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# **Essays on Poetry**



# Essays on Poetry

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## PREFACE



THE essays contained in this volume have been selected on account of a certain unity of subject from a large number published or delivered as lectures at various times and places. Those on the theory of poetry were written with a more definitely didactic aim than the rest—for the instruction of students rather than for that general reader whom the courteous author supposes at the outset to know nearly everything. The essays on Allingham and Father Hopkins are mainly new.

G. O'N.



# ESSAYS ON POETRY

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## POETRY AND THE REVERSE.

(*Five Papers for Students.*)

### I.—VARIOUS VIEWS ON POETRY.



DEFINITIONS," says Mr. Watts-Dunton in his article on Poetry in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "are for the most part alike unsatisfactory and treacherous; but definitions of poetry are proverbially so. Is it possible to lay down invariable principles of poetry, such as those famous 'invariable principles' of the Rev. Mr. Bowles, which in the earlier part of the century awoke the admiration of Southey and the wrath of Byron? Is it possible for a critic to say of any metrical phrase, stanza, or verse, 'This is poetry,' or 'This is not poetry'? Can he, with anything like the authority with which the man of science pronounces upon the natural objects brought before him, pronounce upon the qualities of a poem? These are questions that have engaged the attention of critics ever since the time of Aristotle." Further on, Mr. Watts-Dunton quotes Byron, who for his part, in one of those letters of his which so oddly mingle sense and nonsense, declared they could never be settled. "So far," he

wrote to John Murray, "are principles of poetry from being invariable, that they never were nor will be settled. These principles mean nothing more than the predilections of a particular age . . . It is now Homer, and now Virgil: once Dryden and now Sir W. Scott: now Corneille and now Racine." He might have added: "once Walter Scott and now Byron," and had he been gifted with prophetic vision he might further have added: "now Byron and in fifty years Tennyson."

There is, unhappily, no denying the variability of popular and contemporary judgments: the historical proofs are too numerous. The cultivated Athenians refused a first prize to the greatest play of their townsman Sophocles—his *OEdipus Rex*. Elizabethan estimates of Shakespeare had an amazing way of classifying him with personages now absolutely forgotten. Thus Francis Meres, M.A., discussing in 1598 English literary achievements up to that date mentions as "best for tragedy" Doctor Leg of Cambridge, Mr. Shakespeare, and eleven others! He singles out *Richard III.* as a fine play. You fancy it is Shakespeare's *Richard III.*? Not at all; it is Doctor Leg's (or Legge's), written in Latin trimeters and abundant Senecan rhetoric. For comedy, he gives Shakespeare a kind of "honourable mention" along with a crowd of competitors. Queerer still it is to find an Oxford don drawing up, some years after Shakespeare's death, a list of England's great dramatic poets and forgetting Shakespeare altogether!

But those, someone will say, were uncritical times: they produced great works, but judged them ill. Well, let us come closer to our own days: how stood it in

that highly-cultured nineteenth century, where surely, if anywhere, the angel of criticism might fold her wings and rest? We remember Byron's judgment as to the critical fluctuations of the "Romantic" era. The succeeding decades give proofs of a scarcely-diminished variability. We find that sixty or seventy years ago it was commonly believed in English literary circles that Rogers, Campbell and Moore were stars of the first magnitude—at least when compared with doubtful luminaries as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. To current criticism Moore looks very small in comparison with any of these; Campbell lives only in half-a-dozen lyrics; and Rogers is dead and buried. These facts—and they might be multiplied indefinitely—are assuredly not encouraging to the believer in fixed standards of literary beauty. They are calculated to cool the ardent dogmatist, whether he would arrange his poets in cast-iron order of merit, or lay down infallible canons for judging poetic values.

I am not, however, for my part, prepared to be driven by them in utter scepticism into the denial of all critical faith and critical hope. I believe that throughout the course of the ages, though with marked fluctuations, critical theory grows stronger and larger by what it feeds on, and that, in particular, the age which came in with the great Romantic Revival has on the whole brought us criticism perhaps unprecedented in its combination of knowledge, depth and acuteness. It is hard to believe that posterity will ever think very differently from the general body of doctrine on poetics left us by such minds as those of the Schlegels, Goethe, Schiller, Coleridge, Lamb, De

Quincey, Carlyle, Châteaubriand and other French Romanticists. These all, amid incidental differences of standpoint and of view, were yet largely of one mind in their antipathy to conventionalities and superficialities, and in general notions and ideals which still, I think, after many "schools" have come and gone, prevail.

Mr. Watts-Dunton however, like many others, is not so hopeful; and, in the essay I have quoted, he persists in maintaining a certain scepticism as to the fixity of the conclusions reached. He doubts whether it is sufficient to allow of our building thereon a solid and four-square definition. Nevertheless, he asserts that some definition of poetry, if one is to talk about it at all, must be attempted; and, overcoming a modest reluctance, he attempts a definition of his own. It is this—"Absolute poetry is the concrete and artistic expression of the human mind in emotional and rhythmical language." By "absolute poetry" I understand him to mean poetry that is not dramatic, and not applied in any way, as, for example, in didactics. By "concrete expression" he marks poetry off from abstract and theoretical expression: poetry (that is to say) sets things before us, does not talk *about* things. The other terms of the definition I may, for the moment, leave as self-explaining. I consider this definition a good but not an entirely satisfactory one. Thus, it seems too wide and vague in the words "expression of the human mind." Poetry is rather the expression of certain finer powers of the human mind, the others being for the time silent or subordinate. "In emotional language" the definition says: now I do not conceive of emotion as belonging

to the *language* of poetry, but rather as an element pervading its entire *substance*. Emotion that is only word-deep belongs to the artificial and theatrical.

Ruskin has somewhere given us a definition of poetry: "Poetry is the suggestion by the imagination of noble grounds for the noble emotions." We must admire in these words, as in so many of Ruskin's, his zeal for the moral dignity and spiritual value of art. But as a definition they utterly fail. Causes and effects are confused. Poetry is not a suggestion received, not even a suggestion made; it is something which suggests. And what is it?—we again ask. The reference to "imagination" does not wholly enlighten us. The twice-repeated adjective "noble" seems to lay down undue limitations. It excludes dramatic variety such as belongs even to the Epic: it will not allow fallen angels and sinful men to utter poetry. On the other hand it seems to annihilate all the lighter muses: Thalia, Terpsichore, and one or two more must vanish from Parnassus.

Let us turn aside for a while from attempts at definition and listen to the wider expatiations of one who, however unwise he may have been in the practical conduct of life, claims high authority on any question regarding poetry and can express his views with unsurpassed charm. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote "A Defence of Poetry" extending over some forty pages, in which he quotes or makes his own some of the best things that had previously been said about his art by Aristotle, Sidney, Hazlitt, Wordsworth and others, fusing them with thoughts more personal and characteristic. The expositions are not always clear, but they are always attractive and suggestive. No one

hitherto had so well brought out the relation of the poet's art to the inner truth of things: none so effectively exploded the eighteenth century notion of poetry as a matter of superficial observation, conventional feeling and applied ornament: none so truly set forth the interrelation between the substance and the form of poetry—its necessary synthesis of beautiful thought, beautiful imagery and beautiful sound.

Poetry, in a general sense, may, says Shelley, be defined to be the "expression of the imagination." Obviously enough, this definition includes the whole of the fine arts; and in a great deal of what he says they are all included, being taken by Shelley as so many manifestations of the poetic spirit or poetic faculty. Man's soul (he goes on to show) is marvelously adapted to the universe which surrounds him (it may be remarked that when Shelley wrote thus, a year before his death, he was no longer the crude atheist he had professed himself in *Queen Mab*); and without man's vital response that cosmic beauty would be that of a corpse. Man responds vitally: and so have language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation, become for man, from his lowest stages of culture, images of the total effects produced on his soul by striking surrounding objects; so in more highly developed man have the imitative arts become "at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony," springing into existence as the offspring of man's soul wedded to soulless beauty. Now among the various arts, that of the poet must take the highest place, by virtue of the superior nobility and flexibility of the medium in which he works.

Language . . . . is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art have relations among each other which limit and interpose between conception and expression.

The word of a poet (that is to say) is of its nature a direct expression of thought, while the stone taken up by an architect or the paint on the painter's brush can be no such thing

The former is as a mirror which reflects, the latter as a cloud which enfeebles, the light of which both are mediums of communication

Again Shelley says :

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.

There is this difference between a story and a poem [by story he means literal unimaginative record] that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connection than time, place, circumstance, cause, and effect: the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is in itself the image of all other minds.

This Platonic and Christian conception had already been expressed by Philip Sidney. He had pleaded for the superiority of poetry to history on the ground that history is tied to detached facts, which are necessarily imperfect, disjointed, transitory, unilluminating; while poetry deals with the essence of things, and makes the transient immortal by clothing them with imperishable forms. But Shelley's mind was even more like to Plato's in the extreme importance he attached to the ideal and abstract as opposed to the actual and concrete: and even more ardently than Sidney does he apply Platonic idealism to his theory of poetry.

Time which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that [those] of poetry, and for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains. A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful: poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.

It might at this point be suggested that a great deal of what Shelley and others say of poetry is true also of the higher products of prose fiction. Of the work of a great novelist as of great poetry it may be said that it is creative in its methods, essential in its portrayals, permanent in its value: and these seem to include the chief claims made for poetry. The question thus raised is an interesting one—one, however, which we can here mention but parenthetically.

Shelley next asks: "What is the object or purpose of poetic creation?" His answer (in summary form) is this:—the object or purpose is the production of pleasure—pleasure of a very high order; it is the ennobling of the highest faculties of man by giving them worthy and pleasurable exercise.

The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect [namely, moral good] by acting upon the cause [the imagination]. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.

Here a touch of exaggeration may be noted. Neither imagination, nor any other single faculty or set of faculties can be rightly called "the organ of the moral nature of man." Every faculty of man's nature has its own place in the moral order of things. But undoubtedly the imagination is a high and important organ of our moral nature: and so far as it does hold such a pre-eminence may Shelley's phrase be accepted.

Having by these considerations, and with the further help of a long historical retrospect proved the majesty and utility of poetry, Shelley warms into eloquent panegyric of his art and of its masters.

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge : it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things ; it is as the odour and the colour of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it ; as the form and splendour of unfaded beauty to the secrets of amatory and corruption. What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship ; what were the scenery of this beautiful universe we inhabit ; what were our consolations on this side of the grave ; and what were our aspirations beyond it ; if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar? . . . Poets can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this ethereal world ; [their art] turns all things to loveliness. It transmutes all that it touches ; and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes ; its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life ; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms.

All things exist as they are perceived : at least in relation to the percipient. "The mind is its own place, and, of itself, can make a heaven of hell a hell of heaven." But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil

from before the scene of things; it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. . . . It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. It justifies the bold and true words of Tasso: *Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta.*

These are eloquent pages, and their eloquence contains much which is worth apprehending even at the cost of a little mental labour. But we have once more to recall the fact that most of what they say is true of other arts than poetry—is indeed a description of art in general. It becomes a glorification of poetry in particular only so far as we can feel or prove that poetry has prerogatives over the other arts. In his just enthusiasm for the *soul* of poetry as her chief glory, Shelley leaves us unenlightened as to the precise *differentia* of poetry from the other arts: he seems to ignore her body and garb of words and metre.

This deficiency has been abundantly made up for by theorists who have arisen since Shelley's day. Indeed, his pardonable one-sidedness has been followed by less pardonable exaggeration in the opposite direction. Shelley, like the best of the older critical writers, flew to the essence of poetry, its meaning, its appeal to the soul: he trusted the formal, still more the accidental, elements to look after themselves and find their proper place. Those who have come after him have made form and accident, words and metres,

the object of their interest—too often of their idolatry. Along this path, ever since the decline of the Romantic movement, have walked various French *côteries*, represented by Gautier, de Banville, Mallarmé, Verlaine : kindred views have been held in England by Pater, Wilde, Symons : at present the high authority of Professor Saintsbury is to some extent committed to the support of the same exaggeration. These writers have of course differed widely in the manner as well as in the degree in which they have championed the general theory of poetry which I here ascribe to them. But they have all more or less cherished and fostered the delusion that poetic form can have vital existence without poetic substance. They have conceived of poetry as built up on words, without sufficiently taking into account the nature and dignity of words, which nature and dignity lie, before all else, in their being the direct instruments and vehicles of thought. To leave this fact out of sight ; to treat words as mere sounds or as symbols of other sense-objects such as colour, is to pervert and degrade them. It is thoroughly bad art. For nothing vitiates art more than to ignore the essence and prime characteristics of the material in which the artist works. This is true alike of stones and notes, pigments and words. In its simplest expression, none will deny the theorem. But in practice it is ignored by many ; by those, among others, who have endeavoured to turn poetry from her true vocation into a foolish rival of music, and have minimized the importance of her essential and noble characteristic—her direct and definite message of thought to the human soul.

“ De la musique avant toute chose.” So begins

Verlaine a poem in which he says some pretty and some true things about poetry. He is not speaking from the chair of Aristotle, and doubtless he did not mean to be taken quite *au pied de la lettre* in his opening line. But if he did (and many others have taken up the sentiment very seriously) then he is in flat contradiction with Shelley's teaching, and shows himself as superficial as the other was noble and profound. Who more musical than Shelley in his verse? Yet he would probably have declared, if asked—he has indeed equivalently declared—that music, far from being first, is last in the philosophical consideration of poetry. It is (at best) the fine flower, not the root. He might have recalled how Horace, surely not without significance, placed it last in his enumeration of the poet's gifts:—

Ingenium cui sit, cui mens divinior. atque os  
Magna sonaturum, des nominis hujus honorem.

Who owns the native gift, the mind inspired,  
The utterance of mighty music, he  
May claim the honour of a poet's name.

Willingly, also, would he have made his own the phrase in which Milton—surely an “os magna sonaturum” as well as a “mens divinior”—has summed up the substance and wealth of the true poet—“thoughts that voluntary move harmonious numbers.” Such a true poet, such a *vates*, is not the expert versifier, whose stock of ideas consists mainly of what his vigorous foraging for rhymes has brought him in; whose “mens divinior” is nothing more than ingenious

jugglery with harmonious syllables. Shelley, we may be certain, would not have shared that enthusiasm of our prosodic specialists which bursts into eloquence over sonorous emptinesses. Keenly susceptible to the sensuous charm of such a piece as Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, he would nevertheless have considered utterly topsy-turvy Professor Saintsbury's judgment on that little-meaning rhapsody—that "it is not easy to think of a greater piece of poetry than *Kubla Khan*."

## II.—A DEFINITION.



WE have spent some time in considering certain definitions and descriptions of poetry. This was done more in pursuance of the general purpose which directed the writing of these papers, namely, the giving of a simple but (if possible) correct answer to the question, "What is Poetry?"—not with the intention of marshalling before us opinions—even important ones—in comprehensive review. That would be too big a task. My hope has been to collect from the best opinions the elements of a solid and serviceable web of doctrine. We find ourselves the learners in a school where great doctors differ; and therefore we do well to show ourselves receptive rather than original, eclectic rather than partisan. But some criticisms must be hazarded, some synthesis, and—a definition!

The definition of Poetry which I offer is this: "Poetry is the language of passion and imagination expressing themselves under control of the laws of beauty."

Of the terms of this proposition we shall at once offer some brief and then some lengthier explanations. Poetry is a "language." This is to be taken literally, and thereby poetry is marked off from the plastic arts, from music and from dancing; it is an intelligible utterance of concepts in words. "Of passion and imagination." The two must be taken conjointly: neither will make poetry in the complete absence of the other. "Under control of the laws of beauty." We shall reserve till later a closer analysis of these terms. For the present it may be interesting to enquire whether the various passions are all equally amenable to the laws of beauty and equally available for poetry. We may recall how Collins has pictured and distinguished the passions in a well-known ode. He represents them as having all, once upon a time, essayed the task of making music. Some failed or but poorly succeeded in their attempt. Fear, Jealousy, Revenge, Despair produced scarcely anything deserving the name of music. And which were those that succeeded? Those whom we naturally regard as the more gentle, sweet, expressive emotions—Hope, Melancholy, Cheerfulness, Joy.

A somewhat broader view of the ambit of art, a somewhat bolder conception of the beautiful than was current in his age might have led Collins to see that none of the passions lies outside the scope of either music or poetry. Some of them, no doubt, afford more graceful and facile themes than others: they lend themselves to the development of what Dr. Bosanquet distinguishes as "easy beauty"; but all, so far as they admit of idealizing treatment and noble expression, can burn in art's transfiguring flame and

light. *Facit indignatio versus* : fury can make verses, and not merely verses but poetry, as a great satirist long ago said and proved. The Scriptures present to us many a page splendid with the poetry of denunciation or imprecation. Shakespeare's King Lear is frenzied into high poetry by his wrongs; Gray's Bard is a similar figure. Poetic (usually at least) were the fierce invectives hurled by Victor Hugo at Napoleon III. from his island of exile, in the days when Louis Veuillot pictured him as an angry Cyclops,

Debout, farouche, l'oeil en feu,  
Lançant des blocs de poésie !

Living by the spell of great art, all the passions of struggle and tragedy can assume a garb of the sublimest artistry; can speak in "the strong-winged music of Homer" or Dante or Shakespeare. Yet, undoubtedly, it is in proportion as they are tender and sympathetic, or else vivid and bright, that human emotions most readily and easily take to themselves the wings of the imagination and rise into regions of light and music; and in proportion as they are noble and expansive will their utterance more easily attune itself to that ideal goodness which upholds and tunes the universe.

From the fact, however, that all are tunable, all essentially good, all intended for good purposes, we may pass to an important consideration regarding the psychological basis of poetry. The passions, these movements of our sensitive nature, are elements of vital force, but of themselves irrational. They are by consequence rebellious to law or control of any

kind. And this refractoriness is the more powerful and menacing in proportion as the passion is present in an intense degree. Passion may (as we are only too well aware) usurp complete domination over the soul; and just as in the ethical, so also in the aesthetical order the consequences of this are disastrous. For uncontrolled passion leaves to beauty, no more than to morality or prudence, any share in determining its expressions. It finds utterance in outbursts merely animal and unbeautiful. But so far as passion comes to be controlled by the sense of beauty, so far as it submits itself to the laws of winning expression, in that measure arises a fruitful antimony, a clash happily resolved into harmony, which is a principal cause of the beauty of poetry and of all art: and the happiness, the beauty, become greater in proportion as the passion is stronger and requires to be curbed by the more masterful control. This is a noteworthy theorem of aesthetic doctrine, which I do not remember to have seen anywhere well set forth, apart from some profound, but brief and obscure, utterances of Coleridge. Yet, once attention is called to it, it seems unquestionable. Is it not plain what pleasure there is—and Art *is* pleasure, is *this* pleasure—for the maker, producer, and performers of any art-work, for the beholder also, or hearer, or reader, in the contrast and struggle between the vitality and vehemence of emotional self-expression on the one hand and the perfect fulfilment of law on the other, between the outpouring of an ardent energy and ebullient emotions and the triumphs of faultless expression and exquisite *technique*? Every work of art is the theatre of this contrast and struggle, the drama of this synthesis and

harmony. It presents us with a perpetual reconciliation of opposites, each of which singly appeals to our sympathy. It may be followed out in sculpture, in architecture, in music; it becomes elusive in painting; it is most plainly obvious in the inferior art of dancing. It finds its highest and fullest expression in the supreme art of poetry. And the art-work is in every case the more perfect and delightful in proportion as both elements are found singly in their highest perfection, while yet most perfectly unified—the deepest and intensest vitality manifesting itself in expression most perfectly controlled by grace of design and accuracy of execution.

So much as to passion. We next proceed to consider imagination. Concerning this faculty, or rather complex of faculties, much were now to be said, had we not already, in abundant quotations from Shelley, anticipated in a considerable degree the fulfilment of the task. It should here be recalled, however, that the "imagination" spoken of by all the modern authorities on aesthetic is not the faculty defined and discussed by the Schools—not a merely sensile faculty by which we reproduce impressions made on the senses, see landscapes with our eyes shut, etc. The "imagination" described and glorified by Shelley, Wordsworth, Ruskin, and others is a group or conspiracy of faculties, the spiritual among which avail themselves to splendid purpose of the capacities of that sensile minister. Its nimble questing power throughout the world of sense enables their spiritual strength to produce the illusion of absolutely creative effects. It is the sprite leagued with the magician, Ariel serving Prospero.

“The imagination,” writes Hazlitt, “is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power.” It is, according to Coleridge,

the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others, and by a sort of fusion to force many into one. . . . Various are the workings of this—the greatest faculty of the human mind—both tranquil and passionate. In its tranquil and purely pleasurable operation, it acts chiefly by creating out of many things, as they would have appeared in the description of an ordinary mind, detailed in unimpassioned succession, a oneness; even as Nature, the greatest of poets, acts upon us when we open our eyes upon an extended prospect. Thus the flight of [Shakespeare’s] Adonis in the dusk of the evening .

Look ! how a bright star shooteth from the sky,  
So glides he in the night from Venus’s eye

How many images and feelings are here brought together without effort and without discord, in the beauty of Adonis, the rapidity of his flight, the yearning, yet hopelessness, of the enamoured gazer, while a shadowy ideal character is thrown over the whole .

“A shadowy *ideal* character.” These words remind us that the function of the ‘imagination,’ as it is understood in modern art-theory, is to idealize. We

might indeed give it this definition : " the imagination is the group of faculties which idealizes."

Coleridge continues :

Or this power acts by impressing the stamp of humanity and of human feelings on inanimate . . . objects . . .

The sun ariseth in his majesty,  
Who doth the world so gloriously behold.

Or, again, it acts by so carrying on the eye of the reader as to make him almost lose the consciousness of words—to make him see everything *flashed*, as Wordsworth has grandly and appropriately said :

Flashed upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude.

But we must return to the admirable remarks of Hazlitt. He quotes Lord Bacon, who says of poetry that it " has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and carries it into sublimity by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things, as reason and history do." This (we observe) is a perfect description of idealization by imagination. Hazlitt then reminds us how Shakespeare (or, at least, Shakespeare's Theseus) has linked the poet, as an incurable idealist, with the lunatic and the lover :—

The lover, equally with the poet, speaks of the auburn tresses of his mistress as locks of shining

gold; because the least tinge of yellow in the hair has, from novelty and a sense of personal beauty, a more lustrous effect to the imagination than the purest gold. We compare a man of gigantic stature to a tower: not that he is anything like so large, but because the excess of this size, beyond what we are accustomed to express or the usual size of things of the same class, produces by contrast a greater feeling of magnitude and ponderous strength than another object of ten times the same dimensions. The intensity of the feeling makes up for the disproportion of the objects. Things are equal to the imagination which have the power of affecting the mind with an equal degree of terror, admiration, delight or love. When Lear calls upon the heavens to avenge his cause, "for they are old like him," there is nothing extravagant or impious in this sublime identification of his age with theirs; for there is no other image which could do justice to the agonizing sense of his wrongs and his despair.

We are tempted to quote still further from Hazlitt's exposition, as it illustrates not only the precise matter we have in hand, but also other parts of our definition of poetry:—

As in describing natural objects, it [poetry] impregnates sensible impressions with the forms of fancy, so it describes the feelings of pleasure or pain by blending them with the strongest movements of passion and the most striking forms of nature. Tragic poetry, which is the most impassioned species of it, strives to carry on the feeling to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos by all the forces

of comparison or contrast; loses the sense of present suffering in the imaginary exaggeration of it; exhausts the terror or pity by an unlimited indulgence of it; . . . brings every moment of our being or object of nature in startling review before us; and in the rapid whirl of events lifts us from the depths of woe to the highest contemplations on human life. When Lear says of [the miserable vagrant] Edgar, "Nothing but his unkind daughters could have brought him to this," what a bewildered amazement, what a wrench of the imagination, that cannot be brought to conceive of any cause of misery than that which has bowed it down, and absorbs all sorrow in its own! *His* sorrow, like a flood, supplies the sources of all other sorrow. Again, when he exclaims, in the mad scene, "The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanche and Sweetheart, see they bark at me!" it is passion lending occasion to imagination to make every creature in league against him, conjuring up ingratitude and insult in their least looked-for and most galling shapes.

It will not, perhaps, be superfluous or tedious if I add to the examples given by these capable expositors some others of a perhaps more familiar character. They will help to bring home to the less philosophical reader the essential simplicities of the whole matter. Take, for instance, a well-known stanza in Burns's version of *Auld Lang Syne* :—

We twa hae paidelt in the burn  
 From morning sun till dine;  
 But seas between us braid hae roared  
 Sin auld lang syne.

How admirably the simple but intense human feelings of sorrow in separation, joy in re-union, have here attracted the sweetest and the grandest of natural objects—the burn rippling along between the fields, the vast and storm-harassed ocean—to harmonize with themselves and express themselves! How well the quiet streamlet and the restless sea are made to reflect back to us the sports of two village children and the rude trials and turmoils of two world-wandering men!

When Moore tells of his own work in reviving the ancient charm and glory of Irish song, his opening lines afford us a good example of imaginative and idealistic statement:—

Dear harp of my country, in darkness I found thee,  
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long.

The figure of a chain with its implications of constraint, slavery, tyranny: the epithet "cold," suggestive of the ardour, the enkindling and comforting power of song, in this case cruelly withheld; the historic and romantic association of the "chain of silence"—a phrase borrowed from old Irish legend and history; finally the fact that Moore is not speaking of any literal harp or literal chain, but of a national treasury of music and poetry and of repressive influences heart-deep and centuries old:—all this illustrates for us in a well-known text the idiom and the method of the Poet.

Let me add one more example—this time taken from a living writer. A sunless, colourless February morning—how often have we looked out upon such, and seen nothing worth looking at, much less worth writing

of! But Alice Meynell looked out upon it, and this is what she saw :—

A poet's face asleep is this grey morn.

What a reading of nature is there; what a probing of the soul, heart and possibilities of that dull first hour! Truly, as William Blake said, "a fool does not see the same tree that a wise man sees." No telescope can elevate *his* eye to make its own the vision of nature enjoyed by the poet-seer,—by a Blake or a Meynell.

"The method of the Poet" we said above. Is the phrase an apt one? Our considerations so far have suggested little of method; and assuredly the mechanical, the conventional, the arbitrary are incompatible with the nature and needs of those two forces—imagination and passion—which are the life of poetry and whose life involves a large freedom. These two winds will always rebel against any entangling and hampering yoke. But—not to speak of higher and more comprehensive laws that rule all human action and must be supposed in aesthetics as elsewhere—poetry has her own natural laws; she has her intrinsic discipline, to which imagination and passion must reconcile themselves, if they would become free of her enchanted realm. These regulations are summed up as "the laws of beauty." Of the laws of beauty, then, and of the conditions they impose on the poet, we shall next have to say something.

## III.—THE UTTERANCE OF POETRY.



WHEN a theorist on an art-subject begins to talk about "the laws of beauty," then indeed there is reason for anxiety on the part of those who are following him as to when and where he will end, and through what obscure regions, after "how many ways and days" he will arrive, if at all, at a conclusion. On such a subject as this the professor in the Bab Ballads was very exhaustive :

He argued high, he argued low,  
He also argued round about him,

while his auditors slept. But we have no desire to afflict ourselves and our readers with the necessary price of so unrelenting a completeness. We intend to escape it on the present occasion by the most drastic of methods—by skipping an entire treatise on the nature of the Beautiful and leaving that difficult question to be settled by the general apprehensions of each reader. General apprehensions will, I believe, be sufficient for our purpose. What we require is such a general idea of the demands of beauty in art as will enable us to determine the nature of poetical expression. We require practical answers to questions such as the following—does poetry require verse and metre; can there be poetry in prose; is science rather than prose (*i.e.*, the matter rather than the manner) the true antithesis of poetry? To supply such answers (or the material for them) is one and the same thing

with our consideration of the laws of beauty as ruling the utterances of poetry, and forms, therefore, our present task.

Poetry is subject to the laws of beauty because it is an art, and art is *par excellence* the sphere of beauty—of beauty evolved by man. The connections of art with the good, the true, the useful are real, most real; else would art have no right to exist. But these relations are indirect or external. The intrinsic laws by which art is ruled are those of beauty—beauty understood in its widest, most generous sense. Now, it would appear that if poetry is subject to those laws it must be in some sense rhythmical. Rhythm pervades all that is beautiful, nay indeed, if we are to believe some thoughtful souls, all that is vital. Our pulses beat rhythmically, our physical pains, our griefs, our remorse, our high spirits, come and go rhythmically. In all that pleases or delights us rhythm is obviously or subtly present. Good prose is rhythmical. But these loose rhythms of nature and prose are not enough for poetry. Considering its definition so far as already explained, we shall see that it asks for elaboration of design and symmetry, for rich variety rounded by unbroken unity. It is a *carillon* whose chimes must always satisfy and never disappoint the expectant ear. And therefore poetry craves metre—seeks expression in rhythms that are balanced, measured, symmetrical.

Prose, we have said, is rhythmical: it cannot be metrical. Why? Because prose is not a pure art, while poetry is. The former therefore must not "lay itself out" (as we say) for the purpose of giving aesthetic pleasure, while it is the very business of poetry to do this. Prose has its own harmonious

effects, powerful often, sometimes exquisite : but they must remain far short of metre as of all that suggests ornament for the sake of ornament. Prose, bent on the tasks of reason and practice, must be always sparing and sometimes ascetic in its use of graces and embellishments ; but Poetry, even though her message be as weighty as that of an archangel, need never, any more than Gabriel, lay aside her rapid wings and her rainbow vesture.

Poetry tends to be metrical, because it is passionate. This is no contradiction of what has been already said concerning the utterances of passion. The outbursts of uncontrolled passion are indeed unmusical and therefore unmetrical. But the control exercised by Art changes all that, and we shall find that human emotion—and the more surely the higher, intenser, more engrossing it is—actually tends to submit itself to that control—to the bonds of rhythm. In musical forms it finds soothing and solace ; it also finds effective self-expression. Study the outbursts of joy for triumph, grief for disaster, lamentation for the dead fury against the enemy, welcome to the conqueror that are the rude poetry of primitive folks ; and you will find how largely repetition, refrain, inchoate metre are part of their natural language. Of simple repetitions it might be tedious to give examples : but passing on to more artistic forms of varied or intensified repetition, many illustrations might be quoted from (to take but one source) the Hebrew Scriptures. Listen to the Psalmist's penitential prayer, the " Miserere," with its pathetic returns upon its own phrases ; or to a passage like the following, where linked progress is combined with constant increase of force :—

Hear, O Lord, my prayer,  
And let my cry come unto thee :  
Turn not away thy face from me ;  
In the day of my trouble, incline thine ear to me ;  
In what day soever I shall call upon thee, hear  
me speedily.

“Rhythm,” says De Quincey, “is at once a cause of impassioned feeling, an ally of such feeling and a natural effect of it.”

Passion, then, naturally seeks for itself the sublimated and perfect rhythm which is the voice of poetry; only when it has found it can it thrill the world. For, as the rhythmic, symmetric vibrations of the air or ether call up illimitable corresponding vibrations and fling far into space the contagion of sound or electricity, so the metric pulses of the song or the saga propagate unto multitudes and nations the emotions of the singer, and make his song a vital force in millions of remote lives.

Poetry, then, is metrical because it is emotional. It is metrical, again, because it is imaginative. Imagination requires expression that in the highest degree idealizes. We have seen how this faculty, or rather group or conspiracy of faculties tends to exalt and transfigure all that it takes up, raising us from the inconsistencies and poverties of the actual world to spheres where (for a brief hour) dreams and hopes are realized. Now to this idealizing process metre gives the last magic touch. It bars out the real by what we may venture to call its own unreality. Its unreality—for, in the first place, manifesting as it does the shaping hand and the creative purpose of the artist, it

is (like the music of an opera) a perpetual evidence and silent reminder that we are now far removed from the region of literal facts, that we have given up materialistic records for what Lord Bacon calls "feigned history." In the second place, metre constantly suggests to us what is the immediate and proper purpose of poetry, namely, the giving of pleasure—of a certain rare and elevated pleasure keeps ever before us the non-realistic beauty of order and design unremittingly and agreeably stimulates the attention, claiming no small share of this for itself, and, by this perpetual interposition of its own beauty, relieves the grimness of tragic themes and the dullness of plain ones, presenting all these to us alike not as narrow realities, but as ethereal fields for the free play of our mental faculties.

Finally, poetry is metrical because it is an art. Its business is the use of words to the purposes of beauty : now metre is the most commanding means by which beauty can be elicited from words. It elevates them to a new power of impressing, suggesting, and charming; its absence therefore, leaves much of the music of the poet's lyre unevoked. This argument has been well put by Leigh Hunt :

Poetry modulates what it utters, because in running the whole round of beauty, it must needs include beauty of sound, and because in the height of its enjoyment, it must show the perfection of its triumph and make difficulty itself become part of its facility and joy. . . . Poetry shapes this modulation into uniformity for its outline and variety for its parts; because it thus realises the last idea of

beauty itself, which includes the charm of diversity within the flowing round of habit and ease.

It is the subject of an eloquent page by Victor Cousin, which I translate :

Words are the instrument of Poetry ; she plays on them as she will, she makes them capable of expressing ideal beauty ; she lends them the charm and power of metre ; she makes of them something between speech and music, something at once material and immaterial, something definite, clear, and precise, like Nature's most strong and delicate outlines, something vital and animated like colours, something appealing and infinite like sounds.

Simple words in themselves, but much more, words chosen and transfigured by the poet are the most emphatic and universal of symbols. Taking in her hands this talisman which she has made for herself Poetry reflects all the images of the sensible world, as sculpture and painting do ; she reflects sentiment, as painting and music do, with all the variety of retail which music cannot reach, and with the rapid successions which neither painting nor sculpture, fixed in immobility, can follow. Nor is this all : she can express as no other art ever can, thought entirely aloof from the senses, thought formless, thought without colour, thought silent from any sound, thought read in no glance of the eye, thought in its highest flights and most refined abstractions.

Such is indeed the magic power of the word—  
sensible symbol and reflex of human thought—which

Poetry wields : a power which is not brought fully into play until the language is raised to its highest musical and suggestive power by metre and metrical devices and all the ornaments which seem not at home when away from the society of metre.

As music makes the atmosphere of a festival, so metre makes the climate of poetry—the “largior aether” wherein the highly-wrought ingenuities of verbal artifice and the strangest audacities of the quick imagination are accepted as natural and welcomed as delightful. Metre tempers the tragic, elevates the commonplace, makes all odds even. As Poetry first wins the ear and memory of the child by the repeated jingle of metre and rhyme, so by virtue of perfect verse does she exalt the mere vocables of the lexicon to their highest touch of concord with the melodies of heaven. To a mystic dance of metre does she weave her soul-enchanting spells, as our great Irish lyrist has seen and apostrophised her :—

Thy lovely motions answering to the rime  
That ancient Nature sings,  
That keeps the stars in cadence for all time  
And echoes through all things.

So far, then, have we carried our study of the expression of poetry as determined by the laws of beauty. Satisfied with having attempted to explain this matter in its essence, we shall not enter into consideration of the varieties of adaptation or compromise of the sacrifices sometimes made of perfection in one respect in order to secure faultlessness or force in another. The admissibility of such adaptations,

compromises or sacrifices we have nowhere excluded. We shall only add here that if the question be asked. "Are there not 'prose-poems' of high value, which would lose, not gain, by being translated into verse-form?" we should answer: "Very possibly; we maintain, however, that they are not, and cannot be, perfect poems."

Much less shall we be tempted to rove outside the inward sphere of poetic art to consider how and to what effect it underlies those vaster laws which regulate the entire ambit of rational thought, speech and action, and by obedience to which the world of poetic beauty is brought to correspond harmoniously with other exigencies of the Divine Goodness and Beauty. Our business on the present occasion is only to consider what Poetry is, not how she ought to comport herself. Let it be enough to say, in conclusion, that, as our inquiry so far has justified our regarding her as one of the noblest and strongest natural powers which truth and virtue can summon to their aid, so no angelic apostasy can be more lamentable than the degradation of Poetry to become the minister and voice of baseness, sensuality, sin. There is no more seductive agent of evil, when, forsaking her true allegiances, she recks with her fairy lights and fairy hues the cheats of Vanity Fair, the phantasmagoria of Satan, the foulness of corruption. But her power for evil is simply in proportion to her capacity for good. There is no merely human thing that appears more congruously amid the courts of the supernatural, the divine. when, rising to her highest possibilities, she bears aloft man's sublimest aspirations towards the perfect Beauty, the Ideal Reality;

there is none that better speaks the message of his heart to

L'amor che muove 'l sole e l'altre stelle—  
 "The love which moves the sun and all the stars."

#### IV.—THE REVERSE.

**W**HEN is poetry not poetry?"—would seem to be a not unfair variant of our heading on the present occasion. We are entering a vaguely-negative region which assumes under our gaze a bewildering number of aspects. Here is found everything which, though claiming to be poetry, yet is in conflict with the ideals and notions of poetic art and success which we have been endeavouring to establish. Here is to be found a lamentably large number of types, from creeping commonplace up to the false sublime, from inane febleness to the violence which falls over the verge of the ridiculous.

Here sighs a jar, and there a goose-pie talks

To sample, not to exhaust, the products of this chaos-world will take up all the time the subject deserves, and will probably be quite enough for the reader's wants or wishes.

With deliberate parody of poetry we will not deal. It is a realm apart, and, unlike that of bad poetry, may be a pleasant and profitable one to stray into. It is excluded from our scope, because parody does not aim

at being poetical. It is, as someone has said, "a department of pure criticism," and criticism (*pace* Mr Pope and his *Essay*) is something inconsistent with poetry; something that ought never to try to be poetry, but represents a quite opposite frame of mind from the poetical. The parodist-critic takes up the characteristic manner and peculiarities of a true poet (for whom perhaps he has a great respect) and employs them on such themes or in such a way as to produce an effect just the opposite of that intended and achieved by his original. He cunningly analyses, synthesises, then creates in his turn—a caricature.

Akin to parody is the suggestive and entertaining nonsense sometimes written by Lewis Carroll and some other moderns of similar trend. Who would reject with scorn as mere nonsense, and nothing more the "Jabberwock" verses or the best parts of "The Hunting of the Snark?"

"And hast thou slain the jabberwock?  
 Come to my arms, my beamish boy!  
 O frabjous day! Calloo, callay!"  
 He chortled in his joy.

Such nonsense as this is sometimes so full of suggestion that it steps over the border-line into poetry. Very different is the nonsense of one who fails to get hold of any idea or of any true and telling expression for an idea, but merely simulates the capture while it throws word after word, rhyme after rhyme. This great class of non-poetry has been satirized by Aristophanes, by Persius, by Pope: the latter's "Song by a Person of Quality" is the first explicit caricature of

it that I know of in English. It has flourished in the *libretti* of operas and in the popular songs of the concert-room and drawing-room. We are familiar with this sort of ditty :

I bring thee red, red roses,  
With all their blue and white,  
The day with all its dozes,  
The night with all its light ;

or this :

Though we meet to part for ever,  
Still united we shall be ;  
There is sunlight on the river ;  
But there's moonlight on the sea.

Music, however, must be conceded a certain capacity for making nonsense tolerable. It does this not merely by whatever of charm it may itself contain, but by its power of intensifying the suggestiveness of mere word. Something of the same kind may be said of the marvellous verbal artistry (I had at first written jugglery) of certain poets of no small repute. They hypnotize (as it were) our mental faculties with the chiming play of rhyme, rhythm and cunning iteration, until we almost cease to know or heed whether there is any meaning at all in the glittering, undulating stream of words that courses through our brain. Illustrative examples would be (from the nature of the case) too long to quote here; but they may be found abundantly and in their most fascinating form in the works of Swinburne—whose name we must apologize for introducing in a paragraph which began with the consideration of nonsense.

Passing away from the realms of nonsense and of all that might be (perhaps incautiously) annexed thereto, we may illustrate in one or two other important regions failure as contrasted with success in poetry, and do so all the more agreeably if we can find our instances of failure as well as those of success in the poetry of eminent writers.

Let us glance, for example, at the paraphrases which different ages and writers have produced of the Psalms and other poetical portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is curious what ill-luck has generally attended these well-intended efforts. The elevation, ruggedness, and difficulty of the sublime originals hardly seem a sufficient explanation. Milton, for example, with his great learning as his least qualification, ought surely to have been able to interpret successfully, nay magnificently, the abrupt grandeurs of the Psalms. Yet, as a matter of fact, the versions achieved by the poet of *Paradise Lost* in the prime of his years are poor, weak and tuneless—distinctly inferior to those written by Lord Bacon—written, too, under the oppression of his last illness. The Psalmist says (I give it in simple prose): “For my soul is filled with evils, and my life had drawn nigh unto the grave . . . Thou hast set my friends far from me: I am become to them an object of horror; I am imprisoned and cannot escape.” And this is what Milton makes of it:

For cloyed with woes and trouble sore  
 Surcharged my soul doth lie,  
 My life at death's uncheerful door  
 Unto the grave draws nigh.

Thou dost my friends from me estrange  
 And makest me odious,  
 Me to them odious, for they change,  
 And I here pent up thus.

The verbiage of this is not even melodious. No better is Milton's rendering of the Seventh Psalm—in this style :

Lord my God, to Thee I fly;  
 Save me and secure me under  
 Thy protection while I cry;  
 Lest as a lion (and no wonder)  
 He haste to tear my soul asunder,  
 Tearing and no rescue nigh

It is extraordinary that the metric artist of *Paradise Lost* should not have felt the unseemliness for such a purpose of these short lines and these jingling rhymes.

In the eighteenth century Dr Edward Young, author of "Night Thoughts," once deemed a great poet, got hold of the Book of Job and transposed it for English eighteenth century readers into the monotonous flip-flap of Pope's *Iliad*. Let us sample his achievement.

"Then the Lord answered Job out of a whirlwind, and said: Who is this that wrappeth up sentences in unskilful words? Gird up thy loins like a man: I will ask thee; and answer thou me." Young's version of this splendid simplicity is as follows:—

Full o'er their heads, with terrible surprise,  
 A sudden whirlwind blackened all the skies:  
 (They saw, and trembled!) from the darkness broke  
 A dreadful voice, and thus the Almighty spoke:

“ Who gives his tongue a loose so bold and vain,  
 Censures my conduct and reproves my reign,  
 Lifts up his thoughts against Me from the dust,  
 And tells the world's Creator what is just?  
 Of late so brave, now lift a dauntless eye,  
 Face My demand, and give it a reply.”

True poetry can invest little things with mysterious majesty. The poetaster (and Young is here nothing better) drags down mysterious majesty into littleness and commonplace.

The nineteenth century has seen failures no less signal. Lord Byron also embarked upon the dangerous adventure of paraphrasing the Psalms; but, happily, not for long. He laid hands on that pathetic and unforgettable chant of the Captivity: “*Supra flumina Babylonis.*” “By the waters of Babylon there we sat down and wept while we remembered Sion: on the willows beside them we hung up our harps . . . . How shall we sing the songs of Sion in the land of strangers?” And this is what he gives us—to the tune of “One Bumper at Parting”:—

We sat down and wept by the waters  
 Of Babel, and thought of the day  
 When our foe, in the hue of his slaughters,  
 Made Salem's high places his prey.

On the willow that harp is suspended:  
 Oh Salem, its sound should be free;  
 And the hour when thy glories were ended  
 But left me that token of thee:  
 And ne'er shall its soft tones be blended  
 With the voice of the spoiler by me!

Different as have been these failures of three distinguished poets belonging to three succeeding ages, yet in one respect the failures are alike—they have all missed fitness of form. Fitness of form means that poetic utterance should, in every case, be and seem the one inevitable way of expressing the poet's thought and emotion. Thus the blank verse of *Paradise Lost*, the narrative octosyllables of Scott, the anapaests of his "Young Lochinvar," the quatrains of Gray's "Elegy," Browning's "How we brought the Good News," Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break,"—all in their different ways are illustrations of matter and metre perfectly unified, of the fair soul shining in the fair form. But, in the quotations we have just been making, Milton's octosyllabic quatrains, Young's heroic couplets, Byron's jingling anapaests all alike jar and jolt out of harmony with the message they are meant to convey. English, as well as other, poetry, is full of similar examples. Tragedies in rhyme (such as Dryden's), narratives in elegiac stanzas (such as Davenant's *Gondibert*), elegies in anapaests (such as Moore's and Byron's) will all bring home to us what is meant by incongruity of form and substance.

There is another region to which we may with advantage turn in studying the contrasting methods and results of excellent and of poor poetic art: it is the region of the preternatural. With what ease, and with what impressiveness, does not the true poet body forth to us the mysterious agencies "that seem not of the earth, but yet are on it," his elves and goblins and ghosts, his harpies, gorgons and chimeras; while the poetaster, even when he has expended all his word-

material, leaves us indifferent, if not actually contemptuous!

How beautifully, for example, the Lady of Milton's *Comus*, benighted and alone in the forest, expresses the coming on of mysterious terrors!

A thousand fantasies  
Begin to throng into my memory  
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,  
And aery tongues, that syllable men's names  
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.

Here nearly every word stands for more than its mere literal self. Contrast this with one of Dryden's ghosts, Almanzor, hero of *The Conquest of Granada*, much given to defying gods and men, defies also a ghost (to make things worse it is the ghost of his mother) and he does so in this fashion:

I'll pull thee backward by thy shroud to light;  
Or else I'll squeeze thee, like a bladder, there,  
And make thee groan thyself away to air!

Not so grossly treated, but still very crude and conventional is Pope's ghost at the opening of the *Ode to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*:—

What beckoning ghost along the moonlit glade  
Invites my steps and points to yonder shade?  
'Tis she!—but why that bleeding bosom gored?  
Why dimly gleams the visionary sword?

The fine fourth line saves the exordium of what is certainly one of Pope's finest productions; but the ghost itself is only that of the vulgarest village fancy.

I have noticed, but will not delay to quote, some attempts at the ghostly by Campbell ("The Ritter Ban," "The Spectre Boat"), which are quite ludicrously bad. Longfellow, who tried everything and never failed ignominiously, has occasionally aimed at getting the effect of the haunting and eerie, but with little success. Here is one such passage from *Evangeline*:

Dreamlike and indistinct and strange were all  
things round them :

And o'er their spirits there came a feeling of  
wonder and sadness . . .

But *Evangeline's* heart was sustained by a vision  
that faintly

Floated before her eyes, and beckoned her on  
through the moonlight.

It was the thought of her brain that assumed the  
shape of a phantom.

This is the kind of work which Longfellow could turn out by the yard—wordy, nerveless, conventional; a perpetual echoing of things said, and better said, before. The dull explanatory comment of the fifth line was not needed to make us utterly indifferent to *Evangeline's* "vision."

Contrast with this effort a piece by another modern poet, a quite minor but quite genuine poet, Sydney Dobell. I will give at length his ballad "Keith of Ravelston" as it is given in the *Golden Treasury*:

The murmur of the mourning ghost  
 That keeps the shadowy kine;—  
 Oh, Keith of Ravelston,  
 The sorrows of thy line!

Ravelston, Ravelston,  
 The merry path that leads  
 Down the golden morning hill  
 And through the silver meads;

Ravelston, Ravelston,  
 The stile beneath the tree,  
 The maid that kept her mother's kine,  
 The song that sang she!

She sang her song, she kept her kine,  
 She sat beneath the thorn,  
 When Andrew Keith of Ravelston  
 Rode through the Monday morn.

His henchmen sing, his hawk-bells ring,  
 His belted jewels shine!—  
 Oh, Keith of Ravelston,  
 The sorrows of thy line!

Year after year, where Andrew came,  
 Comes evening down the glade;  
 And still there sits a moonshine ghost  
 Where sat the sunshine maid.

Her misty air is faint and fair,  
 She keeps the shadowy kine;—  
 Oh, Keith of Ravelston,  
 The sorrows of thy line!

POETRY AND THE REVERSE

I lay my hand upon the stile,  
The stile is lone and cold;  
The burnie that goes babbling by  
Says naught that can be told.

Yet, stranger! here, from year to year,  
She keeps her shadowy kine;  
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,  
The sorrows of thy line!

Step out three steps, where Andrew stood—  
Why blanch thy cheeks for fear?  
The ancient stile is not alone,  
'Tis not the burn I hear!

She makes her immemorial moan,  
She keeps her shadowy kine;—  
Oh, Keith of Ravelston,  
The sorrows of thy line!

In this piece, where not a single forcible note is struck, where not a word is thrown away, where the vision is raised of "old, unhappy, far-off things, how past and present, visible and invisible, actual and inaudible are wrought into a unity of unceasing impressiveness!

These poems and their success or failure in the treatment of the preternatural help us to solve a question—what is, and what is not, the vagueness and indefiniteness (sometimes the obscurity), which belong to excellent poetry. It is suggestive of poetry in its fulness. It is the power to open up to our eyes by seemingly artless diction, long vistas, hori-

beyond horizons of beauty, romance, fear and awe. And it is strange how it can alternate or combine with clear definiteness and lucid outlines. This admirable combination may often be studied in Shelley, to mention but one master. *The Cloud* rests its brilliant play of imagination and fancy upon an accuracy of observation and knowledge worthy of a natural scientist; while *The Sensitive Plant* shows the same precision with regard to the world of flowers. On a larger scale still we find this combination in such scenes of Shakesperian drama as the moonlight scene in the *Merchant of Venice*, where humorous realism and soaring fancy sit hand in hand in happiest harmony. With this plastic power is to be contrasted the vagueness and indefiniteness of the poetaster. He is vague from sheer inability to see clearly, conceive clearly, or express clearly. The great poet sometimes writes hazily, as Turner or Whistler sometimes painted hazily, and for similar good reasons. The poetaster writes hazily for the same reason that a child paints hazily. There is no grasp of subject or means; nothing is strongly apprehended, nothing strongly rendered. Of this kind of work we may see abundant examples in the writings of one who is not a mere poetaster, but may be called a feeble Longfellow—in the once-popular writings of Mrs Hemans.

## V.—THE POETASTER, THE VERSIFIER, THE MEDIOCRE POET, THE MINOR POET.



It is of great importance for the peace of mind of the civilized world that the distinctions separating these four classes, the Poetaster, the Versifier, the Mediocre Poet, and the Minor Poet, should be accurately apprehended and steadily kept in mind. Laugh not, good reader: but remember how sensitive are poets (real or would-be), how great the responsibilities of their critics, and how readers, poets and critics include nearly all the civilized world.

With THE POETASTER our last paper may be said to have been concerned. For it is he who (properly speaking) provides "The Reverse" of poetry. But we did not come to close quarters with his personality or psychology. What marks him out, then, we would now say, is not so much the weakness of his means, or the insignificance of his aims, or the faultiness of his execution, or even all these together, so much as pretence and affectation. He feigns passion where there is no real feeling, imaginative vision where there is only echoing of other people's words, inspired utterance where there is but deliberately-contorted prose. He is cousin to the false prophets of old, who persisted in repeating: "Thus saith the Lord," when the Lord had not spoken. We may sternly rejoice that he has also sometimes fared like some of those false prophets. After enjoying a greater or lesser degree of vogue, he has fallen into the hands of zealous

sons of Israel, who have kindled a great fire and roasted him with so mighty a burning that the atoning smell still reeks through the ways of literature. Such was the fate of Robert Montgomery at the hands of that awful high-priest Lord Macaulay. There have been others, whose obscure names have not so well survived the holocaust. Shows and shams of the poetaster impose for a time: a Home is set up as a Shakespeare, a Young as a Milton, a Tupper for a Wordsworth,—I dare not come nearer home; but at last the torch is applied, or perhaps the mere wear and tear of time is sufficient, and presently the whole lath-and-plaster structure goes off in lamentable dust and ashes. Occasionally a big destructive critic, a Macaulay or a Jeffrey, will attempt to kindle an *auto-da-fè* with a victim of real worth: but the flames are apt to recoil on the sacrificer; the child of the gods eludes their mistaken zeal, and, like Shelley's Cloud, or Campbell's Hope, soars above his own pyre and laughs at his own cenotaph.

Excellent poets, however, and even great ones are liable to drop for moments to the level of poetastry. An extreme lapse of good taste, a sinking of the wings of inspiration, ill-fortune as to subject-matter, may cause the fall. We have already given some illustrations: Shakespeare may supply a few more: and they abound luxuriantly in the pages of the "metaphysical" poets, who seemed almost to take pleasure in these wild plunges into bathos.

THE VERSIFIER is quite a respectable, and may be a very useful and admirable person. His merit will depend largely on his guarding himself from the pre-

tentions and affectations that characterise the poetaster. His note and his function are to use the forms of poetry to achieve some purpose which is not proper to poetry. He has no vocation to express glorified passion and transcendent imagination: what he attempts is to meet some practical need, to promote some cause, to chronicle, to narrate, to satirize, to enlighten; and for this purpose he uses, as deftly as he may, the medium of verse. For verse (he knows) hits the fancy, catches the attention, grips the memory, lingers on the ear. And therefore we find that nearly all the beginnings of human literature are in verse, not prose. Laws and moral precepts have constantly tended to this form. The dry enumerations of the schoolmaster were more easily swallowed and assimilated when thus sugared and candied. Compliments and dedications snatched a grace beyond the reach of prose; satire and epigram armed themselves with a sharper sting. And the Versifier has often possessed a remarkable gift of expression. His talents were often so brilliant and varied that he could assume a most plausible resemblance to the genuine *Vates*, seer, or maker, and, needless to say, he was sometimes more attractive and popular than the genuine artist. The most admirable and unmixed example of the Versifier I know is J. R. Lowell—at least in his higher and more academic flights. “Academic flights!”—you will perhaps repeat; “surely an ill phrase!” It is an ill phrase; but its very incongruity helps to hit off the character of such a piece as Lowell’s “Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 21, 1865.” Take the following passage:—

Our slender life runs rippling by and glides  
Into the silent hollow of the past;  
What is there that abides  
To make the next age better for the last?  
Is earth too poor to give us  
Something to live for her that shall outlive us?  
Some more substantial boon  
Than such as flows and ebbs with Fortune's fickle  
    moon?  
The little that we see  
From doubt is never free;  
The little that we do  
Is but half-nobly true;  
With our laborious hiving  
What men call treasure, and the gods call dross,  
Life seems a jest of Fate's contriving,  
Only secure in everyone's conniving,  
A long account of nothings paid with loss,  
Where we poor puppets, jerked by unseen wires,  
After our little hour of strut and rave,  
With all our pasteboard passions and desires,  
Loves, hates, ambitions, and immortal fires,  
Are tossed pell-mell together in the grave.  
But stay! No age was e'er degenerate,  
Unless men held it at too cheap a rate;  
For in our likeness shall we shape our fate.

It is so good (even apart from the value of its sentiments)—yet only a good imitation of poetry! It says much and well, it suggests nothing. It is competent, graceful, elevated, but it never grips, nor overpowers, nor even gives a new life to an old

thought, much less opens for us any sudden new window into eternity.

Very different examples of good verse which is not poetry may be found everywhere in the Young Ireland literature. To this category I would assign the entire work in verse of Sir C. G. Duffy and of "Speranza." Their aim—the clearly-expressed aim of the modest Davis himself—was the stirring political appeal, not the poem. Verse was simply a medium judiciously chosen and effectively used. And, consequently, Callanan's "Gougane Barra," though far from a perfect production, has more poetry in it than any number of pieces like "The Muster of the North."

THE MEDIOCRE POET has been a noted figure ever since Horace pilloried him in the "Ars Poetica"—that casual work which so oddly became a canonical book of criticism.

Mediocribus esse poetis

Non dî, non homines, non concessere columnae.

There he stands through the ages, an undignified Prometheus, rejected by gods, scorned of men, transfixed to one of those pitiless columns! What then is this forbidden personage, and how has he deserved his fate?

He may be described as a mild and tempered version of the Poetaster. He is not ridiculous, but only weak or dull; he does not wallow in the absurd, but he hovers only a little over it. You cannot call him frigid; he is but lukewarm. He may enrapture some people of bad taste; he may extort a *succès d'estime* from some people of good taste. (Hence we see

Horace's "homines" is not to be taken too sweepingly). He may have considerable skill in making small resources go a long way : he may have so many notes to his instrument that he can conceal the poverty of his invention. He may have admirable extra-poetic qualities. He may possess every gift that Shelley lacked. But he remains mediocre because he has not, or has too stintedly, the three gifts that Shelley was lord of,—imagination, passion, and the secret of verbal music.

Looking round for examples, I fear Longfellow is pretty often a type of the mediocre poet—in his more ambitious efforts. Take *Hiawatha*, for instance, with its lack of originality, the trick and monotony of its metre, the poverty of its ideas and imagery—all this beneath a show of novelty and freshness. And it is too ambitious to be saved as genuine "minor" poetry (of which we shall speak presently). Take, again, the dull stagey "Evangeline," with its mock local colouring, shipped over from Sweden to Canada, the cheap appeal of its pathetic story, its pseudo-classical languid metre, its wordiness and lengthiness—is it not as mediocre as a Christmas oleograph? Yet Longfellow has merits (not strictly poetical) which entitle him to unflinching consideration. We should not forget, even in a purely literary study, his pure elevated tone, and his sympathetic humanity. He did an excellent life-work : he helped many good causes : his poems were singularly serviceable in kindling or feeding the love of literature in the hearts of the average man, woman and child. *Their* finer and loftier sentiments he expressed (especially in his lyrics) in a variety of clear and graceful forms, thereby winning himself an

immense popularity. Would to heaven that men of greater gifts had always done as well, and had never earned a vogue by more dubious arts!

Felicia Dorothea Browne, who became Mrs. Hemans, is, as we have already suggested, a sort of feebler Longfellow, and therefore a still clearer type of the mediocre poet. Yet, being less ambitious than he, she too may occasionally claim escape into the happier class of the "minors." It is curious how uniformly she reflects the placid domesticity of English middle-class and early Victorian life; for she was of origin partly Irish, partly German, blended with an Italian strain, and she lived much in Wales. Yet her lyrics are (with two or three partial exceptions) monotonous and undistinguished, while her voluminous sheaves of mildly-romantic and sentimental narrative, "Records of Woman" and the like, are truly mediocre. In all her work, a kind of stock-in-trade of fancy goods is carried about all over the earth, and dumped down anywhere—in Italy, or Poland, or Patagonia. The identical glades and shades, mountains and fountains, doves and loves, dark-eyed maidens and dark-browed warriors who meet in bowers and die among flowers, recur perpetually, with merely the thinnest veneer of local differentiation. "If poetry," writes A. Symons, in a penetrating study of this poetess, "were really what many people are quite satisfied it should be—an idealization of the feelings of an average mind at moments when the mind is open to every passing impression, ready to catch at similitudes and call up associations, but not in the grip of a strong thought or vital passion, then the verse of Felicia

Hemans would be, as some people once thought it was, the ideal poetry."

Needless to say, if the best are liable to lapsès into sheer poetastry, much more are they liable to intervals, and even long intervals, of mediocrity. Indeed, an intensity and force of inspiration and style which never flagged would hardly consist with sanity. Naturally, therefore, we find that the intense Shelley, who was never far from insanity, least often gives the note of mediocrity, while the well-balanced and deliberate Wordsworth most often of great poets does

Finally, we come to THE MINOR POET. The Minor Poet is one who has a distinctly smaller and feebler range of gifts than the great poets, and who essays with success humbler tasks and shorter flights. From this description we may gather at once how he differs from the Versifier and the Mediocre Poet, with whose being and doing he has sometimes been unfairly mixed up. He differs from the Versifier because he has the soul of a poet. He differs from the Mediocre Poet (as well as more emphatically from the Poetaster) in his not being pretentious. Hence he is often (like the Versifier) extremely useful and estimable. Indeed certain members of his class have been among the chief consolers and teachers of common humanity. For various reasons the great poets are often inaccessible to the small human being, to the struggler along life's way, who has little ability for comprehending the word spoken by the Dante, or the Goethe, or the Milton. He finds them too far aloof and aloft. Some of them, too, will ill repay our climb up to their oracular cells, because they use their gifts ill and the word they utter is not the word of truth or helpfulness.

Then comes along some humble singer, who can "sweetly soothe and not betray"; he sounds his gentle lyric or agreeable tale, and straightway he "holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner," chases away gloom and dries up tears. Does he not fulfil Sidney's celebrated characterization of the Poet even more often than his illustrious brother? And do not also the fastidious and the cultured decline upon his pages much oftener than they are ready to confess? But one of them has very agreeably confessed it, and we must quote from him :—

In our hearts is the Great One of Avon  
 Engraven,  
 And we climb the cold summits once built on  
 By Milton,  
 But at times not the air that is rarest  
 Is fairest,  
 And we long in the valley to follow  
 Apollo,  
 Then we drop from the heights atmospheric  
 To Herrick . . .  
 Or our cosiest nook in the shade is  
 Where Praed is,  
 Or we toss the light bells of the mocker  
 With Locker,

Or—let us venture to add on our own account—

The bard that our fancy just lobs on  
 Is Dobson.

For undoubtedly Mr. Austin Dobson, the author of

these lines, is a very agreeable specimen of the minor poet.

Longfellow and even Mrs. Hemans—when they are doing the work that really suits them—scores of Irish lyrists who have written in English, scores of German balladists, and others from elsewhere, will afford us further and varied illustration of the valuable services that minor poetry can render—of the verse-making that lightens the load of life, makes truth agreeable and duty acceptable, supplies for the unspoken jest and the absent friend.

It will be noticed that the names of certain writers have been mentioned in connection with two or three of our classes. There is nothing strange in this, as all our explanations may have helped to show. We might go further and show how it is just conceivable that one and the same person might, according to his moods and manners, figure, not only in two or three, but in all five of our categories! As thus: he might be (1) a Great Poet, by virtue of an unquestioned masterpiece or two, (2) a Poetaster, in some lamentable lapse or lapses from power and taste, (3) a Versifier, in his "pot-boilers," his Court odes, or his party-pamphlets, (4) a Mediocre Poet, in some ambitious semi-failures, (5) a Minor Poet, in some stage of his career, perhaps the earliest or the latest, when he essayed only small poetic tasks and succeeded in them perfectly. This (I say) is a conceivable full account of a poet's career; and the notion of its possibility might warn us against hasty and rash summing-up of men's work as being all this or all that. As a rule, however, things will be simpler: the great man will not often forget himself, the small man will cling to

his modest condition, the humbug will write—humbug!

The fourfold classification that we have sketched out in this paper will be still more useful should it help to restrain from hasty bracketings-together of writers and work that really belong to different categories. I also hope it will give encouragement to shy talent which fears to venture out because it is not a supreme and big talent. I have tried to show how respectable and how useful minor poetic powers may be in their employment, if they are wisely exercised and kept free from the taint of *falsetto* and insincerity. Be yourself, I would, in conclusion, say to every young writer of prose or verse who has followed these remarks; but study to develop your selfhood in the best and fullest way. Put before you, in every sense, St. Paul's great precept: "Be zealous for the better gifts." Yet do not forget La Fontaine's little maxim of good sense:

Ne forçons point notre talent;  
Nous ne ferions rien avec grâce.

## AUBREY DE VERE.

(1914.)



THE centenary of a poet's birth, especially if his life have been a long one, not infrequently coincides with the lowest ebb of his reputation; and there is reason to think that this has been the case with Aubrey de Vere. Very little notice has been taken of his hundredth birthday. At the National Literary Society, the matter having been nearly quite overlooked, there was a hastily-prepared lecture, delivered by the present writer, and it was followed by some remarkably inappreciative speeches. Nowhere else does the centenary appear to have been celebrated. In truth de Vere was an unpopular poet during his long life—1814 to 1902—and 1914 finds him still unpopular. For these facts there are various reasons—some better than others.

The critical event of his uneventful career was his reception into the Catholic Church at Avignon in 1851. From a natural as well as from a higher point of view it had a close connection with his subsequent trials and failures. He therewith cut himself off from a wide circle of friends, many of them influential in the intellectual or social worlds, who were henceforth indifferent or hostile to works they would otherwise have applauded and to a success they would

have been glad to promote. His religion, sincere and profound, permeated his views, thoughts and writings; and a Catholicism much less well-marked might have sufficed to secure him a cool reception from the English literary world and its mouthpieces—at all events from those louder voices which in that very year 1851—year of the “Ecclesiastical Titles” agitation—had been raised to shouting pitch against the religion he was embracing. As regarded Ireland, the new convert’s prospects were of course very different. But Ireland, educationally starved, necessarily half-bookless, could provide no adequate reading public for such poetry as de Vere’s. Furthermore, *pari passu* with the poet’s alienation from the Protestant public of England, went also a regrettable alienation from the sentiments of Catholics in Ireland. As Catholics they were prepared to applaud him, as Nationalists they could not. The poetic love of country which finds expression in many of his earlier effusions, the practical patriotism which showed itself in good service during the terrible famine-years, became, as time went on, chilled and repressed by the bigotries and timidities of the social class to which he belonged—a dominant land aristocracy. He strongly felt the need of better government of Ireland. But he had a deep-seated dread of the spirit of lawlessness; he saw the France of ’89, with its threat of the France of ’93, plainly present in all the more resolute popular movements of his time. With wonder and pain he saw the majority of the Catholic clergy lending their countenance or even active support to movements and methods which seemed to him vitiated by the spirits of rebellion, class-warfare

and dishonesty, by all that he summed up as Jacobinism. We find him writing in 1881 :—

The recent resolutions of the Bishops at Maynooth were a painful surprise to me. I had hoped that they must have seen by this time that their flocks needed serious moral guidance, unless the sheep were allowed to be changed by that political Circe, Mr. Parnell, into a herd of swine, and induced to run violently down 'a steep place into the sea' . . . If it [their warning and moderating advice] is much longer deferred it will come too late; and the result will be the Jacobinising of the Irish race at both sides of the Atlantic

Thus out of harmony with Irish priests and people, it is not surprising if this strong Catholic and well-meaning Irishman should have become more and more of a recluse or if the bulk of his countrymen learnt to regard him as alien, unsympathetic and negligible.

The literary critic must admit that certain features and characteristics of his poetry may be held responsible for the aloofness or indifference of many who found no offence either in his religion or in his politics. He never condescended, and he was never humorous. His genius haunts cold heights of speculation, or seeks warmth only at spiritual fires. Not only are the vulgarities of earth abhorrent to this aristocratic Muse, but she holds us too far away from its domestic charities, its humble simplicities. In the Legends of the Church and the Empire we are not allowed even such sense of home life as a monastery might afford.

We feel as might chilly travellers who view from an aeroplane in the clouds a vague snow-clad Switzerland

From some of his most successful works—his Odes, for example, or his Sonnets, de Vere came with reason to be regarded as an Irish—or half-Irish—disciple of Wordsworth. The imputation ought to carry to the full its favourable as well as its unfavourable connotations. To noble and serene elevations of thought both poets rise. As the beauty of the unspoiled Cumbrian hills and lakes and the rustic life of the Cumbrian dales tempered the Englishman's heavily-brooding and esoteric philosophy, so something of the charm which hangs around Irish (sometimes Swiss or Italian) landscape and its historic associations helps to brighten the marmoreal lines and cloud-grey tints of de Vere's poetic philosophy.

Both poets undoubtedly lacked ardent vitality. They are too cool. Wordsworth's preference for "emotion recollected in tranquillity" is well known; de Vere was pleased not to find himself as the rest of modern men—over-hasty. In his song

Love laid down his golden head  
 On his mother's knee;  
 'The world runs round so fast,' he said,  
 'None has time for me.'

Thought, song and art make the same complaint, and who can doubt but they voice the mind of their poet? There is much to be said for "the philosophic mind" under all circumstances; but it easily proves a danger to the poet, whose utterances are justified only by exalted and tense feeling.

De Vere does not lack feeling. It is the feeling of a spirit both deep and strong. But nowhere, unfortunately, does it show itself in the intense and glowing concentration which makes the greatness of Wordsworth's few greatest passages. Compare the ode "On the Ascent of the Apennines" with the ode "On the Intimations of Immortality?" The former is far better worth knowing than the reader who has never read it may probably imagine. Its theme is incomparably finer than Wordsworth's; its serene nobility of form is fully equal to his. But—up to the last stanza at least—the fire from heaven does not descend to consume the offering; we are not rapt, carried beyond criticism, as we can hardly help being by the platonizing Wordsworth.

Yet, if de Vere hardly knows such moments of Pentecostal visitation, he on the other hand maintained a securer level of inspiration than does the recluse of Rydal. For, whereas both were lacking in humour, the Irishman had a more cultivated sense of form and propriety and a keener outlook for the pitfalls of the ludicrous. Wordsworth could tumble into, nay, flounder in, bathos and absurdity; de Vere is an aristocrat in all his moods and cannot forget the *comme-il-faut*.

Such a poet was bound to fail if he attempted drama. *Alexander the Great* and *Thomas à Becket*, if they ever had life, are certainly now dead. The stage (in this case purely imaginary) is merely a platform from which the philosopher-poet enunciates his favourite theorems on Church and State. Dignified decorum reigns supreme; Macedonia's madman and Becket's murderer are never allowed to lose their tempers, to

blurt out a royal oath, or to indulge in a hypermetrical syllable.

Happier work appears in a class of poems wherein drama blends with narrative. De Vere's re-settings of old Irish legends, both Pagan and Christian, have often a noble and virile, though not exuberant life. It is, indeed, hardly the life of the old sagas. The figures that Macpherson had turned into mist are here presented to us in white marble. It is a Flaxman's or a Foley's dream of those fierce old elemental chiefs and chieftainesses, priests and kerns. Naturally the more gentle or grandiose figures come out the best. "St. Patrick on Cruachan" is perhaps the most vivid. The verses foretelling the triumphant future of Erin's faith glow with all the ardour of the poet's intense Catholicism. Far less congenial to him were those pagan aspects of the ancient Motherland which have, since his day, been dwelt upon with such amorous iteration. It is all the more remarkable that he should have left us in the pagan soliloquist of "The Bard of Ethell" perhaps his most telling presentation of human character. Ethell belongs by date to the Middle Ages, but in his veins the Christianity inherited through some generations is dashed and crossed with flashes of older altar-fires—with a primitive *diablerie*. He is no lover of unbroken peace:—

Sweet is the chase, but the battle is sweeter,  
More healthful, more joyous, for true men meeter.

He is nearly a hundred years old, but not tired of living:—

My hand is weak, it once was strong;  
 My heart burns still with its ancient fire . . .  
 If any man slay me—not unaware,  
 By no chance blow, nor in wine and revel,  
 I have stored beforehand a curse in my prayer  
 For his kith and kindred : his deed is evil.

Forgiveness is a duty to be understood with limitations :—

Columba was mighty in prayer and war;  
 But the young monk preaches as loud as his bell  
 That love must rule all and all wrongs forgiven,  
 Or else, he is sure, we shall reach not heaven.  
 This doctrine I count right cruel and hard,  
 And when I am laid in the old churchyard  
 The habit of Francis I will not wear;  
 Nor wear I his cord or his cloth of hair  
 In secret. Men dwindle : till psalm and prayer  
 Had softened the land no Dane dwelt there.  
 I forgive old Cathbar who sank my boat :  
 Must I pardon Feargal who slew my son ?

Naturally the Ireland of his own day came also to be a theme of de Vere's pen. For a patriotic poet he will seem to most readers too philosophical, too cosmopolitan, too little patriot. Thus to commemorate the terrible visitation of the Famine he wrote four poems on the seasons of "The Year of Sorrow," which are disappointingly cold and reserved in expression. On so painful a subject one might prefer no words at all to words so tranquilly measured and controlled. De Vere is happier when he can assume

the robes of the seer, admonish his countrymen as to the part they have played in the world's history and warn them against the world's besetting temptations.

Apostle, first, of world's unseen,  
For ages, then, deject and mean,  
Be sure, sad land, a concord lay  
Between thy darkness and thy day;  
Thy hand, had temporal gifts been thine,  
Had lost, perchance, the things divine  
Her flatteries scorn who reared by Seine  
Fraternity's ensanguined reign,  
And for a sceptre twice abhorred  
Twice welcomed the Caesarian sword .  
Wait thou the end, and spurn the while  
False Freedom's meretricious smile;  
Stoop not thy front to anticipate  
A triumph certain !

Unquestionably de Vere's greatest work is his *May Carols*. It is one of the greatest poems of the nineteenth century, though so far no critic has thought of saying so. Its title is unreasonably modest—in fact a misnomer. Its 3,600 lines are something quite other than a collection of bird-like lyric flights; they build up a majestic single poem and—yet more—a rounded theology and philosophy. The poem in English they most resemble is doubtless *In Memoriam*; but over *In Memoriam* they have a large advantage of subject. Their theme is the Mother of Christ—Mother of God, the link between God and Man, the woman clothed with the sun but standing upon the earth. Around this central mediating figure cluster

luminous thoughts—"elevations" such as Bossuet might have acknowledged, but tinged with Irish and songlike sweetness—on man's spiritual history, destiny, lights and hopes. Like *In Memoriam*, the *Carols* interweave with these high themes pictures from real life and vignettes of rural scenery. In point of delicate finish and felicity of language they may yield the palm to the finest pages of Tennyson's elegy. Their metrical form is less distinctive and interesting. They lack the elegiac appeal; and this unquestionably accounts largely for their lesser popularity. But they are not at all cold or lifeless. The poet is a lover, a mourner, a worshipper—none the less really because the causes and objects of his emotion lie above the ordinary range of passion. The name *Carols* suggests easy quotability, but in reality it is difficult to sample the poem without doing injustice to its close-enchained thought and unflinching vision. The following stanzas may serve to illustrate the prevailing grandeur of its manner :—

Upon thy face, O Lord, thy World  
 Looks ever up in love and awe;  
 Thy stars, in circles onward hurled  
 Sustain the steady yoke of law :

In alternating antiphons

Stream sings to stream and sea to sea :  
 And moons that set and sinking suns  
 Obeisance make, O God, to Thee. . . .

The whirlwind, missioned with its wings  
 To drown the fleet or fell a tower,

Obeys Thee as the bird that sings  
Her love-chant in a fleeting shower.

Amid an ordered universe  
Man's spirit only dares rebel :  
With light, O God, its darkness pierce,  
With love its raging chaos quell !

This noble conception of a well-ordered universe constantly recurs in de Vere's utterances. He shared with Burke and De Maistre and Newman the love of Order—Order as the great bond linking harmoniously together all things from God downward throughout His Creation—Order as the necessary condition of every good that waits on human life, including rule, life-giving liberty. He was the prophet of a lofty Catholic conservatism—a vastly different thing from the so-called conservatism unhappily more often met with—the jealous tenacity of a privileged class eager for its rights but indifferent to its duties.

Of all that the poet has to say concerning Mary herself, her place and function in the universe, her sorrows and joys, we can cull but a few lines —

Tower of our hope ! through thee we climb  
Finite creation's topmost stair,  
Through thee from Sion's height sublime  
Towards God we gaze through clearer air.

Pure thoughts that make to God their quest  
With her firm footing o'er the clouds,  
Like those sea-crossing birds that rest  
A moment on the sighing shrouds.

From the lighter interludes it is difficult to know what to select as most beautiful. Take a springtime picture such as this :—

The golden rains are dashed against  
 Those verdant walls of lime and beech  
 Wherewith our happy vale is fenced  
 Against the North; yet cannot reach

The stems that lift their leafy crest  
 High up above their dripping screen;  
 The chestnut fans are downward pressed  
 On banks of bluebell hid in green.

White vapours float along the glen  
 Or rise from every sunny brake;  
 A pause amid the gusts—again  
 The warm shower sings across the lake.

Or this summer meditation :—

While all the breathless woods aloof  
 Lie hushed in noontide's deep repose,  
 That dove, sun-warmed on yonder roof,  
 Ah, what a grave content she knows!

One note for her! Deep streams run smooth;  
 The ecstatic song of transience tells;  
 Ah, what a depth of loving truth  
 In that divine content there dwells!

THIS Irish dove suggests to the poet that primal one

of the receding Deluge, and he concludes with a lovely stanza :—

I heard her rustling through the air  
 With sliding plume—no sound beside,  
 Save the sea-sobbing everywhere  
 And sighs of that subsiding tide.

Still more marked is the blend of sensuous and mystic beauty in this lake-side picture —

Ripplings of sunlight from the wave  
 Ascend the white rock high and higher;  
 Soft gurglings fill the satiate cave;  
 Soft airs amid the reeds expire

All round the lone and luminous mere  
 The dark world stretches, far and free,  
 That skylark's song alone I hear,  
 That flashing wave alone I see.

O myriad Earth! Where'er a word  
 Of thine makes way into the soul  
 An echo million-fold is stirred;—  
 Of thee the part is as the whole

Such is the poetry (and its excellence is singularly well sustained) which criticism has hitherto treated as nearly or quite negligible. But we have no doubt at all as to the *revanche* which is one day to come. Like Dante and a very few others, this singer of Mary will, by force of sheer poetic merit, compel criticism to

forgive him the *faux pas* of having been a prophet of Catholic truth.

The high aspects of de Vere's greatness have been already not ill indicated in a sonnet of Sir William Watson's :—

Poet, whose grave and strenuous lyre is still  
 For Truth and Duty strung; whose art eschews  
 The lighter graces of the softer muse,  
 Disdainful of mere craftsman's idle skill;  
 Yours is a soul from visionary hill  
 Watching and hearkening for ethereal news,  
 Looking beyond life's storms and death's cold dews  
 To habitations of the eternal will.

Not mine your mystic creed; not mine, in prayer  
 And worship, at the ensanguined Cross to kneel;  
 But when I mark your faith how pure and fair,  
 How based on love, on passion for man's weal,  
 My mind, half envying what it cannot share,  
 Reveres the reverence which it cannot feel.

It is but a just tribute to the man, the thinker, the moralist. But the serene excellence of the artist should be filled in to complete the picture.

"*Altissimo poeta*" de Vere will always be, and therefore somewhat above heads. So far as he has attained a scanty recognition in the anthologies it is in virtue of some pieces of smaller scope to which these notes of ours have so far scarcely alluded. But even these sonnets and lyrics—especially the Odes—are less generally known than they deserve to be. A capable anthologist for de Vere's own rather

voluminous work is needed, someone like the Matthew Arnold of his leader Wordsworth, who to a public capable (as it seems) of consuming no small quantity of minor verse will bring home such attractive lyric as the "Ode to a Daffodil," such pregnant sketches as "The Bard Ethell" and a few noble pages from the histories and dramas; who, while we await the recognition and vulgarisation of de Vere's grander things, will help his more accessible inspirations to compete with the cheap novel and the cinema.

NOTE.—A useful and low-priced anthology of de Vere's poems has (we are glad to find) appeared: the editor is Lady Margaret Domvile, the publishers the C.T.S.

## WILLIAM ALLINGHAM, POET AND DIARIST

(1912.)



TO most people in Ireland or elsewhere William Allingham is, we believe, a somewhat pale and unsuggestive name. A writer with merits admitted by all competent judges to be considerable and with no small output of work, he has failed to gain any strong following. His appeal to contemporaries and (so far) to posterity has not been sufficiently definite. This son of our north-west was one of the immense army of Irish exiles and absentees. He was cut off from the majority of his fellow-countrymen (as he deeply felt) not only by boundaries of sea and land but by more than one mearing of tradition and sentiment. He is a poet who realized himself in song only rarely and in short flights. He was an official—with a distinct distaste for officialdom. He was a holder of a pension by favour of English ministers—and felt awkward under the obligation. He was a Liberal—not without illiberalities. He had a profound liking and longing for family life and all that it implies; yet not till he was far into middle age did he find for himself a home. He spent the last eighteen years of his life as editor of a leading London Magazine: but whatever name *Fraser's* may have had long ago for a certain independence and originality, it did not succeed in

eliciting and expressing, at long last, the originality of William Allingham; and, anyhow, editorship begun at fifty-six rather supposes a man made than makes him.

Allingham suffered another misfortune—one aptly described by a phrase of Tennyson's which he quotes somewhere: he was "swamped with himself." In the six columns of his *opera omnia* the considerable amount of second and third-best work has been no friendly neighbour to the best. A way out of this encumbrance has, however, been found by the well-selected *Golden Treasury* volume, which ought not only to find for itself a large circle of readers, but also to excite gradually greater interest in Allingham's other work. As for his Diary, it suffers, doubtless from the drawbacks inevitable to every genuine diary; but entire neglect of it was never possible, and—edited and supplemented as it has been by pious hands—it will always repay in an exceptional degree, the attention of every student of literature, of social history, or of human character.

We are approaching the centenary of Allingham's birth; that is invariably a good occasion for noting the influence of fashion in the matter of literary vogue. The centenary often marks a nadir. So it is, we are inclined to think, with Allingham. He was, unmistakeably, middle or late-middle Victorian—it would be off the mark to describe him by any chronological term more distinctively Irish. His personality (after youth), his poetry, his 'Rambles,' his diary come before us as a product and a mirror of the days when Carlyle was great, when Tennyson and Tyndall and Gladstone occupied the front places in public atten-

tion—the days of a Sovereign acclaimed as ‘The Good’ until she was perceived to have been German. All those personages, from the highest down, are at present in the dull shade of reaction, and so (we may believe) is Allingham.

For the earliest scenes and impressions one has but to go to the Diary. Few writers have more fully and happily described the scenes and human surroundings of their opening days. Allingham retained through life the capacity for entering into the minds of children, and with this went an unusual ability for treasuring the genuine impressions of his own childhood and giving them permanent form. No wonder, then, if his first thirty pages or so seem all worth quoting. There are however one or two passages where the merely personal scope is widened, and these especially shall be our citations.

It has been always supposed that some countries have, so to speak, a peculiar magnetic attraction for the souls of their children, and I found plenty of reason, in the conduct of my neighbours as well as in my own consciousness, to count Ireland as one of those well-beloved motherlands. This home-love is strongest in the dwellers in her wild and barren places rock-strewn mountain-glens and windy sea shores, notwithstanding the chronic poverty in which so many of them live. In these remote and wild parts Erin is the most characteristically herself and the most unlike to Saxon England. Her strange antiquities, visible in gray smouldering fragments, her ancient language, still spoken by some, and everywhere present in place-names as well as in

phrases and turns of speech; her native genius for music; her character—reckless, variable, pertinacious, enthusiastic; her manners—reconciling delicate respect with easy familiarity; her mental movements—quickly humorous, imaginative, impressioned; her habits of thought as to property, social intercourse, happiness; her religious awe and reverence;—all these, surviving to the present day, under whatever difficulties, have come down from times long before any England existed, and cling to their refuge on the extreme verge of the Old World, among lonely green hills, purple mountains and rocky bays be-murmured day and night by the Western Ocean.

I never came back to the Ballyshannon country after an absence, without thinking that it looked to be the oldest place I ever saw.

Ballyshannon itself (or, more correctly, 'Belashanny') where the poet saw the light in 1824 is lovingly 'described under many aspects: 'an odd, out-of-the-way little town' looking straight across the Atlantic to America and the setting sun: a town with 'a voice of its own, low, solemn, persistent':

Wherever I think of that town, I seem to hear the voice. The river which makes it rolls over rocky ledges into the tide; before spreads a great ocean in sunshine or storm, behind stretches a many-islanded lake. On the south runs a wavy line of mountains; and on the north, over green or rocky hills, rise peaks of a more distant range. The trees hide in glens, or cluster near the river; gray locks and boulders lie scattered about the windy pastures.

Yet not these grandiose aspects of the Donegal seaboard, gave to the child the first, most vivid and most enduring impressions.

A child's little *camera obscura*, however sensitive to the picturesque, cannot include it on a large scale. There were mountains . . . a large cataract . . . the Ocean: yet it was none of these that impressed me with a sense of beauty and mystery, but the water-tub [in the kitchen 'with its clear olive depth and round wooden dipper'] and the well; flowers and leaves, and, very particularly a heap of gray rocks, touched with moss and on one part laced with briars, in a certain green field to which the nurse used often to bring us.

Places, for this child, had more importance, more reality, than persons; nevertheless he gives us vivid family portraits. He makes real for us his Aunt Bess, whose dominative spirit influenced somewhat too largely the atmosphere in which grew up this boy, naturally susceptible and delicate, yet withal eager and spirited.

She was the maiden aunt of the family, at this time between forty and fifty, very charitable and helpful—from an unwavering sense of duty, and inflexibly 'low-church' in her religious opinions and practices. She did her duty by me, as by everybody, with firmness, regularity and a general good-sense; what was wanting in her ministrations was that personal atmosphere of love and sympathy which does everybody good without effort, and especially children.

The mother, loving, but quiet and frail, died when William was but nine years old. The father belonged to a familiar North-of-Ireland type—sincere, but rough and hasty. From neither parent did the children know anything of tender caresses, nor did any relative or dependent supply this want. No wonder if inanimate surroundings became animate and vocal to the receptive and hungry-hearted little boy. No wonder if he expended thought and affection on such cronies as the walnut-tree that nodded into the nursery-window :

To sit at that little upper-floor window when it was open to a summer twilight and the great tree rustled gently and sent the leafy spray so far that it even touched my face, was an enchantment beyond all telling. Killarney, Switzerland, Venice, could not, in later life, come near it.

There was also the mystic casement in the gable, at the end of the garden.

This gable did not appertain to us; its one little window high up, nearly buried in dark leaves, belonged to an inscrutable and almost mysterious interior. The Great Pyramid could not give me, in later life, so profound a sense of antiquity and awfulness as this old hay-barn gave to the little boy.

Are these things trivial and not worth dwelling on? Some may be of that opinion : I cannot agree with it—especially when there is question of a future poet and (we may add) diarist. Are we not all, in our maturest years, taken up with hundreds of objects and impres-

sions of no more permanent value and solidity than little Allingham's were? Would our emotions (even our profoundest) in face of the Great Pyramid or the Parthenon or the Palace of Versailles seem a whit less childish to a mind that recalled the beginnings of Arcturus and Orion?

Of the big things that came gradually into the boy's life the biggest undoubtedly was religion

I was probably about four years old when they began to take me to church on Sundays . . . The townsfolk and the country gentry had pews in the body of the church; some very poor people sat on benches in the aisle, and, at the other end of the scale, two families had notably large and comfortable pews. [One of these] the Tredennick pew was a place of mystic and luxurious seclusion to my fancy—a sort of *imperium in imperio*. Its woodwork completely partitioned it off from the aisle, but chance peeps showed a snugly-cushioned and carpeted interior, and even a special little fire-place with its special little bright fire on winter Sundays. . . . Essentially, neither service nor sermon had the very slightest interest or meaning for me; but the sense of a solemn stringency of rule and order was deeply impressed, and the smallest infraction, it was felt, might have unimaginable consequences. A child's prayer-book falling from the gallery astounded like an earthquake; and once, I remember, when the congregation suddenly started up in the midst of the service, pew doors were thrown open, and people ran out into the aisles,—a lady had fainted,—it was really as if the Day of Judgment

had come. Connected with church and churchyard was a thought, vague, vast, unutterably awful, of that Last Day, with Eternity behind it; yet it was definitely localised too, and it seemed that not only the rising but the judging of our particular dead must be in our own churchyard.

A somewhat similar vision of judgment inspired the "Dream" poem—that grim procession of the Departed softened only by the 'fair pale face' of the still loved and loving Mother.—

I heard the dogs howl in the winter night;  
 I went to the window to see the sight:  
 All the Dead that ever I knew,  
 Going one by one and two by two . . . .

A terrible thought of Eternity sometimes came [continues the Diary], weighing upon me like a nightmare, on and on and on, always beginning and never ending, never ending at all, for ever and ever and ever, till the mind, fatigued, fell into a doze as it were and forgot. I suppose this was connected, though not definitely, with the idea of a state of punishment. The suggestion of eternal happiness took no hold upon my imagination. My earliest thought of Heaven pictured it as a Sunday street in summer, with door-steps swept and the shutters of the shops closed.

The tedium of the services had one or two "mitigations," as he calls them, such as the observation of faces, noses and attitudes.

The gathering together of neighbours, rich and poor, old and young, as in the presence of the Universal Father and Ruler, has an impressiveness different from anything in daily life. If it could indeed be done simply and purely 'in spirit and in truth'! But here, in one small community, a section only of the neighbours drew together at the set solemn seasons; another section, though animated by the same motives, drew together in different place and manner, drew *apart* from the former gathering, many of whom came from the same households; and in the very act of worship both sections displayed and emphasized feelings of mutual suspicion, contempt and animosity.

Once or twice I was taken clandestinely to Mass by a nurse, on some Saint's Day most likely; and stood or sat for a while just inside the chapel door. It felt like a strange adventure, with some flavour of horror but more of repulsiveness, from the poverty of the congregation and the intonation of the priests.

He argued with his nurse in favour of the superiority of Protestantism, on the ground that, "the Catholics, you see, are poor people."

To which Kitty replied: "It may be different in the next world." A good answer, I felt, and attempted no retort; being indeed at no time of my life addicted to argue for argument's sake, or for triumph.

At some distance after religion came politics. The

sorrows and problems of Irish national life could not be wholly absent from the boy's expanding horizon, even though Belashanny was a quieter place than most country-towns. It had "luckily lost," as he says, the privilege of being a borough returning two members,— "a real curse to a small town"; with regard to which opinion one might compare Canon Sheehan's juvenile reminiscences of Mallow elections. The influence of the clergy on all sides was used in the interests of peace. Yet there were always the military, whose uniforms, bands, marchings to and fro, bugle-calls, occasional billets on civilians helped to relieve general dulness by movement, colour and noise, but who presently began to suggest to young William less pleasant thoughts. And then there were the mysterious Whiteboys.

I came early to the conclusion that I was living in a discontented and disloyal country. It seemed the natural state of things that the humbler class—which was almost synonymous with Roman Catholic—should hate those above them in the world and lie in wait for a chance of despoiling them. Yet I never for a moment believed this of any of the individuals of this class among whom I lived. I used to fancy and sometimes dream frightfully of a swarm of fierce men seizing the town, bursting into the houses, etc.; of soldiers drawn out in rank with levelled guns, of firing, bloodshed and all horror.

Once there was something like an approach to realisation. It must have been at a time when our garrison was temporarily withdrawn or reduced to a detachment, that a rude army of "Whiteboys"

actually marched through the town armed with scythes, pikes, and I know not what. I was turned six years old then (1830). I remember being at the corner of our lane, holding somebody's hand or lifted in somebody's arms, and have a most dim yet authentic memory-picture of a dark, wild procession of men, crowded closely together, holding and brandishing things over their heads . . . . I looked with curiosity unmingled with dread, but it was probably after this that the dread showed itself in dramatic form in my dreams. I have been told that my Aunt Bess on this day was walking through the Pur. (a long straggling street on the south side of the river) when she met the mad-looking multitude with their pikes, etc. Someone said: "That is Miss Allingham going to visit the poor," and they opened a way for her to pass through. No outrage at all, I believe, was done by the 'Whiteboys,' or whatever they were.

With regret one finds that with the advance of boyhood years the vein of autobiography grows rapidly thinner. School-training and experiences played an insignificant part in Allingham's life: his schooldays were short and unhappy; and in later years he often expressed regret at the scantiness of his educational opportunities and the deficiencies thus left in his mental equipment. It is difficult to excuse the parental policy which forced so promising a boy into bank-clerking at the age of fourteen. After five years of this uncongenial employment he was happy to escape into the more varied and open-air occupations of a revenue - official. With the resounding title of

“Principal Coast Officer of Customs” and the extremely modest initial salary of £80 a year, he took up his new duties at his native town; subsequently at Donegal, Coleraine and Ramsay (Isle of Man), rejoicing in the opportunities afforded him of constant intercourse with ever-attractive Nature.

After 1860 England claimed him more and more, and the price of exile had to be paid for the boon of liberty. His fate, he would have said, had willed it so His feelings of regret found an expression which has still power to grip us: it was in the “Adieu to Belashanny.” The stanzas may be too numerous and catalogue-like for a perfect poem: but we feel a genuine affection throb through their lingering rehearsal of local detail. One of the most taking stanzas is this:—

“The thrush will call through Camlin groves the  
 livelong summer day  
 The waters run by mossy cliff and banks with wild  
 flowers gay;  
 The girls will bring their work and sing beneath  
 a twisted thorn  
 Or stray with sweethearts down the path among  
 the growing corn;  
 Along the riverside they go, where I have often  
 been,—  
 Oh, never shall I see again the happy days I’ve  
 seen!  
 A thousand chances are to one I never may  
 return:  
 Adieu to Belashanny and the winding banks of  
 Erne!”

After 1866, when he came to take part in his father's funeral, he never did return. We may believe that his heart was "sore and heavy" and that his farewell purpose was genuine :

If ever I'm a moneyed man, I mean, please God,  
to cast  
My golden anchor in the place where youthful  
years were past,  
For dearer still that Irish hill than all the world  
'beside ;  
It's home, sweet home, where'er I roam, through  
lands and waters wide.

By home, by heart, and by verse, Allingham may claim a place among distinctively Irish poets. By race, religion and family tradition he represented Elizabethan settlers. But few have better hit off than he the Irish ballad in English speech and few more happily turned the lyric of our fairy lore. In the former class there are pleasant rustic playings with love such as *Winny* and *Kitty O'Hea*, while touches of a fine seriousness mingle with the lightness of *Lovely Mary Donnelly*. The humility of true love has not often been more genially expressed.

Tis you're the flower of womankind, in county  
or in town ;  
The higher I exalt you, the lower I'm cast down.  
If some great lord should come this way and see  
your beauty bright,  
And you to be his lady, I'd own it was but  
right . . . .

O lovely Mary Donnelly, your beauty's my  
 distress :  
 It's far too beauteous to be mine, but I'll never  
 wish it less :  
 The proudest place would fit your face, and I am  
 poor and low ;  
 But blessings be about you, dear, wherever you  
 may go !

It is a curious fate that has befallen one of Allingham's most tragic compositions, *The Girl's Lament*—its having been plagiarized to make matter for a serio-comic music-hall ditty. Here is one of the stanzas which have been thus ill-treated :—

There is a tavern in yonder town,  
 My Love goes there and he spends a crown,  
 He takes a strange girl upon his knee,  
 And never more gives a thought to me.

But it may be that both the tragic and the comic versions have drawn upon a common popular original.

Not always distinctively Irish in tone, Allingham's fairy lyrics are unquestionably among his best productions. The most often-quoted in this *genre* is the short-lived piece—a genuine favourite with children—which begins thus :—

Up the airy mountain  
 Down the rushy glen,  
 We daren't go a-hunting  
 For fear of little men—

Wee folk, good folk,  
Trooping all together,  
Green jacket, red cap  
And white owl's feather.

But better (we think) than this, for the grown-up ear at all events, and more redolent of Donegal, is *The Lepracaun* with its far subtler rhythms. A stanza like the following cannot be rightly read or lilted without study; with it the lines are charming:—

You watch your cattle the summer day,  
Sup on potatoes, sleep in the hay;  
How would you like to roll in your carriage,  
Look for a duchess's daughter in marriage?  
Seize the shoemaker! Then you may!  
Big boots a-hunting,  
Sandals in the hall,  
White for a wedding-feast,  
Pink for a ball.  
. . . This way, that way,  
So we make a shoe.  
Getting rich every stitch  
Tick-tack-too!  
Nine and ninety treasure-crocks  
This keen miser-fairy hath  
Hid in mountains, woods and rocks,  
Ruin, round-tower, cave and rath,  
And where the cormorants build;  
From times of old  
Guarded by him,  
Each of them filled  
Full to the brim  
With gold.

In the life and the verse of a poet passing from his twentieth to his thirtieth year it is natural to look for something of a love-story. One, perhaps more than one, seem to find their expression in the verses of that time. But the Diary gives us little elucidative light. There are, however, a few very significant lines which speak of an "Ideal" worshipped remotely and despite of extreme difficulties of communication, yet rich for the worshipper in real human sweetness, 'spring-flower-like,' and never afterwards fading from memory. This mysterious passion seems to have had no earthly sequel. Neither had another, which is much more calculated to provoke a smile,—a juvenile *engouement* for the great singer Jenny Lind. Intensely susceptible to music, Allingham found one of his chief delights in the Opera; and his notes of London and Dublin performances in which "the Swedish nightingale" took part are particularly full and enthusiastic. He tells how, after an evening of *La Sonnambula*, when nearly a dozen bouquets had been thrown, he made a rush after the fall of the curtain to secure one of "Amina's" flowers which had fallen near the footlights. A luckier competitor, however, carried off the trophy, and this disappointment helps perhaps to account for the gloomy reflection jotted down that evening: 'the theatre *at best* a hollow, unwholesome, unsatisfying excitement.' We smile; nevertheless, that conviction seems to have been sincerely his: and the only epistle in which he ventured to address the great *prima-donna* was an exhortation to give up the stage altogether as unworthy of her. In 1887, an old man, he notes the death of Mme. Goldschmidt Lind:—"A good soul,

with music in it as well as in her voice; whom I much longed to meet in private life, but never did."

An unsettled mind and wavering design were shown in 1854, when Allingham suddenly threw up his Customs employment in order to start on a literary career. His early poems had found many admirers, and in London he had formed literary acquaintanceships and even intimacies. In 1850 he had brought out his first volume, *Poems*, with a dedication to Leigh Hunt. At the British Museum Library he had become friendly with the librarian, Coventry Patmore. Together the two poets looked up Blake; but that now much-lauded genius was so far in 1850 from having secured a place on the British Parnassus that he was not even to be discovered on the shelves of the British Museum. It was also in 1850 that Alfred Tennyson, on occasion of the gift from Allingham of the *Poems*, became his life-long friend. Fourteen years later the Laureate was to prove in a practical way his friendship by obtaining from Gladstone for Allingham a pension of £60 a year, which later (in 1887) was increased to £100. Thackeray, the Rossetti's, Dickens, Edward Fitzgerald, the Howitts', Browning and many others—notably Carlyle—were soon included in the circle with which Allingham associated. Nevertheless the London literary scheme, after a few months' trial, was abandoned. He found that the duties and worries of professional journalism, even of the higher and wider kind, were too uncongenial to a temperament given to contemplation rather than action. By 1855 he was again going his rounds as a Customs Inspector; and this remained his principal occupation till 1870 when he finally retired.

Seeing less and less of Ireland from the 'fifties of the century and the 'thirties of his own life onward, he became more and more out of touch with Irish influence. His English surroundings naturally pulled him in other directions, and pulled all the more strongly because they were intellectually imposing. It is not surprising, therefore, if his Diary begins to abound in the evidence of spiritual exile and spiritual contention.

One sees him in daily intercourse and dialectic conflict with minds attuned neither by knowledge nor by sympathy to anything that belonged to his native country. Let it be said at once to his credit that in the midst of surroundings where he must have been strongly tempted to truckling and servility his demeanour consistently stands out as correct and manly. As an Irishman and otherwise he often (it is clear) showed himself both able and willing to "hold his own." Yet it is also clear that as an Irishman he was not often allowed to feel himself at home, and that the foreign atmosphere by degrees coloured and moulded his soul into ever greater congeniality with itself.

Little sympathy was to be looked for from such men as Froude, Patmore or Browning. No less incurably bigoted among his anti-Irish associates were, unfortunately, two still closer and more notable intimates—these were Tennyson and Carlyle. Tennyson we hear of now "raging against the Fenians and all Irishmen along with them—'Kelts are all mad furious fools'; now treating Brian Boru as a jocose myth and Ireland in general as 'that horrible island.'" Carlyle judges Petrie's book on Round Towers 'intolerably stupid.' 'He cares,' says Allingham, 'to hear nothing about

Ireland, save what feeds his prejudices. His is the least judicial of minds.'

Indeed Carlyle's extravagances to have had that not rare effect of all extravagances—that they over-reached themselves and turned possible disciples into opponents. 'In Irish affairs,' again notes Allingham, 'he finds nobody but Froude to agree with him.' In 1880 Tennyson declares: "Ireland's a dreadful country! I heartily wish it was a thousand miles from England. I like the Irish—I admit the charm of their manners, but they're a fearful nuisance." It is only fair to remark that Tennyson's onslaughts were not always to be taken as wholly serious, nor was Ireland the only part of the world fiercely assailed in his conversational outbursts. They excited Allingham to effective (if seldom effectual) *ripostes*. But, if attack thus served to feed the fire of patriotism, still the glow was evidently dying lower and lower for lack of the essential oxygen. In 1866 the last year in which he saw Ireland, one finds him reading someone's *History of Ireland*, and he thus comments :

Lawlessness and turbulency, robbery and oppression, hatred and revenge, blind selfishness everywhere, no principle, no heroism : what can be done with it?

We know that kind of book and that kind of mood ; but the mood may grow to a fixed outlook : we see here the poet losing his vision of the ideal—nay, the truer—Ireland.

In Allingham's case there were, of course, congenital difficulties. We have got more than a hint of

them from the record of his earliest years. Here is a later entry : " Old Irish Airs on Violin. I love Ireland : were she only not Catholic ! But would she be Ireland otherwise ? " It would be difficult to condense more meaning into a three-line entry. An ignorance and a dislike of Catholicity remained part of his mind and heart throughout all other changes. And it chilled and killed the ardour—often promised, never really awakened—of the patriot. A land that had suffered and struggled, age after age, for her religion, that was still a martyr for its sake under his own eyes—how was she to be loved or hymned or helped by one who, while he acknowledged a thousand subtleties in her beauty and her motherhood, saw in her religion only a repellent mystery ? Open-minded man as we usually see him, nevertheless, meeting that religion in many a form from Wiseman and McGettigan and De Vere and Patmore down to newsboys and apple-women, he never comes even near to a view of it from inside. He carries through life, he condenses into a kind of creed, the prejudices first caught at Ballyshannon from his Aunt Bess and his father, from the childish glimpses of the Mass in the poverty-stricken Catholic chapel, from the " intonation of the priests " and the fear of the Whiteboys.

Allingham's earlier and better views and feelings about Ireland found expression in a lengthy and elaborate poem published in 1864. *Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland* is less of a poem than of a tract-cum-story in verse. Its two thousand-odd rhymed couplets might suggest a modernized bundle of Popian *Moral Essays* ; it has much less art, but much more humanity

and sweetness Its outlook on Irish affairs and conditions suffers from colourings and limitations already sufficiently indicated : nevertheless, as a study of landlord and tenant relations in Ireland and of other painful problems connected with the land question, it retains considerable value and interest There are many pages where the author puts well and vigorously for his English readers certain truths about Ireland that have been constantly obscured and denied Take the following—which may stand as our sole extract :—

Search the world around,  
 Where are you safer than on Irish ground ?  
 No burglar reconnoitres your abode,  
 No footpad dogs you on the lonely road,  
 No ruffian's arm or cowardly *garotte*,  
 Walk where you please, is flung across your throat ;  
 No pistol-pointing mask, with stealthy light,  
 Across your slumber stoops at dead of night ;  
 No friendly neighbour, spouse, or next of kin  
 Mixes your glass, to drop the powder in ;  
 Confess, when you have searched the wide world  
 round,  
 You're nowhere safer than on Irish ground

It was not merely in Allingham's character as Irishman that religious prepossessions and negations came between him and the peace of his soul. He felt keenly the *maladie du siècle*. It was de Musset, I think, who first named it so, and expressed it in many a poignant passage like the following :

Je ne crois pas, o Christ, à ta parole sainte  
 Je suis venu trop tard dans un monde trop vieux ;  
 D'un siècle sans espoir nait un siècle sans crainte ;  
 Les comètes du notre out depeuplé les cieux.

After reading de Musset one day, Allingham jotted after his name : "What is life worth without love, without faith?" At these twin anchorages, it is clear, the pull and the whirl of his London life made it increasingly difficult for him to ride. Tennyson, Carlyle, Browning, Rossetti, Fitzgerald, Morris, Clough, George Eliot,—what a 'disorienting' circle for the child of genius, ill-instructed and ardent, suddenly received and flattered by reception into their midst? Before the solvents of their intellectual and temperamental hostility the religious ideas that Allingham had carried away from Ballyshannon melted away like snow before a bonfire. The image is the more appropriate as Allingham seems to have been playing a very passive part while this *deliquium* of his beliefs continued. In the midst of much recurrent talk and soliloquizing on ultimate questions, we see little evidence of serious efforts to fill up the blank places of an originally defective education, or to strengthen the soul-fortress against recurrent assaults. As regards acquaintance with Catholicism, we hear of his going once to a High Mass, and once to hear Wiseman, who was lecturing on "self-culture,"—nothing more. The conversion of Aubrey de Vere and Patmore might have been expected to stimulate the mental processes of their poet-friend in the direction of religious enquiry : but he makes only the disappointing note that it made any 'real intimacy' with these men thenceforth 'a

thing of the past.' No form of Anglicanism or Protestant dissent seems to have won from him the compliment of any earnest attention. Anglican bishops were regarded with particular disfavour, even when they happened to be old acquaintances. "Magee," the Diary notes, "is made Bishop of Peterborough; reflection thereupon; when we met at Ballyshannon he was a curate and we stood on a social level. But would you like to be a Bishop? Would anything induce you to be a Bishop?"

• Another episcopal figure who recalled childhood days was Dr McGettigan, the well-beloved Primate of Armagh. He is pictured as a simple priest in *Laurence Bloomfield*, twice (and much more happily) in the Diary:—

A tall, very comely man, with a pleasant brogue and simple manners—speaks and preaches in Irish *ad lib* · tranquil, simple, dignified, more like by far to one's notion of a primitive bishop than any other prelate I have seen. A good man—if he were only not a bishop!

It must be allowed that Allingham shows himself repelled by the blank unbelief, or indifference, or superficial aestheticism of many among his literary and artistic acquaintances. He was on the other hand, sympathetically drawn by the religious restlessness—one might almost say querulousness—of the two dominant figures of his world—Tennyson and Carlyle. Both honoured him with a large measure of confidence. No figure lives in the Diary more vividly than the aggressive, sometimes brutal, often pathetic, figure of

Carlyle. The story of his youthful religious experiences and subsequent internal struggles was closely akin to that of Allingham, and to the young Irishman he unbosomed himself as to few others and with unusual geniality on those early revolts that had cost the tears of his mother, on his intellectual adventures with Tom Paine, with Goethe, with Æschylus, with Shakespeare, on his inner rages against modern dogmatists and sentimentalists. His characteristic outlook, at once bewildered and angry, meets us in the Diary again and again. "He was contemptuous," writes Allingham, "to those who hold to Christian dogmas; he was angry with those who gave them up; he was furious with those who attacked them. If equanimity be the mark of a philosopher, he was of all great-minded men, the least of a philosopher." He denounced the scientists who dogmatized about the origin of humanity: he "longed to thrash" preachers who applied undogmatic soothing syrup to the wounds of humanity; as for Cardinal Manning, necessarily dogmatic, he said: "I have often been invited to places with the temptation of meeting Manning; but he is perhaps of all human creatures the one I would most decidedly refuse to meet. If we did, it might possibly end in actual blows, old as I am"—[he was eighty.]

But while the "Sage" thus brandished his unphilosophical cudgel, he felt painfully within his own bosom "every day and hour" the fluctuations of the combat of faith and unfaith. "We know nothing," he says one day, "All is, and must be, utterly incomprehensible. Annihilation would be preferable to me—to this state I am in."

The old man of 1878, like the young author of *Sartor Resartus*, sought refreshment or at least anodyne in the serene universalisms of Goethe. 'I hold with Goethe' he said (and he repeated the verses in his own translation).—

The Future still hides in it  
Gladness and sorrow;  
We press still thorough,  
Naught that abides in it  
Daunting us, onward.

And solemn before us,  
Veiled, the dark portal,  
Goal of all mortal :—  
Stars silent rest o'er us,  
Graves under us—silent

Here eyes do regard you  
In Eternity's stillness;  
Here is all fullness,  
Ye brave, to reward you;  
Work, and despair not !

Eloquent words, indeed; yet, as they failed to bring consolation to their writer and speaker, so perhaps the listener too felt that their value ended with their eloquence.

Of Tennyson's self-searchings, Allingham records almost as many evidences. "He is unhappy," notes the diarist in one place, "from his uncertainty regarding the condition and destiny of man. Is it dispiriting to find a great poet with no better grounds of comfort

than a common person?" However this may be, anyhow "a poet's doubts and anxieties are more comforting than a scientist's certainties and equanimities." But on this poet's doubts and anxieties we may dispense ourselves from dwelling. Tennyson has voiced them for himself in language which has caught and lingered in the world's ear. Nor shall we dwell in this connexion on D. G. Rossetti, of whom one full-length picture is given, or on William Morris, who thought the question of the existence of God "unimportant." As to scientists, we meet Darwin—chiefly in his old withered-up days, when his loss of any spiritual outlook had led (as he confessed) to an entire lack of sympathy with poetry or art. Tyndall also appears—as for instance in this dinner-table episode—with another eminent person. "Tyndall began talking in his loose way about 'this poem—or poetic idea—God.' Gladstone looked at him with severity: 'Professor Tyndall, leave God to the poets and philosophers, and attend to your own business.' Tyndall fell quite silent for several minutes."

. . . . .

While these fires crackled around, the snow continued melting: Allingham did not bring himself to close quarters with the history or logic of any creed. He lingers irresolute; he writes poems that end with interrogations. "Is it all in vain?" he asks of the sea; and he appeals to the moaning blasts of night—

Wintry wind,  
Oh, where to find  
The hopes we have left so far behind?

Mystery cold,  
 To thee have they told  
 Secrets the years may yet unfold?

Sorrow of night  
 Is love so light  
 As to come and go like a breeze's flight?

Opiate balm,  
 Is death so calm  
 As to faint in one's ear like a distant psalm?

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the Diary is entirely or even mainly taken up with enquiries into ultimate things and the rather depressing results. Rather is it a very variegated garden where each comer may observe or pluck what especially appeals to his taste. It is a gallery where many notable personages, caught and thumb-nail-sketched in the chance attitudes of daily life, remain alive and unforgettable.

Three such personages appear in the following—the longest episode we shall quote. The scene is Paris, the date 1858.

'Browning was here this morning,' Thackeray said. 'What spirits he has—almost too much for me in my weak state: he almost blew me out of bed! . . . He has a good belief in himself, at all events. I suppose he doesn't care whether people praise him or not?' 'I think he does—very much.' 'O does he? Then I'll say something about him in a number of the *Cornhill Magazine*.'

After dinner I proposed that we should . . . . beat up Father Prout. "His quarters are close by. You know him, don't you?"

"Yes, I know that singing priest a little."

He was then Paris correspondent of the *Globe*, and his letters were much admired. It was said that the *Globe* had been obliged to buy a fount of Greek type by reason of Mahony's fondness for classical quotations.

In a narrow street at the back of the Palais Royal, in a large lowish room on the ground floor, we found the learned and witty Padre, loosely arrayed, reclining in front of a book and a bottle of Burgundy. He greeted us well, but in a low voice, and said: "Evening, boys; there's a young chap asleep there in the corner." And in a kind of recess we noted something like bed-clothes. Thackeray was anxious to know who this might be, and Prout explained that it was a young Paddy from Cork or thereabouts, who had been on a lark in Paris and spent his money. Prout found him "hard up," and knowing something of his friends in Ireland had taken him in to board and lodge, pending the arrival of succour.

This piece of humanity was much to Thackeray's taste, as you may suppose. I said the Burgundy was 'too strong,' and had brandy and water instead.

There are various other appearances and glimpses of Browning, some amusing enough.

Browning called on Carlyle to ask if he might dedicate to him his *Agamemnon*. (Carlyle) I told him I should feel highly honoured. But, oh, bless

me, Allingham, can you understand it at all? I went carefully into some parts of it and for my soul's salvation couldn't make out the meaning. If anyone tells me this is because the thing is so remote from us, I say things far remoter from our minds and experiences have been well translated into English,—the Book of Job, for instance.

Calverly calls Browning 'a well of English defiled.'

Allingham himself opined that there was "too often a want of solid basis for Robert Browning's brilliant and astounding cleverness" and that his riddles presented with Sphinxian solemnity had often no answers that really fit them."

Swinburne is not distinctly met with the following is Allingham's impression of the volume, *Poems and Ballads*, which made the author famous—or notorious—in 1866:—

Can't like it; great display of literary power of a sort—to what result? So elaborated, so violently emphatic, so really cold-blooded.

In 1867 we meet at dinner 'Ouida' (Louise de la Ramée),—

"in green silk, sinister clever face, hair down, small hands and feet, voice like a carving-knife; with a portrait of an immense dog, in a locket, which she detached after dinner and handed round for inspection."

Allingham and Tennyson agreed as to feeling a diminished esteem for Byron since their boyhood.

A. He was the one English writer who disparaged Shakespeare. He was a lord, and talked about, and he wrote vulgarly; therefore he was popular. T. "Why am I popular? I don't write very vulgarly?" A. "I have often wondered that you are, and Browning wonders." T. "I believe it is because I am Poet-Laureate. It's something like being a lord."

That was in 1866: Tennyson hardly then dreamt he was one day to add to laureateship "the other grace" of lordship.

As regards the great names of more settled rank, belonging to past literary epochs, we find many an utterance here which may hearten the timid dissident from current critical dogmas. It is curious, for example, to find both Carlyle and Emerson unable to "see anything" in Shelley's poetry. Carlyle pronounced *Paradise Lost* "absurd"—could admire it only in fragments. It would be piquant to quote Carlyle's flings at other literary divinities, were they not so excessively frequent. He became monotonous in denunciation. Of more exceptional interest, perhaps, is this comment of his on British military affairs, uttered in 1873, when, after his long labours on *Frederick the Great*, he was no mere tyro in the arts of war:—

Carlyle has no belief at all in the efficiency of the British Army: "nobody connected with it has the least notion of the art of war. Our officers ought to be sent to Germany to learn this, and one or two of our royal princes ought to go."

Of notable military personages we meet but one; this was Lord Wolseley, whose views as to the value and sacredness of human life did not strike Allingham agreeably:—

He agreed with Dr. Bodichon's theory for improving the world in the shortest possible time by the painless extinction of all human beings. He would have juries, including a large proportion of men of science, to decide on the fitness of this or that to live . . . supplies of chloroform for gaols and hospitals, for cripples and soforth; and the world would be *débarrassé* of such trouble and expense. He seemed to mean it.

Music and musicians provoke a few penetrating comments. He did not esteem highly the popular gifts of Arthur Sullivan

*Mikado* (in 1885)—not an atom of melodic invention. Sullivan's only way of getting at the semblance of a tune is to set words with a very marked rhythm, and by dint of time-beat and harmonisation to give a sort of an air—but 'tis a mere bubble. In "Yum-Yum" (and elsewhere) the phrase is old and familiar.

Very different is this note on George Petrie (1866) :

Fine, spring-like day, but I not well—thinking of George Petrie all day—sad and sweet recollections. In the mild sunshine of his company I never had a vexed moment; his presence like one of those tender old Irish airs which flowed so lovingly from his violin.

On the death of Ferguson in 1886 Allingham bitterly notes the ignorance and indifference of the English Press as to the genius and achievement of the Irish poet.

*Times* obituary this morning: "We have to record the death of Sir Samuel Ferguson, Q.C., LL.D., Deputy Keeper of the Public Records in Ireland: for some years a Vice-President of the Royal Irish Academy." (A Vice-President!) Not one word or hint of his poetry or other writings. Truly the union between England and Ireland is not made of flesh and blood, but the harsh material of politics and economics: no thrills of national sympathy run through the connecting tie . . . No London paper speaks of Ferguson as a man of letters.

It was Allingham's melancholy feeling that, to men like Ferguson and himself, England and Ireland alike, though for different reasons, presented a sadly unkind soil for the development of their best powers. "Cork gave me birth, but couldn't give me bread," said the painter Maclise in his day: and often has the complaint been echoed since. It is hard to have no choice

between starvation and a bread sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet but unwholesome.

On into the last years of his life Allingham continued to jot down day by day or at least week by week events and impressions. In one of these last entries we read :—

“ I care for any old diaries for the sake of the Past—the sad, sacred, happy Past, whose pains, fears, sorrows, have put on the calm of eternity—mysterious Past, for ever gone, for ever real, whose footsteps I see on every page, invisible to other eyes.”

He died, after a lingering illness of nine months, on November 18th, 1889. The body was cremated at Woking. The incinerated ashes were brought for interment to Ballyshannon, and “ the winding banks of Erne ” at last regained their poet

. . . . .

A word must be given in conclusion to some aspects of Allingham as a literary figure to which we have as yet scarcely alluded. His temperament and powers as a singer were happily blent rather than great at any single point. He had the poet's impressionability. With the beauty of the visible world, wind and waves, stars and clouds and summer suns, he found, from childhood to old age, refuge and solace from the worries and griefs of “ this pinfold here.” Yet this elective affinity with the remotely beautiful, with faultless but soulless Nature, did not hinder a saving harmony with the incalculable and faulty greatness of

humanity. Domestic ties were for him a good earnestly looked for, then gladly accepted and cherished. He had sympathy for the poor and tenderness for children

As a critic, he persistently ascribed to matter over manner and to sense over sound a superiority which with a later generation became unfashionable. As an artificer in verse, he naturally never gives us these airier and freer effects which more recent metrists have sometimes achieved; but the carefully-euphonious prosody of the Tennysonian era was an instrument on which he played to excellent effect.

How beautifully closes his sonnet—a war-time inspiration—*To the Snowdrop!* It was in 1855 He thinks of the white flower as “conceived without sin” amid a sinful world; and then comments on his thought—

A fitting phantasy and fond conceit !

Yet mark this little white-green bell, three-cleft,

Nor say : “ of miracles the Earth’s bereft ”

Lo, for our comfort, here is one complete :

And, after this, the whole new springtime left

And all the roses that make summer sweet.

A curious but (we think) successful experiment is the sonnet ‘Honeysuckle’ in nine-syllable trochaic lines. ‘The Ruined Chapel’ is an effective study in ‘atmosphere’ and varied refrain.

In quite a different style, very personal in thought, though reminiscent of Goethe and Mathew Arnold, is the gnomic piece from which we give this fragment :—

What is the artist's duty?  
His work, however wrought,  
Shape, colour, word, or tone,  
Is to make better known  
(Himself divinely taught),  
To praise and celebrate,  
Because his love is great,  
The lovely miracle  
Of Universal Beauty :  
This message would he tell.

And if he deal, perforce,  
With evil and with pain,  
With horror and affright,  
He does it to our gain ;  
Makes felt the mighty course  
That sweepeth on amain,  
Planet-like, smooth and severe,  
Of law ; whose atmosphere  
Is beauty and delight,  
For these are at its source.

His own work, be it small,  
Itself hath rounded well,  
Even like Earth's own pall  
Wrapt in its airy shell.  
His gentle magic brings  
The mystery of things ;  
It gives dead substance wings ;  
It shows in little, much ;  
And by an artful touch  
Conveys the hint of all.

An excellent poetic *Credo!* Its serious philosophy gives place to a more humorous and more aggressive note in the lines called 'Advice to a Young Poet.' The advice had its appositeness in the days of Browning and is by no means out of date in ours.

You're a true poet; but, my dear,  
 If you would hold the public ear,  
 Remember to be not too clear! . . .  
 Be strange; be verbally intense;  
 Words matter ten times more than sense . . .  
 Your readers must not understand  
 Too well; the mist-wrapt hill looks grand,  
 The placid noonday mountain small.  
 Speak plainly, folk say: "Is that all?"  
 Speak riddles—"What is here?" They read  
 And re-read, many times indeed:—  
 "It may be this: it might be that.  
 Who can be certain what he's at  
 This necromancer?" While they talk  
 You swing your solemn cloak and stalk,  
 Or else look on with smile urbane:—  
 "Well done, my children; guess again!"

The lines give us the man and thinker, who, if he failed to find for himself a definite and satisfactory path in life or art, at least never postured before the public as teacher and prophet. We may feel that he would have been a happier man and a more commanding influence had he succeeded in grasping and holding certain precious things that Ireland offered him. Yet Ireland owes him grateful recollection. He escaped

the guilt of injuring her, as some sons of stronger gifts have done, by false or unfair presentation : he has left a few inspired pages and some heartfelt musical lyrics that are truly hers and his and unforgettable.

## THOMAS BOYD.

(1907.)



WHEN we have praised something as "genuine poetry" it is difficult to add anything to that particular supreme commendation. Logical weapons, at least, are of little use, and simple quotation will be our best means of carrying conviction. One feels this in the case of the small volume which is now before us. There is little in the more obvious aspects of Mr. Boyd's poetry to raise prompt suspicion that he is a writer of genius. It will probably strike one at first inspection as very like other English poetry written in Ireland during the twenty years or so after 1890. We shall go on to find that its general inspiration is that "neo-Celtic" impulse which had already given so much verse of various value. Not only may we safely assign Boyd to that "school," but one may easily point out in his pages evidences of the pre-existence of its older and dominant members. And yet we have here a true poet, possessed of all the originality that true poetry must claim—of all that it need claim. He sings because he must, says of what genuinely moves him to musical utterance, and sings supremely well.

The subject-matter of these poems does not help to proclaim them great. Their intellectual content is not usually important; there is nearly everywhere an absence of "message." Yet here and there we meet with sayings of pith and moment—weighty lines suggesting that with further development the writer might one day claim that title of "great" which belongs only to those who speak with the *os magna sonaturum* and the *mens divinius*. The vivifying power of imagination is here—creative power, working on antique and faded themes and making them live again in colour and music. A poet-soul speaks: the idiom is not always free from blemish, but it is not spoiled by the affectations and oddities that are put on to disguise poverty or to baffle our sense of borrowed inspiration.

The longest piece in the volume is a dramatic scene entitled "On the Road to the Ford." The hero Cuchullin drives his chariot forward to war. His thoughts and presentiments are brought before us in lines that may readily suggest the name of Shakespeare.

Red fires of war on yonder mountain-peak,  
That tongue the darkening air, dimening the stars,  
Ye guide me on my way. Yet dark it is;  
And very dark what lies unknown before me.  
My spirit ! lonelier than the wintry oak  
Companioned only by a mourning wind,  
Grows cold before the weary breath of night,  
I hear deep muttered sighs as of farewell—  
As if this day had folded up from me  
For ever all the good things of the light.

To the hero, thus heavily boding as he starts on his journey, appear three mysterious women. One of them promises prosperity if he will turn back from his

Return and reign in power ;  
 And to thy sword shall fall the blossomed bough ;  
 And thou shalt have a kingdom for a dower,  
 A light upon thy brow ;  
 The sun shall league with thee, and all thy land  
 Grow fair with fruit and corn,  
 Thy rivers shine with fish ; thy warrior band  
 Make all thy foes a scorn.

But Cuchullin answers :—

Power sleeps in prosperous days a dreamless sleep,  
 We know the joy of power only in strife,  
 And highest joy in the great hour of all,  
 When all our strength goes forth, though we may die.

In language and imagery of sustained beauty another of the women promises peace and wisdom ; then the third offers enduring love. But the warrior is constant to his purpose, and ends the declaration of his unquenchable spirit in lines where an old image is revived in new splendour :—

And all my past—my greater self now urges  
 To deeds beyond the weakness of the hour ;  
 Yea, as a wave, whose might has slowly gathered  
 In raging with the dragon-winged wind,  
 Recoils not, though it would, from the dread rock,

But dies in anger, foaming to the skies.  
 Dearer is self-fulfilment to the strong  
 Than the entranced oblivion of love;  
 Dearer than hollow sway o'er mighty clans,  
 Or fruitless knowledge; dearer even than life.

It has the Shakesperian ease and power.

We leave this poem to notice a lyric drawn from the same Cuchullin cycle: it sets before us the famous Bull of Cuailgne—cause of direful wars—in verses which splendidly exemplify a poet's use to poetic purpose of material not specially promising.

The sons of God have died for him,  
 The sons of Mortals die;  
 He breathes death from his nostrils' rim,  
 Death lightens from his eye

Slowly he journeys to the West,  
 Trampling the sons of light;  
 Beneath his hooves their limbs are pressed  
 Red in the wastes of night.

The shadows of the primal wars  
 Darken his giant sides,  
 And his harness gleams with glimmering stars  
 That light his mighty sides.

His voice is of the deep; his path  
 With the fair dead is strewn;  
 Awful, upon his brow he hath  
 The great horns of the moon.

To find a parallel to this lyric one must perhaps turn back through the ages to Job's description of Leviathan and Behemoth. Impressive and memorable creatures have been given us recently by Leconte de Lisle in his basking hippopotami and Andean condors; but compared with Boyd's evocation—this illimitable figure wearing the blood-clouds of a gigantic war—they seem crude and small.

Beside this study in the spiritualizing of the material we may place a picture wherein an ideal is delicately incorporated. The spirit of Poetry has been invoked by many a poet, but we know not if ever with rapture more truly of her own kindling than in Thomas Boyd's appeal "To the Leanan Sidhe."

Thy beauty! ah, the eyes that pierce him through,  
 Then melt into a dream;  
 The voice that sings the mysteries of the blue  
 And all that be and seem;  
 Thy lovely motions, answering to the tune  
 That ancient Nature sings,  
 That keeps the stars in cadence for all time  
 And echoes through all things . . . .

A similar evocation, worded, however, in a haunting half-trisyllabic metre, is found in the stanzas called "Angus in the North." It has sometimes been doubted whether these oldest Celtic myths can have any meaning for our generation: or, if they can, of what value that meaning will be. Into the difficulties of the second question we will not now enter; but as to the first the answers have been sufficiently numerous and emphatic. Thomas Boyd has been kindled to

inspiration by these fables of a remote dawn. The ancient Irish Orpheus lives for us here again, re-created, indefinite only because spiritual, in the light shed by the poet's intense vision :—

Thy white limbs shine through the shadows,  
And thy wind-loved locks are curled  
From the white uplifted throat  
That sings in the grey of the world.

And ah ! thy shining eyes  
Are alive with the soul of light  
That was living before the sun  
Or the quiet fires of night.

In this poem there is nothing superfluous, and nothing weak—if we except a minor flaw—the hypermeter of one line, which careful revision would have easily got right.

Perhaps the most memorable poem in the volume, as it is also one of the longest, is "Ethne in Torinis." One will do well to preface it by reading "Balor" which is wrongly printed away from it, but which serves it as introduction and explanation—also as foil. In "Balor" we are shown a savage old demi-god or demi-demon, who exhales in monologue his contempt for men and his thirst for their blood. He has a fierce kind of love for his daughter Ethne. A prophecy has been heard that from her is to spring a son who will one day be the slayer of Balor; and therefore he has shut her up "in Torinis" in the rocky isle of Tory,—"the spoil of a kingdom hoarded in the dark."

In "Ethne in Torinis" we meet the maiden herself, and learn from her lips that she has already seen the face of man. She loves and is loved by the hero Kian. Hero-like he had swum from the mainland, and found her, one night, when—

The winds were still, and yet the ocean rolled  
Slowly, great moonlit waves, half gloom half gold,  
Didst thou not fear to come from thy far shore,  
Adventuring in the shadow of Balor  
On such a night? I saw thee on the tide  
Swim to the cove upon the eastern side  
Where sheltered waters lay . . .

Narrative and lyric elements combine throughout the poem in about the same proportion as in Tennyson's "Enone" to which it bears a certain resemblance. Something of the Poet-Laureate's graceful classic idyl may have been lingering in the memory and ear of the poet of "Ethne." But, in the first place, the metre of "Ethne" is essentially different: in the second, "Ethne," though shorter, though less artistically finished and rounded than the earlier and famous poem, is a far greater thing. It has a white intensity of passion to which Tennyson remains always a stranger. It deserves to be ranked with the great love-poems of the world. Without effort or strain, without monotony, without a touch of mere rhetoric or false emphasis (there may be found perhaps, one single weak couplet) the monologue rises to a climax of passion, to the convincing utterance of a love primitive, simple, noble—a love inevitable as winds and flowers, a love so fused with all perception of delightful out-

ward things, with all self-devotion, fear, joy and hope, that it has become identified with life itself. It would be unfair to quote fragments, beautiful though they might seem, to prove the perfection of a poem so created: but we may attempt to define further our judgment of it, by some comparisons.

Shelley's "Epipsychidion" is in the same metre—in both cases an unexpected one—heroic couplets; it is more vast, vague, wonderful, not so human in its hold. Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese," with all their human and feminine charm, might seem, set beside "Ethne in Torinis," only like lyrics of Mendelssohn's compared with the tragic depth of the "Unfinished Symphony." Yet it never loses calm clearness of style and in this respect surpasses Robert Browning's love-poems—too often obscure and tortuous. In simplicity of genuine passion it has an advantage over any love lyric that Crashaw—sometimes equally intense—could ever have written, and it rises into an atmosphere not unlike that of his mystical raptures.

It is regrettable that such first-fruits of a poetic genius should have been followed by no products of riper growth—that such music should lapse into silence. Be the cause what it may, the fact is to be deplored: nor does it help to justify the lack of appreciation which has hitherto kept such poems in an obscurity so incongruous with their merits. To say nothing further of the more exalted and esoteric aspects of this volume, one would gladly hear more in the strain of enthusiastic patriotism of which "Banba" is in the volume the solitary but splendid utterance.

And we love thee, O Banba,  
Though the spoiler be in thy hall,  
And thou are bereft of all,  
Save only that Spirit for friend,  
Who shapes all things in the end ;  
Though thine eyes are a sword that has slain  
Thy lovers on many a plain,  
When glad to the conflict they pressed,  
Dumb with the light of thy breast,  
To die for thee, Banba !

In rejoicing, O Banba,  
Thou hearest the far-off sound  
Of a river that rolls underground,  
That will rise till the daylight be won,  
Till it burst, till it foams in the sun ;  
Thou hearest as from afar  
The golden thunders of war,  
The cries of the conquering lords,  
The ringing, the singing of swords,  
That shall crown thee, O Banba !

Still more might one welcome further work in the spirit and tone of the memorial verses on Lionel Johnson. They do not perhaps belong to the author's best achievement, but they have caught a Christian inspiration, which might well elicit in future more memorable work from one whom the early loss of his deeply-religious friend could move to such lines as these :—

O Life, the mighty fire consuming all, we mourn  
That thou too soon didst burn  
This branch of the singing leaves and flowers that  
trembling shone  
With light from beyond the sun.  
But yet is our sorrow his joy when the Light he fol-  
lowed in gleams . . . .  
Ingulfs him in dazzling beams . . . .  
And I saw over billows of light the heart of the mystical  
Rose  
Its flaming leaves unclose . . . .  
My unworthy eyes might not see her face, but in  
wonder I saw  
His look of love and awe;  
And I dream of his golden rest, while the eternal  
movement rolls,  
In the hands of the Mother of Souls.

## GERARD HOPKINS.



It is an odd fortune that has brought out before the generation of 1919 and under the editorial care of the English Protestant Poet Laureate the poems of a Jesuit priest deceased thirty years earlier. And the little volume thus produced has many other singularities. In fact the "oddity and obscurity" (to use the editor's own words) of the poems it includes have provided almost the one point of agreement among its various critics. There has been a difficulty, it would seem, in arriving at any other general verdict. The difficulty has, we think, its origin in a lack of judicial discernment on the part of the poet himself. Gerard Hopkins had an exquisitely refined literary sense, but it permitted him to lapse into nearly every literary fault. He was a cultivated scholar, but this did not stay him from fantastic misuse of the English language. Most delicate perceptions were associated in him with a most untrustworthy sense of fitness and proportion. His metrical notions, as here expounded in an "Author's Preface," are a mixture of simplicities, unpromising novelties and one or two illuminating suggestions. His poetic work in general has—to use the words of Coventry Patmore—"the effect of veins of pure gold embedded in masses of impracticable quartz"; and

there is evidence enough that the owner of the mine misjudged the golden and quartzian elements and their admixtures. He is a proof (by no means the first) that a *crassa Minerva*, not a subtly-poised discernment, is the surest safeguard against the misadventures of genius.

For reasons among which we may discern discretion and good feeling Mr. Bridges, in ushering into the world his friend's volume, has remained almost wholly silent as to his career and personality. While approving of his reticence, we must admit its disadvantages. The general reader, confronted by lyrics so unusual and often so very personal, and left in the dark as to the circumstances of their origin, is likely to resent the *discipline arcani* to which he is subjected and to be the worse for it in his reading. Let us then attempt to supply (in a very restricted way) some of the information he will desiderate.

Born in 1844, at Stratford, near London, of parents English and Protestant, Gerard Hopkins had brilliant school-days (Cholmeley was their scene) and early showed an almost bewildering variety of talents or accomplishments, including drawing and singing. Entering Balliol College, Oxford, as an exhibitioner, he there added architecture to the list of his amateur pursuits. If his career disappointed high hopes of intellectual results, the comparative failure might well be ascribed to early exhaustion of the mental soil.

Before he was sixteen years old he produced well-turned Spenserian stanzas, headed with a Greek motto and showing a precocious knowledge and sense of artistic matters. *A Vision of Mermaids*, written when he was eighteen, is Keatsian in its richness. Very

like Keats is the discussion on the question "why sadness dwells on mermaids" :—

Whether that they ring the knells  
 Of seamen whelm'd in chasms of the mid-main,  
 As poets sing; or that it is a pain  
 To know the dusk depths of the ponderous sea,  
 The miles profound of solid green, and be  
 With loath'd cold fishes, far from man—or what;—  
 I know the sadness, but the cause know not;

and very like Keats the description of their music :—

Then they, thus ranged, can make full plaintively  
 A piteous Siren sweetness on the sea,  
 Withouten instrument, or conch, or bell  
 Or stretch'd chords tuneable on turtle's shell;  
 Only with utterance of sweet breath they sang  
 An antique chaunt and in an unknown tongue

Derivative and immature, such art might, nevertheless, one fancies, have flowered in later years into a style more charming than the somewhat archaistic and word-thrifty manner that actually followed after a songless interval.

From 1865 to 1868 we find Hopkins at Oxford, having for his tutor Walter Pater, and for his favourite study Plato. It is easy to imagine how his sensitive and receptive spirit must have responded to the touch of two such masters; how easily too, the Keatsian love of the beautiful in art and nature, thus stimulated, might have led him not upwards, but downwards. Happily another influence became predominant with

the young Oxonian—that of Newman and the chief things that Newman stood for.

In January, 1866, a poem called "The Habit of Perfection," shows the spiritual in him asserting mastery over the merely aesthetic; it also shows his singular originality. For who else, old or young, in the England of 1866 was writing in a strain at all like the following?—

Elected Silence, sing to me  
And beat upon my whorlèd ear,  
Pipe me to pastures still, and be  
The music that I care to hear.

Shape nothing, lips; be lovely-dumb :  
It is the shut, the curfew sent  
From there where all surrenders come  
Which only makes you eloquent.

Be shellèd, eyes, with double dark  
And find the uncreated light :  
This ruck and reel which you remark  
Coils, keeps and teases simple sight . . .

"The can must be so sweet," he reflects, "the crust so fresh, that come in fasts divine,"—and—"what relish shall the censers send along the sanctuary side!" The conclusion is still more precise in its anticipation of his priestly calling :—

O feel-of-primrose hands, O feet  
That want the yield of plushy sward,  
But you shall walk the golden street  
And you unhouse and house the Lord.

The hedonist peril was clearly past. In 1867 he was received into the Catholic Church by Newman himself. In spite of his religious preoccupations and numerous artistic distractions he had put in a distinguished academical course ending with honours in the first class, so that he easily found a post in the Birmingham Oratory School and a home near to the guide and father to whom through life he looked with reverence and love. Yet this situation, seemingly so promising, did not hold Hopkins for a year. In 1868 he offered himself to the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Roehampton. Newman seems to have approved or even counselled the step. Others wondered. So intensely individual a soul, strong-willed too, already at twenty-four a finished product of Anglican and Oxford training—was such a one likely to find self-expression and happiness in the definite *cadre*, the strict discipline of the regiment enrolled by Ignatius Loyola?

Beyond a doubt Hopkins realized that this step meant costly sacrifices; he knew and he willed: his poems strike one of their sincerest notes when he touches on the iron and fire of sacrifice. Had he not already, indeed, gone through the anguish of parting involved in his conversion? That he lived to endure some intense unhappiness, especially in his later years, is evident from his *litera scripta* (and now *impressa*) That his sensitive, susceptible spirit and unconformable originality (call it 'oddity') would have been brushed less roughly by the world, and fought more successfully the battles of the world, outside the ramparts of the religious life and of the particular religious life he

chose, is a supposition for which it is difficult to find any good argument.

A proof of the intense seriousness with which he viewed the renunciatory character of his vows is afforded by the literary holocaust which he made early in his noviceship—a burning of all his poems, so far as they were in hands, with the intention of writing no more in the future. No superior (it need hardly be said) demanded of him any such renunciation; but he did not, in fact, compose any further poetry—apart from a few trifles demanded of him by occasion—until, in his thirty-first year, an invitation actually fell from the lips of a superior.

“When,” he wrote to his friend R. W. (afterwards Canon) Dixon, “in the winter of '75 the *Deutschland* was wrecked in the mouth of the Thames and five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Germany by the Falck laws, aboard of her were drowned, I was affected by the account and happening to say so to my rector [it was at St. Beuno’s College, North Wales], he said he wished someone would write a poem on the subject. On this hint I set to work and, though my hand was out at first, produced one.” *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, thus accounted for, was replete with so many “oddnesses that when I offered it to our magazine *The Month* . . . they dared not print it.” Such reception of his work, when by degrees and sparingly he allowed the stream to flow again, became an expected fate; so that the unappreciated poet acquired the habit of concealing the fruits of his fancy wholly from the general eye and confiding them only to the knowledge of two or three intimates, who did not belong to the circle of his religious or even Catholic

brethren—to a very select *côterie* in fact, including only himself, Mr. Bridges and Canon Dixon, with Coventry Patmore as a kind of honorary member. With these he corresponded on poetry and cognate themes, confiding still more intimate jottings and reflections to note-books seldom opened for any eye but his own.

Meantime, he “went through the mill” as a Jesuit. He was no shirker from the unspectacular self-denial required, putting sincere goodwill into the various tasks imposed on him as student, teacher, preacher and missionary priest. It was often, however, evident enough how severe a strain he felt in the heavier responsibilities of such a life and its monotony of labour. The propensity to that variety of idleness called “*aliud agere*” was strong in his blood, and the ‘something else’ would usually be some literary or artistic fad that seemed oddly remote from the day’s immediate concerns.

In 1884 came the most notable event of Father Hopkins’s years in the Society. He was invited to Dublin to be a Fellow in Classics of the newly-established Royal University of Ireland. It became his business to examine twice yearly a couple of hundred candidates drawn from every part of Ireland and to profess Greek in University College, Dublin. Although the establishment conducted by his Irish religious brethren in St. Stephen’s Green was unofficial, unendowed, and in various ways sadly restricted, yet the prospects for the new Fellow might well have seemed propitious. Of his professional competence there was no doubt: Jowett had pronounced him one of the finest Greek scholars that had passed in his time through Balliol.

His duties might have pleasantly recalled the old Balliol days, Pater and the redoubtable "Master"; the perfume of Newman reminiscences still hung about the house in Stephen's Green; on the College Staff were Thomas Arnold and Ornsby and Stewart and Fathers Darlington and Browne,—Englishmen, Oxonians and Newmanites like himself; the society in which he daily moved had even more than its due share of intellectual gifts. By labours which could in no sense be called hard or uncongenial he was called to further Newman's noble enterprise on behalf of higher Catholic education—an enterprise none the less glorious in itself or attractive to a fine spirit because tangled with hindrances and mortifications. Large freedom of movement was conceded by his superiors, and he formed many congenial acquaintances. Music was a frequent and much-prized recreation. Perhaps some of his happiest moments were spent with children when he met these in friendly houses. Though sometimes silent and abstracted, his usual demeanour with his house-companions—including the sixteen or twenty resident students—was cheerful and unconstrained. The mention of the students brings back another pastime of his in which they took some part. This was the collecting of words and expressions—Anglo-Irishisms—for Dr. Wright's then growing Dialect Dictionary. Dublin was not too happy a situation for studying the *nuances* of provincialism, and certai. humoristic youths, getting wind of what was wanted, added further complications. They plied the too-trustful collector with idioms and vocables, often highly-coloured, entirely of their own invention or interpretation. A few wonderful things

were forwarded to Dr. Wright, but he seems to have been on his guard; the initials "G.M.H." do not occur very often in the Dictionary, and then not (so far as I have remarked) in connection with any very notable specimen of Irishism.

Thus during those years Father Hopkins' situation might seem to have been a favourable one. Yet from the beginning his health, his spirits, his capacity for work or enjoyment seemed to sink. The causes are not obvious, though we believe they were simple enough. Some facts that might be, or have been, cited as such, turn out, when properly regarded, to be symptoms rather than causes. Ireland, that has captivated so long a succession of incomers, failed to win from him a single line of poetry: it remained his land of exile. Yet, in the sole poem in which Ireland is mentioned, there is no complaint of his Irish associates.

To seem the stranger lies my lot, my life  
 Among strangers. Father and mother dear,  
 Brothers and sisters are in Christ not near  
 And he my peace my parting, sword and strife.

England, whose honour all my heart woos, wife  
 To my creating thought, would neither hear  
 Me, were I pleading, plead nor do I: I wear-  
 Y of idle a being but by where wars are rife.

I am in Ireland now; now I am at a third  
 Remove. Not but in all removes I can  
 Kind love both give and get. Only what word  
 Wisest my heart breeds dark heaven's baffling van  
 Bars or hell's spell thwarts. This to hoard  
 unheard,  
 Heard unheeded, leaves me a lonely began.

“ In the life I lead now,” he wrote at the same time to Mr. Bridges, “ which is one of a continually jaded and harassed mind, if in any leisure I try to do anything I make no way—nor with my work, alas! but so it must be.” Here, too, there is no suggestion of any source of trouble outside himself. And the strongest expressions he uses in sonnets which the Poet-Laureate not unjustly calls “ terrible ” are such as these : “ self-yeast of spirit a dull dough sours,” “ a curse ” which seems to reign within him. These internal troubles, together with a minute conscientiousness and his slight frail physique, rendered an intolerable burden to him the task of marking the few scores of candidates answer-books, which each summer or autumn came into his hands. Stories, which had their amusing side, circulated as to the desperate efforts made by colleagues and officials to extract from Father Hopkins the final returns for some fifty candidates while he was still struggling with the award or non-award of a mark or half-a-mark to No. 10 or No. 11. Irish politics, too, began to be a serious pain and trouble to him. He had come over with views sympathetic enough for one whose outlook was intensely English ; but Ireland was then in the throes of the “ land-war,” and intercourse with some members of the landlord class who had suffered beyond their personal deserts aroused Father Hopkins’s compassion and—on general grounds—his alarms. Concern, resembling that of de Vere, for the spiritual prospects of discontented Ireland induced him to write for light and solace to his old counsellor, Cardinal Newman. The aged Cardinal sent a reply which may be said to have become historic. He feared his anxious friend was looking at Irish

affairs through spectacles too absolutely English and thought that if he himself (the Cardinal) "had been born an Irishman he would be a rebel."

But there is no evidence that politics or professorial duties or any other external cause played a large part in the making of the "terrible" sonnets. What the intelligent eye may read in all the author's utterances is this: a temperament, a bodily constitution, exceedingly high-strung, delicate and sensitive, and a prolonged trial of spiritual desolation, an "obscure night" of the soul. It is to some of David's psalms, to the darkest moods of Elias or Job, to the utterances of some Christian mystic storm-beaten in his cloudy citadel, that we must look for the analogue of the following, and for its interpretation:—

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief  
More pangs will, schooled past forepangs, wilder  
wring.

Comforter, where, where is your comforting?

Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?

My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a chief  
Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and  
sing—

Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked no ling-  
ering! Let me be fell: force I must be brief.

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap  
May who ne'er hung there. Nor long does our small  
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep  
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all  
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

' It is a soul face to face with despair, and just holding good in the tremendous trial. ✓ But in another "terrible" sonnet we hear defiance definitely hurled at the powers of evil :—

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, feast on  
thee,  
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last  
strands of man  
In me or, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can.

In a more peaceful moment he writes the beautiful sonnet on patience—"patience, hard thing!" which yet he recognizes as a hive full of honeycombs.

Through all moods, and conditioning all, there ran the golden thread of his religious life—a life (in the opinion of those who knew him best) of rare depth as well as simplicity. Detesting ostentation, he was yet faithful in all observances. Of his more devout concerns an agreeable reminder comes in 1888 (a few months before he died) in the shape of a sonnet written to celebrate the then recent canonization of the Jesuit lay-brother Alphonsus Rodriguez. It had been requested, and was to be forwarded to Majorca, the chief centre of rejoicings on the event; but the author sends, as usual, his first draught to Mr. Bridges for comment and criticism, adding an explanation of the occasion and the quaint remark: "The sonnet (I say it snorting) aims at being intelligible." This aim was, we fear, for most readers or hearers, missed; but the heroic meaning of the saint's life is not missed, and there is a healthy militant ring in the phrases concerning "the war within, the wand we wield unseen, the

heroic breast not outward-steeled," and the arbiter of battles, God, who

Could crowd career with conquest while there went  
Those years and years by of world without event  
That in Majorca Alfonso watched the door.

We meet, finally, the strange piece entitled: "That Nature is a Heracleitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection," which, amid much volcanic noise and *scoriae*, bursts into a kind of wild paean of triumphant hope:—

Enough! the Resurrection  
A heart's clarion! Away grief's gasping joyless days,  
defection,  
Across my foundering deck shone  
A beacon, an eternal beam. Flesh fade and mortal  
trash  
Fall to the residuary worm; world's wildfire, leave but  
ash;  
In a flash, but a trumpet-crash,  
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am.

Amid such glooms and gleams the end came. After an illness of three weeks typhoid fever carried him off in 1889 amid his books and papers in the room at Stephen's Green. He left his MSS. to the care of Mr. Bridges.

. . . . .  
If the editor keeps his counsel as to the life and the man, he is not silent as to the poet and the poems. After a dedication, couched (oddly enough) in Latin

to the poet's aged mother, still surviving in her ninety-eighth year, the Laureate addresses his departed friend in a sonnet which lacks nothing of fervent appreciation :—

Our generation already is overpast,  
 And thy lov'd legacy, Gerard, hath lain  
 Coy in my home . . . .  
 Go forth : amid our chaffinch flock display  
 Thy plumage of far wonder and heavenward flight !

In a similar strain the ' Preface to the Notes ' speaks of " the rare masterly beauties " that distinguish the text. With all this friendliness Mr. Bridges' detailed criticism remains strictly and even sternly judicial. There are few causes of his friend's " oddity and obscurity " which he does not touch on and exemplify. He notes the not infrequent bad or ludicrous rhymes, the " mixture of passages of extreme delicacy and exquisite diction with passages where, in a jungle of rough root-words, emphasis seem to oust euphony " ; the erring quest of euphony itself with an outcome of mere jingle.

It would be difficult, indeed, to find a volume which justifies so many different impressions and comments. It is chiefly, perhaps, in matters of form that Father Hopkins' poetry defies precedent and invites attack. One could easily quote long passages or entire poems in which meaning which we fain would gather is hidden behind a cloud-mirage of far-fetched phrases and queerly assorted vocables or tangled up in knotted and sometimes insoluble syntax. Euphonious verse beguiles us over some difficult passages, but too often

we are jolted over stylistic ruggednesses without the relief of any perceptible rhythm. New and surprising rhymes are plentiful, but exorbitant prices in sense and congruity are paid for them. The passion for verbal assonance of every and any kind leads to oblivion of sense and tune.

In this last way *Binsey Poplars* (to take a moderate example) quite misses the elegiac effect intended :—

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,  
 Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,  
 All felled, felled, are all felled ;  
 Of a fresh and following folded rank  
     Not spared, not one  
     That dandled a sandalled  
 Shadow that swam or sank . . .

Ten or twelve (only ten or twelve)  
 Strokes of havoc unselfe  
     The sweet especial rural scene,  
 Rural scene, a rural scene,  
 Sweet especial rural scene.

✓ A sort of breathless hunt after assonant monosyllables is one of this poet's amusements. Thus :—

Let life, waned, oh, let life wind  
 Off her once skeined stained veined variety  
     Upon, all on two spools; part, pen, pack  
 Now her all in two flocks, two folds—black,  
     White; right, wrong; reckon but, reck but, mind  
 But these two . . .

This excerpt may serve also to illustrate the wilful oddities of Father Hopkins's grammatical constructions. ✓ He inverts and condenses bewilderingly. Instead of "end ycur roaming round me" he will say "your round me roaming end"; instead of "to my own heart" he writes "to own my heart"; instead of "the beauty that has been," "the beauty been." He pays no attention to the fact that English monosyllables like "own," "still," "well," "part," may be noun, adjective, verb, adverb, and escape ambiguity only by careful collocation. He will often add to the obscurity thus caused by straining the meaning of these unfortunates homophones. Mr. Bridges—a pundit in linguistic matters—has not failed to note this weakness.

✓ The poet's impatience of every word or syllable that is merely constructive and his eagerness to pack every phrase and line with meaning and colour lead him to omissions of the relative pronoun which out-Browning Browning. An inserted 'that' is the key to many a strange line like the following :—

Squander the hell-rook ranks sally to molest him.

✓ In the building up of compound words Hopkins is again audacious beyond all precursors. Not merely two or three but half-a-dozen elements will he juggle with. We hear of "come-back-again things," an "O-seal-that-so feature," "to heavenpie" (*i.e.* to make pied with bits of heaven), "a fallowbootfellow" (?) "wind-lilylocks-laced" (*i.e.* apparently "lilylocks laced by the wind") and a

Tatter-tassel-tangled and dingle-a-dangled  
Dandy-hung dainty head!

✓ But—when we have rejected, in the name of all the orthodoxies, such “derangements of epitaphs” and topsy-turveydoms of grammar—it remains impossible, in fairness, to deny his striking successes. They are to be met with on many a page, constantly intermingled (to their detriment, alas!) with some of his least happy inventions. ✓ We cannot admire as a whole the harsh force of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, but it has not a few lines as fine as these:—

Wiry and white-fiery and whirlwind-swivelled snow  
Spring to the widow-making, unchilding, unfather-  
ing deep.

What life again in those picturing Oxford:—

Towering city and branching between towers;  
Cuckoo-echoing, bell-swarmèd, lark-charmèd, rook-  
racked, river-rounded.

What magic in such phrases as these:—“hoar-hallowed shrines,” “a crimson-cressed dawn”; what power in these—“Christ, our passion-plungèd giant risen,” “womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all Night!” Such poems in miniature make us regret more the ill-setting of the gems, the perverse unthrift of so wealthy a brain

However we may estimate the poet's failures or successes, beyond question his audacities made him a

true pioneer. His belated appearance should not be allowed to obscure his notable originality. In his passion for Teutonic monosyllables, in his hatred of convention or meretricious ornament, in the free swing of his rhythms and the running over of his lines, in the restless novelty of his forms, of his rhymes following all manner of schemes or no-schemes, of his sonnets varied in some half-dozen ways, he was quite ahead of his own generation and anticipated doings still far off in the twentieth century. Many a poem of Walter de la Mare, of Sandburg, Untermeyer, W. W. Gibson, James Stephens, Joseph Campbell, could be fitted without any incongruity into the slender volume of this shy recluse who passed from earth long before Victoria or Tennyson.

When we turn our attention to the spirit and substance away from the body and form of this poetry one finds much that may (for many readers) redeem the less-happy ventures and peradventures of the "rare ill-brokered talent"—to quote a phrase from his editor's verse-tribute. Subtle penetration of thought and kindly human feeling are both found and sometimes in happy combination. Sympathy with the poor and simple, with children and boys, is often breaking out: would it were always with unmixed charm! *Tom's Garland (upon the Unemployed)* and *Harry Ploughman* are among the author's most freakish and bewildering inventions, and *The Bugler's First Communion* has fantastic twists and queer rhymes; but very beautiful are *Spring and Fall (to a young child)* and *In the Valley of the Elwy*. The former we give in full:—

Margaret, are you grieving  
 Over Goldengrove unleaving?  
 Leaves, like the things of man, you  
 With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?  
 Ah! as the heart grows older  
 It will come to such sights colder  
 By and by, nor spare a sigh  
 Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;  
 And yet you will weep and know why.  
 Now no matter, child, the name:  
 Sorrow's springs are the same.  
 Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed  
 What heart heard of, ghost guessed;  
 It is the blight man was born for,  
 It is Margaret you mourn for.

It is, we think, a poem such as Alice Meynell might be not displeased to find conjecturally ascribed to her. *In the Valley of the Elwy* touches on Welsh hospitality and kindness as overshadowed by a lack of supernatural religion. *Brothers* tells well a simple anecdote of Shrovetide school-plays and of the affection of two brothers—one spectator, the other actor. Simply human and straightforward is the patriotic marching song:—

What shall I do for the land that bred me,  
 Her homes and fields that folded and fed me?

† Unique, truly, is the ever-recurrent combination of a real or apparent simplicity with "metaphysical" subtleties, far-fetched vocabulary and strained style.

The very unusualness and oddity are often felt to spring from the very eagerness to be thoroughly plain, vernacular and vigorous.

✓ It is, perhaps, as a poet of external nature that Father Hopkins was peculiarly fitted to excel had it been his lot to make poetry in any degree the business of his life. As it is, his keen observation, his delight in the simple things of God's making, his subtle choice of words have resulted in some fragmentary studies, if hardly completed pictures, which delight by their originality and freshness. What an eye and feeling for certain aspects of trees in winter is shown in the following!—

Not of all my eyes see, wandering on the world,  
Is anything a milk to the mind so, so sighs deep  
Poetry to it, as a tree whose boughs break in the  
sky.

Say it is ash-boughs : whether on a December day  
and furred

Fast or they in clammyish lash tender combs creep  
Apart wide and new-nestle at heaven most high.  
They touch heaven, tabour on it; how their talons  
sweep

The smouldering enormous winter welkin !

Trees have again been propitious to the poet in the notable fragment *Epithalamion*, with its " sudden zest of summertime joys," its delightful bathing pool

There ; sweetest, freshest, shadowiest ;  
Fairyland ; silk-beech, scrolled ash, packed sycamore,  
wild wvch-elm. horn beam frettv overstood

By. Rafts and rafts of flake-leaves light, dealt so,  
 painted on the air,  
 Hang as still as hawk or hawkmoth, as the stars or as  
 the angels there,  
 Like the thing that never knew the earth, never off  
 roots

Rose.

' As we might expect, his art presents us with many pieces in which nature is but the vestibule of revelation and his fine sense of its life and beauty but guides him to higher thoughts. Of such imaginative work we have a brief exquisite example in the early lyric on a nun taking the veil :—

I have desired to go  
 Where springs not fail,  
 To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail  
 And a few lilies blow.

I have asked to be  
 Where no storms come,  
 Where the green swell is in the havens dumb  
 And out of the swing of the sea.

Simile developed into parable and unusual amplitude of treatment meet us in "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe"; here too the 126 lines maintain almost unflawed the beauty of their opening :

Wild air, world-mothering air,  
 Nestling me everywhere,  
 That each eyelash or hair

Girdles; goes home betwixt  
The fleeciest, frailest-fixed  
Snowflake; that's fairly mixed  
With, riddles, and is rife  
In every least thing's life;  
This needful, never spent  
And nursing element . . .

Such things require, but they also repay, more than one reading—three or four perhaps; and we fancy many readers, for perhaps many generations, will be willing to take them at that price and that valuation.















