome burnt,

upon the almost divine attributes of her successive rulers, this was not the austere storage of song which Milton himself practised.

Andrew Marvell was for many years member for Hull, with his expenses paid by the Corporation. His immense, minute, and elaborate correspondence with his constituents, in which he gave an exact account of the progress of public business, remains to do him credit as a sagacious and conscientious man. But it cannot be certainly imputed to any higher motive than to stand well with his employers. He was provided with the means of livelihood, he was in a position of trust and dignity, and he may well be excused for wishing to retain it. In spite of certain mysterious absences on the Continent, and a long period during which he absented himself from the House in the suite of an embassy to Russia, he preserved the confidence of his constituents for eighteen years, and died at his post. He spoke but little in the House, and his reported speeches add but little to his reputation. One curious incident is related in the Journals. In going to his place he stumbled over Sir Philip Harcourt's foot, and an interchange of blows in a humorous and friendly fashion with hand and hat, took place. At the close of the sitting the Speaker animadverted on this, Marvell being absent; and a brief debate took place the next day on the subject, Marvell speaking with some warmth of the Speaker's grave interference with what appears to have been nothing more than a piece of childish horse-play. "What passed (said Mr. Marvell) was through great acquaintance and familiarity between us: He never gave him an affront nor intended him any. But the Speaker cast a severe reflection upon him yesterday when he was out of the House, and he hopes that as the Speaker keeps us in order, he will keep himself in order for the future."

For one thing Marvell deserves high credit; in a corrupt age, he kept his hands clean, refusing even when hard pressed for money a gift of £1000 proffered him by Danby, the Lord-Treasurer, "in his garret," as a kind of retainer on the royal side. In Hartley Coleridge's life of Marvell this is told in a silly, theatrical way, unworthy and not even characteristic of the man. "Marvell," he says, "looking at the paper (an order on the Treasury which had been slipped into his hand) calls after the Treasurer, 'My lord, I request another moment.' They went up again to the garret; and Jack the servant-boy was called. 'Jack, child, what had I for dinner yesterday?' 'Don't you remember, sir? You had the little shoulder of mutton that you ordered me to bring from a woman in the market.' 'Very right, child. What have I for dinner to-day?' 'Don't you know, sir, that you bid me lay by the blade-bone to broil?' 'Tis so; very right, child; go away.' 'My lord, do you hear that? Andrew Marvell's dinner is provided. There's your piece of paper; I want it not. I know the sort of kindness you intended. I live here to serve my constituents; the Ministry may seek men for their purpose,—I am not one.'" But with the exception of perhaps the concluding words, there is no reason to think the story authentic, though the fact is unquestioned.

Over Prince Rupert, Marvell seems to have had a great influence, so much so that, when the Prince spoke in public, it was commonly said: "He has been with his tutor."

Marvell died suddenly in 1678, not without suspicion of poisoning; but it seems to have been rather due to the treatment he underwent at the hands of an old-fashioned practitioner, who had a prejudice against the use of Peruvian bark which would probably have saved Marvell's life. Upon his death a widow starts into existence, Mary Marvell by name, so unexpectedly and with such a total absence of previous allusion, that it has been doubted whether her marriage was not all a fiction. But Dr. Grosart points out that she would never have administered his estate had there been any reason to doubt the validity of her claims; and it was under her auspices that the Poems were first given to the world a few years after his death, in a folio which is now a rare and coveted book.

Of his Prose Works it is needful to say but little; they may be characterised as prose satires for the most part, or political pamphlets. "The Rehearsal Transposed" and "The Divine in Mode" are peculiarly distasteful examples of a kind of controversy then much in vogue. They are answers to publications, and to the ordinary reader contrive to be elaborate without being artistic, personal without being humorous, and digressive without being entertaining; in short, they combine the characteristics of tedium, dulness, and scurrility to a perfectly phenomenal degree. As compared with the poems themselves, the prose works fill many volumes; and any reader of ordinary perseverance has ample opportunities of convincing himself of Andrew Marvell's powers of expression, his high-spirited beginning, the delicate ideals, the sequestered ambitions of his youth, and their lamentable decline.

It is a perilous investment to aspire to be a poet,—*periculosæ plenum opus aleæ*. If you succeed, to have the world, present and to come, at your feet, to win the reluctant admiration even of the Philistine; to snuff the incense of adoration on the one hand, and on the other to feel yourself a member of the choir invisible, the sweet and solemn company of poets; to own within yourself the ministry of hope and height. And one step below success, to be laughed at or softly pitied as the dreamer of ineffectual dreams, the strummer of impotent music; to be despised alike by the successful and the unsuccessful; the world if you win,—worse than nothing if you fail.

Mediocribus esse poetis
Non di, non homines, non concessere columnae.

There is no such thing as respectable mediocrity among poets. Be supreme or contemptible.

And yet we cannot but grieve when we see a poet over whose feet the stream has flowed, turn back from the brink and make the great denial; whether from the secret consciousness of aridity, the drying of the fount of song, or from the imperious temptations of the busy, ordinary world we cannot say. Somehow we have lost our poet. It seems that,

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a ribbon to stick in his coat.

And the singer of an April mood, who might have bloomed year after year in young and ardent hearts, is buried in the dust of politics, in the valley of dead bones.

VINCENT BOURNE

"I LOVE the memory of Vinny Bourne," said Cowper in a letter to Newton in 1781, thirty-four years after Bourne's death. "I think him," he went on, "a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, Ausonius, or any of the writers in his way, except Ovid, and not at all inferior to him." Landor, in 1847, thought this criticism of Cowper's an unintelligent one; he could not conceive how a poet so great as Cowper came to pass such a judgment. The truth is that Landor was a better scholar than Cowper, and was thinking more of Bourne's Latinity than of his choice of subjects or mode of treatment. Cowper was not, it appears, a very acute Latinist, and his renderings of Vincent Bourne's poems, as we shall see, proved that he cared little for the simple terseness of Bourne's elegiacs. What is remarkable in Cowper's criticism is his preference of Ovid to Propertius. Ovid must almost have thought in pentameters; he had from boyhood an incredible facility in verse; "*Et quod tentabam dicere, versus erat*," he says, in that interesting autobiographical poem about his boyhood and youth; "I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came." Ovid was a perfect master of his craft; he is one of the least amateurish of poets; he had the power of producing with luminous precision the exact effect that he intended, and as often as he intended. As a narrator he is perhaps without a rival; but his scope is limited, and his metrical scheme is, like Pope's, without variety. But if Ovid appears in his verse as a somewhat placid egotist, Propertius is full of unchastened fire and passion. His writing, like that of Catullus, bears the undefined stamp of something which can only be named genius. Bourne is more Ovidian perhaps than Propertian; and if his verses have not the easy and lucid movement of Ovid, this is amply compensated for by their originality of subject and treatment.

And we may now call into court a still better critic than either Cowper or Landor, the surefooted Charles Lamb, who in his innumerable appreciations of writers both in verse and prose, hardly ever makes a false step, save from some affectionate bias of the heart, hardly ever pronounces a judgment that has not been cordially endorsed by posterity. Writing to Wordsworth in 1815, he says, "Since I saw you, I have had a treat in the reading way, which comes not every day, the Latin poems of Vincent Bourne, which were quite new to me. What a heart that man had, all laid out upon town schemes, a proper counterpoise to *some people's* rural extravaganzas! Why I mention him is that your 'Power of Music' reminded me of his poem of 'The Ballad-Singer in the Seven Dials.' Do you remember his epigram on the old woman who taught Newton the ABC, which, after all, he says, he hesitates not to call Newton's Principia? I was lately fatiguing myself by going through a volume of fine words by Lord Thurlow; excellent words; and if the heart could live by words alone, it could desire no better regales; but what an aching vacuum of matter! I don't stick at the madness of it, for that is only a consequence of shutting his eyes, and thinking he is in the age of the old Elizabeth poets. From thence I turned to Bourne. What a sweet, unpretending, pretty-mannered, *matterful* creature! Sucking from every flower, making a flower of everything, his diction all Latin and his thoughts all English. Bless him! Latin wasn't good enough for him. Why was he not content with the language which Gay and Prior wrote in?" And again, in one of the "Essays of Elia," "A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis," he says: "Well fare the soul of unfastidious Vincent Bourne, most classical, and, at the same time, most English of the Latinists, who has treated of this human and quadrupedal alliance, this dog-and-man friendship, in the sweetest of his poems, the 'Epitaphium ad Canem,' or 'Dog's Epitaph.' Reader, peruse it; and say if customary sights, which could call up such gentle poetry as this, were of a nature to do more harm or good to the moral sense of the passengers through the daily thoroughfares of a vast and busy metropolis." Here, of course, Lamb is really speaking of the spirit of the poems; his own Latinity, as shown by the Latin letters which he was fond of intermingling with his correspondence, was more copious than correct. Lamb, it is true, saw poetry in Bernard Barton, but that, as we have said, was an affair of the heart; if he could write as he did of Vincent Bourne, we may be sure that his words are worth attention.

The biographical facts of Bourne's life are of the simplest. He was born in 1695, educated at Westminster and proceeded to Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he became a Fellow in 1720. His earliest published poetical effort seems to have been a copy of congratulatory verses addressed to Addison on his recovery from a severe illness in 1717. In 1721 he edited *Carmina Comitialia*, containing Tripos verses, satirical poems on local events, and miscellaneous poems. From Cambridge he returned to Westminster as a master, and there he remained till his death in 1747. In 1734 he was appointed, perhaps through the influence of the Duke of Newcastle, who had been a boy at Westminster with him, and to whom he dedicated the first edition of his poems, Housekeeper and Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms to the House of Commons.

As a teacher he seems to have been wholly without energy or practical power. He made no attempt to preserve discipline, and Cowper, who was in his form for a time, says that he remembers seeing the Duke of Richmond, then a boy at the school, set fire to his greasy locks and box his ears to put the conflagration out. He does not even appear to have stimulated, as absent-minded, unpractical teachers often do, the keener and more ardent minds among his pupils. "I lost more than I got by him," says Cowper, "for he made me as idle as himself." Cowper also says that he was so inattentive to his pupils, and so utterly indifferent whether they brought him good or bad exercises, that "he seemed determined, as he was the best, so to be the last, Latin poet of the Westminster line." As to his good-nature, however, there appear to have been two opinions, as can be seen from a trenchant entry in Nichol's *Literary Anecdotes*. "Vincent Bourne was usher to the Fourth Form at Westminster, and remarkably fond of me. I never heard much of the goodness of heart. T. F." He was noted, too, for extreme slovenliness in attire. Cowper says: "He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for everything that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings, he has almost made amends for all." And again to Mr. Rose, in 1788, he writes: "I shall have great pleasure in taking now and then a peep at my old friend Vincent Bourne, the neatest of all men in his versification, though, when I was under his ushership at Westminster, the most slovenly in his person."

So Vincent Bourne lived his shabby, unpretending life, the *secretum iter, et fallentis semita vitæ*. Every one must have known some one of this kind,—good-natured, easy-going, murmuring a phantom music in his head, indifferent to what went on about him, without ambition or personal dignity. His patron, the Duke of Newcastle, was anxious to benefit him, but Vinny could not be coerced into taking Orders, and so the Prebend at Westminster and the Canonry at Christchurch, which were destined for him, went elsewhere. And yet he seems to have had some obscure visions of preferment, founded on a promise given by Dr. Arbuthnot, the friend of Pope. Bourne wrote in a copy of

Arbuthnot's work on Coins: "[As] to the reputation of Dr. Arbuthnot, I never met with less honour and generosity than I have received from him; I scorn to charge that upon his country which he has been guilty of in his private character; he should have remembered his promise, and would have done it, if he had not been a courtier;" and there is a preceding passage, which looks as if Bourne had given Arbuthnot literary assistance which had neither been acknowledged nor repaid.

Bourne, in a curious letter to his wife, written shortly before and in anticipation of his death, gives her the reasons which prevented him from taking orders; he says that the importance of so great a charge, joined with a mistrust of his own sufficiency, made him fearful of undertaking it. And he adds, "If I have not in that capacity assisted in the salvation of souls, I have not been the means of losing any; if I have not brought reputation to the function by any merit of mine, I have the comfort of this reflection, I have given no scandal to it by my meanness and unworthiness." This letter shows that he considered the pastoral office in a different light from most of his contemporaries, as one of great personal responsibility; and the whole letter breathes a spirit of intense contrition and pathetic humility at the thought of the opportunities he has missed and the idleness and vanity of his life. He does not however write as if with any sense of his shortcomings as a teacher, for he says that his one desire has been to be humbly serviceable in his quiet sphere of duty. But the most touching part of the letter is the vague dismay which, in spite of his deep and sincerely Christian hope, he finds in the thought of dissolution; the terrors of the grave lie very hard upon him, as they would upon a man of imagination and sensibility who had lived a thoughtless and easy-going life. The whole letter is a singular contrast to another rhetorical epistle which has been preserved, addressed to a young lady on the thoughts suggested by a graveyard, in which he says with a pretentious philosophy that the more human document belies, that "the frequent perusal of gravestones and monuments, and the many walks I have taken in a churchyard, have given me so great a distaste for life." Poor Vinny! When he came to die he had little of the philosopher about him, but shivered and cried at the dark passage.

It may be a matter of wonder how Bourne found time or inclination to marry; but he did so, and the maiden's name was Lucia. He even begat children, of whom one was a Lieutenant of Marines, and left some vague property, a house in Westminster and land in Bungay. The poet's death took place in 1747, not unexpected by himself, as I have said, and by a disease which, he records with grateful thankfulness, left him in full and calm possession of his faculties. He had written his own epitaph, which may be thus rendered: *Vincent Bourne, of unfeigned piety and utter humility, who in no place forgot his God or forgot himself, descends into the silence which he loved*. It is a touching estimate, and shows, in its anxiety to deal only with essentials, how incidental his work was to his character; he forms no pompous appreciation of the value of his writings, but leaves them, like Sibylline leaves, for the wind to whirl away, the only testimony to his quiet and observant eye, his love of simple things, his intense interest in nature and humanity. *Qui bene latuit, bene vixit*, he might have said.

Cowper wrote to Newton in 1781, in reply to a letter suggesting that he should translate Vincent Bourne's Latin poems, and offering literary assistance. It appears to have been one of the few occasions on which Newton gave Cowper sensible advice. Cowper replies that he is much obliged for the offer of help: "It is but seldom, however, and never, except for my amusement, that I translate; because I find it impossible to work by another man's pattern. I should at least be sure to find it so in a business of any length. Again, that is epigrammatic and witty in Latin which would be perfectly insipid in English, and a translator of Bourne would frequently find himself obliged to supply what is called the *turn*.... If a Latin poem is neat, elegant, and musical, it is enough; but English readers are not so easily satisfied. To quote myself, you will find, on comparing 'The Jackdaw' with the original, that I was obliged to sharpen a point, which, though smart enough in the Latin, would in English have appeared as plain and blunt as the tag of a lace.... Vincent Bourne's humour is entirely original; he can speak of a magpie or a cat in terms so exquisitely appropriated to the character he draws, that one would suppose him animated by the spirit of the creature he describes. And with all his drollery, there is a mixture of rational and even religious reflection at times, and always an air of pleasantry, good-nature, and humanity, that makes him in my mind one of the most amiable writers in the world. It is not common to meet with an author who can make you smile, and yet at nobody's expense, who is always entertaining and yet always harmless; and who, though always elegant and classical to a degree not always found in the classics themselves, charms more, by the simplicity and playfulness of his ideas, than by the neatness and purity of his verse."

To turn to the poems in detail, almost the first thing that strikes one is the originality of his subjects. Nothing was common or unclean to our poet, at a time when poetry, except in Cowper's hands, was grandiose and affected to an uncommon degree. Vincent Bourne may be held to have been in a remote connection the parent of the poetry of common life, for he undoubtedly exerted a strong influence on Cowper. I do not think it is too much to say that Cowper's best contributions to literature, his exquisite lyrics on birds and hares and dogs, which will live when "The Task" and "Tirocinium" have gone down to the dust, would never have been written had it not been for Vincent Bourne. In the year 1750, the future of English poetry was dark; there were only two considerable writers at work, Gray and Collins. There was, it is true, a certain respectful attitude to nature prevalent, but it was a conventional attitude. Cowper, as I believe inspired by Bourne, was the first to make it unconventional. Then came the sweet notes of Burns across the border, and the victory was won.

Let me now give a few instances of Bourne. First must come "The Jackdaw," and I have given Cowper's rendering; but I have also ventured to subjoin a version of my own, not because I challenge even the most distant comparison with Cowper's sparkling and graceful lyric, but because Cowper's is in no sense a translation. It is a poem of which the line of thought is suggested by Bourne, and at a few points touches the Latin poem; but the turn, the colouring is Cowper's own. In my own translation, though I have several times sacrificed verbal accuracy, I have endeavoured to keep as closely to the Latin as is consistent with writing English at all.

CORNICULA.

Nigras inter aves avis est, quæ plurima turres,
  Antiquas ædes, celsaque fana colit.
Nil tam sublime est, quod non audace volatu,
  Aeriis spernens inferiors, petit.
Quo nemo ascendat, cui non vertigo cerebrum

Corripiat, certe hunc seligit illa locum.
Quo vix a terra tu suspicis absque tremore,
Illa metus expers incolumisque sedet.
Lamina delubri supra fastigia, ventus
Qua cœli spiret de regione, docet;
Hanc ea præ reliquis mavult, secura pericli,
Nec curat, nedum cogitat, unde cadat.
Res inde humanas, sed summa per otia, spectat,
Et nihil ad sese, quas videt, esse videt.
Concursus spectat, plateaque negotia in omni,
Omnia pro nugis at sapienter habet.
Clamores, quos infra audit, si forsitan audit,
Pro rebus nihili negligit, et crocitat.
Ille tibi invideat, felix cornicula, pennas,
Qui sic humanis rebus abesse velit.

THE JACKDAW.

(By William Cowper.)

There is a bird, who by his coat,
And by the hoarseness of his note,
Might be supposed a crow;
A great frequenter of the church,
Where bishop-like he finds a perch,
And dormitory too.

Above the steeple shines a plate,
That turns and turns, to indicate
From what point blows the weather;
Look up—your brains begin to swim,
'Tis in the clouds; that pleases him,
He chooses it the rather.

Fond of the speculative height,
Thither he wings his airy flight,
And thence securely sees
The bustle and the raree-show
That occupy mankind below,
Secure and at his ease.

You think, no doubt, he sits and muses
Of future broken bones and bruises,
If he should chance to fall;
No! not a single thought like that
Employs his philosophic pate,
Or troubles it at all.

He sees that this great roundabout
The world, with all its motley rout,
Church, army, physic, law,
Its customs and its businesses
Is no concern at all of his,
And says—what says he?—Caw.

Thrice happy bird! I too have seen
Much of the vanities of men,
And sick of having seen 'em,
Would cheerfully these limbs resign
For such a pair of wings as thine,
And such a head between 'em.

. . . . . .

Of fowls with black and glossy coat,
One dear familiar bird I note;
In towers and ancient piles he dwells,
Above the din of sacred bells;
High fanes he seeks; with daring flight
Aspires, despising aught but height;
He sits where mortals mount with pain
Of reeling pulse and dizzy brain;
And where you shudder with alarm,
He's perched aloft, and free from harm.
The vane that on the steeple shows
Whither and whence the free wind blows,
He choosing, owns no care at all,
Much less is careful lest he fall;
And thence in lofty ease surveys
Mankind's inexplicable ways.
He sees the streets, the concourse dim,
They hold no interest for him;
And if some murmur upward floats
He heeds not, but with pensive notes

Beguiles the hour. Blest bird, I'd be
A winged and airy thing, like thee!
From human things I'd sit aloof
Like thee, above the minster-roof.

Next shall come Lamb's favourite, the Epitaph on the Beggar's Dog. Lamb's rendering is very fairly exact.

Pauperis hic Iri requiesco Lyciscus, herilis,
Dum vixi, tutela vigil columenque senectæ,
Dux cæco fidus; nec, me ducente, solebat,
Prætenso hinc atque hinc baculo, per iniqua locorum
Incertam explorare viam; sed fila secutus,
Quæ dubios regerent passus, vestigia tuta
Fixit inoffenso gressu; gelidumque sedile
In nudo nactus saxo, qua prætereuntium
Unda frequens confluxit, ibi miserisque tenebras
Lamentis, noctemque oculis ploravit obortam.
Ploravit nec frustra; obolum dedit alter et alter,
Queis corda et mentem indiderat natura benignam.
Ad latus interea jacui sopitus herile,
Vel mediis vigil in somnis; ad herilia jussa
Auresque atque animum arrectus, seu frustuia amice
Porrexit sociasque dapes, seu longa diei
Tædia perpessus, reditum sub nocte parabat.
  Hi mores, hæc vita fuit, dum fata sinebant,
Dum neque languebam morbis, nec inerte senecta,
Quæ tandem obrepsit, veterique satellite cæcum
Orbavit dominum: prisci sed gratia facti
Ne tota intereat, longos deleta per annos,
Exiguum hunc Irus tumulum de cespite fecit,
Et si inopis, non ingratæ munuscula dextræ;
Carmine signavitque brevi, dominumque canemque
Quod memoret, fidumque canem dominumque benignum.

———

Poor Irus' faithful wolf-dog here I lie,
That wont to tend my old blind master's steps,
His guide and guard; nor, while my service lasted,
Had he occasion for that staff, with which
He now goes picking out his path in fear
Over the highways and crossings, but would plant,
Safe in the conduct of my friendly string,
A firm foot forward still, till he had reach'd
His poor seat on some stone, nigh where the tide
Of passers-by in thickest confluence flow'd:
To whom with loud and passionate laments
From morn to eve his dark estate he wail'd.
Nor wail'd to all in vain: some here and there,
The well-disposed and good, their pennies gave;
I meantime at his feet obsequious slept;
Not all-asleep in sleep, but heart and ear
Prick'd up at his least motion: to receive
At his kind hand my customary crumbs,
And common portion in his feast of scraps;
Or when night warned us homeward, tired and spent
With our long day and tedious beggary.
These were my manners, this my way of life,
Till age and slow disease me overtook,
And sever'd from my sightless master's side.
But, lest the grace of so good deeds should die,
Through tract of years in mute oblivion lost,
This slender tomb of turf hath Irus rear'd,
Cheap monument of no ungrudging hand,
And with short verse inscribed it, to attest,
In long and lasting union to attest,
The virtues of the Beggar and the Dog.

It may be noted that Lamb treats Lyciscus, which was evidently intended merely as a name, as referring to the species of dog; Virgil uses Lycisca as a dog's name in the third Eclogue. Probably Bourne was thinking of a fox-terrier, and the term wolf-dog is pompous and incongruous. Lamb's last line but three is a very lame one; it is a difficult point to determine, but did not he mean "no ungrateful hand"? The true sense of the original line is, "the slender gift of a hand which although poor is not ungrateful."

Bourne shows also a remarkable observation of street life, the quaint water-side manners, the odd obscure life that eddied near the river highway and round about the smoky towers of Wren. Absent-minded he may have been, but observant he was to a peculiar degree, and that not of broad poetical effects, but of the minute detail and circumstance of every-day life. It would be easy to multiply instances, but this extract from the "Iter per Tamisin," of the bargeman lighting his pipe, will serve to show what I mean. Why does he call tobacco *pœtum*, it may be asked? The only solution that I can suggest is that Pink-eye, or Squint-eye, was a cant term for some species of the weed at the time. It can hardly be, I think, the word *peat* Latinised. The version, as in the case of those which follow, is my own.

His ita dispositis, tubulum cum pyxide magna

Depromit, nigrum longus quem fecerat usus.
Hunc postquam implêrat pæto, silicemque pararat,
Excussit scintillam; ubi copia ponitur atri
Fomitis, hinc ignem sibi multum exugit, et haustu
Accendens crebro, surgentes deprimit herbas
Extremo digito: in cineres albescere pætum
Incipit et naso gratos emittit odores.

———

This thus disposed, a pipe with ample bowl
He handles, blackened with familiar use;
Stuffs with the fragrant herb, and flint prepares
To strike the spark: and thence from fuel stored,
Black provender, he spouts a plenteous flame,
Kindling with frequent gusts of breath indrawn:
Meanwhile he tends with cautions finger-tip
The rising fibres; into lightest ash
Whitening, they pour the aromatic fumes.

Vincent Bourne had that passionate sympathy with and delight in youth that is the surest testimony to a heart that does not grow old. The pretty ways and natural gestures of childhood pleased him. He was fond of his boys, and allowed that fondness to be evident, at a time when brow-beating and insolent severity were too much the fashion. In his epitaphs it is curious to note how many deal with the young, and touch on the immemorial fragrance of early death with a peculiar pathos. There is an epitaph on a Westminster boy of twelve years old, where he most touchingly alludes to the thought that he died both beautiful and innocent; and an epitaph on a little girl who, he said in quaint phrase, had the modest red of roses and the pure whiteness of lilies in her face. Again the inscription to the memory of the young Earl of Warwick, who died at the age of twenty-four, is full of delicate beauty; but I will give in full what seems to me the sweetest of all. It is printed among the authentic epitaphs, but it is, I imagine, purely fanciful.

EPITAPHIUM IN SEPTEM ANNORUM PUELLULAM.

Quam suavis mea Chloris, et venusta,
Vitæ quam fuerit brevis, monebunt
Hic circum violæ rosæque fusæ:
Quarum purpura, vix aperta, clausa est.
Sed nec dura nimis vocare fata,
Nec fas est nimium queri caducæ
De formæ brevitate, quam rependit
Aeterni diuturnitas odoris.

———

My pretty Chloris—ah, how sweet
The roses o'er your head shall show;
The violets, strewn above your feet
How brief the life that sleeps below.
We must not chide the grudging fates.
Nor say how short a lot was thine,
For, ah, how amply compensates
The eternal fragrance of thy shrine.

I subjoin to these a couple of epigrams which give a good idea of the natural and solemn way in which he approaches death, as an event not necessarily of a gloomy and forbidding character, but as tending to draw out and develop an intimate and regretful hope in the survivors. There is nothing austere about his philosophy; it puts aside pompous and formal consolations, and goes right to the heart of the matter, with a child-like simplicity. The first deals with the Pyramids, the second with an incident, real or fancied, connected with the burial of Queen Mary at Westminster.

PYRAMIS.

Pyramidum sumptus, ad cœlum et sidera ducti,
Quid dignum tanta mole, quid intus habent?
Ah! nihil intus habent, nisi nigrum informe cadaver;
Durata in saxum est cui medicata caro.
Ergone porrigitur monumentum in jugera tota!
Ergo tot annorum, tot manuumque labor!
Integra sit morum tibi vita: hæc pyramis esto,
Et poterunt tumulo sex satis esse pedes.

———

Aspiring monument of human toil
What lies beneath that's worth so vast a coil?
A shapeless blackened corpse, set all alone,
Embalmed and mummied into silent stone.
The mighty pile its ponderous circuit rears;
Ah, ingenuity! ah, wasted years!
Pure be thy life; let pompous trappings be!
Six feet of kindly earth's enough for thee!

PIETAS RUBECULÆ.

Quæ tibi regalis dederant diadematis aurum,

Dant et funereum fana, Maria, tholum.
Quisque suis vicibus, mæsto stant ordine flentes;
Oreque velato femina triste silet.
Parva avis interea, residens in vertice summo,
Emittit tremula lugubre voce melos.
Vespera nec claudit, nec lucem Aurora recludit,
Quin eadem repetat funebre carmen avis,
Tale nihil dederint vel Mausolea; Mariæ
Hæc pietas soli debita vera fuit.
Venales lacrymæ, jussique facessite fletus;
Sumptibus hic nullis luctus emendus erit.

———

The ancient fane that crowned thy flashing head,
Oh queen, oh mother! now receives thee dead.
The mourning train, in funeral pomp arrayed,
Weeping adore the venerable shade.
A duteous bird the while, high perched above,
Utters the tremulous notes of tender love.
Each waning eve, each dewy opening day,
That gentle heart repeats his solemn lay.
No lamentable anthem pealing high
Can match the gift of pious minstrelsy.
Tears, venal tears, ye cannot give relief.
No lavished gold can purchase natural grief!

There have been several editions of Vincent Bourne; three of them deserve, bibliographically, a word. The first is the third of his publications, a very rare and beautiful book, which by the kindness of Mr. Austin Dobson I have been privileged to examine. This is *Poematia, Latine partim reddita, partim scripta*, printed by J. Watts, 1734, and dedicated to the Duke of Newcastle; it is a small volume printed in italics of the tribe of Aldus, with quaint head and tail pieces, and red lines ruled by hand. The next is the *Miscellaneous Poems* of 1772, a handsome quarto, published by subscription. The third is *Poems by Vincent Bourne* published by Pickering in 1840, with a memoir and notes by the Rev. John Mitford. This is a carefully and beautifully printed book, with but one drawback. Whenever an ornamental head-piece is inserted at the top of a page, the number of the page is omitted. This tiresome affectation makes it very difficult to find any particular poem.

An exhaustive account of Vincent Bourne's Latinity would be a long enumeration of minute mistakes—mistakes arising from the imperfect acquaintance of the scholars of the day with the principles of correct Latinity. To give a few obvious instances, metrically, Bourne is not aware of the rule which forbids a short syllable to stand before sp, sc, st, sq. In classical Latin, such a collocation of consonants does not *lengthen* the preceding short syllable, but is simply inadmissible. Then again, he is very unsound in the quantity of final o. I am not speaking of such words as *quando, ego,* where there is a certain doubt. But he makes short such words as *fallŏ*, and even such a word as *experiendŏ*;, which is quite impossible. He also ends his pentameters with trisyllables such as *niteat*, a practice which has no Ovidian countenance. Grammatically, a considerable licence is observable in the use of the indicative for the subjunctive, as, for instance, after *si forsitan* and *nedum*. But these, it may be said, are minor points, and in form and arrangement his Latin is pure enough. His verse is of the school of Ovid and Tibullus, but his vocabulary is not Augustan; this, however, may be due to the fact that his choice of subjects necessitates the use of many words for which there is no Augustan authority.

It can hardly be expected that Vincent Bourne will be read or appreciated by the general reader. But any one with an adequate stock of Latin, who is given to wandering among the byways of literature, will find him a singularly original and poetical writer. His was no academic spirit, writing, with his back to the window, of frigid generalities and classical ineptitudes. He was rather a man with a warm heart and a capacious eye, finding any trait of human character, any grouping of the grotesque or tender furniture of life, interesting and memorable. He reminds one of the man in Robert Browning's poem, "How it Strikes a Contemporary," who went about in his old cloak, with quiet observant eyes, noting the horse that was beaten, and trying the mortar of the new house with his stick, and came home and wrote it all to his lord the king. Vincent Bourne had of course no moral object in his writings; he had merely the impulse to sing, and we may regret with Lamb that so delicate and sensitive a spirit chose a vehicle which must debar so many from walking in his company. With his greasy locks and dirty gown, his indolence and his good-humour, the shabby usher of Westminster, with his pure spirit and clear eyes, has a place reserved for him in the stately procession, "where is nor first, nor last."

THOMAS GRAY

EVERY boy who leaves Eton creditably is presented with a copy of the works of Gray, for which everything has been done that the art of printers, bookbinders and photographers can devise. This is one of the most curious instances of the triumphs of genius, for there is hardly a single figure in the gallery of Etonians who is so little characteristic of Eton as Gray. His only poetical utterance about his school is one which is hopelessly alien to the spirit of the place, though the feelings expressed in it are an exquisite summary of those sensations of pathetic interest which any rational man feels at the sight of a great school. And yet, though the attitude of the teacher of

youth is professedly and rightly rather that of encouragement than of warning, though he points to the brighter hopes of life rather than brandishes the horrors that infest it, yet the last word that Eton says to her sons is spoken in the language of one to whom elegy was a habitual and deliberate tone.

Gray's was in many ways a melancholy life. His vitality was low, and such happiness as he enjoyed was of a languid kind. Physically and emotionally he was unfit to cope with realities, and this though he never felt the touch of some of the most crushing evils that humanity sustains. He was never poor, he was never despised, he had many devoted friends; but on the other hand he had a wretched and diseased constitution, he suffered from all sorts of prostrating complaints, from imaginary insolences, violent antipathies, and want of sympathy. Fame such as is rarely accorded to men came to him: he was accepted as without doubt the first of living English poets; but he took no kind of pleasure in it. He was horrified to find himself a celebrity; he declined to be Poet Laureate; he refused honorary degrees; when at Cambridge the young scholars are said to have left their dinners to see him as he passed in the street, it was a sincere pain to him. Cowper counterbalanced his fits of unutterable melancholy by his hours of tranquil serenity over teacups and muffins and warm coal-fires, with the curtains drawn close. Johnson enlivened his boding depression by tyrannizing over an adoring circle. But Gray's only compensations were his friends. Any one who knows Gray's letters to and about his young friend Bonstetten, knows how close and warm it is possible for friendship to be.

No biography is more simple than Gray's. From Eton he passed to Cambridge, which was practically his home for the rest of his life. He went as a young man on a long foreign tour of nearly three years with Horace Walpole, quarrelled, and came back alone, both afterwards claiming to have been in the wrong; he travelled in England and Scotland a little; he lived a little in London and a good deal at Stoke Poges, where he kept a perfect menagerie of aged aunts, and he died somewhat prematurely at the age of fifty. He spent in all more than twenty years at Cambridge—the only event that interrupted his life there being his move from Peterhouse to Pembroke, across the road, in consequence of an offensive practical joke played on him by some undergraduates, who, working on his morbid dread of fire, induced him by their cries to leave the window of his room by means of a rope-ladder, and descend into a tub of water placed ready for this purpose. The authorities at Peterhouse seem to have made no sort of attempt to punish this wanton outrage, nor to have been anxious to keep him at their college.

So he lived on at Cambridge, hating the "silly dirty place," as he calls it. The atmosphere, physical and mental, weighed on his spirits with leaden dulness. In one of his early letters he speaks of it as the land indicated by the prophet, where the ruined houses were full of owls and doleful creatures. He often could not bring himself to go there, and once there, his spirits sank so low that he could not prevail on himself to move. Almost the only part he took in the public life of the place was to write and circulate squibs and lampoons on people and local politics, most of which have fortunately perished; those that remain are coarse and vindictive. Nevertheless he had some true friends there: Mason, his worshipper and biographer, Dr. Brown, the Master of Pembroke, in whose arms he died, and several others. He held no office there and did no work for the place, till late in his life the Professorship of Modern History, a mere sinecure, for which he had unsuccessfully applied six years previously, came to him unsolicited. It was his aim throughout to be considered a gentleman who read for his own amusement, and with that curious fastidiousness which was so characteristic of him, he considered it beneath him to receive money for his writings, the copyrights of which he bestowed upon his publisher. Forty pounds for a late edition of his poems is said to be the only money of this kind that he ever handled. But he was, as has been said, well off, at least in his later years. He had a country-house at Wanstead which he let, a house in Cornhill, property at Stoke, and, though he sank some money in a large annuity, he died worth several thousand pounds.

It might be thought that such a life, meagre and solitary as it was, would furnish few details to a biographer, and this is to a certain extent true; but about Gray there is a peculiar atmosphere of attractiveness. He went his own way, thought his own thoughts, and did not concern himself in the least with the ordinary life of people round about him, except to despise them. This disdainful attitude is always an attractive one. The recluse stimulates curiosity; and when we pass behind the scenes and see the high purity of the life, the wide and deep ideals always floating before such a man, the wonder grows. He lived unconsciously at so high a level that he could not conceive how low and animal lives were possible to men; he owned to no physical impulses; he held that there was no knowledge unworthy of the philosopher, except theology; and over the whole of his existence hung that shadow of doom which lends a pathetic interest to the lives of the meanest of mankind.

When such a man is the author of the most famous poem of pure sentiment in the English language, as well as of smaller pieces by which some readers are fascinated, most impressed, and each of which has enriched the world with one or more eternal phrases, our interest is indefinitely increased, because isolation only ceases to be interesting when it is self-absorbed and self-centred. Gray, on the other hand, suppressed himself so effectually in his writings that he even caused them for some readers to forfeit that personal interest that is so attractive to most. "We are all condemned," he says, "to lonely grief,"—"the tender for another's pain, the unfeeling for his own;" one of the latter could never have written these words.

The deeper that we enter into such a life, the more fascinating it becomes. All Gray's tastes were natural and yet high; whatever he sets his hand to ceases to be dull; he had a transfiguring touch; he was moreover a strangely unconscious precursor of modern tastes and fancies, in such things as his self-created taste for architecture and antiquities, by communicating which to Horace Walpole (for Gray's influence can be surely traced in Horace's artistic development) he succeeded in making fashionable; his dignified preferences in art, his rapturous devotion to music, especially to Pergolesi and the contemporary Roman school, whose airs he would sit crooning to himself, playing his own accompaniment on the harpsichord in the high unvisited rooms at Pembroke; his penchant for heraldry, his educational theories, his minute and accurate investigations of Nature, as close and loving as Gilbert White's, recording as he does the break of dry clear weather into warm wet winds, the first flight of ladybirds, the first push of crocuses, the first time he heard the redstart's note in the bushes and the thrush fluting about the butts of the old college gardens, "scattering," as he said in a lovely impromptu line that he made in a walk near Cambridge, "her loose notes in the waste of air." In 1740 he wrote from Florence to a friend:

"To me there hardly appears any medium between a public life and a private one; he who prefers the first must

feel himself in a way of being serviceable to the rest of mankind, if he has a mind to be of any consequence among them. Nay, he must not refuse being in a certain degree dependent upon some men who are so already; if he has the good fortune to light on such as will make no ill use of his humility, there is no shame in this. If not, his ambition ought to give place to a reasonable pride, and he should apply to the cultivation of his own mind those abilities which he has not been permitted to use for others' service; such a private happiness (supposing a small competence of fortune) is almost in every one's power, and is the proper enjoyment of age, as the other is the proper employment of youth."

And this was the programme to which Gray settled down. In what vast schemes of study he indulged we do not know; but we do know that he gave five years to a comprehensive survey of Greek literature, taking prose and verse alternately, like bread and cheese; he contemplated and wrote notes for an edition of Strabo; he translated many Greek epigrams into Latin verse, curiously weighing his words for weeks together; he read history exhaustively, with such tenacious accuracy that he could correct in the margin with the everlasting pencil dates and names in a Chinese dynasty—"a dismal waste of energy and power," sigh his biographers. No, it was no waste, for this was Gray. He wrote no more poetry, except a few "autumnal verses" still unidentified. He could not write any. Mr. Matthew Arnold, in his delicate essay, blames the age for this; he puts Gray's reticence down to a want of literary sympathy and intellectual stimulus. Had Gray been born with Milton or with Burns, he says he would have been a different man. We may thankfully doubt it. Gray's nature, Gray's powers of production, would have been far more liable to be crushed into extinction by the consciousness of the existence of a superior artist, fluent and sublime. He would have read and wondered, and thrown aside his pen. The fact that he could strike out better verse and nobler thoughts than his contemporaries, though it did not urge him to prolific production, made him at least not ashamed of work that gained by comparison with the work of all living artists; but a genius on the scene would have elbowed Gray out altogether. To take the very first instance that comes to hand of his fastidious discontent, consider the two exquisite stanzas which he struck out of the Elegy for no more adequate reason than that "they made too long a parenthesis."

There scattered oft, the earliest of the year,
  By hands unseen, are showers of violets found;
The redbreast loves to build and warble there,
  And little footsteps lightly print the ground.

Him have we seen the greenwood side along,
  While o'er the heath we hied, our labours done,
Oft as the woodlark piped her farewell song,
  With wistful eyes pursue the setting sun.

Akenside or Mason, Dyer or Armstrong, if they had lit upon any one of these delightful lines, would have made a whole poem in which to set it, and have been well content.

Perhaps his own words best describe the intrinsic characteristics of his writings: "Thoughts that breathe and words that burn." Gray's thoughts, the elegiac poet's thoughts, are common property, after all; every one has felt them, or something like them; the poet has got, so to speak, to make a formula which shall cover all the vague, blind variations of which every one is conscious. When he has thus made thought live, expression comes next, and here Gray surpasses almost every English poet. The words literally eat their way into memory and imagination; the epithets seize upon the nouns and crown them. Take such a stanza as the one to which Dr. Johnson gave a grudging admiration:

For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
  This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
  Nor cast one longing lingering look behind?

Try the effect of substitution or suppression on a stanza like that! Nothing can be spared; the gap if created could not be filled. A good instance of this is in a little posthumous poem of Gray's, written on a sheet of paper from which the lower right-hand corner has been unfortunately torn, thus depriving the last three lines of the last stanza of their last words. Both Mason and Mitford tried their hands at restoring the text. Mason's is the best, but they are both hopelessly far away. The lines run thus, Mitford's emendations being given above Mason's.

Enough to me if to some feeling breast
  convey,
My lines a secret sympathy impart,
  is exprest
And as the pleasing influence flows confest
  dies away.
A sigh of soft reflection heaves the heart.

The only thing of which we feel certain is that neither is near the truth.

It is not only in Gray's poetry that this sure touch is visible. I do not know any more simple or yet more worthy epitaph than the one that he wrote for his mother. "In the same pious confidence, beside her friend and sister, sleep the remains of Dorothy Gray, widow, the careful tender mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her." Given the circumstances and, so to speak, the sense, how many people could have produced such an ideal of tender dignity?

It is not within the scope of these essays to make large quotations, but page after page of Gray's letters illustrate this felicitous and apposite handling. In Horace Walpole's quaint diction: "His letters are the best I ever saw, and had more novelty and wit." But besides the perfection of style they have a charming meditative tone, combined with a certain subtle humour running through them. Moreover, Gray exercised to the full the privilege of allusion. Out of his teeming mind, echoes and memories, images and unsuspected likenesses streamed, encircling all that he thought or wrote. The perfection of classical culture, the departure of which we cannot help deploring, even though it may have been succeeded by a wider and freer sentiment, is seen in him; not only are his quotations exquisite, but there is a

forgotten music which haunts his sentences and words, even in the very nicknames with which it was his delight to dub his friends.

I venture to quote the exquisite description of Burnham Beeches, which cannot be too well-known.

"I have, at the distance of half a mile through a green lane, a forest (the vulgar call it a common) all my own, at least as good as so, for I spy no human thing in it but myself. It is a little chaos of mountains and precipices, mountains, it is true, that do not ascend much above the clouds, nor are the declivities quite so amazing as Dover Cliff, but just such hills as people who love their necks as well as I do may venture to climb, and crags that give the eye as much pleasure as if they were more dangerous. Both vale and hill are covered with most venerable beeches and other very reverend vegetables, that like most other ancient people are always *dreaming out their old stories to the winds*. At the foot of one of these squats ME (Il Penseroso), and there I grow to the trunk for a whole morning. The timorous hare and sportive squirrel gambol around me like Adam in Paradise before he had an Eve, but I think he did not use to read Virgil as I commonly do."

In this letter emerges that fact which at least no one disputes, that Gray discovered and introduced the taste for natural scenery. He was nearly the first to love the hills and woods for themselves. He found out Wordsworth's favourite prospects in the lakes when Wordsworth was a dumb baby; he gazed upon Scotland and the Alps with a reverent awe. It was a time when writers about Nature's loveliness were accustomed to describe her with their back to the study-window, and the only Nature that such men as Shenstone and Akenside revelled in was Nature as they had themselves adapted her. Gray was the first to take her as he found her.

To any one who is familiar with it, the quiet Buckinghamshire country where Gray lived comes to have a peculiar charm. Lower down, nearer the Thames, the land is oppressively flat, but Burnham and Stoke are on higher ground, broken into innumerable little undulations, with copses in the hollows, and little lanes, meandering about for no apparent purpose except their own pleasure. It is a gravel soil, and immemorial excavations which indent the surfaces of all the hills and fields give a pleasant character to the whole. The wayfarer is for ever looking down into pits full nearly to the brim of ferns and brambles, elder plants and young ash-suckers; the great bare sweeps of the fields, with the rounded gravel lying thick among the thin vegetation, are broken by little hollows full of ragwort and the brisk hardy bugloss and a dozen other light-soil plants. Of Burnham Beeches itself it is unnecessary to speak. The old wreathed trunks full of gaping mouths and eyes, standing in the green twilight knee-deep in ferns, have a character that no other trees wear, and the breaks of moorland scenery, heathery sweeps dotted with tall fir spinnies, out of which the owls call on summer nights—all this is true forest, and needs no praise; but the roads and lanes themselves, with the venerable hump-backed Buckinghamshire cottages, with houseleek and stonecrop on the roof, the moated farms, the parks set with noble cedars, the high-shouldered barns, all these are full of delight. The pedestrian may climb the long slope to Burnham and gaze up its straggling red-brick street; the quaint cupola of the church, familiar to Gray, has lately, alas! fallen before a whirlwind of restoration, and given place to a neat spire; he may pass on to Britwell, a house, half-grange, half-mansion, with a modern tower, where Gray used to live with his gouty uncle, a Nimrod *emeritus*, who, too broken to ride out, used to regale himself upon the "comfortable sound and stink" of his hounds. The elm-girt paddocks and the tall plane-trees must be much as they were then. By Nut Hall, with its close of ancient walnuts, he may pass through East Burnham village, and finally descend upon Stoke itself by West-end House, still nestling in trees, where Gray was petted and coddled by his old aunts till he was too lazy even to go down to Eton, which lay full in view from the brow that spread half a mile below him. The tall chimneys of the manor, the hideous white dome of the park, the church ivy-girt and irregular, the churchyard surrounded by old brick walls on three sides, over which tower the foliage of yews and cedars—all these he may see. The only memorial of Gray, save a tablet, is the one thing which he himself would have loathed. On a rising ground stands a huge cube of stone with marble panels, crowned with a sarcophagus of the kind that suggests a hopeless prisoner for ever trying to force up the lid. This was the best that they could do for Gray!

It is only quite lately that the aid of Mr. Thornycroft, a sculptor of a genius akin to Gray's, has been invoked to decorate her hall with a worthy monument of the poet.

Shelley's letters are said by some to be the best ever written, but I cannot think that they come near to Gray's. With that independence so characteristic of him, Gray and Horace Walpole are perhaps the only writers of the time who entirely escape the Johnsonian contagion. Johnson's style, as written by Johnson himself, has indeed most of the elements of magnificence; unfortunately it is also very useful for concealing the absence of ideas. Gray's English, on the other hand, is pure and stately, and never diffuse; he said what he had to say and was done with it; he never appears to be endeavouring to "get in diction," as so many of the imitators of the Doctor undeniably did. In this respect it resembles Johnson's conversation, and for the art of statement it is hardly possible to say more.

Some slight affectation is traceable in the earliest letters. They are mostly written to his young and brilliant friend, West, by whose premature death literature, we may believe, was a loser. "Take my word and experience upon it," he writes for example, "doing nothing is a most amusing business, and yet neither something nor nothing give me any pleasure. For this little while past I have been playing at Statius. We yesterday had a game of quoits together. You will easily forgive me for having broke his head, as you have a little pique with him." He means to say that he has been translating him. West replies in the same strain. "I agree with you that you have broke Statius' head, but it is in like manner as Apollo broke Hyacinth's—you have foiled him infinitely at his own weapons."

This is sad posturing, and only excusable in very young and clever men. These letters are, however, fortunately relieved by a short note, in which he is very humanly rude to his tutor.

As a specimen of the early style at its best, I may quote the following, written from Rome in imitation of a classical epistle:

"I am to-day just returned from Alba, a good deal fatigued, for you know the Appian is somewhat tiresome. We dined at Pompey's; he indeed was gone for a few days to his Tusculan, but by the care of his villicus we made an admirable meal. We had the dugs of a pregnant sow, a peacock, a dish of thrushes, a noble scarus just fresh from the Tyrrhene, and some conchylia of the lake with garum sauce. For my part I never eat better at Lucullus' table. We

drank half a dozen cyathi apiece of ancient Alban to Pholoe's health, and after bathing and playing an hour at ball, we mounted our essedum again, and proceeded up the mount to the temple. The priests there entertained us with an account of a wonderful shower of birds' eggs that had fallen two days before, which had no sooner touched the ground but they were converted into gudgeons; as also that the night past a dreadful voice had been heard out of the Adytum, which spoke Greek during a full half hour, but nobody understood it."

That is nothing short of admirable; it catches the subtle classical flavour, and intermingles it with the later humour of which the Roman mind seemed so singularly destitute.

Among these earlier letters, however, there are charming passages in his natural manner. What could be better than this humorous description of Peterhouse and his life there?

"My motions at present (which you are pleased to ask after) are much like those of a pendulum or oscillatory. I swing from Chapel or Hall home, and from home to Chapel or Hall. All the strange incidents that happen in my journeys and returns I shall be sure to acquaint you with. The most wonderful is that it now rains exceedingly; this has refreshed the prospect, as the way for the most part lies between green fields on either hand terminated with buildings at some distance—castles I presume, and of great antiquity. The roads are very good, being as I presume the work of Julius Cæsar's army, for they still preserve in many places the appearance of a pavement in pretty good repair, and if they were not so near home, might perhaps be as much admired as the Via Appia. There are at present several rivulets to be crossed, and which serve to enliven the view all around; the country is exceeding fruitful in ravens and such black cattle; but not to trouble you with my travels I abruptly conclude."

But perhaps the most striking characteristic throughout the whole series are the extraordinarily felicitous criticisms, and the soundness of the taste which he brought to bear on an author. It is true he made mistakes; he spoke of Collins as a writer that deserved to live, but that would not; and he, like many other clever men, was carried off his feet by the rage for Ossian. Like other critics he was misled by the accounts of interviews with Macpherson, who appeared to be a dull, unintelligent person, incapable of originating or of putting together even such a composition as *Fingal*; besides, the difficulty of getting solid testimony on the subject seems to have been extreme. Gray's last word on the subject is: "For me, I admire nothing but *Fingal*, yet I remain still in doubt about the authenticity of these poems, though inclining to believe them genuine in spite of the world. Whether they are the inventions of antiquity, or of a modern Scotchman, either case is to me alike unaccountable. *Je m'y perds.*" We, nowadays, with all the barbarous treasures of Indian and Scandinavian literatures about us, find it hard to understand how fascinating the opening of such a mine must have been, even when the ore extracted was such thin stuff as Ossian; the old rude primitive world, as simple as Homer, fighting and singing in desolate Northern forests, seems to have been altogether too much even for the discrimination of Gray; his imagination was taken captive; he dreamed of little else; we have several disappointing attempts of his own to imitate the ancient Icelandic staves, and of Ossian, or rather Macpherson, he writes: "This man in short is the very Dæmon of poetry, or he has lighted on a treasure hid for ages." We may forgive him for having floundered here. Dr. Johnson, whose imagination was not so strong as his common-sense, was the only man not misled.

But Gray on Aristotle, Gray on Froissart is admirable; his pungent criticism on Shaftesbury, too long to quote, is a perfect masterpiece; even his verbal criticisms on the poor stuff with which Mason inundated him, are wonderfully patient and acute. It may be worth while to hear Gray on other people's elegies. He writes to Mason: "All I can say is, that your elegy must not end with the worst line in it; it is flat, it is prose, whereas that above all ought to sparkle, or at least to shine. If the sentiment must stand, twist it a little into an apophthegm, stick a flower into it, gild it with a costly expression, let it strike the fancy, the ear or the heart, and I am satisfied." Again he writes, on the nature of elegiac writing: "Nature and sorrow and tenderness are the true genius of such things; poetical ornaments are foreign to the purpose—for they only show that a man is not sorry—and devotion worse, for that teaches him that he ought not to be sorry, which is all the pleasure of the thing."

Yet he could condescend to a little good-natured puffing of his friend's writings. He sends Mason's tragedy, *Caractacus*, a tiresome work, to a friend. "You will receive to-morrow *Caractacus*, piping hot, I hope before any one else has it. Observe it is I that send it, for Mason makes no presents to any one whatever; and moreover you are desired to lend it to nobody, that we may sell the more of them,—for money, not fame, is the declared purpose of all we do. He has had infinite fits of affectation as the hour approached, and is now gone into the country for a week, like a new-married couple."

He mistrusts his powers as a critic: "You know I do not love, much less pique myself on criticism, and think even a bad verse as good a thing or better than the best observation that was ever made upon it." Indeed his diffidence with regard to his own work was profound. This is the first announcement of the completion of the *Elegy*: "I have been here at Stoke a few days, and having put an end to a thing, whose beginning you have seen long ago, I immediately send it to you. You will, I hope, look upon it in the light of a thing with an end to it, a merit that most of my writings have wanted and are like to want."

The following contains a pathetic touch; the diffident man's silent hankering after recognition: "I cannot brag of my spirits, my situation, my employments, or my fertility; the days and the nights pass, and I am never the nearer to anything but that one to which we are all tending. Yet I love people that leave some traces of their journey behind them, and have strength enough to advise you to do so while you can; winter is the season of harvest to an author."

This is his own account of his powers of composition: "I by no means pretend to inspiration, but yet I affirm that the faculty in question [of composition] is by no means voluntary. It is the result (I suppose) of a certain disposition of mind, which does not depend on one's self, and which I have not felt this long time. You that are a witness how seldom this spirit has moved me in my life, may easily give credit to what I say." The great Doctor, whose favourite maxim it was that any one can write at any time who sets himself "doggedly" to it, was profoundly irritated by this. He speaks of Gray's "fantastic" notion that he could not write except at happy moments; a "foppery," he adds, "to which my kindness for a man of learning makes me wish that he had been superior."

Gray was a master of the art of delicate moralising. I cannot help wondering that more literary apophthegms have

not been extracted from his writings. Here is one for example: "I am persuaded that the whole matter is to have always something going forward." And again: "You mistake me, I was always a friend to employment and no foe to money; but they are no friends to each other. Promise me to be always busy, and I will allow you to be rich." Or more solemnly still:

"A life spent out of the world has its hours of despondence, its inconveniences, its sufferings as numerous and real (though not quite of the same sort) as a life spent in the midst of it. The power we have, when we will exert it, over our own minds, joined to a little strength and consolation, nay, a little pride we catch from those that seem to love us, is our only support in either of these conditions. I am sensible I cannot return to you so much of this assistance as I have received from you. I can only tell you that one who has far more reason than you I hope will ever have, to look on life with something worse than indifference, is yet no enemy to it, and can look back on many bitter moments, partly with satisfaction, and partly with patience, and forward too, on a scene not very promising, with some hope and some expectations of a better day."

The last extract is particularly characteristic, and strikes a note which sounds again and again throughout the letters. Gray was deeply serious. Seriousness unrelieved by humour is tiresome; but Gray, however melancholy he felt, could always retire a few paces and view himself as a spectator, with a smile. It is the truth that we do not really love a man unless we are sure that he is serious; he may amuse us and fascinate us, but he does nothing more. And Gray was never cynical; below his humour and contempt lay a deep regard for the holiness of life, for friendship and loyalty and old-fashioned virtues. Shelley attracts us, but we do not feel sure of him: our respect for Gray grows with every page we turn.

Of his humour it is difficult to give specimens. Isolated from the connection in which they occur they lose half their charm; there is a habitual tone, a point of view, of which extracts can give no idea. But it may perhaps be worth while to give a sentence or two to illustrate his habit of viewing himself. On settling in London he writes: "I am just settled in my new habitation in Southampton Row; and though a solitary and dispirited creature, not ungenial nor wholly unpleasant to myself. I live in the Museum and write volumes of antiquity." That was the sort of life that suited him. Nothing tires him, he declares, more than being entertained. "I am come to my resting-place, and find it very necessary, after living for a month in a house with three women, that laughed from morning to night, and would allow nothing to the sulkiness of my disposition. Company and cards at home, parties by land and water abroad, and (what they call) *doing something*, that is, racketing about from morning to night, are occupations I find that wear out my spirits, especially in a situation where one might sit still and be alone with pleasure; for the place was a hill like Clifden, opening to a very extensive and diversified landscape, with the Thames, which is navigable, running at its foot."

He does not indulge much in anecdote, nor indeed in witticisms of a direct kind, but when he met with a story that pleased him, he sent it on. The following seems to have taken his fancy, as it occurs more than once; and it may be noted in passing that Gray was never averse to reproducing a letter almost verbally for the benefit of two or three friends: there are several instances of these duplicate letters. "An old Alderman I knew, who after living forty years on the fat of the land (not milk and honey, but arrack-punch and venison) and losing his great toe with a mortification, said to the last that he owed it to two grapes which he ate one day after dinner. He felt them lie cold at his stomach the minute they were down." Again, when he was told that a certain Dr. Plumptre, a plethoric pluralist, had had his picture painted by Wilson with his family motto below, *Non magna loquimur sed vivimus*—Gray humorously suggests a rendering: "We don't say much, but we hold good livings."

Apart from actual letters, his diaries are delightfully suggestive reading; and there is a peculiar freshness about them, because the taste for natural scenery was not then universal. It was impossible that there should be any cant about it then; any one who delighted in it was peculiar in his tastes; and Gray, who practically visited all the English districts where Nature shows herself on a more striking scale, met with little sympathy from his friends who were writing about her with their back to the window. It is impossible to illustrate this by quotation; but I may perhaps be excused for giving a well-known sentence, into which is concentrated a wealth of sympathetic observation; it suggests lonely evenings, when the winds were blustering round the little college-court or moaning in the tall chimneys of Stoke; for after all it is an indoors-criticism. "Did you never observe (while rocking winds are piping loud) that pause, as the gust is re-collecting itself, and rising upon the ear in a shrill and plaintive note, like the swell of an Æolian harp? I do assure you there is nothing in the world so like the voice of a spirit."

It was not, of course, likely that Gray's letters would ever attain a very wide popularity; to appreciate them, they require a rather minute study of a very peculiar character, and a certain familiarity with the leisurely movements of a very uneventful life. And they are moreover touched throughout with a stately refinement, a certain delicacy and remoteness which need almost an initiation to comprehend. In days when vulgar romances run in a few weeks into a circulation of thousands, it is only to be wondered at that such things as these letters get readers at all; for they are high literature, not spiced for a jaded taste, but somewhat austere and solemn—the intimate thoughts of a high-minded man.

Much has been said that is wide of the mark about Gray's religious belief. The fact was that he was a pagan of the grand type. He was not really a Christian, but he had no wish to tilt against orthodoxies and accepted dogmas. The most that can be traced in his writings is a solemn Theism. He recognised the huge inscrutable fate that lay behind the inexplicable fabric of human life and human history, but of the God with men, of the Divine hope, the consecration of life, the self-abnegation of the Christian, he had no real cognizance. This, I think, cannot be doubted. His contemptuous hatred of theology and of creeds is marked; he had no patience with them; of worship he knew nothing. It has been said that he would have found a medicine for his unhappiness in wedded love; he would have found more than a medicine in religion.

The stately pathos of such a life is indisputable. The pale little poet, with greatness written so largely on all his works, with keen, deep eyes, the long aquiline nose, the heavy chin, the thin compressed lips, the halting affected gait, is a figure to be contemplated with serious and loving interest, spoiled for life, as he said, by retirement. How he panted for strength and serenity! How far he was from reaching either! Yet the bitter dignity of his thought, the diffident and fastidious will, are of a finer type than we often meet with. We cannot spare the men of action, it is

true; yet the contemplative soul, with the body so pitifully unequal to sustain its agonizing struggle, is an earnest of higher things. In the valley of shadows he walked, and entered the gate without repining. All are equal there; and the memory that he left, and the characters that he graved on the rock, while they move our pity, stir our wonder too.

WILLIAM BLAKE

BLAKE has had many admirers; he is *a laudatis laudatus*; that he should have called forth the outspoken and elaborate admiration of Mr. Swinburne and the two Rossettis is of itself a title to consideration. He has had, and will have detractors, though they are mostly of the kind that are converted to an artist's merits when high prices are paid for his work: and that has long been the case with Blake. When some drawings of his were shown to George III., the King cried out pettishly, "Take them away, take them away"; yet we do not hold this to be a crowning proof of Blake's artistic merits, as some of his critics have done. The observation may have been purely fretful, but we believe that it arose from a deeper psychological cause than mere want of appreciation—the timid sympathy of insanity. Blake's sweeping fiery forms, his globular ebullition of light, his insight into all that coils and writhes, are the instinctive creation of a brain which, if not under the actual pressure of madness, was, as Dr. Johnson said, "at least not sober."

Blake has had, we say, his admirers and his detractors, but he has never had a critic. Rossetti, Mr. Swinburne, Gilchrist, Ellis, Yeats, they are sympathetic, appreciative, instructive. Given the admiration for Blake they are the most delicate of commentators; but they are none of them critical.

It will be convenient to summarise shortly Blake's life. He was born in 1757, his father a comfortable hosier; he received a haphazard artistic education, writing original verse at the age of twelve, apprenticed to an engraver at fourteen, under whom he acquired a love for Gothic art which never deserted him—the fact was that to avoid collisions between Blake and his other pupils, Basire, his master, sent him sketching in the summer months in the old London churches. He engraved an original print in 1773. In 1778 he began to earn a precarious existence by engraving for the booksellers; in 1782 he married Catherine Boucher, daughter of a market-gardener, and went to live in Queen Street, Leicester Fields. After a brief and unsatisfactory venture as a print-seller, he began to work for himself, but could find no market for *Songs of Innocence*. His brother Robert, then lately deceased, revealed a secret method of working up these designs, "in a dream," and the book went out into the world, printed, coloured and bound by the husband and wife. Four years later followed *Songs of Experience*. In 1793 he moved to Hercules Buildings, Lambeth—there designing forty-three illustrations for Young's *Night Thoughts*. In 1800 he settled for three years at Felpham, under the auspices of Hayley, a Sussex squire and *littérateur*, author of a Life of Cowper, but grew weary of Hayley's polite disapprobation, and returned to South Molton Street. In 1820 he moved to 3, Fountain Court, Strand, where he died in 1827. He seems to have had the same feeling for London that Samuel Johnson and Charles Lamb had: he could not live elsewhere. It was in these last years that he executed his finest work—*Inventions to the Book of Job*. He was always very poor.

The object of this essay will be to criticise, and, if possible, to define Blake's position as a poet and as an artist. We will turn to his writings first.

The union of artistic and poetical gifts is not an uncommon combination: artistic success argues a certain depth of poetical qualities, and if it is rare to find artists who have achieved a marked success in literature, it is simply accounted for by the exigencies of technical study—a high vocation is apt to drain a life dry of other excellences, and in literature, as in art, there are few instances of permanent success apart from the quality of patient elaboration. In our own days we may quote Rossetti and Thackeray as instances of this alliance of gifts, though in the case of the latter such artistic success as he achieved was the result rather of natural facility than technical excellence. Michael Angelo's sonnets, Henry VIII.'s music, Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography, Mr. Lecky's poetry, Archbishop Sumner's water-colour drawings, Mr. Gladstone's Homeric studies, Mr. Arthur Balfour's philosophical works, are dependent for their interest not so much upon the qualities of the work, as on the revelation in an unfamiliar medium of great personalities. Sometimes, it is true, we have instances such as Spohr's autobiography—a singularly unimpressive book—Lord Tennyson's dramas, Milton's Paraphrase of the Psalms, which seem to prove that excellence in one line is apt to be a limited, almost a mechanical faculty—that the artist is, so to speak, ahead of his own personality in one respect, and that in such cases the art is not the casual efflorescence of a vivid nature, but the concentrated bloom of an otherwise unproductive or mediocre stock.

Blake, in spite of the extravagant claims made for him by his admirers, must be held to have been primarily an artist. If he had not been an artist his poems could hardly have survived at all. Mr. D. G. Rossetti says of the *Songs of Innocence* that they are almost flawless in essential respects. But few will be found to endorse this verdict. The fact is, that those who are carried off their feet by the magnificent originality of Blake's artistic creations, read in between the lines of his delicate and fanciful, but faulty and careless verse, an inspiration to which he laid no claim.

Blake's poetry is, from beginning to end, childish; it has the fresh simplicity, but also the vapid deficiences of its quality—the metre halts and is imperfect; the rhymes are forced and inaccurate, and often impress one with the sense that the exigencies of assonance are so far masters of the sense, that the word that ends a stanza is obviously not the word really wanted or intended by the author, but only approximately thrown out at it. This may be illustrated by a line from the Nurse's song in the *Songs of Experience*, where he says

> Your spring and your day are wasted in play,
> And your winter and night in *disguise*.

where the sense requires some such word as "disgust" or "weariness." Again, his use of single words is often so strained and unnatural as to rouse a suspicion that really he did not know the precise meaning of some word employed. We may cite such an instance as the following from "London" (*Songs of Experience*)—

I wander thro' each *chartered* street
Near where the *chartered* Thames doth flow.

And also in the "Ideas of Good and Evil," the first two lines of "Thames and Ohio"—

Why should I care for the men of Thames
And the cheating waters of *chartered* streams...?

Whatever the word 'chartered' means, it is obvious, from its iteration, that Blake attached some importance to it; but what does it mean? In ordinary speech the word of course means 'licensed,' in a metaphorical sense, 'enjoying some special immunity,' as 'chartered buffoon.' Is it possible that Blake confused it with 'chart,' and meant 'mapped out' or 'defined'? Conjecture is really idle in the case of a man who maintained that many of his poems were merely dictated to him, and that he exercised no volition of his own with regard to them.

His rhymes too are incredibly careless—we have 'lambs' rhyming with 'hands,' 'face' with 'dress,' 'peace' with 'distress,' 'vault' with 'fraught,' 'Thames' with 'limbs,' and so forth, in endless measure.

It may be urged that it is hypercritical to note these defects in a poet like Blake; it may be said that he was a child of nature, and that it is in the untamed and untrained character of his poems that his charm lies. "I regard fashion in poetry," he wrote, "as little as I do in painting." But Blake was a foe to slovenliness in the other branch of his art; in his trenchant remarks upon engraving, in the "Public Address," he is for ever insisting on the value of form; he is for ever deploring the malignant heresy that engravers need not, nay ought not to be draughtsmen. He maintains that this degrading of the engraver into a mere mechanical copyist has killed the art; so had he devoted himself scientifically to poetry, he would have been the first to realise and preach that it is the duty of the artist to acquire a technical precision, so sure, so instinctive, that it ceases to hamper thought.

Blake's work in literature may be roughly divided into three periods: (1) his early Elizabethan period, (2) his original lyrics, (3) his prophetic writings.

The Elizabethan lyrics are to some the most attractive; they are penetrated with the spirit of the Shakesperean age; but when one has said that they are exquisite imitations one has classified them: no imitations, however perfect, can rank with original work; poetry must develop in natural and orderly sequence; the recovery of earlier traditions, however perfect the workmanship, however intimate the insight, is within the grasp of talent. As Tennyson exquisitely says, "All can raise the flower now, for all have got the seed."

In the present century we have often encountered what may be called the neo-Jacobean play. Its characteristics are strikingly Shakesperean: isolated lines would be referred by critics unhesitatingly to the Shakesperean outburst of dramatic poetry; but the knack is one that is capable of being learnt, and not an original gift. "My silks and fine array," "How sweet I roamed from field to field," "Memory hither come," and the delicate poem to the muses which ends with the well-known line, "The sound is forced, the notes are few," are worthy of a place in anthologies, but they are not Blake. Such expressions as "fired my vocal rage" are not what the Romans would call *ingenuus*—they are not native but exotic. Even these poems published in 1783 contain strange lapses characteristic of Blake's later manner: "where white and brown is our lot" is a monstrous line, alluding, I believe, to bread. Among this collection, however, are included two poems which are interesting as containing the germ (it is hard to believe otherwise) of Keats' "Ode to Autumn," where the poet sees the merry sun-browned summer smiling under the oak.

To this period also belongs the unfinished play of Edward III., with some beautiful lines, but wholly incoherent; yet we may linger in pleasure over such a couplet as "The eagle that doth gaze upon the sun, Fears the small fire that plays about the fens," which contains just the kind of fantastic image belonging to the mystic side of nature that comes naturally to few poets.

It would of course be idle alike to analyse or deny the charm that many have found in the *Songs of Innocence*. Charles Lamb, perhaps the most surefooted critic we have ever raised among us, was one of the first to recognise it, though in a humorous spirit, luxuriating in them as in the rich absurdities of a childish poem. "The Tiger" he calls "Glorious," though he maliciously altered "Tom Dacre" in the "Chimney Sweep" to "Tom Toddy."

In the poems of natural description there is a certain visionary inspiration, with the freedom of large airs and moving light. And there is at times the poetical realisation of some deep life-truth, as in "Barren Blossom":

I feared the fury of my wind
Would blight all blossoms fair and true;
And my sun it shined and shined,
And my wind it never blew;

But a blossom fair and true
Was not found on any tree,
For all blossoms grew and grew
Faithless, false, though fair to see.

This lyric is born out of the spirit of Blake's life; there was no man better fitted to understand the dangers of the sheltered existence, or with a more visible appreciation of the discipline of life and labour. "I don't understand what you mean by the want of a holiday," he said; "I never stop for anything—I work on whether ill or not:" we may take the lines as applying to, and perhaps suggested by, Blake's dilettante friend and patron, Hayley, the hermit of Eartham, a feeble and profuse poetaster, who mistook the gentlemanly celebrity of a country squire who wrote verses, for the fame of the laborious poet.

A certain lyric, pre-eminently praised by Mr. Swinburne, has a solemn music of its own, but is less what a lyric

should be, the flash of a single mood, a passing experience, than the opening of a stately prelude:

Silent, silent night
Quench the holy light
Of thy torches bright.

For possessed of Day,
Thousand spirits stray
That sweet joys betray.

Why should joys be sweet
Used with deceit,
Nor with sorrows meet?

There is but one more stanza, and in that, inspiration seems suddenly to flag and falter as if the hand had grown weary. And so it is all through—many poems have, especially at the beginning, passages of the rarest lyrical beauty, and then comes some lapse of rhyme or sense that makes the reader feel that the writer either did not know what perfection was, or that he mistook for inspiration the sudden flow and ebb of a mood; many poets must have this experience, that of a mood not lasting quite long enough to stamp the "thoughts that breathe" on "words that burn;" the intellectual faculty fails first—and then succeeds the power which Wordsworth thought so characteristic of the true poet, the power of rendering remembered emotion. Blake seems to have had none of that; the mood flashed without his control, the words flowed, and good or bad there was no mending them. Edward FitzGerald, one of the sanest and surest of critics, lays his finger on this blot: he recognises the genius of Blake, but he says there is not a single poem which retains its inspiration all through.

For instance, it seems almost incredible that the same hand can have written, in the *Songs of Experience*, within a few pages,

The Holy Word
That walked among the ancient trees,
Calling the lapsed soul,
And weeping in the evening dew,
That might control
The starry pole
And fallen, fallen light renew—

and when we turn the page, in the "Human Vagabond,"

And modest Dame Lurch, who is always at church,
Would not have bandy children, nor fasting, nor birch—

which is gross and unintelligible.

At the same time, treating them strictly as sketches, Blake's poems are seldom without interest, and as we have said, occasionally rise into flights of lyrical beauty. All art is necessarily incomplete, but it is not mere incompleteness that we blame—it is the almost total absence of the critical faculty; the inability to separate what is mediocre and fatuous from what is high and great.

The third period is that of the prophetical books; and into this maze of obscurity and futility we will not venture to enter; they are accompanied with glorious designs, many of them, and, but for that, we must honestly say they would have been long ago consigned to oblivion: Mr. Swinburne has penetrated their deepest abysses, solved their enigmas, materialised their allegories, and extracted from them a system of philosophy; and it must be added that their latest champions, Messrs. Ellis and Yeats, consider that not only did Blake never write a page without distinct meaning, but that the utterances combine into a great mythic system. Mr. Rossetti takes his leave of them with the somewhat ambiguous remark that if a man was cast on a desert island with nothing but Blake's poetical works, and came away with an increased admiration for them, he might have a right to his opinion, but it would not agree with Mr. Rossetti's. They are written in a rhythm which appears to be irregular, but which Blake assures us was carefully weighed and calculated. Their language is the language of one who is saturated with Biblical models, and the solemn, if tedious, rhapsodies of Ossian, for whom Blake had a strange admiration. The author considered them direct revelations from God. He said of the "Jerusalem" that it was the grandest poem that this world contains; when each was refused by publisher after publisher, he would say with pathetic faith, "Well, well, it is published elsewhere—and beautifully bound;" a touching instance of how the visionary clung to the material expression of his work. He wrote to Flaxman the sculptor, saying, "I am more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive." There have been no signs, if we except Gilchrist and Mr. Swinburne, of the terrestrial public taking the same view. It reminds us of the satirical Princess who, on being told that her husband's previous morganatic marriage was a marriage in the sight of God, said that she was quite content to leave it so, if she could be assured that it was not one in the sight of men.

It would be easy to make merry over the prophetical books by quoting passages; but it is a pious duty to refrain from so doing. What value, however, can be attached to writings where three mythical personages, Kox, Kotope, and Skofeld, spirits of evil, with sway over certain English counties, appear to be nothing more than Messrs. Cox and Courthope, Sussex acquaintances of Blake's, and Scholfield, the drunken soldier who revenged himself on the prophet for a brawl in a public-house, by taking out a summons against him for seditious talk at the Quarter Sessions?

As to their prophetical value, we are hardly in a position to judge; we feel with George Eliot that of all the mistakes we commit, prophecy is probably the most gratuitous.

The fact is that what Blake wanted was culture; in literature he is a good type of how ineffective genius may be, if it is too narrow in its republicanism. Blake was self-absorbed and obstinate. His sympathy with certain qualities and aspects of life—simplicity, innocence, natural purity, faith, devotion—was innate and deep; but he had no idea of

making himself appreciate what he did not at once understand: he was his own standard. Consequently, within certain limits, he has left beautiful and refined work, though never with the added charm of elaborateness; the imagination is pleased with Blake's poetry as it may be attracted by an innocent face, a wild flower, a thrush's song; the heart may hanker after a purity that it has lost or possibly never enjoyed. But Blake can only charm idyllically: he can never satisfy intellectually: he has not the simplicity, let us say, of the Gospel, which enters into and subdues the complexity of human hopes and desires. Like the little maid that attended Guinevere, "who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness, that often lured her from herself," it is away from the true and myriad-sided self of man that he wins; his is not the poverty of spirit which comes of renunciation, but the cleanness of soul which results from inadequacy. Self-reverence he has, but not self-knowledge, nor the self-control, the need of which comes home to the human heart through its imperious passions. Wordsworth proposed the remedy of simplicity for healing the diseases of the soul, but Blake's simplicity is not medicinal; it is the calm of the untroubled spirit, not the deeper content which comes of having faced and cured the heaven-sent maladies of mortal nature. Thus it is that his *Songs of Innocence* have a charm denied to the *Songs of Experience*, because he was at home in the former region, and did not really understand the meaning of the latter. The critical faculty, the power of seeing the merits latent in work whose scope and aim is not sympathetic, the gift of delicate appreciation was, in Blake, almost wholly in abeyance. He praised and condemned wholesale, vehemently, violently, as a child might judge, deciding from the superficial aspect of the object. Occasionally, as for instance, when he said of Milton in the Spiritual world, "his house is Palladian, not Gothic," he uttered a deep and suggestive criticism. But such sayings are very rare. Probably his own work gained in originality. The man who could work from morning to night at his engraving, for a period of two years, in London, without ever stepping into the open air except to fetch his meat and drink, is to be congratulated no doubt upon his fund of steady enthusiasm, but he is not cast in the mould of other men, still less is he the prey of the temptations which, if they sometimes also degrade, are at least needed to develop in the artist the intimate sympathy with human passion which must be the basis of his work.

But with Blake's pictorial art we step into a different region: it is full of errors and ungainliness; it is often rough and trivial, but it is full of insight and strength and tragic intensity; he touched, as few have done, the secret springs of horror. His methods were of course his own. To take a common instance—the *Songs of Innocence*—the groundwork of each design was rough copper-plate, used like a stereotype, and containing the main lines of the decoration and the poem. This was then filled up and tinted by hand, sometimes by Blake himself, sometimes by Mrs. Blake; and the latter bound the books.

The very variations in the copies are in themselves a source of confusion. A man might study certain examples, even of some of Blake's finest creations, and see nothing. The design is confused in many cases with colour blotched and blurred, and seemingly laid on rather with the knife than with the brush. In the British Museum there are two instances of one design: in the one, something—it may be a snake, or some monstrous sea-worm, dark, and rude, and violent in colour—seems knotted in strange tangles on an uncertain back-ground of crude green; the picture is like the ugly imagination of a child and its imperfect performance; it scarcely touches the mind except with a shuddering disgust for anything so vile. In the next we see what the truth is: the scale comes out; it is a league-long Behemoth, with gaping jaws crowded with venomous teeth, slipping along, coil after coil, in a surging foaming sea, with a low sun weltering in a distant horizon; it is like some relic of primeval chaos, passing with brute indifference from shore to shore, imagined by a poet, depicted by an artist; and similar instances are by no means rare.

The first characteristic of Blake's plastic work, as revealed to the average student, is his mastery of *form*. In the majority of his pictures everything is made subservient to this; backgrounds are selected not so much for their own intrinsic features as to give prominence to the main figure: he is full of the poetry of motion. Let any one study the designs in the *Europe*, where the male and female figures of the Mildew and Blight, blowing the corruption that rushes, as straight as sound, from their long horns on to the festooned ears of barley that droop down the page. The figures seem to fly directly away from the eye, to use a homely metaphor, like a rising partridge—or as the eye watches the last carriage of an express train, is even deceived into substituting for known velocity an imagined contraction of mere dimension.

The *Jerusalem*, one of the prophetic books, contains perhaps the most striking of Blake's figure designs. We see the best instance here of what seems to have been a favourite design of Blake's, as it occurs in more than one work—in Blair's "Grave" for instance, with the addition of another figure. It is that of an old man stumbling to a shadowy door in the hill-side, and blown forwards, with his garments sweeping in front of him, as if drawn in by some strong current of air, as he approaches. It is worth noticing how exquisitely Miss Jean Ingelow has used this in her "Song of the Going Away."

Here again is the strange mythical figure, half-swan, half-woman, floating on the stream; or the gigantic Cyclopean gate of piled stones, with the wistful crowd about it, and the crescent moon seen through the huge orifice; or that mysterious design of the little bewildered figure, with arms outspread in agony and despair, stumbling between the huge firmly set feet of a gigantic being, to whose ankle-bone he hardly reaches.

Yet with all this subservience of accessories to form, Blake's anatomy is far from perfect. He had a trick of attenuating and elongating the thigh, as in one of the cases we mentioned above, where the young figure in the rising light kneels on the top of the mound into which the old bent man is being urged; or in the three melancholy beings represented on p. 51 of the *Jerusalem*—Vala, Hyle, and Skofeld, the anatomy of the second figure being of the stiffest kind—the attitude aimed at being that of prostration or abandonment, the head between the knees, as in the story of Elijah.

Neither is it universally true that he spends no pains on backgrounds or distances. Occasionally there is some salient and distant point flashed in with a delicacy that reminds you of Albert Dürer, as in one of the coarsely engraved woodcuts, done in 1820 to illustrate Philips's pastorals, where in a background between two heavily outlined hills appears a distant town on the hillside, with spires and roofs lying in its own circle of sunlight, divinely delicate and airy.

Or those rude swathes of newly cut corn that lie beside the wrinkled oak, whose diminished top bows in the tempest that fills the sky with a flickering rain, half-lighted by the crescent moon. In such pictures it is the feeling for

nature, in many of them strangely resembling Bewick, which rises above the obvious coarseness of the drawing, and is indeed rather concealed than suggested, as a great artist might cover a superb and glowing work with a filthy cloth of service, and replace it almost fretfully while still the gazer looked. And this quality one is never surprised at others for not recognising, as it depends for its effect upon no technical excellence, but simply on the fact that there was poetical inspiration behind it which demands poetical sympathy. But the most brilliant lesson of Blake's suggestiveness is to be drawn from the rude designs of *Gates of Paradise*: the spirits of the elements are among the rudest and yet the most poetical of these. "Air" looks from his perch in clouds, drawn as hardly as boulder stones, and clasps his dizzy brow. "Water" sits brooding complacently with outspread hands, in a universal dissolution (the face, be it noted, bears a strange resemblance to that of Mr. Gladstone). Blake was a prophet, and it is impossible to say at what moments, present and to come, his visions may not be found illuminating our history.

But it is in the region of pure fancy—fancy, it must be confessed, which, though sometimes of the essence of the purest poetry, is often on the border line of insanity, that Blake is at his best. Such a design as that from the *Daughters of Albion*, of God measuring the world with a pair of golden compasses, which contrives to give an impression of vastness and mystery in spite of the precise delineation of hands and hair; the original sketch of this is in the British Museum, and it is interesting to note how much it is altered in the finished design—the position of the chief figure being improved, and the details carefully worked out.

Again in "America" there is a notable design, a drowned man lying at the bottom of an unfathomed sea, still undecayed, though the sunken ribs and stiffening limbs show that he has been long dead, and is suffering a sea change: the worms crawl round him and beneath him, and the fish with large eyes poise in the gloom—notable because, though harshly and literally drawn, and crudely coloured, nothing hinted save what is actually seen, there is a dark suggestiveness about it which fairly takes captive the sense. In "Los" again there is a design of little figures, male and female, of a fairy kind (such perhaps as at the roseleaf burial, of which Blake in a waking vision was the spectator), seated among the petals of a huge lily, with a background of night and stars. This, in the British Museum collection, is coarsely coloured, the night having no aerial quality, no distance, and the lily itself and the vestures of the pigmies being disagreeably strained in tint. But there is a latent spirit which many a more delicately painted study lacks.

But it is as the delineator of immensity and secret horror that Blake by his temperament was pre-eminent. Most people know, and none can describe, a certain nightmare sense of vastness and weight, which is neither near nor far, but of ambiguous horror. This, which is a mental effect of some disordered brain cell, is suggested instinctively by certain of Blake's pictures. Horror is a quality difficult to produce deliberately; it tends to become instantly grotesque, and to provoke mere laughter unless it is based on some secret dismay. Look, for instance, at the work of Henry Fuseli, a contemporary of Blake's, and obviously indebted to him for such a picture as his Nightmare, which aims at producing, and fails to produce, the very impression which Blake awakens, so easily, that it is by no means certain that he always intended it. It is easy to multiply instances of this, but we will take only two. One is the terrible picture in the Job series, where Satan with a look of hard fury turns with his hand the nozzle of an inky cloud, which, swelling into bigness, fills all the sky behind and above, on the body of the prostrate saint. And again in the well-known design for Hamlet's Ghost, the drawing of which is in the British Museum, the stiff arms and hanging hands are lit with a difficult light, that seems to strike upwards from some unknown source. The background is a waste line of sea; on the young man's head, as he kneels, the hair appears to knot itself in terror, while the agony of the woeful eyes of the spirit, which seem to claim pity and revenge, and yet to be too distraught for either, can never be forgotten.

The noble designs of the Book of Job, given by Gilchrist in full, contain the summary of Blake's best qualities: it would be out of place to discuss them here, but a student of Blake's art must make them his first and last study.

It is strange to find that, as a critic, one drifts unconsciously into making the very excuse for his art that one cannot permit to be made for his poetry. The luminous soul shines through, the critic says. But is not much right in art that is not right in literature? Through plastic art we appeal directly to the sensibilities of many untutored souls, that we could not touch through literature. Granted that primarily the object of both art and literature is to gladden and refine, art of the two has the wider scope, and reaps a larger harvest, out of spirits that have never been touched and never can be touched, for want of culture, by anything worth calling literature at all.

Blake's republicanism in art was such that he chose his masters by a theory of his own: Raphael, Michael Angelo, Albert Dürer and Giulio Romano were his idols; Titian, Rubens, Correggio and Rembrandt he abhorred and despised. The selection on the whole did him credit, at the time when it was made. At the same time the attitude which he adopts towards the *profanum vulgus* is almost sacerdotal in its claims. It never for a moment conceals that the artist must please his audience first; but his eye, as he chides, is on the beast. He flouts the verdict of his contemporaries on himself, while he holds the verdict of posterity over the head of his enemies. The attitude is neither dignified nor even rational. "To imitate," he wrote, "I abhor. I obstinately adhere to the true style of art, such as Michael Angelo, Giulio Romano, Raphael and Albert Dürer left it. I demand therefore of the amateurs of art the encouragement which is my due. If they continue to refuse, theirs is the loss, not mine, and theirs is the contempt of posterity. I have enough in the appreciation of fellow-labourers; this is my glory and my exceeding great reward: I go on and nothing can hinder my course."

With respect to Blake's character as exhibited in his life, it is difficult, treating him as a sane man, to understand the estimate formed of him by his admirers. There is too much puerile violence and loud self-complacency, too much aggravating childishness and wilful eccentricity, not to offend and even disgust. But treat him as a man of unbalanced brain, and these variations are the very things we should expect, and the hypothesis at once clears the ground.

Both Mr. Rossetti and Mr. Gilchrist have been at pains to prove that Blake was not mad. Perhaps he was not, as they would define madness; but when we find gravely alleged as testimony the fact that his intimate friends did not think him mad, and, on the other hand, the *Examiner*, or some popular journal of the day, speaking of Blake's little exhibition of pictures "as the production of an unfortunate lunatic who owes his freedom from restraint solely to his personal inoffensiveness"—we know what view we are compelled to take. If Blake was not a madman, he was a

fraudulent impostor. Perhaps Hamlet was not mad; perhaps Cowper was not mad. No doubt madness is a divine attribute, and our madmen are our only sane thinkers; but the use of such a term is only a question of majorities, and it is ill to tinker with definitions. A man who saw God Almighty for the first time when he was four years old—"*you know, my dear, he put his face to the window and set you screaming,*" as good Mrs. Blake said; a tree filled with bright angels near Islington at the age of ten; and a ghost in Hercules Buildings at Lambeth, "*scaly, speckled, very awful,*" stalking downstairs, is not as other men. He may have been a philosopher, a poet, an angel; but the world has a right to call such men mad, and will do so to the end of the chapter. Mr. Gilchrist says, in the *Dictionary of National Biography*: "As a boy, he perhaps believed these were supernatural visions: as a man, it must be gathered from his explicit utterances that he understood their true nature as mental creations." And again: "Blake was wont to say to his friends respecting these 'visions,' 'You can see what I do if you choose. Work up imagination to the state of vision, and the thing is done.'"

Putting aside Blake's visions for a moment, I would be content to rest my case on the following letter:

Letter to Flaxman, written from Felpham.

"DEAR SCULPTOR OF ETERNITY,

"We are safe arrived at our cottage, which is more beautiful than I thought it, and more convenient. It is a perfect model for cottages, and, I think, for palaces of magnificence—only enlarging, not altering its proportions, and adding ornaments and not principles. Nothing can be more grand than its simplicity and usefulness. Simple without intricacy, it seems to be the spontaneous expression of humanity, congenial to the wants of man. No other-formed house can ever please me so well, nor shall I ever be persuaded, I believe, that it can be improved either in beauty or use.... Felpham is a sweet place for study, because it is more spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all sides her golden gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapours; voices of celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen; and my cottage is also a shadow of their houses. My wife and sister are both well, courting Neptune for an embrace.... And now begins a new life because another covering of earth is shaken off. I am more famed in heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my brain are studies and chambers filled with books and pictures of old which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life; and these works are the delight and study of archangels. Why then should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality? The Lord, our Father, will do for us and with us according to his divine will for our good.

"You, O dear Flaxman, are a sublime archangel—my friend and companion from eternity. In the divine bosom is our dwelling-place. I look back into the regions of reminiscence and behold our ancient days, before the earth appeared in its vegetated mortality to my mortal vegetated eyes. I see our houses of eternity, which can never be separated though our mortal vehicles should stand at the remotest corners of heaven from each other.

"Farewell, my best friend. Remember me and my wife in love and friendship to our dear Mrs. Flaxman, whom we ardently desire to entertain beneath our thatched roof of rusted gold. And believe me for ever to remain your grateful and affectionate

"WILLIAM BLAKE.

"FELPHAM,
"*Sept.* 21, 1800, *Sunday morning*."

This letter seems to me to bear traces of that cloud on the brain which is involuntary, and beyond the reach of affectation. Or take another episode—that of the visionary heads, of which the "Ghost of a Flea" remains as one of the most diabolically inspired creations of the human fancy; the bloodthirsty eye, the remorseless jaw, the plated mail of the neck, the suppressed look of lustful fury, combine to give it a peculiar horror.

"Varley, water-colour painter and astrologer, it was," says Gilchrist, "who encouraged Blake to take authentic sketches of certain among his most frequent spiritual visitants. The visionary faculty was so much under control, that at the wish of a friend he could summon before his abstracted gaze any of the familiar forms and faces he was asked for." This was during the favourable and befitting hours of night, from nine or ten in the evening till one or two, or perhaps three or four o'clock in the morning; Varley sitting by, "sometimes slumbering and sometimes waking." Varley would say, "Draw me Moses," or "David"; or would call for a likeness of Julius Cæsar, or Cassivelaunus, or Edward III., or some other great historical personage. Blake would answer, "There he is." And paper and pencil being at hand, he would begin drawing with the utmost alacrity and composure, looking up from time to time as if he had a real sitter before him.... Sometimes Blake had to wait for the vision's appearance: sometimes it would come at call. At others, in the midst of his portrait, he would suddenly leave off, and, in his ordinary quiet tones, and with the same matter-of-fact air another might say, "It rains," would remark, "I can't go on—it is gone: I must wait till it returns;" or—"It has moved—the mouth is gone;" or—"He frowns: he is displeased with my portrait of him." In sober daylight, if criticisms were hazarded by the profane on the character or drawing of any of these visions, "Oh, it's all right," Blake would calmly reply. "It *must* be right: I saw it so."

Among the personages whom Blake then drew were the Builder of the Pyramids, Edward III.—with a peculiar protrusion of skull, said by Blake to be characteristic of tyrants in the spirit world—a man who instructed Blake in painting in his dreams, David, Uriah, Bathsheba, the Ghost of a Flea—to which allusion has been made above—Joseph and Mary and the room they were seen in, Old Parr at the age of forty, and many others which are still extant.

But allowing this want of balance to account for the abnormal variations of vanity, jealousy, and violence, we have a residuum of manly independence, sweet austerity, and faithful devotion that is rare in any annals, most of all in the annals of art. What a touching story it is of the young artist who came to Blake and complained that he was deserted by his inspiration. Blake turned to his faithful wife: "*It is just so with us (is it not?) for weeks together, when the visions desert us. What do we do then, Kate?*" "*We kneel down and pray, Mr. Blake.*" What pathetic dignity there is in

his often-repeated saying, when time after time his prophetical books were returned upon his hands—"*Well, it is published elsewhere—and beautifully bound.*"

Blake is one of the few artists who worked all their life long under the pressure of poverty, of whom we can safely assert that he would have worked as hard had he been possessed of a competence; on the other hand, it is equally true that his work would not have been so lasting; the need of finding subsistence kept him saner than he wished to be; had he been a wealthy man, we should have had perhaps twice as many prophetical books—in which his heart was all the time—and no Book of Job. FitzGerald said there was hardly a single poem of Blake's that was good all through. But the man was one of those few who do with simple seriousness whatever comes to their hand, from an illustrated show-list for Wedgwood to the sublimest and most stupendous designs of heaven and hell. The consequence is that some of his crudest designs, almost childish in their execution, have a suggestive insight that is altogether out of proportion to the artistic value of the work. It would be easy to multiply examples. But take the familiar instance of the early wood-cut, "*I want, I want,*" where the little group of enthusiasts have set from a bald shoulder of the globe, as it swims in dark space, a filmy ladder to the crescent moon.

The great value of Blake's life, after all, apart from his productions, is that he is one of the saints of art. That is the problem! To retain simplicity, naturalness, unselfishness in the service of art. Art seems almost to demand self-absorption, self-cultivation, however noble be the ultimate end it sets in view. The duty of cultivating sensitiveness to impressions is hard to reconcile with high and pure devotion. We in this century feel the contrast perhaps too painfully. The fashionable habit of seeking amusement and interest in the problems of others, and on the other hand the blind, dark pressure of Democracy on life, throw into painful prominence the fastidious seclusion of the artist. Nowadays, for a man to throw himself blunderingly into philanthropy, disguising his own reckless hankering after power and influence under the name of duty, is held to have something of heroism about it. Even failure there is thought to be honourable. But the artist who, in obedience to as inevitable, as high an impulse, isolates himself in the sacred pursuit of beauty in all her forms, is called by hard names if he does not make himself a reputation; and if he does attain notoriety, his selfishness, at all events, acquires prestige. It is in reality a far more arduous undertaking. Fiction and life are full of memorable failures. *Roderick Hudson* is a magnificent presentation of the failure of character to sustain the devotion of art. The life of one of Blake's greatest admirers, D. G. Rossetti, must be forgiven in the light of his achievements, but cannot be forgotten as one of the most dark and shuddering tragedies ever played upon the human stage. But, on the other hand, such a life as Edward FitzGerald's, with its scanty and fortuitous successes, is yet lifted by its dignity and austerity as high and higher than that of many professional saints. The message that we are in need of is something that will introduce the loving simplicity of the Christian Revelation into the world of beauty; for, comprehensive as that revelation claims to be, it is difficult to define the exact place in the Christian economy which is reserved for hearts haunted by the tyrannical instinct of beauty. Such a life as Blake's is an attempt at the reconciliation of the matter. He seems to get nearer the divine principle than many professed religionists; as he himself wrote, "I have laboured hard indeed, and been borne on angels' wings."

THE POETRY OF KEBLE

IT is a difficult matter to criticise a religious poet from a purely literary standpoint. There was a curious instance of this last year. When the Keats Memorial was unveiled at Hampstead, Mr. Gosse spoke some disrespectful words of Kirke White. There followed a short sharp controversy in the *Standard* on the subject. The defenders of Kirke White's position as a poet, based their arguments, as far as I can remember, on the grounds (1) that he was a good Christian, (2) that he might have been Senior Wrangler, (3) that he was the victim of an early death. The facts themselves, or rather the facts in combination, may certainly be said to invest Kirke White with a romantic interest. Southey, indeed, felt this so strongly that he wrote a memoir of the young man, and edited his Remains. But any one who will now study Kirke White's poems in themselves, as literature, without prejudice, must inevitably come to the conclusion that they are worthless, and disfigured by every fault that can be laid to the charge of poetry. They are not even promising. They are tedious, grotesque, inharmonious, dull. And yet they have a place in the Aldine edition of British poets.

No one would, of course, dream of classing Keble with Kirke White. Keble was a wise, able, devoted man, narrow-minded, no doubt, and timid in thought, if not in action. Not imaginative nor vivid, but intensely affectionate, dutiful, and reserved; a lover of Nature, scenery, friends, children, reflection; somewhat melancholy, no doubt, and not growing in hopefulness as years went by—with little independence of thought or character; but reverent, a lover of precedent, and authority, and things established. Altogether a wholesome, valuable man, like Telemachus in Tennyson's "Ulysses," of a type of which Englishmen may be proud; but not a man who can be called interesting or romantic in any degree; even Mr. Lock, who has written his life in a lucid style, and with pious discretion, would admit that.

There is something eminently depressing about Keble's want of personal ambition; no doubt, it was a triumph of grace over nature; but one would have liked the triumph to have been a little more impressive. In the celebrated canvass for the Provostship of Oriel, where the decision of Newman and Pusey turned the scale, and gave it to Hawkins rather than Keble, it is evident that Keble was not greatly disappointed; he acquiesced too easily. In some men, this could almost be called indolence, but in Keble we may call it modesty. It argues, however, a certain want of fire, of intensity—and the same is the case with his writings.

Keble never *lets himself go*; he is always checking and controlling the impulse of song. And thus he spoke of his

own poetry as a relief from graver thoughts: "Poeticæ vis medica," the healing power of poetry, he called it; as something to which he could turn to distract and soothe him, but a πάρεργον nevertheless, not the business of his life, not an overmastering impulse, an imperious need of self-expression. This did not lead to the careful chastening and correcting of his verse that one might expect. There have been poets, in whom the sense of perfection was very strong, like Gray, who worked rarely, slowly, painfully, producing a marvellous, jewelled masterpiece, wrought out touch by touch. But there was nothing of this about Keble; he was copious, fluent, uncritical; he was never fastidious, and allowed much to go out under his name which was quite unworthy of an able man; puerile, inelegant stuff; no one, we may say, was ever capable of more extreme flatness than Keble reached in some of the poems in the *Lyra Innocentium*; such as the compositions entitled "Irreverence in Church," and "Disrespect to Elders," where it is asked that some good angel may wait, "With unseen scourge in hand, On the Church path, and by the low school door," in order to "write in young hearts Thy reverend lore,"—very advisable, no doubt, but how suggestive of Bumble, and the charity children, and the rod of office! A sense of propriety, we will not say of humour, would have prevented such a bathos as this.

It is not, of course, contended that a sense of humour is, in the least, part of the outfit of a poet. Shelley had none, yet was rescued from bathos by enthusiasm. Wordsworth had none, and he wallowed in bathos. The sense of humour is merely negative in a poet; it does not give a poet sublimity, but it rescues him from puerility and absurdity. And so into both of these faults Keble not unfrequently fell. In the *Lyra Innocentium* and the miscellaneous poems are many very lamentable verses. In the Lyra indeed, there are few that are not lamentable. The fatal blight of the book is that it is occupied throughout, not with what one can learn from children, but with what one can teach them. It upholds an impossible and undesirable ideal for childhood—the ideal of the sainted infant, cheerful, high-principled, devout, obedient, but neither natural nor child-like. Keble was very fond of children, but only a childless man could have constructed so false a picture. This false note vitiates the whole book; we are conscious of an under-current of rebellion as we read it. We realise that, after all, we do not want children to be such as Keble describes them. We do not wish them to be "prostrate in their sin and shame," as in the poem of "Absolution" in "Early Encouragements." And it is not poetry, whatever it may be, to tell a child that

> The Sunday garment, glittering gay,
> The Sunday heart will steal away.

Even from the religious point of view, the book is pharisaical; it tends to multiply offences, to create a fantastic and elaborate morbidity of conscience fatal to the natural simplicity of childhood, that should be so jealously guarded.

The following incident casts a curious light on Keble's taste. On a stray piece of paper still preserved in his writing are the following "principles in choosing and correcting hymns"!

(1) Always use "we" instead of "I," or nearly always.

(2) Insert as many touches of doctrine as may be.

(3) Under every head have at least one ancient or archaic hymn.

This is an interesting and characteristic fragment, because it illustrates so well Keble's intense dislike to the personal, the autobiographical element in poetry, that "self-revelation" which is so much in demand at present. Secondly, it shows that he laboured under a deep-seated error as to what was and what was not suitable material for poetical treatment. The second principle would be bad enough if it referred to composition, but when it deals with the correction of the hymns of other authors it is unpardonable. The third principle illustrates his reverence for antiquity and tradition.

We will now take the *Christian Year* and we will say at the outset that we do not propose to consider it, except incidentally, from the doctrinal and hortatory point of view. We must first remember that whatever be its merits and demerits, it is a book that has achieved a popularity of an absolutely phenomenal kind. It is a book that has been bought and read in England as Shakespeare, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, and in America as the works of E. P. Roe. In 1853 it was in its forty-second edition, twenty-five years after its publication. In 1873, when the copyright expired, it had reached the 158th edition, and it is still in demand. For many years it took its place, with High Church people, by the side of the Bible and Prayer Book. It would be incredible, were it not true, that a book of religious poetry, not suitable for public worship, the outcome of a very definite school of thought, should have achieved such a success. It was undoubtedly what the world wanted.

Now, let us first take some of its obvious demerits before we proceed to discuss its merits. In the first place, it is often careless in form and obscure in expression. It was consciously so, and Keble, probably wisely, refused to alter and amend it, imagining that such afterwork often sacrificed some of the freshness of inspiration. It was this carelessness that made Wordsworth, who read it with great admiration, say of it, "It is very good—so good that, if it were mine, I should write it all over again."

The metrical schemes are often complicated and unsatisfactory. Many of the poems are far too long, so as to be hardly lyrical. Such poems as that for Advent Sunday, or the Second Sunday after Trinity, contain between seventy and eighty heroic lines. Then, again, the cyclical instinct which beset Keble, made him provide poems for every event, every service of the Christian year. Thus we have Gunpowder Treason and the Churching of Women celebrated, though it must be owned that, in these cases, the poem has but the slightest connection with the subject.

Next—and this is a more serious point—the poems have been praised for their frequent references to nature and the fidelity of their imagery; after careful study of the Christian Year one is compelled to say that this praise is not deserved: the imagery is of a purely conventional character, and the observation employed of the most general kind. Dean Stanley said, in praise of Keble's descriptive passages, that his local and topographical details, whenever he spoke of the Holy Land, were marvellously clear and accurate. But this is not really a compliment. It shows that Keble was content to describe without his eye on the object, and relying on the observation of others; and if the pictures of landscapes that he had not seen are among his most felicitous passages, we may well be excused for

mistrusting his powers of observation when dealing with the features of his own native country. The fact is that he did not seize upon salient features; Matthew Arnold, in such a poem as the "Scholar Gypsy," brings the Oxford atmosphere, the high gravelly hills, the deep water-meadows, before the eye; but Keble's landscape is the conventional English landscape, and has no precise definition, no native air. For instance, in the poem for "Trinity Sunday" he says:

As travellers on some woodland height,
When wintry suns are gleaming bright,
Lose in arch'd glades their tangled sight;

By glimpses such as dreamers love,
Through her grey veil the leafless grove
Shows where the distant shadows rove.

Will any one say that there is the least precision about this picture? What kind of a place is he describing? How different it is from such verses as are found on every page of Tennyson, as

A full-fed river winding slow
  By herds upon an endless plain,
The ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
  With shadow-streaks of rain.

Again, when Keble is describing the source of the moorland spring, some of which is beautifully delineated, he says ("Monday in Easter Week"):

Perchance that little brook shall flow
  The bulwark of some mighty realm,
Bear navies to and fro
  With monarchs at their helm.

Or canst thou guess how far away
  Some sister nymph, beside her urn
Reclining night and day,
  'Mid reeds and mountain fern,

Nurses her store, with thine to blend?

This is pure conventionalism: the mixture of the reclining nymph and the mountain fern is not felicitous. Constitutional monarchs do not steer their own ironclads, and it is not picturesque even to pretend that they do.

The following may stand as instances of his failure in precise delineation. In the very first stanza of the book we have:

Hues of the rich unfolding morn,
That ere the glorious sun be born,
  . . . . . .
Around his path are taught to swell.

"Swell" is a property of bulk or sound, surely not of light? Again, addressing the breeze, he says:

Wakenest each little leaf to *sing*.

This is purely conventional; how different from the "laurel's pattering talk" of Tennyson. Again:

The torrent rill
That winds unseen beneath the shaggy fell,
Touched by the blue mist *well*.

How weak a word to end a stanza! Again:

The birds of heaven before us fleet,
They cannot brook our shame to meet.

How falsetto, how prejudiced a tone! And these are not isolated instances: similar infelicities occur on every page.

Keble's whole view of Nature, it must be said, was onesided and wanting in insight. Nature was to him nothing but a type of mild fervour and uncomplaining patience. "All true, all faultless, all in tune," he says. To the cruelty, the waste, the ugliness, that seem so inextricably intertwined with natural processes, he diligently closed his eyes. Thus, in No. 9 of the *Lyra Innocentium* he propagates a host of innocent superstitions as to the power of childhood over wild beasts. It surely is not poetical to say of a baby:

The tiger's whelp encaged with thee
Would sheathe his claws to sport and play;
Bees have for thee no sting.

because it is not true.

Again, in the beautiful stanzas on the Second Sunday after Trinity, he sees "the many-twinkling smile of ocean" up the glade. His only thought is:

Such signs of love old Ocean gives
We cannot choose but think he lives.

An agreeable view, but hardly consistent with the vast and barren cruelties which are as natural to the ocean as his

genial presence.

We do not mean that a poet is bound to insist on the harsher aspects of the case, but in a poet like Keble, who made so much of close communion with Nature, of intimate musings, it is mere blindness not to take these things into account. The fault, with Keble, was entirely in man's corrupt heart; further than that he did not care to follow it; he deliberately ignored the bewildering anomaly, the law of failure and suffering that runs through Nature, as surely as through the history of nations. How different a view it was from the view that Tennyson found grow more and more intense with advancing years—that the world was, as it were, the creation of some vast poetic heart, with its necessary concomitant of failure and incompleteness.

Keble himself, in his "Prælectiones Academicæ," or lectures delivered as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and in his review of the "Life of Sir Walter Scott" (*British Critic*, 1838), enunciated a theory of poetry which it will be well to examine. Dean Church said of the former work, that it was "the most original and memorable course ever delivered from the Chair of Poetry in Oxford"; but the statement does not imply any very extravagant claims. Again, Bishop Moberly said that the book exhibited "a power and delicacy at once so original and so just, as to make these lectures one of the most charming and valuable volumes of classical criticism that have ever issued from the press." Allowing for all possible partiality, this is strong praise; but it is difficult to see how it is justified. As to its critical value we may say at once that no one was ever less fitted to be a critic than Keble. "What Keble hated instinctively," says Newman, "was heresy, insubordination, resistance to things established, claims of independence, disloyalty, innovation, a critical and censorious spirit." That is an indifferent outfit for a poet, and an impossible one for a critic. And even granting to Keble a certain submissive acumen, a certain relish for masterpieces, criticism which deals only with the panegyric of great masters, or the classification of established reputations is surely the most valueless of all criticism. If it is presented in attractive literary form it merely diverts to itself the attention it professes to direct elsewhere! If it is elucidatory, it is excusable: but Keble is not elucidatory. The only true function of criticism is the judicial and tentative selection of contemporary excellence. Artistic impulse, literary progress, poetical production, have orbits of their own. Depreciative criticism is nothing more than a kind of attendant *umbra*, and has never done more than retard, if it has done even that, the popular verdict. Dr. Johnson was perfectly right when he said, "Depend upon it, sir, no man was ever written down but by himself." The criticism of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, brilliant in form, retrograde in spirit, made a few writers uncomfortable and gave a malicious pleasure to a great number of readers: but poetical creation continued its calm advance quite independently. Nay, they even overshot their mark and called attention to the very writers they professed to crush. Had the reviewers had their way, we should have heard no more of Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Tennyson. The only valuable criticism is the unprejudiced republican criticism, that dares to see what is good and give instant encouragement to it. And Keble's is just the opposite, as might be expected from the whole tone and habit of his mind. A cautious appeal to authority, predetermined canons of taste and propriety—these are his characteristics.

He enunciates the theory which would divide all poets into primary and secondary poets. "Primary poets, according to Keble," says Principal Shairp, "are they who are driven by overmastering enthusiasm, by passionate devotion to some range of objects, or line of thought, or aspect of life or Nature, to utter their feelings in song. They sing because they cannot help it.... This is the true poetic μανία of which Plato speaks. Secondary poets are not urged to poetry by any such overflowing sentiment: but learning, admiration, choice and a certain literary turn have made them poetic artists." Of the former kind are Homer, Æschylus, Lucretius, Virgil, Pindar, Shakespeare, Burns, Scott: of the latter, Sophocles, Milton, Dryden, Horace, and Theocritus. This, in itself, is a somewhat singular selection of names. But what absence of insight is there in Keble's judgment that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the work of one hand, the former in youth, the latter in later life. "The overmastering feeling of Homer," he says, "is *a sad regret for the decay of the heroic age*, with its common national feeling, its reverence for its leaders." What a fantastic judgment! Homer the poet of a sad regret! Surely it is the very absence of all critical or introspective or even *latent* thought which gives the poems their overwhelming charm.

The truth is that Keble's theory of poetry is practically an expansion of Aristotle's Poetics, and is a narrow generalisation on wholly insufficient grounds. Poets cannot be swept off the board entire, like chessmen. There are many writers of verse, whose impulse to sing was certainly original, and, according to Keble's definition, primary; yet their work was essentially second-rate. Take such a poet as Southey: he composed in a mood which he mistook for solemn inspiration; his poetry was written in obedience to a high and sacred sense of vocation; he—in a letter which cannot be called conceited, for it is written with a serene and stately consciousness of greatness—placed his own poem of *Madoc* second only to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Wordsworth again—writing sometimes from a large and grave inspiration, sometimes from a sense of duty—was he always a primary poet? The fact is that it is almost entirely a matter of expression and style. Many men are poets at heart, and have a vivid and eager consciousness of beauty, but only a small percentage of these have the gift of transmuting it into language. The truth is that secondary poets are mere literary men, *dilettanti* verse-writers; and all poets who establish a real hold on the minds of others, if it be, as Lovelace, by two lyrics only, or Shirley by one, are primary poets. The thing cannot be done at all without a genuine inspiration; but granted the inspiration, even the mood, the expression is not always there.

Keble, says Principal Shairp, was, when tested by his own theory, a primary poet—that is, his impulse and treatment were alike original. The former of these statements may be granted with certain reservations: *The Christian Year* is an original book. The idea was an original one and a happy one, though Heber had made a similar attempt. To assign to each of the seasons of the Church a devotional commentary; to enrich the austere and narrow melody of the ecclesiastical tone—running, like its own plain-song, with a severe and plaintive monotony—with chord upon chord of rich and suggestive philosophy, was no ignoble thought. Indeed, the most apt comparison that can be found for Keble is to consider him as a skilful musician, embroidering and enlarging with intricate harmonies, a series of strict and uniform subjects. It is not, indeed, the highest form of art, but it gives scope for the exercise of a wide and tender skill. But Keble had no really original impulse; he required to have his ground-bass found for him, and he could construct a descant of admirable softness and delicacy, while underneath moved the solemn and measured music of the ancient tradition.

As to the originality of the form which he employed, it is impossible to agree with Principal Shairp; indeed, he vitiates his whole case by comparing Keble to George Herbert and Henry Vaughan. Was ever a more inapt

comparison made? To begin with, Keble was neither a mystic nor even a symbolist. With George Herbert, and even more with Henry Vaughan, the outward sign, the ordinance, the ornaments of religion were weak and faint foreshadowings of some distant glory, some vast truth dimly understood. But to Keble the form, the ceremony, the material detail of service and sacrament were far too real and desirable. An instance of this is to be found in the poem on Holy Baptism.

Where is it mothers learn their love?
  In every church a fountain springs,
O'er which the Eternal Dove
  Hovers on softest wings.

What a failure of human perception! It is said that Wordsworth, once reading with admiration the above-mentioned poem, stumbled at the lines I have quoted—the statement that mothers learn their love at the font. "No, no," said the old poet, "it is from their own maternal hearts." Henry Vaughan could never have been betrayed into so intimately unreal a statement as this.

Again, as to technical treatment and form, it would be difficult to select two poets so utterly and radically unlike as George Herbert and Keble. The only point of resemblance is that they are both sometimes unnecessarily obscure; but in George Herbert's case this arises from a curious elaboration of expression, an intensity of compression, an omission of logical steps, a tendency to cram a sentence into a word; while in Keble's case, his obscurity arises from a kind of indefinite garrulity, a tendency to divergence on side issues, a vapid displacement of language.

The eye in smiles may wander round,
  Caught by earth's shadows as they fleet,
But for the soul no help is found
  Save Him who made it, meet.

What could be more inartistic than the disarrangement of the last two lines? No, the strength of Keble lies in the gentle lucidity of many of his finest poems, never in the arresting force of his epithets, never in intricate and ingenious conceits of language.

The real prototypes of Keble in English literature are Gray and Wordsworth. Keble on more than one occasion echoes the stately and majestic cadence of Gray. Could such a stanza as the following have been written without the example of the "Elegy"?

Why should we faint and fear to live alone,
  Since all alone, so Heaven has will'd, we die?
Not even the tenderest heart and next our own
  Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh.

And again, from the "Second Sunday after Easter":

In outline dim and vast
  Their fearful shadows cast
The giant forms of empires, on their way
  To ruin: one by one,
  They tower and they are gone—
Yet in the Prophet's soul the dreams of avarice stay.
  . . . . . .
  He watched till morning's ray
  On lake and meadow lay,
And willow-shaded streams, that silent sweep
  Around the banner'd lines,
  Where, by their several signs,
The desert-wearied tribes in sight of Canaan sleep.

These sober, grave stanzas have something of the cadence of *The Bard*. The resemblance to Wordsworth is more general, but it may be said that the tone, the structure, the language of many of Keble's lyrics, the background of Nature in which his thoughts enact their part, the presence of skies and woods and waters, of which he is for ever conscious, for which he is ever grateful, however inaccurately observed and sketched, his innate love of old, traditional, wholesome things, "our peace, our fearful innocence, and pure religion breathing household laws"—all these make Keble a true Wordsworthian.

The qualities of style to which I propose to call attention in Keble are—(1) simplicity; (2) propriety; (3) gravity—all three unpopular qualities enough nowadays, and, therefore, perhaps all the more worthy of study. (1) Simplicity, artistic simplicity, is a noble thing, and as rare as it is noble; it must be beyond and above ornateness; anciently, indeed, before literature had begun to knit her infinite combinations, it was more attainable; but now to be unstudied is to be thin. Art must now be "careless with artful care, affecting to be unaffected." Modern simplicity must show the spareness of asceticism, not the leanness of anæmia. It must arise from the repression of luxuriance, not poverty of spirit; strict simplicity implies the rejection of all startling and glittering tricks of style, and consequently it implies a lordly patience in pursuit, with an indefatigable zeal for the selection of the precise, the majestic, the supreme.

I do not say that Keble was always successful in the pursuit of simplicity. But it was his object all through. Outside the *Christian Year*, indeed, in the *Lyra Innocentium* the studied avoidance of the ornamental and the attractive, degenerated into vapid debility. But in the "Morning" and "Evening" poems:

Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love,
Fit us for perfect rest above,
And help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray.

and—

If some poor wandering child of Thine
Have spurned to-day the Voice Divine,
Now Lord, the gracious work begin:
Let him no more lie down in sin.

have the true note of pure directness; how, in the middle of so sweet and low a strain, such a stanza as—

The Rulers of this Christian land,
'Twixt Thee and us ordained to stand—
Guide Thou their course, O Lord, aright,
Let all do all as in Thy sight.

could be intruded, shows us how uncritical, how helpless Keble could be.

Again, consider such a poem as that for the "Second Sunday after Easter," quoted above,

O for a sculptor's hand, &c.

and some of the stanzas on "St. Matthew's Day":

There are in this loud stunning tide
  Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
  Of the everlasting chime,
Who carry music in their heart
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet,
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat;

and again for "Septuagesima":

There is a book who runs may read, &c.

and what is perhaps the finest of all his lyrics, that for "Whitsunday":

When God of old came down from Heaven,
  In power and wrath He came:
Before His feet the clouds were riven,
  Half darkness and half flame.

Around the trembling mountain's base
  The prostrate people lay,
A day of wrath and not of grace,
  A dim and dreadful day.

These have the authentic note of grandeur. They are lines that take the heart and imagination captive, and linger in the memory unbidden. It may be, of course, that some of them are consecrated by familiar use, by being connected with moments of emotion and resolution. What an immense, what a sacred power, these writers of liturgical poems wield! but, on the other hand, such familiarity is apt to blind us also to excellence of style. No, the claim of genuine, severe simplicity may be sustained for Keble.

(2) Propriety.—I am using the word, of course, in the extended sense of delicate appositeness, not as the reverse of impropriety.—Keble has a wonderful power, without tricks of rhetoric, of touching in some natural homely feeling with exquisite grace. How could the instinctive dislike of change in familiar surroundings be more pathetically described than in the poem for Whit Monday?

Since all that is not Heaven must fade,
Light be the hand of Ruin laid
    Upon the home I love.
With lulling spell let soft decay
Steal on, and spare the giant sway,
    The crash of tower and grove.

In such a mood it is so easy to be jealous, to be vindictive, to lose the central thought in invective or unconvincing particularisation.

Again, in a frame of mind that easily drifts into morbidity and despondency, with what pure patience he delineates the vague languors, the unutterable discontents of the soft days of early spring, in the poem for the third Sunday after Easter:

Well may I guess and feel
  Why autumn should be sad,
But vernal airs should sorrow heal,
  Spring should be gay and glad.
Yet as along this violet bank I rove,
The languid sweetness seems to choke my breath,
  I sit me down beside the hazel grove,
And sigh, and half could wish my weariness were death.

And what could be more supremely delicate, more touched with a loving humiliation, than the exquisite line (in the poem on Gunpowder Treason, of all places!),

Speak gently of our sister's fall.

(3) Gravity.—This may be held perhaps to be almost a defect of quality; but in Keble it has a positive value. He, a

clerical Wordsworth, so to speak, moved through the world, not indeed without some simple merriment, but without a suspicion of the existence of that deeper and larger mood that we name humour. He never cared to note the odd, bewildering contradictions of humanity, its reckless absurdities, its profound and intimate mirth. Keble's smile, and he is said to have had one, was the grave, bright smile of the contented and joyful spirit, not the secret and refreshing twinkle of the humourist. Indeed, the spirit sickens to recall the pieces resolutely labelled humorous, which have been shamefully made public among his miscellaneous poems. If these were specimens of the wit in which his talk is said to have abounded, it is a matter for deep thankfulness that so few reminiscences of his conversation have survived.

Life was far too serious and momentous to Keble for him to have enjoyed its pitiful contrasts. The only consolations indeed that can prevent a spirit, bounded by so petty a horizon, from becoming sullen or bitter, are perennial humour or intense seriousness. And Keble was as serious as Shelley or Wordsworth. It is not a quality that needs defining by quotation, for every single poem in the *Christian Year* is penetrated with it from the first line to the last. But in these days, when the issues of life and death, the intricacies of character, the logical truth of fatalism, are matters of after-dinner conversation, it is well to live a little with a mind to whom they were absorbing and fearful realities, too deep for laughter or tears. Keble's inmost instinct was not love, or the sense of beauty, but a resolute and puritanical sternness. He made the mistake, so common to religious spirits, of supposing that the religious instinct is universally implanted, and that whatever the varying quantities of intellect and capacity in an individual, the spiritual faculties are evenly distributed.

Well, such an attitude, if unsympathetic and statuesque, is noble and admirable. It is the temper in which great deeds are done and heroic resolutions formed. It seals Keble one of that honourable minority who clearly see the force of a moral ideal, maintain it in themselves, and demand it from others; and if it is difficult to sympathise with it, it is impossible not to admire it.

It may be urged, then, that on these three grounds Keble may be reckoned among English poets. It will not be on these grounds that he will be most read, but for his pure and sober religious spirit, about which indeed much might be said that would be foreign to the purpose of this essay. But it may be granted that he had a strong perception of beauty, moral and physical, in spite of a certain rigidity of tone; and that he had style, the gift of expression, an artistic ideal, without which no purity of outlook, no exultant sense of beauty, can make a poet. But even if his claim cannot be sustained, even if his writings were not poetry, we may be thankful that for more than half a century there have been spirits so high, so refined, so devoted, as to have been misled by his spiritual ardour, the lofty sublimity of his ideal, as to mistake his refined and enthusiastic utterance for the voice of the genuine bard.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

IT is a matter of regret that there is no adequate biography of one of the very few women who have achieved real eminence in literature. Mrs. Richmond Ritchie has indeed written an article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, but this from the nature of things could not be much more than a record. In the series of *Eminent Women*, Mr. Ingram has attempted to supply the want, and after reading his book through more than once we are bound to say that we regret that he has been first in the field. However, as Mrs. Browning herself says, "we get no good by being ungenerous, even to a book."

When Horne in the *New Spirit of the Age* gave some biographical particulars about Miss Barrett to the public, she wrote to him as follows:—"My dear Mr. Horne, the public do not care for me enough to care at all for my biography. If you say anything of me (and I am not affected enough to pretend to wish you to be absolutely silent, if you see any occasion to speak) it must be as a writer of rhymes, and not as the heroine of a biography. And then as to stories, my story amounts to the knife-grinder's, with nothing at all for a catastrophe. *A bird in a cage* could have as good a story. Most of my events, and nearly all my intense pleasures, have passed in thoughts." And again later, when the paper had appeared:—"You are my friend I hope, but you do not on that account lose the faculty of judging me or the right of judging me frankly. I do loathe the whole system of personal compliment as a consequence of personal interest.... I set more price on your sincerity than on your praise, and consider it more closely connected with the quality called kindness.... I want kindness, the rarest of all nearly—which is truth."

Those are Mrs. Browning's own deliberate views, written it is true in early life, as to her own biography. That a biography need not be critical has been amply proved by Boswell; on the other hand, this only applies to a biography written by a contemporary friend, and even then it must be absolutely faithful. Boswell, it is true, admired too deeply to criticise. If he ever thought his subject ungenerous, ungenial, tyrannical, he does not say so; but at least he does not shrink from recording experiences which might suggest those qualities to readers who did not admire as he did. But any one who sits down to trace the history of one with whom he had no personal acquaintance, when that life is closed by death and rounded by the past, is bound to make some effort to discriminate. In Mr. Ingram's book the quality of discrimination is conspicuously wanting. He has evidently conceived an ideal and done his best to transmit it to others. That he has not altogether succeeded in disguising his heroine is no fault of his; as Miss Barrett complains in another sentence of the letter from which we have been quoting—"he has rouged her up to the eyes."

We must only touch upon two or three of the most salient points of Mrs. Browning's biography. Her life was uneventful enough, as far as events go, and its outlines are sufficiently well known. The impression which it leaves upon a reader is strangely mixed. The intellect with which we are brought into contact is profoundly impressive; the

spectacle of a life so vivid and untiring, so hopeful and ardent, lived under the pressure of constant physical suffering, and the still more marked presence of morbidity both of thought and feeling, is inspiring and moving. But there is a want of wholesomeness about a great deal of it; there is a sense of failure somewhere. This reveals itself in its concrete form perhaps most clearly in the fact that with all the presence of high and animating thoughts, with the resolve of self-dedication to the poetic office, with the assiduous and systematic labour to cultivate the art of expression, yet obscurity seems to haunt so many efforts, and the instinct of discrimination so frequently appears to slumber. Mrs. Browning as a letter-writer is disappointing; again and again there is a touch of true feeling, a noble thought, but with all this there is a want of incisiveness, a wearisome seriousness, which of all qualities is the one that ought not to obtrude itself, a strange lack of humour, a certain strain—a *scraping* of the soul, as Tourgenieff has it. And this may, we think, be best expressed by the pathetic words that fall from her in the letter already quoted: her history was that of *a bird in a cage*. Not only from the physical fact that she was for many years of her life an invalid—but mentally and morally also she was caged, by imaginary social fictions, by certain ingrained habits of thought; and, last of all, as a passionate idealist, she saw with painful persistence and in horrible contrast the infinite possibilities of human nature and the limitations of low realities.

It is a curious fact which meets us at the very threshold of her life, that the author of "The Cry of the Children," the passionate partisan of the Abolitionist cause in America and of freedom in Italy, came from generations of slave-owners. In fact the Jamaica Emancipation Act cost her the loss of her Herefordshire home, by resulting in a large decrease in her father's fortune. It seems indeed typical of her sentiment, typical of the limitations and impersonality of her feelings that, among all her bitter reveries and passionate revolts against human tyrannies, it never (so far as we can judge from her correspondence) seems to have occurred to her that the wealth and comfort with which she was surrounded, the very dower of books that made life possible, was actually wrung from generations of slave-labour, the forced toil of hundreds of impotent lives. No one would ask for, or even hint at expecting, even from the most fantastic idealist, a renunciation of luxury thus acquired; but it is strange that the idea seems never to have entered her head.

She spent a happy though precocious childhood, but by the age of fifteen was already condemned to that bitter isolation of invalid life which, when it falls on a strong and vivid personality, has, fortunately for human nature, a purifying and ennobling effect. Intellectual effort became first the anodyne of physical evil, then the earnest aim of her life.

She never seems to have doubted as to the form that her impulsive need for expression was to take. "You," she writes to her father in the dedication of her second volume of poems, "you are a witness how if this art of poetry had been a less earnest object to me, it must have fallen from exhausted hands before this day." And again in the preface: "Poetry has been as serious a thing to me as life itself, and life has been a very serious thing; there has been no playing at skittles for me in either. *I never mistook pleasure for the final cause of poetry*, nor leisure for the hour of the poet. I have done my work, so far, as work—not as mere hand and head work, apart from the personal being—but as the completest expression of that being to which I could attain."

There is something very impressive about the earnestness of this. Its fault is perhaps that it is a little too outspoken: and, from a human point of view, we cannot help regretting that she did not a little more fall into that error which she so indignantly repudiates: if she had mistaken pleasure a little more, not perhaps for the final cause, but for one of the primary causes of poetry, we cannot help feeling that she might have done, if not such earnest, at least more artistic work.

One of the things that one expects to find in the biography of a poet is a detailed account of methods of composition. It is interesting to know whether morning or evening hours were devoted to writing; whether the act of composition was slow or quick; whether the poem was worked out in the mind before it was transmitted to paper; what proportion finished compositions bear to unfinished; whether incomplete work was ever resumed; whether the observation of language was systematised in any way. All these things one is particularly anxious to hear in the case of a poetess whose work bears at once traces of hasty and elaborate workmanship, whose vocabulary is so extraordinarily eclectic, whose rhymes are so peculiar, and often—may we say?—so unsatisfactory. Mr. Ingram's biography, abounding as it does in details of what we may call the interviewer's type, is almost entirely silent on these points. We hear indeed incidentally that the solid morning hours were Mrs. Browning's habitual hours of work; and a curious correspondence has been made public between herself and Horne, which shows that her rhymes, according to herself, were deliberately and painfully selected, principally in the case of dissyllabic rhymes (even, we fear, such pairs as *Goethe* and *duty, Bettine* and *between ye*) because she held that English composers, though the language was rich in these rhythmical combinations, had been instinctively slow in applying them to serious poetry. If Elizabeth Browning's, or indeed Robert Browning's, dissyllabic rhymes are the best defence that can be urged for this position, we must affirm that the general instinct on the whole has been right: such rhymes give a sense of fantastic elaborateness, and tend to concentrate the reader's attention too closely upon the *technique* of the composition. This is, however, a minor point. But it is interesting to observe that this very detail, which constitutes a blemish in the eyes of even indulgent critics, was a subject upon which Mrs. Browning had not only definite ideas, but enthusiastic convictions.

One other thing may be noted. It is alleged, though without certainty, that "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," a poem consisting of over four hundred lines, was actually composed within twelve consecutive hours. If that is so, it is a marvellous *tour de force*. The poem is one which, in spite of obvious faults, has an immense outburst of lyrical power and magnificent feeling; it contains many lines which linger in the memory; and every one who has had any experience of composition will recognise at once that, if this tradition about its origin be true, it is easy to understand why the poem was allowed to remain as it does. Besides the repugnance which most writers (and especially, we are inclined to think, Mrs. Browning) have felt for the *limæ labor*, the painful excision and chiselling of a work of any kind, there is a special distaste for meddling with a work which springs to life as it were in a moment; such work grows to have, even in the course of a few hours, a sentient individuality of its own which almost defies mutilation.

Mrs. Browning's best lyrical work was all done before her marriage; but the stirring of the truest depths of her

emotional nature took voice in the collection of sonnets entitled "From the Portuguese"—strung, in Omar's words, like pearls upon the string of circumstance. In these sonnets (which it is hardly necessary to say are not translations) she speaks the universal language; to her other graces had now been added that which she had somewhat lacked before, the grace of content; and for these probably she will be longest and most gratefully admired. Any one who steps for the first time through the door into which he has seen so many enter, and finds that poets and lovers and married folk, in their well-worn commonplaces, have exaggerated nothing, will love these sonnets as one of the sweetest and most natural records of a thing which will never lose its absorbing fascination for humanity. To those that are without, except for the sustained melody of expression, the poetess almost seems to have passed on to a lower level, to have lost originality—like the celebrated lady whose friends said that till she wrote to announce her engagement she had never written a commonplace letter. Their fervour indeed rises from the resolute virginity of a heart to whom love had been scarcely a dream, never a hope. We must think of the isolation, sublime it may have been, but yet desolate, from which her marriage was to rescue her—coming not as only the satisfaction of imperious human needs, but to meet and crown her whole nature with a fulness of which few can dream. As she was afterwards to write:

How dreary 'tis for women to sit still
On winter nights by solitary fires
And hear the nations praising them far off.

And again:

To sit alone
And think, for comfort, how that very night
Affianced lovers, leaning face to face,
With sweet half-listenings for each other's breath
Are reading haply from some page of ours
To pause with a thrill, as if their cheeks had touched
When such a stanza level to their mood
Seems floating their own thoughts out—"So I feel
For thee"—"And I for thee: this poet knows
What everlasting love is."
To have our books
Appraised by love, associated with love
While we sit loveless.

Such a heart deserved all the love it could get.

The latter years of Mrs. Browning's life have a certain shadowiness for English readers. The "Casa Guidi," if we were not painfully haunted by the English in which interviewers have given their impressions of it, is a memory to linger over. The high dusty passage that gave access to the tall, gloomy house; the huge cool rooms, with little Pennini, so called in contrast to the colossal statue Apennino, "slender, fragile, spirit-like" flitting about from stair to stair: the faint sounds of music breathing about the huge corridors; the scent, the stillness,—such a home as only two poets could create, and two lovers inhabit.

Nathaniel Hawthorne gives, among some rather affected writing about a visit of his there, a few characteristic touches. "Mrs. Browning met us at the door of the drawing-room—a pale, small person, scarcely embodied at all; at any rate only substantial enough to put forth her slender fingers to be grasped, and to speak with a shrill yet sweet tenuity of voice. Really I do not see how Mr. Browning can suppose that he has an earthly wife any more than an earthly child; both are of the elfin race, and will flit away from him some day when he least thinks of it. She is a good and kind fairy, however, and sweetly disposed towards the human race, although only remotely akin to it. It is wonderful to see how small she is, how pale her cheek, how bright and dark her eyes. There is not such another figure in the world." "The boy," he says elsewhere, "was born in Florence, and prides himself upon being a Florentine, and is indeed as un-English a production as if he were a native of another planet."

This touch perhaps will explain why it is that we rather lose hold of Mrs. Browning after her marriage; England was connected in her mind with all the old trials of life which seemed to have fallen away with her new existence; ill-health, and mental struggle, bereavement and pain—even though it was pain triumphed over. With marriage and Italy a new life began. It became her adopted country—

And now I come, my Italy,
My own hills! Are you 'ware of me, my hills,
How I burn to you? Do you feel to-night
The urgency and yearning of my soul.

And there the English reader is at fault. He cannot call Italy his own in any genuine sense; much as his yearnings may go out towards her, in days when his own ungenial climate is wrapping the hedge-rows and hill-farms in mist and driving sleet, much as he may long for a moment after her sun and warmth, her transparent skies and sleepy seas, yet he knows his home is here. Even when he finds himself among her vines, when the lizards dart powdered with green jewels from stone to stone, and the dust puffs up white in the road beside the bay, he finds himself murmuring in his heart Mr. Browning's own words.

Oh! to be in England now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England sees some morning unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough—
In England now!

That is what he really feels; and however much he loves to think as a picture of the poet and poetess transplanted into the warm lands, his heart does not go out to them, as it would have done had they stayed at home. And so it comes to pass that some of the lines into which Mrs. Browning threw her most passionate emphasis, "Casa Guidi

Windows," the words that burn with an alien patriotism—alien, but sunk so deep, that her disappointed hopes made havoc of her life—reach him like murmuring music over water, sweet but fantastic—touching the ear a little and the heart a little, but bringing neither glow nor tears.

They say that the Treaty of Villa Franca snapped the cord; that the bitter disappointment of what had become a passion rather than a dream broke the struggling spirit. It may be so—"With her golden verse linking Italy to England," wrote the grateful Florentines upon her monument. But England to Italy? No—"Italy," she wrote herself, "is one thing, England one." We feel that she passed into a strange land, and in its sweetness somewhat forgot her own: the heart is more with her when she writes:

> I saw
> Fog only, the great tawny weltering fog
> Involve the passive city, strangle it
> Alive, and draw it off into the void,
> Spires, bridges, streets, and squares, as if a sponge
> Had wiped out London.

Or:

> A ripple of land: such little hills, the sky
> Can stoop to tenderly, and the wheatfields climb.
> Such nooks of valleys lined by orchises,
> Fed full of noises by invisible streams
> And open pastures, where you scarcely tell
> White daisies from white dew—at intervals
> The mythic oaks and elm trees standing out
> Self-poised upon their prodigy of shade;
> I thought my father's land was worthy too
> Of being Shakespeare's.

II

"Mr. Kenyon," wrote Miss Barrett, "was with me yesterday.... he accused me of writing a certain paper in the *Athenæum*, and convicted me against my will; and when I could no longer deny and began to explain and pique myself upon my diplomacy, he threw himself back in his chair and laughed me to scorn as the least diplomatic of his acquaintance, '*You* diplomatic!'"

Mr. Kenyon, without perhaps intending it, gave expression to a feeling which rises again and again half unconsciously in the mind even of the most sympathetic reader of Mrs. Browning's poetry: there is no diplomacy about it. The diplomatist achieves his successes not only by saying what he has to say in the most lucid possible manner—that is not enough—but by a discreet reticence, by implying possibilities rather than stating them, by guarded admissions, by suggestive silence.

There is a well-known rhetorical device, upon which Mrs. Browning in her classical studies must have not unfrequently stumbled, called the Aposiopesis—in plain English, the art of breaking-off. Classical writers are often hastily accused by young learners of having framed their writings with a view to introducing perplexing forms and intolerable constructions, so as unnecessarily to obscure the sense. But it is a matter of regret that Mrs. Browning did not employ this particular construction with greater frequency,—to use a colloquial expression—that she did not let you off a good deal. Many of her poems are weighted with a dragging moral; many of them fly with a broken wing, stopping and rising again, dispersing and returning with a kind of purposeless persistency, as if they were incapable of deciding where to have done. Poems with passage after passage of extraordinary depth of thought and amazing felicity of expression, every now and then droop and crawl like the rain on a November day, which will not fall in a drenching shower nor quite desist, but keeps dropping, dropping from the sky out of mere weakness or idleness.

To secure an audience a poet must be diplomatic; he must know whose ear he intends to catch. It is mere cant to say that the best poetry cannot be popular; that it should be read is its first requisite. When Gray wrote φωνάντα συνετοίσιν on his Odes he meant that there would be many people to whom they would not appeal; but it is ridiculous to say that the merit of poetry is in proportion to the paucity of its admirers. If Mrs. Browning aimed at any particular class it was perhaps at intellectual sentimentalists. As the two characteristics are rarely found united, in fact are liable to exclude one another, it may perhaps be the reason why she is so little appreciated in her entirety: she is perhaps too learned for women and too emotional for men.

Let us consider for a moment where her intellectual training came from. Roughly speaking, the basis of it was Greek from first to last; at nine years old she measured her life by the years of the siege of Troy, and carved a figure out of the turf in her garden to represent a recumbent warrior, naming it Hector. Then came her version of the "Prometheus Vinctus"; her long studious mornings over Plato and Theocritus with the blind scholar, Mr. Boyd, whom she commemorates in "Wine of Cyprus," when she read, as she writes, "the Greek poets, with Plato, from end to end"; her dolorous excursion with the Fathers; and at last, in the Casa Guidi, the little row of miniature classics, annotated in her own hand, standing within easy reach of her couch. Of course she was an omnivorous reader besides. She speaks of reading the Hebrew Bible, "from Genesis to Malachi,—never stopped by the Chaldean,—and the flood of all possible and impossible British and foreign novels and romances, with slices of metaphysics laid thick between the sorrows of the multitudinous Celestinas." But it was evidently in Greek, in the philosophical poetry of Euripides and the poetical philosophy of Plato, that she found her deepest satisfaction.

At the same time she was not in the true sense learned, though possessing learning far greater than commonly falls to a woman's lot to possess. Her education in Greek must have been unsystematic and unscholarly; her classical allusions, which fall so thick in letters and poems have seldom quite the genuine ring; we do not mean that she did not get nearer the heart of the Greek writers and appreciate their spirit more intimately than many a far more erudite scholar; that was to be expected, for she brought enthusiasm and insight and genius to the task; but her

learning is not an animated part of her; it is sometimes almost an incubus. The character of her allusions too is often remote and fanciful. They fall, it is true, from a teeming brain, but they are not the simple direct comparisons which would occur to a man who had made Greek literature his own, but rather the unexpected, modern turns which so often surprise a student, like the red bunches of valerian which thrust out of the sand-stone frieze of a Sicilian temple—such comparisons, for instance, as the celebrated one in *Aurora Leigh* of the peasant who might have been gathering brushwood in the ear of a colossus had Xerxes carried out his design of carving Athos into the likeness of a man. Her characterization of the classical poets in "The Poet's Vow" will also illustrate this; now so extraordinarily felicitous and clear-sighted, as for instance in the case of Shakespeare and Ossian, and now so alien to the true spirit of the men described.

Sophocles
With that king's-look which down the trees
Followed the dark effigies

Of the lost Theban. Hesiod old,
Who, somewhat blind and deaf and cold,
Cared most for gods and bulls.

The fact was that she read the Greeks as a woman of genius was sure to do; she passed by their majestic grace, amazed at their solemn profundity, and yet unaware that she was projecting into them a feeling, a sentimental outlook which they did not possess, attributing directly to them a deliberate power which was merely the effect of their unconscious, antique, and limited vision upon the emotional child of a later age.

The strangest thing is that a woman of such complex and sensitive faculties should have given in her allegiance to such models. Never was there a writer in whom the best characteristics of the Greeks were more conspicuously absent. Their balance, their solidity, their calm, their gloomy acquiescence in the bitter side of life, have surely little in common with the passionate spirit that beat so wildly against the bars, and asked the stars and hills so eagerly for their secrets. Such a passage as the following, grand as is the central idea, is surely enough to show the utter incompatibility which existed between them: "I thought that had Æschylus lived after the incarnation and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, he might have turned, if not in moral and intellectual, yet in poetic faith, from the solitude of Caucasus to the deeper desertness of that crowded Jerusalem, where none had any pity,—from the faded white flower of a Titanic brow to the withered grass of a heart trampled on by its own beloved—from the glorying of him who gloried that he could not die, to the sublime meekness of the Taster of death for every man: from the taunt stung into being by the torment, to his more awful silence, when the agony stood dumb before the love." ... It was characteristic of a woman to bring the two personalities together, to dwell on what might have been; but this is not Greek.

The two poems which are the best instances of the classical mood, are the two of which Pan, the spirit of the solitary country, half beast, half god, is the hero. In these Mrs. Browning appears in her strength and in her weakness. In "The Dead Pan," in spite of its solemn refrain, the lengthy disordered mode of thought is seen to the worst advantage: the progression of ideas is obscure, the workmanship is not hurried, but deliberately distressing; the rhymes, owing to that unfortunate fancy for double rhyming, being positively terrific; the brief fury of the lyric mood passing into the utterances of a digressive moralist. But when we turn to the other, "A Musical Instrument," what a relief we experience. "What was he doing, the great god Pan, down in the reeds by the river?" The splendid shock of the rhythm, like the solid plunge of a cataract into a mountain-pool, captivates, for all its roughness, the metrical ear. There is not a word or a thought too much: the scene shapes itself, striking straight out into the thought; the waste and horror that encircle the birth of the poet in the man; the brutish elements out of which such divinity is compounded—these are flung down in simple, delicate outlines: such a lyric is an eternal possession of the English language.

As a natural result of a certain discursiveness of mind, there is hardly any kind of writing unrepresented in Mrs. Browning's poems. She had at one time a fancy for pure romantic writing, since developed to such perfection by Rossetti. There is a peculiar charm about such composition. In such works we seem to breathe a freer air, separated as we are from special limitations of time and place; the play of passion is more simple and direct, and the passion itself is of a less complex and restrained character. Besides, there is a certain element of horror and mystery, which the modern spirit excludes, while it still hungers for it, but is not unnatural when mediævalized. Nothing in Mrs. Browning can bear comparison with "Sister Helen" or "The Beryl Stone"; but "The Romaunt of the Page" and the "Rhyme of the Duchess May" stand among her most successful pieces.

The latter opens with a simple solemnity:

To the belfry, one by one, went the ringers from the sun,
Toll slowly.
And the oldest ringer said, "Ours is music for the dead,
When the rebecks are all done."
Six abeles i' the churchyard grow on the north side in a row,
Toll slowly.
And the shadow of their tops rock across the little slopes
Of the grassy graves below.
On the south side and the west a small river runs in haste,
Toll slowly.
And between the river flowing and the fair green trees agrowing,
Do the dead lie at their rest.
On the east I sat that day, up against a willow grey:
Toll slowly.
Through the rain of willow-branches I could see the low hill ranges,
And the river on its way.

This is like the direct opening notes of the overture of a dirge. Whatever may be said about such writing we feel at once that it comes from a master's hand. So the poem opens, but alas for the close! Some chord seems to snap; it is

no longer the spirit of the ancient rhymer, but Miss Mitford's friend who catches up the lyre and will have her last word. The poem passes, still in the same metre, out of the definite materialism, the ghastly excitements of the story into a species of pious churchyard meditation; and the pity of it is that we cannot say that this is not characteristic.

Then closely connected with the last comes a class of poems, of so-called modern life, of which "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" shall stand for an example. This is a poem of nineteenth-century adventure, which is as impossible in design and as fantastic in detail as a poem may well be. The reader does not know whether to be most amazed at the fire and glow of the whole story, or at the hopeless ignorance of the world betrayed by it. The impossible Earls with their immeasurable pride and intolerable pomposities; the fashionable ladies with their delicate exteriors and callous hearts,—these are like the creations of Charlotte Brontë, and recall Blanche and Baroness Ingram of Ingram Park. And at the same time, when we have said all this, we read the poem and we can forgive all or nearly all—the spirit is so high, the passion is so fierce and glowing, the poetry that bursts out, stanza after stanza, contrives to involve even these dolorous mistakes in such a glamour, that we can only admire the genius that could contend against such visionary errors.

But we must turn to what after all is Mrs. Browning's most important and most characteristic work, *Aurora Leigh*. Unfortunately its length alone, were there not any other reasons, would prevent its ever being popular. Ten thousand lines of blank verse is a serious thing. The fact that the poem is to a great extent autobiographical, combined with the comparative mystery in which the authoress was shrouded and the romance belonging to a marriage of poets—these elements are enough to account for the general enthusiasm with which the poem was received. Landor said that it made him drunk with poetry,—that was the kind of expression that its admirers allowed themselves to make use of with respect to it. And yet in spite of these credentials, the fact remains that it is a difficult volume to work through. It is the kind of book that one begins to read for the first time with intense enjoyment, congratulating oneself after the first hundred pages that there are still three-hundred to come. Then the mood gradually changes; it becomes difficult to read without a marker; and at last it goes back to the shelf with the marker about three-fourths of the way through. As she herself wrote,

> The prospects were too far and indistinct.
> 'Tis true my critics said "A fine view that."
> The public scarcely cared to climb my book
> For even the finest;—and the public's right.

Now what is the reason of this? In the first place it is a romance with a rather intricate plot, and a romance requires continuous reading and cannot be laid aside for a few days with impunity. Secondly, it requires hard and continuous study; there is hardly a page without two or three splendid thoughts, and several weighty expressions; it is a perfect mine of felicitous though somewhat lengthy quotations upon almost every question of art and life, yet it is sententious without being exactly epigrammatic. Thirdly, it is very digressive, distressingly so when you are once interested in the story. Lastly, it is not dramatic; whoever is speaking, Lord Howe, Aurora, Romney Leigh, Marian Earle, they all express themselves in a precisely similar way; it is even sometimes necessary to reckon back the speeches in a dialogue to see who has got the ball. In fact it is not they who speak, but Mrs. Browning. To sum up, it is the attempted union of the dramatic and meditative elements that is fatal to the work from an artistic point of view.

Perhaps, if we are to try and disentangle the motive of the whole piece, to lay our finger on the main idea, we may say that it lies in the contrast between the solidity and unity of the artistic life, as opposed to the tinkering philanthropy of the Sociologist. *Aurora Leigh* is an attempt from an artistic point of view to realise in concrete form the truth that the way to attack the bewildering problem of the nineteenth century, the moral elevation of the democracy, is not by attempting to cure in detail the material evils, which are after all nothing but the symptoms of a huge moral disease expressing itself in concrete fact, but by infusing a spirit which shall raise them from within. To attack it from its material side is like picking off the outer covering of a bud to assist it to blow, rather than by watering the plant to increase its vitality and its own power of internal action; in fact, as our clergy are so fond of saying, a spiritual solution is the only possible one, with this difference, that in *Aurora Leigh* this attempt is made not so much from the side of dogmatic religion as of pure and more general enthusiasms. The insoluble enigma is unfortunately, whether, under the pressure of the present material surroundings, there is any hope of eliciting such an instinct at all; whether it is not actually annihilated by want and woe and the diseased transmission of hereditary sin.

It is of course totally impossible to give any idea of a poem of this kind by quotations, partly, too, because as with most meditative poetry, the extracts are often more impressive by themselves than in their context, owing to the fact that the run of the poem is interfered with rather than assisted by them. But we may give a few specimens of various kinds. "I," she says,

> Will write my story for my better self,
> As when you paint your portrait for a friend
> Who keeps it in a drawer, and looks at it
> Long after he has ceased to love you, just
> To hold together what he was and is.

And this is one of those mysterious, sudden images that take the fancy; she is describing the high edge of a chalk down:

> You might see
> In apparition in the golden sky
> ... the sheep run
> Along the fine clear outline, small as mice
> That run along a witch's scarlet thread.

And this is a wonderful rendering of the effect, which never fails to impress the thought, of the mountains of a strange land rising into sight over the sea's rim:

I felt the wind soft from the land of souls:
The old miraculous mountain heaved in sight
One straining past another along the shore
The way of grand, tall Odyssean ghosts,
Athirst to drink the cool blue wine of seas
And stare on voyagers.

We may conclude with this enchanting picture of an Italian evening:

Fire-flies that suspire
In short soft lapses of transported flame
Across the tingling dark, while overhead
The constant and inviolable stars
Outrun those lights-of-love: melodious owls
(If music had but one note and was sad,
'Twould sound just so): and all the silent swirl
Of bats that seem to follow in the air
Some grand circumference of a shadowy dome
To which we are blind; and then the nightingales
Which pluck our heart across a garden-wall,
(When walking in the town) and carry it
So high into the bowery almond-trees
We tremble and are afraid, and feel as if
The golden flood of moonlight unaware
Dissolved the pillars of the steady earth,
And made it less substantial.

It would seem in studying Mrs. Browning's work as though either she herself or her advisers did not appreciate her special gift. The longest of her poems are the work of her later years, whereas her strength did not lie so much in sustained narrative effort, in philosophical construction, or patriotic sentiment, as in the true lyrical gift. It seems more and more clear as time goes on that the poems by which she will be best remembered are some of her shortest—the expression of a single overruling mood—the parable without the explanation—the burst of irrepressible feeling.

I should be inclined, if I had to make a small selection out of the poems, to name seven lyrics as forming the truest and most characteristic work she ever produced—characteristic that is of her strength, and showing the fewest signs of her weakness. These are: "Loved Once," "The Romance of the Swan's Nest," "Catarina to Camoens," "Cowper's Grave," "The Cry of the Children," "The Mask," and lastly "Confessions," which seems to me one of the stormiest and most pathetic poems in the language. A few words of critical examination may be given to each.

The first fact that strikes a reader is that all of these, with one exception, depend to a certain extent upon the use of a refrain. Of course the refrain is a species of metrical trick; but there is no possibility of denying, that, if properly used, it gives a peculiar satisfaction to that special sense—whatever it be, for there is no defining it—to which metre and rhyme both appeal. At the same time there is one condition attached to this device, that it should not be prolonged into monotony. At what precise moment this lapse into monotony takes place, or by what other devices it may be modified, must be left to the sensitive taste of the writer, but if the writer does not discover when it becomes monotonous the reader will do so; and this is certainly the case in "The Dead Pan," though the refrain is there varied.

To a certain extent too it must be confessed that this same monotony affects two of the poems which we have mentioned: "Loved Once," and "Catarina to Camoens." The former of these deals with the permanence of a worthy love; and the refrain, "Loved Once," is dismissed as being the mere treasonous utterance of those who have never understood what love is. The poem gains, too, a pathetic interest from the fact that it records the great estrangement of Mrs. Browning's life.

"Catarina to Camoens" is the dying woman's answer to her lover's sonnet in which he recorded the wonder of her gaze. But alas! of these lines we may say with the author of *Ionica*, "I bless them for the good I feel; but yet I bless them with a sigh." The poem is vitiated by the unusually large proportion of faulty and fantastic rhymes that it contains.

"The Swan's Nest," the story of a childish dream and its disappointment, is an admirable illustration of the artistic principle that the element of pathos depends upon minuteness of detail and triviality of situation rather than upon intensity of feeling.

"The Mask" is not a poem that appears to have been highly praised. But it will appeal to any one who has any knowledge of that most miserable of human experiences—the necessity of dissembling suffering:

I have a smiling face, she said,
  I have a jest for all I meet,
I have a garland for my head,
  And all its flowers are sweet—
And so you call me gay, she said.

Behind no prison-grate, she said,
  Which slurs the sunshine half-a-mile,
Live captives so uncomforted
  As souls behind a smile.
God's pity let us pray, she said.

If I dared leave this smile, she said,
  And take a moan upon my mouth,
And twine a cypress round my head,
  And let my tears run smooth,
It were the happier way, she said.

And since that must not be, she said,
  I fain your bitter world would leave.
How calmly, calmly, smile the dead,
  Who do not, therefore, grieve!
The yea of Heaven is yea, she said.

It is not necessary to quote from either "Cowper's Grave" or "The Cry of the Children." The former is the true Elegiac; the latter—critics may say what they will—goes straight to the heart and brings tears to the eyes. We do not believe that any man or woman of moderate sensibility could read it aloud without breaking down. It has faults of language, structure, metre; but its emotional poignancy gives it an artistic value which it would be fastidious to deny, and which we may expect it to maintain.

Lastly, "Confessions" is the story of passionate love, lavished by a soul so exclusively and so prodigally on men that it has, in the jealous priestly judgment, sucked away and sapped the natural love for the Father of men. The poor human soul under the weight of this accusation clings only to the thought of how utterly it has loved the brothers that it has seen. "And how," comes the terrible question, "have they requited it? God's love, you have rejected it—what have you got in its stead from man?"

I saw God sitting above me, but I ... I sate among men,
    And I have loved these.
The least touch of their hands in the morning, I keep it by
  day and by night;
Their least step on the stair, at the door, still throbs through
  me, if ever so light:
Their least gift, which they left to my childhood, far off in
  the long-ago years,
Is turned from a toy to a relic, and seen through the crystal of
  tears.
    "Dig the snow," she said,
    "For my churchyard bed,
Yet I, as I sleep, shall not fear to freeze,
If one only of these my beloveds, shall love me with heart-warm
  tears
    As I have loved these!"

"Go," I cried, "thou hast chosen the Human, and left the
  Divine!
Then, at least, have the Human shared with thee their wild
  berry wine?
Have they loved back thy love, and when strangers approached
  thee with blame
Have they covered thy fault with their kisses, and loved thee
  the same?"
    But she shrunk and said,
    "God, over my head,
Must sweep in the wrath of His judgment-seas,
If He shall deal with me sinning, but only indeed the same
    And no gentler than these."

We have been dealing with a poet as a poet; but we must not forget that she was a woman too. From Sappho and Sulpicia (whose reputations must be allowed to rest upon somewhat negative proof) to Eliza Cook and Joanna Baillie, and even Mrs. Hemans, sweet singer as she was—how Mrs. Browning distances them all! There was something after all in the quaint proposal of the *Athenæum*, upon the death of Wordsworth, that the Laureateship should be offered to Mrs. Browning, as typical of the realisation of a new possibility for women. That alone is something of an achievement, though in itself we do not rate it very high. But the truth is that we cannot do without our poets; the nation is even now pining for a new one, and every soul that comes among us bringing the *divinæ particulam auræ*, who finds his way to expression, is a possession to congratulate ourselves upon. If there is that shadowy something in a writer's work, coming we know not whence and going we know not whither, unseen, intangible, but making its presence felt and heard, we must welcome it and guard it and give it room to move. "My own best poets," writes Mrs. Browning, "am I one with you?"

Does all this smell of thyme about my feet
Conclude my visit to your holy hill
In personal presence, or but testify
The rustling of your vesture through my dreams
With influent odours?

We need not doubt it; she is worthy to be counted among these,

The only teachers who instruct mankind
From just a shadow on a charnel-wall
To find man's veritable stature out
Erect, sublime—the measure of a man—
And that's the measure of an angel, says
The apostle.

THE LATE MASTER OF TRINITY

(DR. W. H. THOMPSON)

THE interest that attaches to the life of a notable man is generally very complex: it entwines itself with the great events which our hero helped to bring about, his personal relations with the other great men of his time, his view of the movements agitating society. And then there is a further interest in his private life. We desire to see the secret sources from which he drew the inspiration he carried into the outside world; we are anxious to know whether he was most real when before the public, and made his inner life subserve his outer, or whether he withdrew from the dust of battle and the rush of the world, into the quiet of his own circle, feeling that he was returning home. All these varying moods are an attractive study: when the mask falls away and we know that he was most dispirited when he seemed most serene, or in reality buoyed up by a divine elation when apparently crushed by a sorrow that seemed irreparable—the disentangling the central strand from the variegated web is a task of fascinating difficulty.

But in the life which we are here endeavouring to trace there was no such bewildering complexity. The secret history of an essentially reticent mind cannot be written; it is at the best sympathetic guessing. In a life where events are rare, circumstances monotonous, a character with few friends and fewer intimates, withdrawn alike from the political, the religious, the social arena, there can be little to record, unless there has been some definite *line* taken throughout, some marked attitude which a nature has consistently maintained towards the outer world.

In the case of the late Master of Trinity we can lay our finger at once upon the characteristic which made him what he was—which gave to a personality such an exclusive strength that when it fades from the world we feel that no replacing is possible. He stood to the action and thought of the present day in the character of a judge: like Rhadamanthus in the old fables, who dealt not with motives or tendencies, but with recorded acts, who sate to give judgment upon them, his function was one of pure criticism. How much that is needed in an age where on the one hand so much is excused on the score of irresistible fatality, while on the other hand such an unreasonable preponderance is given to the value of action, is acutely felt in the face of such a loss as his.

It is a part of the strange irony of life that the personalities which make themselves most strenuously felt among their own generation have a way of slipping out of history. A man who is much occupied in leaving his mark in life, in stemming or colouring the whirling stream that passes him, has little time to spend in piling monuments on the banks to be the envy and wonder of the fluid tides that come and go. The wild grief that we often encounter in books, sometimes in real life, that centres about the disappearance of some apparently unemphatic figure can be thus explained: his vitality did not lend itself to visible labour; it was content to modify the temporary and fluctuating. When such an attitude is artistically maintained: when a character most highly gifted, with a taste and delicacy of perception that overrides the captiousness of less instinctive critics, is seen to devote itself not to gathering straws, but to merely watching life, an atmosphere is created which is at once intensely attractive and baffling. When a patient silence is maintained upon questions which appear to the young and fervent to be essential to the progress of the race; when an impenetrable contempt for fanaticism and extravagance occasionally steals out in pungent sentences; when the outbursts of not unnatural emotions are drily repressed; when the overbalancing of enthusiasm is not forgiven, a deep and provoking wonder grows gradually up as to what standpoint such a critic has reached that such judgments should be possible; as to what platforms, what further heights are visible, that the plain should seem so low and despicable. Of all fascinations there is none like the fascination of contempt, and when this is seen, justified by a sure touch, a genuine grasp of ideas, a most piercing intellect, and seen moreover steadfast in a place of which the very atmosphere is that of generous and ardent spirits, the wonder becomes almost intolerable.

There is a great and common misapprehension which accepts no criticism as valid except what proceeds from a basis of superior capacity. The ordinary man requires the critic to be a better man than the performer whom he dissects, to be able to beat his victim on his own ground. But this is a deep-seated error. The creative power often confers no clearness of vision on its possessor; the best critics are seldom originative men. The critic is, in fact, meant to clear the air about great work for ordinary people; to ascertain the best points of view, and to sting to death the crawling nerveless creatures who are just capable of obscuring by the closeness of their imitative powers the beauty of their great exemplar.

To this task the late Master of Trinity brought an instinctive taste of the first order. He possessed a mind so delicate as to be only saved from becoming hypercritical by a certain robustness and virility of taste, a literary discrimination which led the men to whom he lectured to scribble down his very epithets on the margins of their note-books, and which carried into all he wrote a flavour few writers have leisure to bestow. And yet he was no pedant.

But this critical faculty had its negative side; it grew at the expense of the other sides of his intellect. No faculty can be sustained in such perfection except by a loss of balance. And there is something like a sense of failure that crosses us when we look over the list of works by which he will soon be known: an edition of a dialogue or two of Plato's, a few reviews, a sermon or two, occasional contributions to a classical journal—and that is all.

There is a dissatisfaction attending the production of all work even in the most creative minds; but when to this there is added a keenly fastidious taste, working in a region where there can hardly be a constant glow of enthusiasm to propel a student through his exertions, it will be seen that natural difficulty must have been great. In his later years, moreover, the Master had to contend with constant ill-health—and ill-health, too, engendering a hypochondriacal tendency, which is of all physical evils the hardest for a student to struggle against. A *malaise* which seems to require the distraction of the mind is fatal to its attaining a firm standpoint for laborious origination. And so his intellect turned aside into the easier path of wide and various literary diversion, the impulse, the imperious conscience, so to speak, of the writer to *produce*, growing fainter and fainter.

Such a mind as this, with its insight into philosophy, its unique power of entering into the heart of subtle ideas and

refined phrases, joined with its keen discernment of the modern spirit, might have done a great work of reconciliation. The Master was the founder of the present Cambridge Platonic School; but he is more the suggester and inspirer of the movement, than its leader—or even, to any great extent, its pioneer. He was neither the hard progressive thinker nor the revolutionary scholar—he was merely one of those who by their acute touch, by the subtle mastery with which they present ideas, inspire enthusiastic effort—the Master, indeed, made more than one subtle mind which came under his influence, turn in that direction and do the tasks that he was perhaps himself incapable of performing.

But to the outer world he was perhaps best known as a conversationalist; he had the kind of reputation upon which stories are fathered. Men who knew the oracular background from which Dr. Thompson's utterances proceeded, who knew the inimitable air, the droop of the eyelids, the inscrutable coldness of the eyes and lips, the poise of the head, were ready to give a fictitious value to sayings that had the sanction of his name. To couple his name, falsely or truly, with an epigram gave it an indefinable prestige; his personality thrown into the scale made a sarcasm that might have passed unnoticed into a crushing hit.

Those of his epigrams that survive (and there are a considerable number of a first-rate order) will appeal, it must be confessed, chiefly to those whose humour is of the caustic and derisive order. When he said, for instance, on hearing that the numbers of a rival college were diminishing, that he had heard that emigration was increasing among the lower classes, or that he had never realised what was the full force of the expression in the bidding prayer, "the inferior clergy," till he saw the minor canons of a northern cathedral—the fancy, though irresistibly tickled by the collocation, will on reflection recognise the cruelty of the expressions. And yet those who knew him best concur in saying that the Master was an intrinsically *kind* man; so promptly generous indeed that in the days when he was a college tutor, undergraduates in trouble went naturally to him for help and advice—a most weighty proof to those who know the undergraduate world and its reticence.

The explanation is that these sayings were uttered solely with reference to the amusement of those who heard them, with no ulterior idea: he had no wish that the venom of these stings should circulate and rankle—least of all that they should penetrate to those who formed the subjects of them. But he could not resist an epigram—when, for instance, on accompanying a popular preacher who was to preach at St. Mary's, he found that they were so hampered by the crowd at the door as to be almost unable to force an entrance—his suave utterance, "Make way, gentlemen, or some of us will be disappointed," was genuinely uttered, because the thought had occurred to him, and he was convinced that it would amuse the throng, and with no sort of wish to harrow the feelings or dash the satisfaction of the divine at his side.

Only two years before the Master's death, the writer of these pages heard him say in a meditative manner at the Lodge at Trinity, speaking of an offensive speaker at a meeting held the previous day, "So-and-so was very unfortunate; he reminded me of his father"—whereupon, his sentences having somewhat an oracular effect about them, those present instinctively turned in his direction, thinking that some interesting reminiscences had been aroused—when he continued "he succeeded in being at once dull and flippant" (a pause), "no uncommon combination." This last is a specially characteristic utterance—a strong personal judgment relieved by a general application—if we may use the word—a "back-hander" to humanity. This was what he delighted in doing. No one, again, had a greater power of freezing enthusiasm, when expressed with what he considered unnecessary vehemence. A well-known divine tells me that in his undergraduate days he was once spending the evening in Thompson's rooms, and the conversation turned on the respective merits of certain celebrated Madonnas. This gentleman expressed himself strongly in favour of Raffaell's "Madonna della Seggiola" as compared with Lionardo's "Vierge aux Rochers," adding, "There can be no reasonable doubt on the subject." "When you are older you will think differently," said Thompson.

"Have you forgotten my rusty sword?" muttered Bentley to some contumacious Fellow of Trinity, threatening to revive an ancient regulation long in abeyance. The late Master's sword was neither rusty, nor were mankind ever suffered to forget it. About once in every calendar year, at one of the college meetings, it would whistle flashing from its sheath, and go straight to the heart of the opponent through the vulnerable point of the harness. Thompson never thrust but he killed.

When upon the discussion of some trivial point he turned stiffly to a *dilettante* Fellow who had professed ignorance of the question, and said: "I am surprised Mr.——, that you are not acquainted with the fact: it is so very unimportant"; or when, at a lecture, after closing a list of books that he recommended, he ended by saying of one of the works of his predecessor in the mastership, that "he had looked through it and corrected some of the grosser blunders,"—we cannot help feeling that such improvisations, though amazingly ingenious in themselves had better not have been uttered if they were (as they actually were) capable of personal application. If humour is the saline element, the wholesome preservative of the tone of life, we sometimes meet it concentrated, when its bitterness seems its only characteristic. It is worth noting too, that though a deeply conscientious, nay religious man, Thompson managed to create a very opposite impression upon his pupils. An old pupil of his has told me that he experienced a curious shock of surprise at finding Thompson's name on the title-page of a book of family prayer. It had hardly occurred to him to think of him as a clergyman.

The Mastership of Trinity is a unique position; with its traditions it confers a kind of intellectual peerage upon its occupant. It is the only great position at Cambridge which is of Crown appointment and not elective. At another college the man who means to end by being Master has to gain the confidence of and conciliate his colleagues; and a Headship is generally conferred upon the man who has best deserved it by worth and weight, and by cheerful labour spent in furthering the college interests; but at Trinity no such exertions are needed. College opinion is, of course, considered; but a man has far more need to impress the outer world. If, on attaining this position, a man isolates himself from his fellow-workers, makes no efforts to attain popularity, arrogates to himself a critical position, no remarks are possible, so common elsewhere, of the type of "kicking away the ladder by which the ascent was made." It is a great testimony to Dr. Thompson's weight and impressiveness, that among the remarks that have been made as to his manner of administrating the position, it has never been hinted that he was unworthy to succeed that intellectual Titan, Whewell. Dr. Thompson had no encyclopædic knowledge to show; he had no vast capacities of

dealing with general subjects; he had not a remarkably comprehensive mind. But he was a man of whom it was impossible to think meanly; he extorted admiration even where he did not win sympathy. His presence among heads of houses, in the Senate House, at Boards and Syndicates, was instinctively felt to confer an honour upon his associates; he had, in fact, some of the "kingly" attributes about him. He moved naturally in an atmosphere of deference, not only the deference conceded to a man whose speech is feared; his manner had something to do with it, no doubt. It was *majestic*; there is no other word.

It is to be feared that the impression he will leave will be that of a man whose mind was deliberately depreciative; and it cannot be denied that his best things were in the depreciatory manner. But they were only occasional flashes in much conversation of the subtle, deft type that perpetually flowed from him. Of course such a stream cannot be remembered if it is not "photographed" at the time. It only exists in beautiful impressions left on the hearer's mind. Friends who went to see him for a few minutes' chat on business stayed an hour beguiled by the entertainment. It is said of him, that "much of the enjoyment of talking to him was that the expectation of conversational *friandises* was so frequently gratified." Such a delicate turn as occurs in the prefatory remarks to his edition of the *Phædrus* will illustrate this. He says, that in sorting "a heap of Neoplatonic rubbish, many remarks emerge that are *learned, even sensible*"; the inversion of the two epithets—the suspicion hinted that the ground covered by the first is by no means conterminous with the ground of the second, is the kind of turn he delighted to give.

At no period of his life was he probably a very arduous worker; though always fond of serious and sustained reading he used to lament the change of the dinner-hour—which, in the old barbarian days was at such a time as four—as depriving him of his long peaceful evenings, when he did all the work he ever did; and, as has been already said, he was the victim for many years of a very hypochondriacal temperament—which may account for many things—for his never applying himself to the production of a *magnum opus*—for the acid turn of his wit. He was a great smoker at one time; it is said to have affected him injuriously.

The wonderful magnificence of his face and figure will haunt those who knew them well. The complexion like parchment; the large ear; the short snow-white hair in such strange contrast to the coal-black mobile eyebrows, with which, as is recorded of Dr. Keate, he seemed able to *point* at anything; then the critical wrinkles of the brow; the droop of the eyelid, slowly raised as he turned to you, as though to give your faltering remarks his more particular attention; the eye, formerly so keen, in latter days so curiously dull and obscured; the depressed curve of the lip drawn down at the corners—it was a face which it will be absolutely impossible to forget, which it was impossible not to take delight in watching; it was a face from which you could not help expecting some memorable utterance.

There is a strange pathos in his criticism when he was first shown the magnificent but somewhat appalling portrait of himself painted by Mr. Herkomer, taken when he was not far from the end. "Do I really look as though I held the world so cheap?" he said. It was like a kind of recantation, a kind of protest against the opinion which held him to be so innately an unkindly man; a kind of claim to be reckoned as one of the human race whom he was popularly supposed to despise.

An impressive figure is gone from us. We cannot, without a pang, see our characteristic types pass and disappear from the gallery of life. The late Master of Trinity possessed, perhaps, a character that appealed more to the older, to the humorous than to the young, the generous, the ardent. But we shall terribly misunderstand him if we do not see that a heart beat beneath the cynical mask, that the figure inside the sardonic shrine was of pure gold.

1886.

HENRY BRADSHAW

THOSE who on that grey February day, with its pitiless east wind, straggled sadly away from the shadow of the great church where they had laid all that was mortal of their friend, must have found it hard to believe that the familiar figure would never again be seen pacing down that very walk. Day by day it used to pass along the huge white front of the Fellows' buildings, with steps short but never hurried, the broad shoulders swaying almost imperceptibly, the great head set back, and the kindly humorous eye glancing over the great buttresses that fronted him, as he clasped the well-worn note-book to his side. And the mourners felt the blank still more, because it was just on such occasions as that which they had been attending, that he knew how to render sympathy and comfort as no one else alive could do. They could some of them remember how in such moments of unutterable regret, he would come close to them with no easy words of healing, for a grief that words could not touch, but with love and sadness and mute inquiry in his eyes, would in tender demonstration take and retain a hand—and nothing more—only saying, perhaps, "I understand," and so pass on, knowing that by showing human fellowship, by suffering with you—for he made no pretence not to suffer—he had done far more than if he had pointed you to a help of which you knew already, and to a strength to which you could not yet aspire.

And thus it was that the grey-headed contemporaries of his undergraduate days wept at that vault with men young enough to have been his sons, all feeling that the earth was poorer—not only for all the learning that had descended almost unrecorded into the grave, not because of the works unfinished that no one else could dare to do, but because they had lost so much love. And not love of an ordinary kind: Henry Bradshaw loved both well and wisely—of the words and events of intercourse with him you never wished a single thing done or said otherwise. He was one of those on whom had fallen the true priestly nature. It came so naturally to him to bear others' burdens that it at last became natural for others to lay them on him; he knew that repentant recital of failures to one whom we revere is in

itself a potent absolution—and he had the true priest's tact: he did not want to set right, to give advice, but to hear what his friend had to say: how it was said was nearly as important to him as what was said; the more detailed was the difficulty or the struggle or the misadventure, the better he was pleased. "Go on," he would say, if the inquirer feared he wearied him, "tell me every thing you can: it is so *interesting*." In that word lay the secret of his influence over the young men who talked so naturally to him of all their doings—the young men that many complain it is so hard to influence. The fact is, they do not want merely sympathy—*that* they can get, and more than they want, in their home circle—where it is apt to be (they think) unintelligent sympathy—which floods but does not fill. No! what they want is to feel that their trials are *interesting*. It is the season of egoism—they are supremely interested in themselves, self-conscious. Any one who finds them interesting too will influence them.

No one is ever widely loved who has not mannerisms—those little ways and methods that stir such smiling affection, that are so eagerly consulted during life, and that wring the heart with pathos, and brim the eyes to recall, when all is over. Who that knew them well will ever forget those broad high rooms? They were on the first-floor, by the Hall, looking into the College Court in front with all its trim stillness, broken only by the drip of the falling fountain. The windows that looked that way were always bright with flowers, geranium and lobelia as I remember them. The room behind looked across a little grassy court, on the huddled high-roofed buildings of St. Catharine's, with their Flemish outline, on the left, and the huge glossy walnut in the inner court; straight in front it commanded Queen's Lane from end to end, and on the right there rose the battlemented brick towers and the quaint oaken *flèche* seen over apple trees and orchard walls—and the whole view rounded off by the high garden-elms across the river.

In the window-boxes in that room—for many years his favourite sitting-room—grew stubbly smoke-dried evergreens, cypress and lignum vitæ. On the left as you entered stood a huge serviceable deal press with innumerable drawers, on one side of which were pinned notices and invitations; to the left of the room, books, the larger at the top in a book-case, passing over the door and embedding it—a family picture or two, and some dusky oil paintings. In one corner an untenanted frame, with the glass in it, showing the wall-paper through, which he would neither take down nor get refilled. A large telescope on a stand by one of the windows—and the broad table with its rough red cloth strewn with books and papers, in orderly confusion, at which his visitor would find him sitting, with his back to the fire, writing in that broad blunt readable hand, or handling affectionately some yellow manuscript or brown clasped quarto. "How nice of you," he would say as you entered and stepped on to the square bordered carpet laid on the bare boarded floor. "I suppose you mean that I ought to get it stained," he would add with a smile, interpreting a hardly momentary glance that you gave as you crossed the threshold.

In the outer room, rarely used except in the summer, were many books and a few pictures—an original sketch by Thackeray, a bold pen-and-ink drawing of the view from the back window of the rooms—six postcards illustrated and sent him by some artistic friend on a tour, a grand piano, on which I never heard him or any one but Dr. Stanford presume to play. In this room were held the delightful Sunday evening assemblies to which friends used to drop in uninvited for tea and talk, while he would sit caressing the hand of some more favoured intimate, or dropping those wonderfully humorous sentences, sometimes caustic, had it not been for the glance with which they were accompanied, shooting through with little shafts of criticism any affectation or prejudice, any little idiosyncrasy and personal peculiarity that displayed itself in those round him, and laughing every now and then with that delightful intimate laugh, that irradiated his face. "Oh I forgot," he would say (after mentioning the name of some other undergraduate) to the young friend sitting by him, reputed to be exclusive in his social estimates—"not b.s." (best set), or, by a little gesture with his finger he would indicate the "nasus aduncus"—or on the entrance of another he would playfully hide a little gold charm which he wore on his watch chain, because the newcomer was supposed to have an aversion to it—and if the delinquent pleaded that such an aversion had never been hinted or expressed, "Oh, I like you to dislike it," he would say, "it's so characteristic."

And one special gift he had, which is indeed rare. He could rebuke and yet not give offence—for he was never an instant out of season. He could, with a little barbed speech, pierce right to the heart of some weakness, probe some secret fault that, unconsciously to its possessor, was betraying itself to others, stab a pretence or an arrogance through and through at the right moment, and yet never make the auditor dislike him. As a rule, the critic and the censor are obeyed and hated. We recognise that we are the better for the stroke, but we hate the hand that directed it. But with Henry Bradshaw it was never so: one could not feel personal resentment, though the little wound rankled long. Even those whom he emphatically did not like, with whom he was most unsparing of criticism and direct derision, did not resent it: they were uneasy under it, but anxious for his good opinion, anxious to redeem themselves in his eyes.

The conversation with him, as I remember it, was never sustained or argumentative. He did not care to sift the problems of life and being, or to hear them sifted before him—that was not the way in which life presented itself to him. He was hereditarily endowed with much of the Quietist instinct: he had not (on the surface, at least) questionings of heart and searchings of spirit. He was what can be called a life-philosopher; that is to say, he was not for ever deducing a system from faith or experience, like some restless spirits, and modifying it from day to day; he was simply acting, when it became him to act, in the way that his pure high instincts led him, and growing wiser so. And thus voluble or flashy talkers, keen, disputative, absorbed spirits, conversational dogmatists, found little to satisfy them in him: they were even apt to despise him in his greatness; and he too was uneasy in such society, he sported his door against them, he gave them no encouragement—unless, indeed, he had been their father's friend; then everything was forgiven.

In his bedroom, which latterly became his sitting-room, he kept all the Irish pamphlets which he and his father had amassed—for he was of Irish descent. It was a very characteristic room—the walls were covered to the top with bookcases, painted white, and gradually sloping away inwards as they descended, so that he could have the larger books at the top, and the smaller at the bottom. These were filled with grey and white and blue paper volumes, many unbound and dusty, tied up in masses with strings and paper of all colours; in one corner an immense heap standing high up on the floor. "I know they oughtn't to be here—they ought to be in the library," he would say, "but of course that has never been done." It was in this room, so he told us, that he used to be ceaselessly annoyed by a mouse, which began to perambulate about 2 A.M., night after night, for many weeks: night after night he would resolve, he

said, to "humour it no longer"—but night after night he would at last get up and open the door for it to go into his other room, which it instantly did, returning by some secret way to renew its wanderings the next night. "There never was such a pampered mouse," he used to say.

The rooms all through were filled with little mementoes, of which he would sometimes give us the history, from the little pictures and ornaments on the ledges and chimney-pieces, to the incongruous-looking tea-set that he used, and that formed so integral a part of the picture in *tête-à-tête* talks with him—every single piece of which was a memorial of some one. In former times he had a little toy, a model of the old Eton Long Chamber bedsteads that stood on his table. One evening a fantastic wild friend, who had been at Eton with him, was sitting with him—a man who had been miserable, hounded and persecuted through the whole of his school-life there—and, stung by a sudden thought, perhaps some barbarous association, seized this model with the tongs, and crushed it into the fire—the owner sate immovable till the holocaust was over, and then said gently, "Was that necessary?"

Nothing was more remarkable than the kind of men to be found in his rooms: any one engaged in arduous literary work of a nature involving special research we were sure to see there sooner or later. Many of the rising men in the University who knew greatness when they saw it—and not only these, but scapegraces to whom Bradshaw accorded an almost fatherly protection, "outsiders," so called, who for some venial social defect, some ungraciousness of manner, or want of refining influences, society in general had rigorously excluded—these were to be found expanding in his presence—and the strangest thing about these intimacies was a point to which many will bear testimony, that if they grew at all, they grew to include all the home circle of which his friend was a part. "All my brothers and sisters," said one who was much with him, "unknown to him before—he came to realise and love them all for themselves."

He was a wonderful instance of a man, unmethodical and dreamy by nature, made business-like by consideration for other people: his library-work was always exactly done. His own private work suffered by the rigorous self-sacrifice with which he devoted his time to the details of business: invitations and other social requirements did not come off so well. He was said frequently to neglect these. "I hardly ever go out," he used to say, though it was not for want of being asked: but it so soon got to be understood that such was his habit, and he was so welcome when he did come, though he had not announced his intention of so doing, that the delinquencies were accepted in the spirit in which they had been committed. Indeed, so great was his dislike of being forced to a decision, that it is related of him that a friend who had written to ask him to dinner, on receiving no answer, sent him two postcards, with "Yes" written on one, "No" on the other, and by return of post received them both.

When one speaks of Bradshaw's "work," it is hard to make the uninitiated quite understand either its extent, its importance, or its perfection. He knew more about printed books than any man living—he could tell at a glance the date and country, generally the town, at which a book was published. And the enormous range of this subject cannot be explained without a technical knowledge of the same. He was one of the foremost of Chaucer scholars, a very efficient linguist in range (though for reading, not speaking purposes), as, for instance, in the case of the old Breton language, which he evolved from notes and glosses, scribbled between the lines and on margins of Mass books—and his joy at the discovery of a word that he had suspected but never encountered was delightful to see. He could acquire a language for practical purposes with great rapidity—as, for instance, Armenian, which he began on a Thursday morning at Venice, and could read, so as to decipher titles for cataloguing, on Saturday night. He had a close and unrivalled knowledge of cathedral statutes and constitutions. He was an advanced student in the origins of liturgies—especially Irish—and, indeed, in the whole of Irish literature and printing he was supreme—and, finally, he was by common consent the best palæographist, or critic of the date of MSS. in the world.

The story of his adventure in the Parisian Library is worth recording here: a book had been lost for nearly a century; he went over to Paris to see if he could discover it. Search was fruitless, though there was a strong presumption as to the part of the library where it would be found. He stood in one of the classes describing its probable appearance to the librarian, and to illustrate it said, "About the height, thickness, and of similar binding to this," taking a book out of the shelves as he did so. It was the missing volume.

So too he would refer Oxford men by memory to the case and shelf of the Bodleian where they would find the book for which they had looked in vain—and most characteristic of him was the explanation which he once gave me of his enormous knowledge. "You know," he said, "I have never worked at anything for myself, except, perhaps, at Chaucer, all my life long: all the things that I do know I have stumbled across in investigating questions for other people." How much of this knowledge was merely held in solution in that amazing brain, how much was committed to paper, I do not know—of the latter, comparatively little. He had a long series of miscellaneous note-books, but most of them so technical as to be unintelligible except to one as far advanced in such knowledge as himself. His published works are but a few pamphlets.

The way in which all this work was done, all this knowledge was accumulated, was, among the other peculiarities of his genius, the most amazing. No man ever seemed to have more leisure; he would talk with perfect readiness not only on any special matter that any friend wished to consult him on, but he enjoyed trivial, leisurely gossip, and never showed impatience to continue his work, or the least desire to return to it. The secret was that he never left off. Except for rare holidays, visits to relations or foreign tours, he never left Cambridge for years. His hours were most perplexing; he would generally work very late at night, sometimes till four or five in the morning, if there was much work on hand, go to the library about eleven, return for lunch, then back to the library again, with perhaps a visit to a Board or Syndicate till tea-time—for he took no exercise except spasmodically. Then he would go into Hall, or not, as the fancy took him, on the majority of days not doing so, and tasting nothing but tea and bread-and-butter in his rooms—and then from eight o'clock he would sit there, working if uninterrupted, but with his doors generally open to welcome all intruders, ceaselessly, patiently acquiring, amassing, disintegrating the enormous mass of delicate and subtle information which not only did he never forget, but all of which he seemed to carry on the surface, and carry so lightly and easily too—for he did not appear to be erudite—he never played the *rôle* of the learned man, though with acquirements as ponderous and detailed, and to the generality of people as uninteresting, as the real or the fictitious Casaubon.

Yet this knowledge was not only of things that lay inside his own subjects, but extended to all kinds of paths that

could never have been suspected. I have never met a person so nearly omniscient. If you wanted to hear private and personal details about a man with whom you became connected in a business or official capacity, he could give them. He drew the man, or the family, or the place he lived in. I once travelled up to London with him and pointed out a great house that was gradually getting absorbed into the creeping metropolis but which still preserved its country characteristics, stately and smoke-dried. "Yes," he said, "it used to be much fresher; I used often to go there when I was a boy; it belonged to the——" and there came out a little string of old-world anecdotes and tales. Presently we passed a church (near Barnet) with an ivied tower, which had been engulfed in the town. This also I showed him. "Yes," he said, "I was christened there."

The story is almost too well-known to require repetition, of Mommsen, who said, after half-an-hour's conversation with Bradshaw on some historical *specialité*: "If I had had a shorthand writer with me, I could have got in half-an-hour's talk enough materials to have made an interesting volume." And this fabric had been ceaselessly growing and expanding, fitting itself into order and connecting itself together, ever since the early days when in the school-yard at Eton, a boy who was possessed of some bibliographical treasures saw Henry Bradshaw issue out of college, carrying two curious volumes under his arms, stealing off to some secret haunt to study them, and greeted him with: "Hullo, Bradshaw, whose books have you got there?" The only answer, delivered without a sign of confusion, in the tones which even then were more expressive in their imperturbability than most men's, "Yours."

Professor Prothero, in his Life of Henry Bradshaw, gives a rationalistic explanation of this story that I can hardly credit. He says that the books were from the School Library, and that Bradshaw's reply was meant to indicate that the volumes belonged as much to one person as another. As this explanation deprives the story of most of its point and all of its humour, I have preferred to retain it in its lighter, if more apocryphal, form—the form in which I heard it from one of Bradshaw's Eton friends. And we may here add the delightful touch with which he dismissed the claims of a celebrated forger of MSS. to have been the writer of the "Codex Sinaiticus." "I am sure if he had ever seen it, he could never have pretended to have written it," he said.

And in an instant the whole structure breaks and melts before our eyes: the knowledge gone, God knows whither: the centre of so many quiet activities, of so many dependent lives slipped from its place. However often we say to ourselves that nothing runs to waste, that hoarded experience—gathered painfully in life and seemingly only to be applied in life—thus vanishing in an instant, is hidden not gone, the blank is there. As Bradshaw himself said to a friend after a great trial that he had told him of, which seemed to have in it no wholesome flavour, to be nothing either in prospect or in retrospect, but the very root of bitterness itself, "Everything is the result of something—whether it is our own fault or not, it means something: what we have to do is to try and interpret it."

And we feel that when such a life, acting as it did so directly on others and affecting them so visibly, is cut short, there is not a sheer waste of love. And though we may be called fanciful, we seem to trace a hopeful analogy in the ease with which he renewed old intimacies, silent for a long interval—he took up the friendship where he had laid it down: there was no adjustment necessary—one became part of his life again at once, because one had never ceased to be so. Such an affection, when it has passed the veil, seems to be waiting for us still—it seems emphatically to have but gone before.

1885.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

FEW poetical writers lived more consistently in the shadow of death than Christina Rossetti. There was a certain taint of doom about her writings from the first, and something of the hollow-eyed listlessness of low vitality, that characterises the artistic work of the school to which she primarily belonged, is never absent for very long together from her writings. There is extant a portrait of her at about the age of thirty-six, by her brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, which will be familiar to many of my readers. After subtracting from it the languorous mannerism of the artist, there remains in the wide, pathetic eyes, the wistful uplifting of the eyebrows and the depressed curves of the stately mouth something dreary and uncomforted about the whole aspect. And a later photograph, which I have had the privilege of seeing, has the same regretful patience. For many years she had been an invalid, and lived a life of singular seclusion in Torrington Square, one of the dreariest and least romantic of London thoroughfares. Latterly she had been an acute sufferer from a wearing disease, borne with silent fortitude. One after another, her mother, and the two aunts to whom she devoted her tenderest care, were taken from her; and her brother William Michael, the critic and editor of Shelley, was the only survivor of the brilliant circle in which her life began. Her fervent religious faith, inspired and matured by desolate experience, had nothing dreary or undecided about it; it issued in a sedulous dutifulness and a patient devotion that were the best proof of its sincerity.

Her artistic nature developed early, and before she was seventeen, a little volume entitled *Verses by Christina Rossetti*, dedicated to her mother, was printed by her maternal grandfather, Gaetano Polidori, at his private printing-press in Regent's Park. This is now one of the rarest of bibliographical treasures. Here her precise delineation of natural objects, and a certain delicate antique charm, are distinctly observable. But in 1850, under the *nom-de-plume* of Ellen Alleyne, she contributed verses to the *Germ*, that fertile organ of the pre-Raphaelites, Holman Hunt, Thomas Woolner, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and others. Of these lyrics we shall presently have occasion to quote one, "Dreamland," which shows how early her lyrical gift had matured. And indeed it may be said that of the seven poems which she contributed to the *Germ*, at least five are among her best lyrics.

In 1862 appeared *Goblin Market and other Poems*; and in this, as is so often the case with the work of poets done before the thirty-fifth year—the year that has so often been fatal to genius—she reached the zenith of her poetical powers. Not that much of her later work was not excellent, and would have sufficed for a definite reputation; but it may be said that twenty or thirty of these earlier poems are those by which she will be best remembered.

Some writers have the power of creating a species of aerial landscape in the minds of their readers, often vague and shadowy, not obtruding itself strongly upon the consciousness, but forming a quiet background, like the scenery of portraits, in which the action of the lyric or the sonnet seems to lie. I am not now speaking of pictorial writing, which definitely aims at producing, with more or less vividness, a house, a park, a valley, but lyrics and poems of pure thought and feeling, which have none the less a haunting sense of locality in which the mood dreams itself out.

Christina Rossetti's *mise-en-scène* is a place of gardens, orchards, wooded dingles, with a churchyard in the distance. The scene shifts a little, but the spirit never wanders far afield; and it is certainly singular that one who lived out almost the whole of her life in a city so majestic, sober, and inspiriting as London, should never bring the consciousness of streets and thoroughfares and populous murmur into her writings. She, whose heart was so with birds and fruits, cornfields and farmyard sounds, never even revolts against or despairs of the huge desolation, the laborious monotony of a great town. She does not sing as a caged bird, with exotic memories of freedom stirred by the flashing water, the hanging groundsel of her wired prison, but with a wild voice, with visions only limited by the rustic conventionalities of toil and tillage. The dewy English woodland, the sharp silences of winter, the gloom of low-hung clouds, and the sigh of weeping rain are her backgrounds; and it is strange that one of Italian blood should write with no alien longings for warm and sun-dried lands. Robert Browning, who brings into sudden being by a word, the whole atmosphere of the fiery Italian summer, the terraced vines, the gnarled olive, the bulging plaster where the scorpion lies folded, still yearned for an English spring morning. But Christina Rossetti, unlike even her brother, had no leanings to the home of her race.

The critic of future ages, if he were confronted with the works of Mrs. Browning and Miss Rossetti, and a history of their lives, would, it may be said, acting on internal evidence only, assign such poems as *Aurora Leigh* and the *Casa-Guidi Windows* to Miss Rossetti, and trace the natural heart-beats which still thrilled her for the home of her origin, and equally attribute the essentially English character of Miss Rossetti's feeling to the English poetess. It is said that Miss Rossetti never visited Italy, and had no wish to do so. It is a strange thing that the two greatest of English poetesses should have, so to speak, so passionately adopted each other's country as their own.

The only point in which Christina Rossetti's imagery may be held to be tropical, is in the matters of fruit. In "Goblin Market," in the "Pageant of the Months," even in such a poem as the "Apple Gathering," and in many other poems she seems to revel in descriptions of fruit which the harsh apples and half-baked plums of English gardens can hardly have suggested. Keats is the only other English poet who had the same sensuous delight in the pulpy juiciness of summer fruit. It will be found, I think, that in the majority of English poets fruit is quite as often typical of immaturity and acidity as of cooling and delight. And even Stevenson couples the onion and the nectarine as the noblest fruits of God's creation. But the

> Plump unpecked cherries.
> Bloom down-cheeked peaches,
> Wild free-born cranberries,
> Pineapples, strawberries,
> All ripe together
> In summer weather.

are hardly the produce of the rushy glen where the leering goblin merchants tramped and whisked up and down.

This leads me to speak of another region which Christina Rossetti trode with an eager familiarity—the land of dreams and visions. With the exception of Coleridge, who, in his three great poems, moved in that difficult and turbid air with so proud a freedom, it may be said that no English poet except Christina, her brother, and James Thomson, have ever successfully attempted such work. Mr. Yeats, it is true, of younger writers, has passed beyond the threshold of that eerie and unsubstantial land; but with him it is the melancholy Celtic twilight, the home of old earth-spirits, neither high nor hopeful, but with a bewildered sadness, as of discrowned kings and discredited magicians. To a characteristically English poet such as Wordsworth, such a region, as he betrays in the memorable sonnet, "The world is too much with us," was a place of desperate soulless horror. But Christina Rossetti, in "Goblin Market," and the "Ballad of Boding," as her brother in "Rose Mary," and "Sister Helen," passed successfully along the narrow road of allegory. In English hands such subjects are apt to pass with fatal swiftness into the ludicrous and the grotesque. Witness the merry horned demons of monkish MSS., and the cheerful oddities, so far aloof from fantastic horror, of our English gurgoyles and stall-work, the straddling and padding forms of Bunyan. What is needed is a sort of twilight of the soul, a simple directness such as children value, a sense of grave verisimilitude, hopelessly alien from the business-like Puritan mind.

Then, too, there is the singular creation of the modern ballad, initiated by Coleridge, and carried to supreme perfection by D. G. Rossetti, and in a less degree by his sister; that vague, dream-laden writing which, using old forms of austere simplicity, charges them with a whole world of modern sicknesses and degenerate dreams. It was this that Matthew Arnold went so passionately in search of in a poem like the "Scholar Gipsy," and yet could contrive no inner picture of the haunted wanderer's thoughts, but only touch in the external aspects of the phantom traveller, as seen unexpectedly by human toilers and pleasure-seekers engaged in homely exercises.

But Miss Rossetti, in such poems as "Brandons Both," and in a supreme degree in the exquisite ballad of "Noble Sisters," which we will quote *in extenso*, laid a secure hand on the precise medium required:—

NOBLE SISTERS

> "Now did you mark a falcon,
> Sister dear, sister dear,
> Flying toward my window
> In the morning cool and clear?

With jingling bells about her neck.
  But what beneath her wing?
It may have been a ribbon,
  Or it may have been a ring."
    "I marked a falcon swooping
    At the break of day;
  And for your love, my sister dove,
    I 'frayed the thief away."

    "Or did you spy a ruddy hound,
    Sister fair and tall,
Went snuffing round my garden bound,
    Or crouched by my bower wall.
With a silken leash about his neck;
    But in his mouth may be
A chain of gold and silver links,
    Or a letter writ to me?"
      "I heard a hound, highborn sister,
        Stood baying at the moon;
      I rose and drove him from your wall,
        Lest you should wake too soon."

  "Or did you meet a pretty page,
  Sat swinging on the gate;
Sat whistling, whistling like a bird—
  Or may be slept too late—
With eaglets broidered on his cap,
  And eaglets on his glove?
If you had turned his pockets out,
  You had found some pledge of love."
      "I met him at this daybreak,
        Scarce the east was red;
      Lest the creaking gate should anger you,
        I packed him off to bed."

  "Oh patience, sister. Did you see
    A young man tall and strong,
  Swift-footed to uphold the right
    And to uproot the wrong,
Come home across the desolate sea
  To woo me for his wife?
And in his heart my heart is locked,
  And in his life my life."
      "I met a nameless man, sister.
        Who loitered round our door;
      I said: 'Her husband loves her much.
        And yet she loves him more.'"

"Fie, sister, fie; a wicked lie,
  A lie, a wicked lie.
I have none other love but him,
  Nor will have till I die;
And you have turned him from our door,
  And stabbed him with a lie.
I will go seek him through the world
  In sorrow till I die."
      "Go seek in sorrow, sister,
        And find in sorrow too;
      If thus you shame our father's name,
        My curse go forth with you."

But such writings, exquisite as they are, are but the outworks and bastions of the inner life. One could almost wish that Christina Rossetti were further removed by time and space, and were passed beyond the region of letters, biographies, and personal memoirs, which before long will possibly begin "to tear her heart before the crowd." Nowadays, in the excessive zest for personal information, which received such shameful incentives from Carlyle, and still more shameless encouragement from his biographers, we may thank God, as Tennyson did, that there are yet poets of whom we know as little as we know of Shakespeare, about whom even the utmost diligence of researchers has disinterred but a handful of sordid and humiliating facts.

But Miss Rossetti's poems are so passionately human a document as to set one tracing by a sort of inevitable instinct the secrets of a buoyant and tender soul, sharpened and refined by blow after blow of harsh discipline. The same autobiographical savour haunts all her work as haunted the eager dramas of Charlotte Brontë, the first of women-writers of every age. Step by step it reveals itself, the sad and stately development of this august soul. The first tremulous outlook upon the intolerable loveliness of life, the fantastic melancholy of youth, the deep desire of love, the drawing nearer of the veiled star, disappointment, disillusionment, the over-powering rush of the melancholy, that had waited like a beast in ambush for moments of lassitude and reaction. Then was the crisis: would the wounded life creep on on a broken wing, or would the spiritual vitality suffice to fill the intolerable void? It did suffice; and the strength of the character that thus found repose was attested by the rational and temperate form of faith that ministered to the failing soul.

At such a moment the sensuous spirit is apt to slide into the luxurious self-surrender that Roman Catholicism permits. To me, indeed, it is a matter of profound surprise that Miss Rossetti did not fall into this temptation; but just

as she had, with instinctive moderation, chosen the cool and temperate landscape of her adopted country, so the National Church of England, with its decorous moderation, its liberal generosity, its refined ardour, was the chosen home of this austere spirit. The other danger to be feared was that of a bitter renunciation of old delights, a sojourn in the wilderness of some arid and fantastic pietism. An elder sister of Miss Rossetti's indeed sought the elaborate seclusion of a religious house; and had D. G. Rossetti—to use the uncouth Puritan phrase—"found religion," there is no doubt that he too would have reverted to the Church of his fathers. But Miss Rossetti became, as Mr. Edmund Gosse has, in a penetrating criticism in the *Century Magazine* (June 1893) pointed out, the poetess, not of Protestantism, but of Anglicanism.

We must retrace our steps for a moment, and touch first on Miss Rossetti's love lyrics. Very occasionally she allowed herself, in the early days, to speak of love with the generous abandon of an ardent spirit, as in the exquisite lyric where she still lingers in the pictorial splendours of the pre-Raphaelite school.

A BIRTHDAY.

My heart is like a singing bird
  Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
  Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
  That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these,
  Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a daïs of silk and down;
  Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates
  And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work in it gold and silver grapes,
  In leaves and silver fleur-de-lys;
Because the birthday of my life
  Is come, my love is come to me.

But, as a rule, her thoughts of love are clouded by some dark sense of loss, of having missed the satisfaction that the hungering soul might claim. Take two sonnets:

REMEMBER.

Remember me when I am gone away,
    Gone far away into the silent land,
    When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go, yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
    You tell me of our future that you planned;
    Only remember me. You understand,
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet, if you should forget me for a while,
    And afterwards remember, do not grieve;
    For if the darkness and corruption leave
    A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile,
    Than that you should remember and be sad.

AFTER DEATH.

The curtains were half-drawn, the floor was swept
    And strewn with rushes; rosemary and may
    Lay thick upon the bed on which I lay,
Where through the lattice ivy-shadows crept.
He leaned above me, thinking that I slept
    And could not hear him; but I heard him say,
    "Poor child, poor child!" and as he turned away
Came a deep silence, and I knew he wept.
He did not touch the shroud, or raise the fold
  That hid my face, or take my hand in his,
    Or ruffle the smooth pillows for my head.
    He did not love me living; but once dead
  He pitied me; and very sweet it is
To know he still is warm, though I am cold.

In these sonnets the veil of some pathetic possibility unfulfilled is drawn reverently aside, and the soul-history is written in plain characters. But again the poet is more reticent; and only in sad allusions, incessantly recurring, in unhappy hints, she reveals the hunger of the spirit, the hand that was held out in hope for the heavenly bread, and closed upon a stone. After this the mood becomes one of reluctant certainty, with little bitterness or recrimination; the surrender is accepted, but the thought of what might have been is for ever present.

Then, as in some desolate estuary, the tide begins to set strongly in from the vast and wholesome sea. Sometimes a stoic note is struck of pure desolation, as in the noble lyric;—

UP-HILL.

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
  Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?

From morn to night, my friend.

But is there for the night a resting-place,
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin?
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.

Shall I meet other wayfarers at night,
Those who have gone before?
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
They will not keep you standing at that door.

Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
Of labour you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yea, beds for all who come.

But this bitterness is not enduring. From the first, even in what we may call her Pagan days, the sense of responsibility and deliberate choice had been hers. We venture to quote the noble allegory, "A Triad," omitted, in some vigorous revulsion of spirit, from her later writings:

Three sang of love together, one with lips
Crimson, with cheeks and bosom in a glow,
Flushed to the yellow hair and finger tips;
And one there sang who, soft and smooth as snow,
Bloomed like a tinted hyacinth at a show;
And one was blue with famine after love,
Who, like a harpstring snapped, rang harsh and low
The burden of what those were singing of.
One shamed herself in love; one temperately
Grew gross in soulless love, a sluggish wife;
One famished, died for love. Thus two of three
Took death for love, and won him after strife.
One droned in sweetness like a fattened bee;
All on the threshold, yet all short of life.

Into the service, then, of her religion, Miss Rossetti brought all the passionate fervour of her unsatisfied heart, all her intense enthusiasm after art, and passed steadily, we believe, to the forefront of all English religious poetry. She had not, perhaps, the curious felicity of George Herbert, but, on the other hand, she had the balanced simplicity that stepped clear of his elaborate conceit, the desperate euphuism of Crashaw, and even the pathetic refinement of Henry Vaughan. Again, her passionate imagery put her ahead of the soft beauty of Keble, too apt to degenerate into a honied domesticity; above the pensive richness of Charles Wesley, whose Puritan outlook made his hand unsure; above even the divine ardour of Newman, whose technical dogmatism and paucity of human experience limited his range. With Miss Rossetti it was as the strong man armed, in the Gospel parable. When the stronger victor came, the spoil was annexed, and the ancient pride of defence was applied by a more dexterous hand. Can there be found in the rank of English religious poetry two more majestic lyrics than

A BETTER RESURRECTION.

I have no wit, no words, no tears;
My heart within me like a stone
Is numbed too much for hopes or fears.
Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
I lift mine eyes, but, dimmed with grief,
No everlasting hills I see;
My life is in the falling leaf.
O Jesus, quicken me.

My life is like a faded leaf,
My harvest dwindled to a husk;
Truly my life is void and brief
And tedious in the barren dusk.
My life is like a frozen thing,
No bud nor greenness can I see.
Yet rise it shall—the sap of spring.
O Jesus, rise in me.

My life is like a broken bowl,
A broken bowl that cannot hold
One drop of water for my soul
Or cordial in the searching cold.
Cast in the fire the perished thing;
Melt and remould it, till it be
A royal cup for Him, my King.
O Jesus, drink of me.

Or the third of the "Old and New Year Ditties?"

Passing away, saith the World, passing away;
Chances, beauty, and youth sapped day by day;
Thy life never continueth in one stay,
Is the eye waxen dim, is the dark hair changing to grey
That hath won neither laurel nor bay?
I shall clothe myself in Spring and bud in May;

Thou, root-stricken, shall not rebuild thy decay
On my bosom for aye.
Then I answered, Yea.

Passing away, saith my Soul, passing away,
With its burden of fear and hope, of labour and play.
Hearken what the past doth witness and say:
Rust in thy gold, a moth is in thine array,
A canker is in thy bud, thy leaf must decay.
At midnight, at cockcrow, at morning, one certain day,
Lo! the Bridegroom shall come and shall not delay;
Watch, thou, and pray.
Then I answered, Yea.

Passing away, saith my God, passing away;
Winter passeth after the long delay;
New grapes on the vine, new figs on the tender spray,
Turtle calleth turtle in Heaven's May.
Though I tarry, wait for Me, trust Me, watch and pray,
Arise, come away, night is past, and lo! it is day,
My love, My sister, My spouse, thou shalt hear Me say.
Then I answered, Yea.

The last-mentioned poem is indeed worthy of a technical remark. It is written in an irregular dactylic metre, the longer lines having a beat of five accents, the shorter of three or two; but the whole scheme of rhyme, all three stanzas—a common form with Miss Rossetti—is actually built upon one single rhyme throughout. For such a conception one would be inclined to predicate certain failure; the simplicity is too rude and daring; but consider the result. For sheer simplicity again note her "Christmas Carol":

In the bleak mid-winter
  Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
  Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
  Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter,
  Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him,
  Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away,
  When He comes to reign.
In the bleak mid-winter
  A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
  Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him whom cherubim
  Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
  And a mangerful of hay.
Enough for Him whom angels
  Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
  Which adore.

Angels and archangels
  May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
  Throng'd the air,
But only His mother,
  In her maiden bliss.
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
  Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
  I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise man,
  I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him?
  Give my heart.

which, from beginning to end, has the very note of a Tuscan Adoration.

This exquisite felicity did not continue. It could not be expected that it should. Miss Rossetti had always been capable in her writings of complete and unexpected failures; in many of her lyrics everything is there—style, feeling, harmony, but somehow the mood does not quicken into poetry. In later life she published an immense volume, the *Face of the Deep*, extending to over 550 pages, a devotional commentary on the "Apocalypse." This is written in uncouth and shapeless prose, as a rule; and though it has many suggestive and striking thoughts, and some images of exquisite beauty, yet it is a singular monument of failure. Scattered up and down in it are several hundred religious lyrics, which are never exactly commonplace, but seldom satisfactory. I venture to quote one, which may

serve as a fair sample, p. 119, chap. iii. v. 10:

Wisest of sparrows, that sparrow which sitteth alone
  Perched on the housetop, its own upper chamber, for nest.
Wisest of swallows, that swallow which timely hath flown
  Over the turbulent sea to the land of its rest;
    Wisest of sparrows and swallows, if I were as wise!

Wisest of spirits, that spirit which dwelleth apart,
  Hid in the Presence of God for a chapel and nest,
Sending a wish and a will and a passionate heart
  Over the eddy of life to that Presence in rest,
    Seated alone and in peace till God bids it arise.

One word must, perhaps, be said here on the question of her technical skill and metrical handling. With characteristic humility, she was herself of opinion, as appears from a letter to Mr. Gosse, that the inspiration of her sonnets was wholly derived from her brother. That was an entire, if affectionate, mistake. There is no real or even apparent connection. There is none of the intricate scheming, the subtle inter-weaving of tremulous tones which make D. G. Rossetti's sonnets the most musical of English sonnets. But the consequence is that Dante Gabriel's sonnets are not in the least characteristically English. The sonnets of Milton and Wordsworth may be regarded as the true examples of English sonnet-writing, stiff, grave, sober, drawing through precise and even stilted metres to a sonorous and rhetorical close. D. G. Rossetti's are exotic work essentially. But that is not true of Miss Rossetti's. They are simple and severe. In such a sequence as "Monna Innominata," there is not a trace of the luscious and labyrinthine ecstacies of her brother's work; they are indeed far more like Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

Trust me, I have not earned your dear rebuke;
I love, as you would have me, God the most;
Would lose not Him, but you, must one be lost;
Nor with Lot's wife cast back a faithless look,
Unready to forego what I forsook.

This say I, having counted up the cost.
This, though I be the feeblest of God's host,
The sorriest sheep Christ shepherds with His crook.
Yet while I love my God the most, I deem
That I can never love you overmuch;
I love Him more, so let me love you too;
Yea, as I apprehend it, love is such,
I cannot love you if I love not Him,
I cannot love Him if I love not you.

This severity is not the same in her lyrics; it will be obvious from the specimens already quoted, that, if anything, the metrical scheme is not strict enough. In many lines will be found a deficiency of syllables, musically compensated for by variety of accent; many of her rhymes are almost licentious in their vagueness. But for some reason I have found that they do not offend the critical judgment, as Mrs. Browning's do. Whether it is that the directness and simplicity of the feeling overpowers all minute fastidiousness, or whether they are all part of the careful artlessness of the mood, is hard to determine. But the fact remains, that none but the most inquisitive of critics would be likely to hold that the art is thereby vitiated.

Lastly, of all the great themes with which Miss Rossetti deals, she is, above all writers, the singer of Death. Whether as the eternal home-coming, or the quiet relief after the intolerable restlessness of the world, or as the deep reality in which the fretful vanities of life are merged, it is always in view, as the dark majestic portal to which the weary road winds at last. True, in one of the earliest and most beautiful of all her lyrics, the sense of dissatisfied loneliness is carried on beyond the gate of Death.

AT HOME.

When I was dead, my spirit turned
  To seek the much-frequented house;
I passed the door, and saw my friends
  Feasting beneath green orange boughs;
From hand to hand they pushed the wine,
  They sucked the pulp of plum and peach;
They sang, they jested, and they laughed,
  For each was loved of each.

I listened to their honest chat.
  Said one: "To-morrow we shall be
Plod, plod along the featureless sands,
  And coasting miles and miles of sea."
Said one: "Before the turn of tide,
  We will achieve the eyrie-seat."
Said one; "To-morrow shall be like
  To-day, but much more sweet."

"To-morrow," said they, strong with hope.
  And dwelt upon the pleasant way.
"To-morrow," cried they one and all,
  While no one spoke of yesterday.
Their life stood full at blessed noon;
  I, only I, had passed away.
"To-morrow and to-day," they cried;

I was of yesterday.

I shivered comfortless, but cast
No chill across the tablecloth;
I all-forgotten shivered, sad
To stay and yet to part how loth.
I passed from the familiar room,
I, who from love had passed away.
Like the remembrance of a guest
That tarrieth but a day.

But, if we can but read into it the hallowing radiance of a tremulous hope, the poem, which as Ellen Alleyne she contributed to the Germ in the days of her unregenerate energies, may be her requiem now:

DREAM LAND.

Where sunless rivers weep
Their waves into the deep,
She sleeps a charmed sleep
Awake her not.
Led by a single star.
She came from very far
To seek where shadows are
Her pleasant lot.

She left the rosy morn,
She left the fields of corn.
For twilight cold and lorn
And water springs.
Through sleep, as through a veil,
She sees the sky look pale,
And hears the nightingale
That sadly sings.

Rest, rest, a perfect rest
Shed over brow and breast;
Her face is toward the west,
The purple land.
She cannot see the grain
Ripening on hill and plain;
She cannot feel the rain
Upon her hand.

Rest, rest, for evermore
Upon a mossy shore;
Rest, rest, at the heart's core
Till time shall cease.
Sleep that no pain shall wake;
Night that no morn shall break
Till joy shall overtake
Her perfect peace.

1895.

THE POETRY OF EDMUND GOSSE

IT happened the other day, in the library of a remote house, that I lighted upon a shelf of old *Blackwoods*, from fifty to sixty years old, and, being confined to the house by wet weather, read largely in them. Christopher North was at his glory then, with his flagrant egotism and stupid bellowings. But what struck me most in the old pages was that, with all his loud Philistinism, he was penetrated with a profound respect for poetry. It is hardly too much to say that poetry was the staple product of the magazine. Almost every number contained long, nightmare poems in Cowperian blank verse by Delta or some other tedious unknown. Mrs. Hemans fluted monotonously. Almost every number, too, contained an article of poetical criticism; even the terrible *Noctes Ambrosianæ* are full of low verses. All this contrasted sharply, I will not say painfully, with modern tendencies. I do not think we are less wanting in respect for really great poetry now, but there is a large class of persons writing verses now which for feeling, expression, and execution beat Delta and Christopher North's favourites out of the field. At the same time, the minor poet is the perennial gibe of the journalist, who would have us believe that the only audience that exists for these amiable singers are themselves. And this is not impossibly the case. But all who take a serious and hopeful view of literature will believe that there are shadowy instincts in the human heart which even journalism cannot satisfy, and the large class of persons—youthful, perhaps, and, as Praed says, "so thankful for illusion"—which the earth is constantly producing, will continue to be grateful to any one who "from the soul speaks instant to the soul."

But between the greater and the lesser lights there are a few living poets who, without captivating an unwilling

public, have, at least, extorted a recognition from it: those gentlemen whom the *Westminster Budget* not long ago represented in a genial caricature as trying the effect of a laurel wreath on their more or less scanty locks before a mirror. And one of these was Mr. Gosse. His poetical work extends over a period of some five-and-twenty years. His first book, *On Viol and Flute*, written when the author was hardly out of his teens, was instantly welcomed by the critics as an offshoot of the Rossetti school, but untainted by any of the uncomfortable irregularities of that fellowship. Since then he has produced *New Poems; Firdausi in Exile and Other Poems; King Erik*, a literary tragedy; while, last of all, there appeared, in 1894, a volume entitled *In Russet and Silver*. This essay will treat exclusively of Mr. Gosse's poetical work, although the present writer may freely confess his conviction that Mr. Gosse's true vehicle, in which he works more spontaneously, is melodious and amusing prose.

The first point that strikes any careful and critical reader of the volumes I have mentioned is the steady and virile progress that the art of the writer compasses. *On Viol and Flute* was a graceful, tender volume, of sensuous and picturesque, but essentially superficial verse. In *New Poems* a certain philosophy, epicurean in tone, began to shape itself. In *Firdausi in Exile* there is a strong and manly note audible. Finally, in *In Russet and Silver* the tumultuous impulse is over, and the poet looks out with a serious resignation backwards over a life of genial effort and happy love, and forwards over a gentle sunset slope. *King Erik* lies apart from the rest, and will be considered separately.

In Mr. Gosse's graceful ode, "The Gifts of the Muses," the goddesses of song take away from Daphnis his beechwood flute and give him an ivory lyre, with which, at the cost of secret sorrow, he charms the ears of the world. But his last prayer to Apollo is that he may have his flute again before he dies. Mr. Gosse is like Daphnis in his preference for the homely flute. The ivory lyre, "the sorrowful great gift," as Mrs. Browning calls it, he has not chosen. His graceful, melodious verse, flawless in construction, delicate in form, does not anywhere show signs of passionate conviction or imperious stress; it has none of the "perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart." Intensity there is, but it is the intensity of enjoyment; Mr. Gosse's poems are full of the spirit of the sunlit wood, the breezy headland, the fragrant garden-walks at dusk; they are full of the cheerful felicity that plays about the wholesome energies of life, the happy love of wife and child, inspiriting talk, leisurely sessions in warm orchards, or libraries full of books. Mr. Gosse has the active love of nature intensified by the confinement of town life. He has inherited the eager instinct of the naturalist, and his studies of woodland things are produced with the eye on the object, or, better still, from loving and accurate recollection. There is nothing vague in his transcripts from sea or wood: the broken imitative music of the white-throat, the yellow water-lily stealing up to daylight through the dim pool, the beetle with his jewelled wing-cases, the bright crest of the swooping wood-chat, the whispering of the rain upon the leaves, the mist flooding the orchard, all these are touched with that swift intuition which comes from patient watchfulness.

Mr. Gosse's muse is fond of masquerading—and she does it very gracefully, too—in a classical dress. In such poems as the "Suppliant" he catches the very spirit, the unadorned sweetness, of the Greek Anthology. But this classical flavour belongs essentially to his earlier work. Mr. Gosse has within himself the untainted Greek spirit, and has grown to feel more and more, I venture to believe, that there is no need to shift his readers to an earlier age and a sunnier scenery: that the ardent natural sense of enjoyment, without morbidity even in its sadness, which is the essence of Greek feeling, needs no setting to declare itself. It can exist in London smoke, on the promontory with its short turf, in the Devonshire orchard. If this be so, the instinct which has led him gradually to abjure the earlier forms is a true one.

Of the poems which have a philosophical motive—not a numerous class—we may take "Verdleigh Coppice" (*New Poems*, p. 74) as a type. It is a sensitive description of the horror that creeps over even the most thoughtless heart on realising that below the surface of nature in her most peaceful moods lies a whole world of death and strife. But this leads to no Puritan or melancholy conclusion. "I learn," he says, in the exquisite stanza with which the poem concludes,

> I learn 'tis best in all things to hold living very lightly,
> Taste the perfumes of the fir-wood, but not linger there too long,
> Lest the mazes of the forest lead to foulnesses unsightly,
> And a haunting horror clash upon the night-bird's liquid song.

Mr. Gosse's latest volume, *In Russet and Silver*, shows, as we have said, the true and gentle development of this happy philosophy. From end to end it breathes the genial resignation of one who feels a happy youth depart with promise of calm and gracious hours to come. But at the same time, as far as poetical power goes, it is incomparably stronger than any of the author's previous work. The noble dedication to "Tusitala in Vailima" (Mr. R. L. Stevenson in Samoa) is the high-water mark of Mr. Gosse's genius. The haunting melody of this poem, its serene and equable sweep, exalt the writer among his contemporaries; although for ardent feeling and pure workmanship the idyll entitled "A Tragedy without Words" ranks nearly as high.

But we must pass to the technical consideration of Mr. Gosse's art.

In the first place, he is singularly free from mannerism, and his style has clarified itself every year. It would be difficult for the most ingenious imitator to produce a poem which should be indisputably in Mr. Gosse's manner. There is an equable lucidity about his expression; it is never necessary to pause in order to adjust the sense of a passage. Robert Browning, perhaps, of contemporary poets, presents the most acute contrast to Mr. Gosse. Browning's style may be compared to a Swiss pasture, where the green meadows which form the foreground of a sublime landscape are yet cumbered with awkward blocks and boulders—things not without a certain rough dignity of their own, but essentially out of place. Mr. Gosse's poems, on the other hand, are like trim meadow-lands, with wealth of wood and water, where the pilgrim can linger without fear of obstacles or catastrophes.

Another salient characteristic of Mr. Gosse is the entire absence of errors of taste. There is nothing that can jar on the most sensitive reader either in feeling or expression; and in this he may be called somewhat of a reactionary when compared with the tendency of much modern poetry. There is, moreover, a sweetness and simplicity about his handling both of metre and rhyme which never degenerates into commonplace, and yet is never affected. The only trace of affectation, indeed, is in a certain dabbling, in earlier work, with names of jewels such as "chrysoprase," and

plants such as "euphrasy" and "agrimony." It may be doubted whether such names—for the introduction of which into our poetry Mrs. Browning is largely responsible—ever succeed in giving true or accurate vividness to a picture, for the simple reason that most readers, and, we fear, many writers, have no idea what jewel or flower is intended.

Lastly, in the difficult matter of epithets Mr. Gosse is a master. Nowadays, when all ordinary combinations of adjectives and nouns have been employed in poetry, the poet must give special attention to epithets which shall arrest and please, shall be, in fact, almost paradoxical at first sight, yet shall justify themselves on examination. And here Mr. Gosse is singularly successful; without multiplying instances, let any reader judicially examine the two poems mentioned above, in *In Russet and Silver*, where experiment in epithet is carried to the verge of daring, and say whether the adjectives do not drop into their places in a predestined fashion, like the swans which Virgil describes settling in the marsh:—"Aut capere, aut captas jam despectare videntur."

It will be as well to give a few phrases and expressions, taken at random from the various volumes, to illustrate the elaborate felicity of phrase and epithet which are characteristic of the patient art of Mr. Gosse. We have the "boisterous bee," the "velvet darkness of the pines," the "horizon's primrose bar," the "night and her innumerable eyes" the "hushed elbow of the reedy leas" where the heron finds peace, the "bales of solid sleep" in which the opium is packed, the loadstone cliff at which "the fluttering magnets leap with lying poles," the "tight curls closing like the marigold," of the young athlete, the eye of the woodman that flickers "keen as the flashing of a snipe through beds of windless rushes." The poet passes the charcoal-burner's hut and says: "I love to watch the pale blue spire His scented labour builds above it." In the June garden he notes "how spring and summer flowers arrange Their aromatic interchange." He hears "the small hushed cry of crisp dry life The terebinth gives beneath the graver's knife." To the pushing iris he cries, "What news from hollow worlds beneath?" He sees, on a Provençal coast, "Where now the prickly cactus gibes and crawls Down towards cold waves from firm rock-battlements." He watches the expiring light: "As ceases in a lamp at break of day The fragrant remnant of memorial flame." He hears in passing "Joybells of some exuberant town at play." He indicates in a stroke of rare insight the characteristic failure of the melancholy Obermann, his "high lassitude," and for a delicate simile what could be more perfect than the following:—

> As on the pale white peacock we discern
> The pencilled shadows of the rainbow dyes
> And coloured moons that on her sisters burn.

All this is the purest literary workmanship. There is nothing of the impressionist here. There is no dim vagueness, but the effect is noted and carefully transferred to words of infinite associations. The possible weakness of this delicate minuteness is that here and there in a moment of strenuous action, when the march of the poem ought to proceed with swift directness, the glancing eye is apt to turn aside or lose itself in detail. One small instance will be enough of a tendency that is as a rule successfully combated. In the "Cruise of the Rover," in the heat of movement, when the young English sailors after their desperate fight are being dragged to judgment, drink is given them from "a great cool earthen firkin." Now this is just such a detail as no one at such a moment should have had leisure or inclination to note, and this is the fault of the literary method. In meditative poems, in transcripts from nature, the more sensitive the eye is to external impressions the more intimate and lucid will the emotion be. But not in the ballad, not in the poem of action and life. And this is true of such narratives as the "Island of the Blest" and the "Death of Arnkel," where detail is almost too tyrannous, closely and vividly sketched as it is.

In the former poem such descriptions as that of the Island itself may be noted for their proportion:—

> And now beneath the magic Isle we came:
> Full of fair havens was it, blue and wide
> With iron promontories, fit to tame
> The wildest storm and make a calm inside,
> Where gentlest birds might plume themselves and ride.
>
> White cities nestled under every hill,
> Stretching their marble feet to touch the tide,
> And shallops driven by more than mortal skill
> Meandered here and there, or cleft the wave at will.
>
> Down coverts, thick with cedar and with pine,
> Sonorous waters dropt their silver shafts.

This is the perfection of stately narrative. But when the mariners are led away for trial in "quaint procession" and "bound three by three in chaplets of wild rose," we pass into a region of whimsical fantasy, into which a true narrative poet like William Morris has no tendency to err.

Firdausi in Exile is a story well told, and is the best narrative poem by Mr. Gosse. Yet even this leaves us convinced that he is pre-eminently a lyric poet, the singer of a swift and passing mood; he has none of the sustained energy of the epic poet, nor the penetrating psychology of the dramatist.

The tragedy of *King Erik*, as Mr. Theodore Watts points out in the admirable critical note which is prefixed to the later edition, is not an acting play; the essence of an acting play is that it should pass firmly from situation to situation. But there is a further defect than even that. From a literary point of view, the images, the metre, the language are skilfully enough handled but the characters lack consistent vitality. King Erik passes from being an elevated, almost superior philosopher into an outrageous Othello, in a manner which, though possibly lifelike, is inconsistent with the dignity of his professions; he is not sincere in his utterances, if his jealousy is so easily awakened and so hardly allayed. And there is a similar want of humanity in many of the characters. Botilda is too mild and tactless, Grimur too amorous, Adalbjörg too venomous. They do not seem to betray their characters so much as to be always keeping them in view. But after all, if Mr. Gosse's dramatic muse is too statuesque, why so are Mr. Swinburne's and Mr. Bridges', and the literary instinct can extract a continuous pleasure from the mellow sequence of line upon line.

As a specimen of pictorial art, fading softly into visionary dreams, we would select a very perfect lyric from Mr.

Gosse's latest book entitled "Circling Fancies." The poet sits at night by the open window, under the acacia which scents the air, with a lighted lamp, to which the gauzy summer flies come thronging.

Around this tree the floating flies
  Weave their mysterious webs of light;
The scent of my acacia lies
  Within the circle of their flight:
  They never perch, nor drop from sight,
But, flashing, wheel in curves of air,
  As if the perfume's warm delight
In magic bondage held them there.

I watch them till I half confound
  Their motions with these thoughts of mine,
That no less subtle bonds have bound
  Within a viewless ring divine;
  Clasped by a chain that makes no sign.
My hopes and wheeling fancies live:
  Desires, like odours, still confine
The heart that else were fugitive.

The poem of "Tusitala" records Mr. Gosse's first meeting with Mr. R. L. Stevenson, four-and-twenty years ago, on a Scotch steamer. He goes on to speak of the novelist's growing fame, the train of suffering that conducted him to glory, his exile in the "ethereal musky highlands" of Samoa, "till," he says, "we almost deem'd you vanished."

Vanish'd? ay, that's still the trouble,
  Tusitala!
Though your tropic isle rejoices,
'Tis to us an Isle of Voices
Hollow like the elfin double
Cry of disembodied echoes,
Or an owlet's wicked laughter,
Or the cold and hornèd gecko's
Croaking from a ruined rafter,—
  * * * *
You are circled, as by magic,
In a surf-built palmy bubble,
  Tusitala;
Fate hath chosen, but the choice is
Half delectable, half tragic,
For we hear you speak, like Moses,
And we greet you back enchanted,
But reply's no sooner granted
Then the rifted cloudland closes.

But the poem must be read in its entirety to give an idea of the delicate melody, the haunting pathos of the strain. It is a poem above praise.

Classification in poetry is a fruitless task, and it is impossible to do a poet a greater wrong than unnecessarily to seal him of a certain tribe; he must be *sui generis*; many writers can imitate with singular felicity; Owen Meredith wrote lines which, if they had been written by Tennyson, would have been reckoned among his sweetest, but they were Owen Meredith and not Tennyson. So Mr. Stevenson in prose is responsible for a knot of ventriloquists who seem to speak with the authentic voice; the hands are the hands of Esau and the utterance is only not Esau's too.

Mr. Gosse is an obsequious follower of none. He has little in common with our pre-eminent lyric lord, Mr. Swinburne; Mr. Swinburne is a rhapsodist, who has made such stately and exhaustive use of the rare dactylic element in English that it is hard to see how any dactylic poetry should in future be cast in any different mould. Mr. Morris is *raconteur* first; his ancient tales create their form, and ornament is accessory to narrative. These are the two great planets of our firmament, but there are other stars of brilliant and individual fire.

Mr. Austin Dobson is the soul of exquisite *finesse*, but the fine, careless rapture he does not claim. Mr. Kipling comes like an explorer laden with strange spoils from an unvisited land, but whether any one may tread in his footsteps is uncertain; it is uncertain, too, whether he has triumphed over or through his environment, and Mr. Gosse has little in common, save his generous admiration, with a poet starred and crowned with gems that all the world before him had conspired to cheapen. Mr. Stevenson, in poetic quality among the greatest, is reticent and will not speak—poignant sincerity is perhaps his most moving characteristic; Mr. Patmore strikes an old, full-flavoured note, in the region of happy homely courtesies—though in the "Unknown Eros" he has once or twice fused the precision of George Herbert with the dignity of Gray. But Mr. Gosse, the Epicurean in the House, would haunt the library rather than the dining-room.

Mr. George Meredith in his gorgeous lyrics strikes the nail too often and too hard, until he dints the panelling. Could he only hold his hand! On any given subject he will breed you a round dozen of stanzas, large and over-ripe, to one more acid berry. Mr. Bridges, the sober, majestic lyrist, with his grave russet effects, his almost stilted dignity, is the one writer, next to the two fixed stars, to whom we are disposed to give unstinted praise for his solemn reticence, his strong, full music; and to him Mr. Gosse must yield the palm in verse; Mr. Bridges has behind him the force of woodland seclusion and the unique devotion of a strong spirit to a slender art, while Mr. Gosse has social claims, artistic and literary criticism, poetical and historical exegesis, and almost unrivalled biographical gifts to drain his spirit. Mr. Watson in his best poetical work is the sublimation of the philosophical critic of poets. For Matthew Arnold, Shelley, Tennyson, Wordsworth, he has done, we think, what Milton did for "Lycidas," and it is impossible to believe that such cool and spacious writing can ever be superseded. Mr. Austin, like Mr. Gosse, is penetrated with Virgil's "inglorious passion for stream and wood." Mr. Aubrey de Vere is the poet of secluded grace,

monastic thrills; Lord De Tabley goes to and fro, like Circe, before his stately loom: Mr. Lang is as his own porcelain, foam frozen into crystal. Among younger writers, Mr. Le Gallienne has the elfish voice of a spirit, airy, whimsical, but full of rapturous phrases; Mr. Yeats the eerie wailing of the winds in a haunted Celtic twilight; yet of these two, so essentially spiritual, it is hard to predict anything—like the wind, their prototype, they blow whither and whence they will. But these both are, so to speak, on the tree-tops, while Mr. Gosse treads the earth. Mr. Henley, again, in some of his vehement, rough lyrics, reaches a poignant fervour of which our graceful bard knows nothing. Lastly, among the undoubted chiefs of song, must be mentioned Miss Rossetti, with whose tender, remorseful, almost conventual outlook Mr. Gosse has no common fibre. No greater contrast could indeed be devised, for Miss Rossetti is at heart a *dévote* and Mr. Gosse a pagan.

It is hard to speak of Mr. Gosse only as a poet without reference to his prose writings, where, indeed, he displays even a more subtle mastery of his art. But we should characterise him as a delicate, impassioned singer of some of the sweetest moods of life. In the fiercer and darker regions of the soul he does not love to linger; in his passion he is, so to speak, anchored safely to life—he is not whirled away in the eddies of elemental seas, with the wild energy that we see, for instance, in Charlotte Brontë's work. In the utmost abandonment of love or sorrow he is conscious of the red moon in the poplar, and the subtle scent of briar and honeysuckle; his feet are on the earth, and almost the deepest pang that he feels is when his jaded senses refuse to respond to the thrill that earth and sky are wont to awaken in him. With man in the abstract he has little sympathy; in the individual the keenest and most intimate delight. He is not the poet of movements; he has no wish to transcribe in verse the economical solutions of poverty. And, lastly, he resolutely lives in a region of sensuous, though pure, delight; he turns aside into the glade when the tainted air warns him that he is near some difficult horror on which he would not gaze. He has none of the impulse of the philosophers to see life steadily and see it whole, and if there is any note of timidity in the poems, we should ascribe it to the author having shunned, or rather missed, *the descent into hell* which we are inclined to believe necessary for the highest artistic development. Each poet, each man, has his own hell, in which some brief sojourn is necessary if he is to test the seriousness of life and art. Mr. Gosse gives us no hint that this article is included in his creed; we cannot wish that he should be forced to include it, but we say that it is the conscious lack of this experience alone which has kept him from laying claim to the highest glories of song. Delicacy rather than intensity, that is the keynote of his lyrics.

In an exquisite epistle lately addressed by Mr. Austin Dobson to Mr. Gosse, he speaks of himself and his friend as moving in the procession of art "where is not first nor last." "At least," he claims, "we have handed on the fire." We dare not expect all things from each man; but to have made some exquisite mood your own, and to have presented it with passionate accuracy, is no light achievement.

1894.

EPILOGUE

LITERATURE, so long as it be idealistic, is the anodyne of the spirit, the mother of faith, the nurse of hope! Literature records and criticises, but does not make history: as we grow older we have to recognise, slowly and sadly, the fact that the world is profoundly incomplete. The more that we can keep our eyes from a vain attempt to plumb the abyss, the more useful, practical, hopeful we become. And literature, like society, athletics, politics, is one of the devices we resort to, to hide from ourselves the horror of the gap. But the only true consolation is our faith in the incompleteness of the world as we see it, and in the ultimate completeness of the Divine plan. Realistic literature can never help us to this faith: it can only plunge us deeper in the mire—deeper in fact than we need be plunged, because realism deludes us into accepting as typical what is only abnormal.

The Realist is a man who stands beside a drag-net that is being slowly hauled ashore. He picks up and handles, not without a sickly creep of horror, the viscous fleshy things, clammy polypi, bulging, translucent cucumber-objects smelling of the peevish brine. They are struggling, heaving, dying; on them, on these creatures of the silent, moving sea, settles the nauseating faintness of the unsubstantial air. Such pleasure as they give him is horrible, physiological, almost obscene.

But the Idealist, to use an exquisite simile of Mr. Henry James' in "The Middle Years," is the man who visits "the great glazed tank of art." There in the vivarium, through the glimmering panes, under the loops and lines of light, and among the bursting bubbles, on the dim sand, in dusky corners, on jutting shelves of the rock, the strange sea-monsters, all humps and horns, lie at their ease. Strange they are and horrible; but it is a cleanly, a spectacular horror. They are quiet, they are at home. They twiddle their mandibles, they rise and walk, with clumsy groping motions. But there is no vile invasion: they are safe behind the crystal wall.

It is thus that I have tried to show my own gallery of persons. I have not burrowed into their secrets, or tried to nose out scandals. Beyond their studies I have not followed them. There has been none of that "ripping up, like pigs," which Lord Tennyson so forcibly deprecated. I have tried to respect the reticences of these persons, their concealments, their caprices. They are not sliced into sections and bottled, but sketched with what would fain be a careful and affectionate hand.

We can never see too much of desirable people. Though my heroes did not all deal with life in a sharp, business-like way, making the most of its pleasures, and shirking its pains, yet they lived and wrote with dignity.

Dignity! That is the saving quality! No matter how mean the surroundings, how squalid the furniture of life, dignity is always possible, always desirable. Victor Hugo's old rag-picker, cataloguing the horrors she disinterred, with her plate, her pot, her basket, respected herself and her calling, and thought her disposition of scraps worthy of interested description.

Only, our dignity must not be a mere mask; it must not be studied for itself; it must not be a robe sedulously arranged over a skeleton; but it must be the outer radiance of truth and hope and courage. For of all fates the most deplorable is, as the wise Greek said, to be opened and found empty.

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