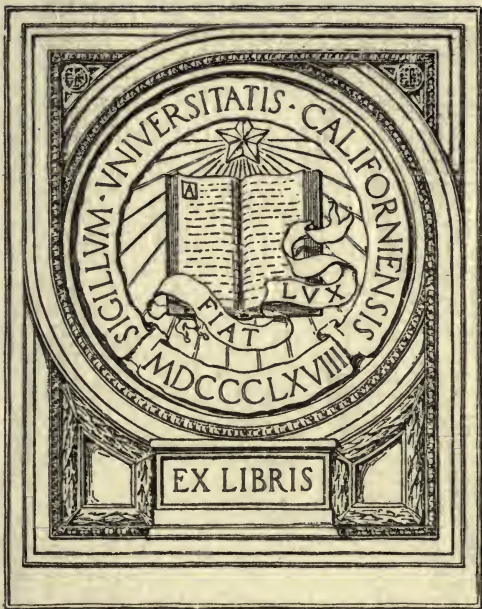


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ENGLISH LITERARY MISCELLANY



# ENGLISH LITERARY MISCELLANY

BY

THEODORE W. HUNT

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"Literature: Its Principles and Problems," etc.

SECOND SERIES



OBERLIN, OHIO  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA COMPANY  
1914

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Printed in the United States of America

Published, April, 1914



The News Printing Company  
Oberlin, Ohio, U.S.A.



TO  
MY COLLEAGUES  
IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

331040



## P R E F A C E

THE papers herein presented are discussions within the definite province of English Letters. They are developed along historical and critical lines and seek to relate the study of our vernacular with the manifest progress of English thought and life. As will be seen, some of the topics treated are of a general, comprehensive nature and range, but sufficiently illustrated by concrete example to make them intelligible and practically helpful to the literary student, while others are more specific. The articles have all appeared in the columns, respectively, of the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *The Methodist Review*, *The Presbyterian Review*, and *The Book-Lover*. These papers constitute a companion volume to the English Literary Miscellany already published.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

April, 1914



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PART FIRST

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GENERAL DISCUSSIONS





# I

## THE ELIZABETHAN AGE OF ENGLISH LETTERS

SHORTLY after the death of Chaucer, in 1400, we enter upon one of those periods of reaction common to every developing literature, and which it is not contradictory to say are an indirect proof, at least, that it is developing. Standing at the tomb of Chaucer, we seem to be standing at the tomb of English poetry. The earlier centuries, from Cædmon onward, were speedily succeeded by the disastrous invasions of the Danes, and by the disturbing influences of the Norman Conquest. After the close of the Old English "Chronicle," in 1154, and, with it, the close of the Old English literary era, the original poetic spirit was somewhat revived in Layamon's "Brut," in the Middle English era, but its expression was partial and temporary. Chaucer was the main factor in making the fourteenth century what it is in English letters, and thus definitely distinguished it from that which immediately preceded and followed it. For a century and a half, literature may be said to have been in abeyance until it began to show signs of awakening in the days of Caxton and through

his personal agency as a printer and an author. From the death of Chaucer to the birth of Spenser, we look in vain for any high degree of literary art or for anything like an unbroken continuity of acceptable literary product. Of that portion of it which included the century from Henry the Fourth to Henry the Seventh, we may safely assert, with Morley, that "it has not bred for us a single writer of the foremost rank." This is especially true of English verse, in that English prose had some approximately worthy exponents in Fortescue, Caxton, and Malory, representing, respectively, political prose, translation, and romance; the appearance of the Paston Letters, in the fifteenth century, affording the first creditable illustration of English epistolary writing. In the long list of indifferent poets, even the most charitable critic can pause but a moment to cite the names of Occleve, Lydgate, Skelton, Hawes, and the Scottish Dunbar, and James the First.

The half century between Henry the Eighth and Elizabeth is a brighter era, and yet more significant as an era of promise and preparation than as one of actual literary achievement. The generous critic need not tarry long, as he scans the roll of authors, noting the names of Heywood and

Wyatt and Surrey. If we seek for the causes of such a literary decline after Chaucer, one, at least, may be found in the French and English wars, and the later Wars of the Roses. Kingly ambition and mere civil advancement took the place of all high ideals in life and letters. The wealth and energies of the people were squandered and the basest passions of the heart developed. Petty and personal issues prevailed instead of great national interests, and the result was necessarily disastrous. Such an English victory as that at Agincourt was in some respects an injury to the nation, while in the domestic discords of the thirty years' war the red and the white colors were more prominent than was genuine patriotism or the cause of truth. It was this ignoble character of the conflicts that degraded the nation and the language. Apart from this, literature might have survived in some honorable form as it did in other instances, despite the evil effects of civil strife. Scotland met England on the field of Bannockburn, and Barbour arose as a national bard to sing the triumph. Gower produced his "Vox Clamantis" during the brave struggle of the English yeomanry for their rights, as Milton wrote his stirring poetry in the stormy days of the Commonwealth. Indeed, an honorable

struggle for high issues may tend to invigorate literature, though it may not refine it. No such struggle was waged, and had it not been for some counter tendencies English letters would have suffered a still more decided decadence.

1. The first of these significant influences was the *invention of printing*, in 1440, and its introduction into England in 1477. Caxton, the first English printer, but little knew of the treasure he brought with him from Holland, and how it was to enrich England and the world. Books and pamphlets in the native tongue now took the place of swords and camps, and the face of literature was at once changed. Monasteries were now dissolved, manuscripts were circulated, and problems long unsettled forced to issue. Henry the Eighth, whatever his motive, never did a better work than when he dissolved these monastic centers. Not only did he thus modify the extreme Romish power and quell discontent by the division of monastic spoils, but positively aided the cause of letters and of learning by the free diffusion of knowledge. A healthful mental activity at once took the place of a cloistered piety, and the subtle distinctions of the schoolmen gave way to the more practical issues of the Modern Era. Some historians have

seen fit to magnify the benefits of the monasteries, and to say, with Warton, that "their dissolution under Henry the Eighth gave a temporary check to letters in England." If so, the check was temporary only, and made the subsequent movement to higher things all the more vigorous and permanent. Monasteries, it may be said, are helpful or harmful according to era and environment. In the Middle Ages, they were essential to the conservation of scholarship and letters. Even in the later eras of the foreign and domestic wars, the monks were busy in their retreats as scholars and guardians of learning. After printing came in, however, all was changed, verifying the prophecy of the Romish priests, "We must root out printing, or printing will root out us." Mr. Hallam is, therefore, just as consistent in decrying such an order at the opening of the sixteenth century as he is in defending it prior to that date.

2. A second influence toward better things is seen in a *revolution in classical culture*. No sooner were these monastic centers dissolved than the attention of the people was turned to the subject of classical training and general education. Erasmus wrote that Italy alone was now superior to England in classical learning. Grocyn, Linacre, Lati-

mer, More, Lily, Lee, Gardiner, Wakefield, and Tyndale were all doing a scholarly work in their respective spheres, and classical studies at Oxford and Cambridge were placed on a stable basis through the efficient influence of Smith and Cheke. Edward the Sixth, Elizabeth, and Lady Jane Grey were apt classical scholars. Henry the Eighth was an author and patron of learning, so that Sir Thomas Elyot in his efforts to purify the language had the positive aid of the King. In fact, the schoolmaster was abroad. Classical scholars came in large numbers from the Continent.

3. Hence, a third factor in the upward movement is seen in that *free discussion* now obtained. Old questions were agitated in a better spirit, and new ones opened. The age of rational inquiry was at hand, the sure forerunner of the English Reformation and the Golden Age. The absorbing attention of scholars to merely partisan and profitless problems, especially in the area of theological dispute, now gave way to a broader outlook and a more wholesome method. The few printers of earlier days had now become over half a hundred. If the papal Mary retarded for the time the progress of Protestantism and popular rights, Edward the Sixth and Elizabeth secured their permanent

advance, and the Modern Age of English letters as of English thought and life was inaugurated under the best conditions.

Such, in brief, may be said to be the historical antecedents of the Age of Elizabeth, which largely made it what it proved to be in English history and literature. We are now in position to study with profit this Elizabethan Era, for which such preparation had been made.

The old distinction of the periods of history, political and social, is equally valid in literature. There are the golden and silver and iron ages in literature. The Causes and Occasions of a golden age are especially interesting, as is the question of its decadence and disappearance. The first thought relative to such eras is that there is in them a superhuman as well as a human element. There is a providence in history and in literary history and a human agency as well, to each of which elements due regard is to be given by the student of letters lest either be pushed to a dangerous extreme. Such ages differ materially in the causes of their beginnings, in their progress, and in the character and measure of their results, while here again double factors are at work. At one time, as among the Hebrews, the divine el-

ement is prominent in an order of literature characteristically biblical and religious. At another time, as among the Greeks, the human is conspicuous in an order of literature characteristically secular and pagan. At times, the preparative agencies are clearly traceable, appearing in the form of literary prophecy and promise, type and symbol. At times, all is dim and uncertain to the most observing student, and the best that can be done is to indulge in rational hypothesis till new facts appear or some new light is cast upon the mystery. So, as to the final outcome: in some cases it appears normally in the order of natural literary law; but at other times all is irregular and abrupt, so that the new order of things when fully instituted induces violent reaction. These facts conceded, however, it may be said that the explanation of the Age of Elizabeth as one of these golden eras is not difficult to trace. Clearer at some points than at others, it is in the main intelligible. From the first faint beginnings of literary awakening, in the Age of Henry the Seventh, the principle of life was at work. Indifferentism had given place to a rational interest, and the leading minds of the time were looking for something that would suggest at least the days of Chaucer and



Langland. The "fullness of time" seemed to be near at hand. The papal Henry the Eighth gave place just in time to the young Protestant King Edward the Sixth, the papal Mary to the Protestant Elizabeth, and the Vulgate to the German Bible. All civic and religious movements seemed now to converge and find their best embodiment in the Golden Age.

A further cause is found in the *friendly attitude of the Government*. The bigotry of Romanism and the bigotry of later Anglicanism and Puritanism were now in abeyance in favor of a genuine religious liberty and of political equality. There was now no such political obstacle to the growth of letters as existed in the earlier and later centuries. The nation, after the Spanish war, was at peace, and the best influences were engaged in the expansion of the nation's intellectual life. During Elizabeth's long reign of forty-five years, authors were encouraged and assisted, while the general sympathies of the age were friendly to rising talent. The Queen was an authoress and a friend of authors. As the drama in its beginnings had been confined to the halls of royalty and the universities, and as private companies of actors were resorting to the open country as strolling players,

the sagacious Queen saw at once the drift of national taste respecting the drama and did what she could to encourage it. England's geographical position was also favorable to the rising literature. Shut in from Continental contact in its most objectionable features, the island was still adjacent to all the best influences of Continental countries.

Some of the chief Characteristics of the Elizabethan Age may now be noted.

1. First of all, is the *literary versatility* of the age, the richness and variety of its literary product. We revert at once to Shakespeare, evincing in his pages the special knowledge of the jurist, botanist, soldier, navigator, artisan, and medical practitioner. So varied is this ability that his claims have been contested and his dramas parceled out among numerous authors. So Bacon was versed in ancient and modern lore, was a jurist, philosopher, parliamentarian, and author. So, we meet with Jonson, Raleigh, Sidney, and Hooker. We find poetry of all classes — epic, dramatic, lyric, and descriptive. In prose, we find history, romance, travels, philosophy, theology, and miscellaneous criticism. What are called sec-

ondary authors would rank as first-rate authors in less brilliant eras.

2. A second characteristic is seen in the *Englishness* of the age. The earlier Italian influence which came in at the time of Henry the Eighth had materially declined. Gallic influence, though existing, had not as yet become a decisive factor, while that of Germany had not as yet appeared, save in so far as seen in Luther's version of the Scriptures. The era was eminently English. Spenser was a zealous disciple of Chaucer. Foreign books now appeared in English dress. Though Bacon wrote his philosophy in Latin, his essays were in English. Though, in the reign of James the First, Spanish influences entered, they were in no sense dominant. The conceits of euphuism, borrowed from the Continent, affected but the surface of literature. Servitude to alien peoples was now forsworn, and the best authors were increasingly loyal to the home speech. Men of all classes were doing their own thinking. If the Queen could read Greek, she was careful to employ Ascham to conserve the interests of the native English. It was more than an era of reformation. It was an era of formation, positive and constructive, and mainly in behalf of national interests.

3. The *catholicity* of the age is noteworthy. The literature was manly, and, though the nation in its new life was in its youth, the authors were mature. In this respect, no age, according to Hallam, has surpassed it. The writers understood themselves and the world, and were able to interpret man to man as could not have been possible in any previous era. Even Chaucer could not, in the fourteenth century, look out upon as wide a horizon as did the Elizabethans. Hence, the poetry of the time naturally assumed dramatic form as that form by which man might best reveal himself to his fellows. It was because Shakespeare had more of this cosmopolitan character than any other author of his time that he was the chief of dramatists, as, also, the most representative spirit of the Golden Age. It was an essentially human era, when the duties, rights, and liberties of men were more pronounced than ever before.

4. The era was specifically *Protestant*. It was the age of the great religious and Protestant reformation, and the rising literature at once felt its influence. The English Bible now entered, as never before, into the heart and life of the people, and its beneficent effect cannot be overestimated. Not in the days of Wyclif, or even of Tyndale,

was it so potent, as it had now become an accredited factor in English civilization and life. The attempt made by Mr. Buckle to explain such an era with this religious factor eliminated is as lamentable as it is futile. Gibbon, in his notable history, took a wiser course in acknowledging such an element, though seeking to explain it away. Taine is never more interesting than when he aims to account for this recognized element in English thought and letters. So pervasive was this biblical influence in the sixteenth century that Bishop Wordsworth has not found it difficult to fill a volume with scriptural references from Shakespeare only, the specific question of Shakespeare's relation to Protestantism being, for the time, in abeyance. The several Bible versions of the time, from the Genevan to that of King James, were, partly, the occasion and, partly, the outcome of the age, while the Protestant character of the versions, whether Anglican or Presbyterian, served to deepen and widen the great reformatory movement. Despite the fact that the Vulgate version just preceded the era and the Rheims-Douay version followed it, the dominant type was Protestant far on to the days of James the Second. Had a Romish king or queen sat on the throne in the

second half of the sixteenth century, the face of English civilization would have entirely changed, while the English language and literature would have been subjected to the theology and standards of the Middle Ages. The Golden Age of English Letters owes as much to the English Bible as to any other single influence.

Two or three suggestions of interest emerge as we close our brief survey of the Elizabethan Age.

1. The first is, that golden ages are applied to specific literary eras in a relative sense and on well-understood conditions. The phrase is one of accommodation only, and may or may not be applicable at other periods in the historic development of the literature. In the nature of the case, such periods cannot be permanent, and, even before they give place to something different, assume various phases indicative of change and give abundant premonition of their decadence and disappearance. It was thus with the Age of Elizabeth. No sooner had the era been established as superior than marks of change and decline began to appear. Moreover, such an age in the sixteenth century could not possibly mean just what it means to the present century, for civilization advances and literary standards advance. In fine,

the Elizabethan Age is but the first golden age in point of time. Subsequent eras have surpassed it.

2. The later influence of this earlier era is noteworthy. Critics and historians have always been at a loss where to draw the line of demarcation between any two literary periods, the Elizabethan Age closing properly in 1603, the year of the death of Elizabeth, or more accurately, at the close of the reign of James the First, in 1625. In any case, the influence of this brilliant era passes on from age to age, through the reign of the Stuarts and the House of Hanover to the days of Victoria. It is thus that Milton has been called "the last of the Elizabethans," while the great Romantic Movement in the days of Wordsworth and Burns and Scott and Gray was but another evidence of the reappearance of sixteenth-century influences. Shakespeare, as the great Elizabethan, still dominates the province of English drama, and bids fair to maintain his primacy as the years go on.

3. The close relations of English literature and the English language appear in this period as at no other modern era. The mooted discussion as to the relative claims of our literature and our language could have had no place at a time when

the best English authors were those who wrote and spoke the best English, with whom the English vocabulary was, first and last, a collection of English words for literary uses, and who had no conception of what is now meant by the textual and technical study of a language quite apart from its content and pervading spirit. Modern English literature and Modern English language began together at the Elizabethan Era and with the ideal, at least, of concomitant development down to our own day. It was one of the exceptional merits of Shakespeare as a dramatist that with a vocabulary of but fifteen thousand words he compassed the widest reaches of dramatic art and set the model of idiomatic English for all his successors to imitate — while in it all he had no thought the most remote of assuming the attitude of what is now known as the English philologist. He had no other uses for the parts of speech than that which Lowell suggests when he tells us that they should be made “vividly conscious” of the thought behind them. In this respect, at least, we have made no improvement upon this earliest standard which was set us by the masters.

As our discussion closes, we are led to ask, What are the signs, if any, of a golden age as the



twentieth century opens? Dependent, as it will be, on what Taine has called the race and place and time factors, who can foretell the emergence of such an era as the natural result of friendly antecedents and conditions? Interwoven as these epochs are with the complex network of human history, when they come they often come unheralded and in violation of all precedent and historic sequence, bursting in upon the indifferent life of the time with something like dramatic effect. It may be so in the century now at hand, inasmuch as, when we scan the horizon, we may discover some manifest signs of its approach, even though the signs be somewhat indistinct.

The Victorian masters who evinced in their work much of the genius of Elizabethan days have gone from us, but we can recall as vividly as possible who they were and what they did, and look with heroic hopefulness for a succession of authors worthy to follow them and to maintain the standards which they established.

## II

### ANTECEDENTS OF THE ENGLISH DRAMA

BEFORE the student is prepared to discuss the rapid revival of the English Drama in the early Elizabethan days and its perfected expression in the works of Shakespeare, it is necessary for him to take a comprehensive survey of English dramatic history from its crudest beginnings and forms. In such a general review, however, it is not to be forgotten that, though these beginnings are comparatively unimportant, they are still beginnings of that which is important, and, as such, assume, at the outset, a high position of relative rank. Enthusiastic artists have told us that they have enjoyed the rudest sketches of Raphael's boyhood and early manhood with as keen a relish as the maturest products of his genius on exhibition in the Vatican or at Dresden. No one can appreciate the works of the world's greatest artists and not, at the same time, acknowledge a substantial indebtedness to such early models as Giotto and Cimabue. The English drama, as indeed the

European and universal drama, finds its rational origin in the nature and inherent tastes of mankind. It may be said to be the legitimate offspring of that imitative faculty with which God has seen fit to endow the race. It is in the early, continuous, and persistent endeavor to give expression to this innate propensity of the soul that such an art has its literary source; the naturalness of dramatic representation in all ages and among all peoples being strictly dependent upon this recognition of its spontaneous origin. With this fact in mind, it is interesting to note the attitude of the fathers of the early church towards the dramatic exhibitions of their time and how impossible it was for them ever to eradicate that deep-rooted institution which they, at length, wisely endeavored to reform. Theophilus, in the second century, speaks of these "tragical distractions as unwarrantable entertainments." By the first General Council of Arles (314 A.D.) players were actually excommunicated until they abandoned their acting. Both Cyril and Tertullian taught that for the baptized children of the church to witness such scenes was a sure evidence of their apostasy. They pronounced the plays idolatrous and superstitious. History informs us, however, that these severe

strictures were well deserved in that the plays of those pagan times were connected with the lowest forms of national life. The voice of earnest rebuke was for a time heeded, so that Augustine tells us that the Greek and the Roman playhouses were for a time improved or abandoned. Hence, it is clear that the dramatic art itself had not become extinct, but had become so corrupted in its connection with the rites of Venus and Bacchus, as for a time to endanger its very existence. In the fourth century of the Christian era, stage representations were renewed, signally improved as to their intrinsic character and under a far safer and purer control. Old Testament history took the place of ribaldry and licentious songs, while the church fathers themselves became personally active as authors of dramatic works and patrons of the stage. It is written of Gregory, Patriarch of Constantinople, that, chagrined by the inferiority of the Greek theater, he prepared material from Scripture on the basis of the classical dramatists, and aimed in a presentation of the history of our Lord to reproduce the art of the great Greek tragedians. The same order of public entertainment is found in France in the reign of Charlemagne. Abundant evidence is produced by Warton that Latin plays

were familiar to the Norman clergy before and after the Conquest, and it is just at this point that the dramatic history of England is seen to connect itself with the general dramatic history of Continental Europe. As to the exact status of the tragic and comic art in Saxon and Norman days, little that is trustworthy is known. The entire period from the beginning of the twelfth century to the middle of the sixteenth may be regarded as one in which the rude portraitures of medieval days were gradually transformed, under various agencies, into the highly organized dramas of Shakespeare and Marlowe. At this early date, in the reign of Henry I. and of Stephen of Blois, are found the first plays that are known to have been composed by an Englishman. These are the three plays of Hilarius, an English monk, written when he was a pupil of the celebrated Abelard, in France. It is the testimony of Fitzstephen, in his "Life of Becket," that London "had entertainments of a more devout kind, either of those miracles which were wrought by holy confessors or those passions and sufferings in which the martyrs so rigidly displayed their fortitude." This is confirmed by the later evidence of Matthew Paris, as he writes of the drama in the middle of the thir-

teenth century. The interest of the intelligent English student in this older history will be greatly deepened when he remembers that, for three centuries or more of our earlier English life, dramatic writing was the chief form of the literary expression of the people and the main agent of their ethical training. It is a fact worthy of special note, that "Scriptural dramas composed by ecclesiastics furnished the nations of Europe with the only drama they possessed for hundreds of years." A late English author may thus safely assert that such compositions as these "are not inconsiderable objects in the philosophy of literary history."

The best classification of the dramatic representations from the earliest English times to the opening of the modern English drama may be given in the generally accepted threefold division of (1) Miracle Plays or Mysteries; (2) Moralities; (3) Interludes and Chronicle Plays. These names are, in themselves, strikingly suggestive.

1. *Miracle Plays.* We have alluded to the prevalence of this first order throughout all the nations of Europe and at a very primitive period. In no other country, Spain excepted, are these particular plays to be found as characteristic as in England and as faithful a reflection of the mental and social

habits of the people. They are called "Miracles," from the supernatural character of the themes and contents, and also "Mysteries," from their hidden meanings and special aim as biblical and devotional. Not only were they written by the clergy, but often presented by them in their own persons. The monastery or the chapel was the playhouse, and the moral education of the public was the prominent object of all scenic display. This special function of the stage as an educator will be fully understood when it is remembered that, in these medieval times, the laity as a class were profoundly ignorant, and necessarily looked to the clergy — the learned class — for their most elementary enlightenment. The parish conventicle was thus church, academy, and theater in one; the parish priest was preacher, teacher, playwright, and actor; and the Christian Scriptures, with some admixture of legend and tradition, were the common source of all instruction. With all their crudeness and abuses, however, these early combinations served a purpose until, as the old monasteries themselves, they yielded, willingly or perforce, to the demands of a more enlightened age. Anniversaries and special occasions of every sort in the civil and church calendar were devoutly cel-

ibrated, and dramatic guilds were established in all of the leading towns of England. With many of these the history of literature has made us acquainted. Any one who has been in the vicinity of London in the suburban towns at the beautiful Whitsuntide festival, may easily form the picture of such outdoor dramatic exhibitions. The magnificent Corpus Christi ceremonies revealed the same order of religious entertainment. It is to this that Chaucer refers, in his natural picture of jolly Absolon, the parish clerk—

“Somtyme, to shewe his lightnesse and maistrye,  
He pleyeth Herodes on a scaffold hye.”

In the same connection, in “The Miller’s Tale,” he refers to the play of “The Flood” and its comic element, when he asks:—

“‘Hastou nat herd,’ quod Nicholas, ‘also  
The sorwe of Noe with his felaweshipe  
Er that he myghte brynge his wyf to shipe?’”

As historical examples of such plays, we note the York, the Chester, the Wakefield or Towneley, and the Coventry Mysteries, so called from the names of the towns for which they were respectively intended. Written in uncouth verse, they were thus adapted to an uncouth people, and so imbued with the principles of scriptural teaching that they have been fitly styled the *Biblia Pauperum*. From time



to time these companies of parish clerks journeyed over the island and gave to their countrymen the most attractive pageants they could present. They were as fully organized and equipped as the traveling bands of modern times. "The Creation of the World," "The Fall of Man," "The Story of the Flood," "The Massacre of the Innocents"—in fine, all the prominent subjects of the biblical narrative—were made to appear in due succession, while special pains were taken to set forth in vivid detail the passion and death of Christ. These old Mysteries may still be witnessed in Continental Europe—in Saxon Switzerland, in the Tyrolean Alps, and in parts of Germany where civilization has made but limited advances and the children of nature live much as did their simple-minded forefathers. The representation of "The Passion Play," as given in Oberammergau, in Upper Bavaria, is the most notable instance of its kind. Occurring once a decade, and as an offering of devout thanksgiving for past deliverances, it may safely be affirmed that there is no such imposing assembly in modern times as is gathered in that secluded province to witness this Miracle Play. Presented in open audience, with scenery and stage accompaniments scrupulously in keeping

with the theme itself, exhibited by actors aware of its providential occasion and sacred import, one can little imagine either the faithfulness with which it reproduces the ancient Mysteries or its singular effect upon native and foreign spectators. It is in reality the thirteenth century of English life represented in the twentieth, and thus serves, among other purposes, social and religious, the distinctively literary purpose of maintaining the connection of the centuries in the sphere of dramatic art.

2. *The Moralities.* The Miracle Plays at length gave place in the developing drama to what are called the Moralities. Warton, in his "History of English Poetry," thus writes: "As these pieces frequently required the introduction of allegorical characters, and as the common poetry of the times, especially among the French, began to deal much in allegory, plays at length were formed consisting entirely of such personifications." These were the Moralities; and it is part of the object of Jeremy Collier, in his elaborate discussion of this subject, to show that this second species of stage presentation is the natural outgrowth of the first. The particular difference is clearly stated when we note that, instead of scriptural and historical characters, the personages were abstract

and allegorical, the prince of evil being the only member of the original *dramatis personæ* that retained his position in each of the forms. It impresses the student of literary history somewhat strangely that the old biblical plays retained their place as long and as firmly as they did. The desire for some change of plan and character was now apparent, alike on the ground of literary novelty and the ever-new necessities of social life. The peasantry of England were earnestly asking for exhibitions suited to their daily experiences and designed to instruct them in the knowledge of human life and manners. There was some indication of growing intelligence in this popular request and it was soon substantially answered in the production of the allegorical. This step was a highly important one in advance of the ancient system in that it embodied so much of that special dramatic character so superbly exhibited in later days. The prevalence of the Moralities may date from the fifteenth century until they finally supplanted the Mysteries. As might be supposed, these representations were no longer under the exclusive control of the Churchmen. The diffusion of intelligence among the laity was becoming more and more general, and as a result they were more

and more enabled to secure and maintain their personal interests. As the work of education advanced and the Reformation drew on, priestly tyranny abated as popular opinion prevailed, and every separate order of society well understood its legitimate sphere and function. It was in strict coincidence with the waning power of an exclusive Catholicism and the rising of a liberal Protestant faith, that Mysteries in the hands of a few gave way to Moralities in the hands of the many. Flesh-and-blood humanity appeared on the stage in the place of angels and the canonized martyrs of the church, while the times of the patriarchs and the marvelous narratives of biblical history were superseded by a matter-of-fact exhibition of English character and habit. As Scott correctly phrases it: "Nowhere is the history of the revolution which transformed the England of Mediævalism into the England of the Renaissance written more legibly than in these plays," such as, "The Castle of Perseverance" and "The Conflict of Conscience," in their contrasted teachings. Allegorical and abstract as the method was, the natural and practical had thrust aside the supernatural and the theoretical, and the devil alone was common to both periods. "The moral plays," says Collier,

“were enabled to keep possession of the stage as long as they did, partly, by means of their approaches to an improved species of composition, and, partly, because under the form of allegorical fiction, the writers touched upon public events, popular prejudices and temporary opinions.” It is on the ground of this double excellence of a distinct dramatic element and an adaptation to varying popular needs that we find these old Moralities upon the English boards in the days of Elizabeth and thus observe the historical connection fitly sustained between the earlier and the later drama.

3. *Interludes and Chronicle Plays.* This was a transitional form, partaking of the features of each of the other forms, and was presented as a kind of middle play and on independent occasions of public interest. The history of the English drama from this early period until after the coronation of Elizabeth is full of literary and general interest. With Henry VIII. and his scholarly court, the Interlude was the favorite form of scenic representation, and John Heywood, the epigrammatist, was the literary idol of the royal circle. It was a time of unwonted agitation in church and in state, in literature and public senti-

ment, and hence the various movements of the time were reflected in the drama of the time. The Interludes assumed at once a political cast and were also made both by Romanists and Protestants the *media* of their respective religious views. The Miracle Plays, abandoned by the reforming Edward as savoring of Romish bigotry, were reinstated in original splendor by papal Mary, and the passion of Christ was again before the English public on the very borders of the modern drama. Henry VIII. sat with manifest relish as a spectator of the caricature of Martin Luther and the Reformers, while Edward VI. hastened to repeal the statutes of his father forbidding Interludes directed against the Church of Rome. This anomalous state of things was repeated when the edicts of Bloody Mary concerning the drama were speedily revoked by order of Queen Elizabeth. Bishop Bale, a writer of Interludes on behalf of Protestantism, hastened from the court of the treacherous Henry to await the induction of Edward, and from the court of the desperate Mary to await the crowning of the Maiden Queen. Merrie Heywood, the writer of comic dialogues in favor of Romanism, prudently withdrew from the court of Henry's successor. When Mary came to the

throne, the judicious playwright reappeared, to retire with similar promptness at the accession of her nobler and more liberal sister. It was thus that civil and ecclesiastical history repeated itself, as the comic dialogue in the hands of Bale and Heywood and less renowned composers was made the medium of the most vital discussions in politics and religion. It is significant here to note that, in the Chronicle Play, such as Bale's "King John," the most pronounced abstractions were converted into real personages, and the Historical Plays of Elizabeth's time thus anticipated. With the Mysteries and Moralities still in vogue and their combination suggestively seen in the form of the Interlude, the gradational development of our dramatic history may be seen from its modest beginnings in the Miracles of Hilarius on to the far greater miracles of Shakespearean art.

The historical sketch already given of the Antecedents of the English Drama would be scarcely complete apart from a brief account of the first examples of the modern drama for which all that preceded was the natural preparation. The theory advocated of late, that the Elizabethan and later drama is altogether traceable to the Italian drama of the Renaissance, and has no dependent relation

to any preceding dramatic forms in England, is but partially admissible. To deny such dependence is as unnatural as it is unhistorical. In the examination of our first tragedy and first comedy, we stand at the very opening of the new dramatic era and can look "before and after."

As late as the middle of the sixteenth century, we find that there was much confusion of view as to the tragic and comic divisions of the drama, so that it was quite impossible to state from the mere title of a play to which of these departments it really belonged. Even in the last quarter of this same century, we hear a writer speaking of "a pleasant tragedy" and of "a pitiful comedy," while in France and Spain and throughout the Continent the distinctions now existing were quite reversed. The most sacred portions of biblical history were classed under the comic order. The great standard poem of Italy's greatest poet was styled the "Divina Commedia," despite its description of hell, purgatory, and heaven. In fact the Dantean definition of comedy is given us as that which begins in sadness and ends in happiness, its happy ending, as it was argued, entitling it to the name of "comedy." Of comedy as conceived by the modern dramatist, there was thus little, and



yet the real drama was in existence in its substantially grave and gay expressions.

Much of this confusion arises from that triple order of dramatic literature then existing, to which Scott alludes as he says: "On the one hand, stands a body of playwrights who adhere to the traditions of the vernacular drama. On the other side, stands an influential body who treated these rude medleys with disdain and owned allegiance to classical masters. Between these two schools stands a third which united the characteristics of both." The constant attempt on the part of this third school to maintain its own standard and yet to adapt some of the best features of the others, is a sufficient explanation of apparent anomalies. The earliest English tragedy, as we know, is "Gorboduc," written by Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset, with the possible assistance of Thomas Norton. It was represented before the Queen in the Inner Temple in 1561. Its object was to show the great dangers which must arise from a distribution of the supreme power of the state, the author asserting at last the prevalent doctrine of the divine right of kings and that of consequent passive obedience. It is thus that one of the counselors of the old king remarks:—

“That no cause serves, whereby the subject may  
Call to account the doings of his prince.  
In act nor speech, no, not in secret thought,  
The subject may rebel against his lord,  
Or judge of him that sits in Cæsar’s seat.  
Though kings forget to govern as they ought,  
Yet subjects must obey as they are bound.”

Such was the political creed of the time, and it was the purpose of Sackville to exhibit and enforce it. We are surprised to find in this early specimen of dramatic literature so complete a picture of the later Elizabethan tragedy. We note the regular division of five successive acts with varying numbers of scenes, the presence and gradual unfolding of a plot, and the uniformly recurring choruses of the ancient Greek stage. The tragedy cannot be said to be characterized by high dramatic quality, nor could this be expected. Its excellence lies rather in its strict adherence to classical models, in its happy introduction of Surrey’s blank verse into the dialogue, and in the comparative purity of its diction. Though the characters are not original, they are well conceived and presented; the question of civil polity is well discussed; the substance of the language is vigorous, if not passionate; while throughout there is evidence of an ethical and a well-balanced mind and

some degree of poetic genius. Sir Philip Sidney, the accomplished critic of the day, wrote of it: "*Gorboduc* is full of stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca's style and as full of notable morality. Thus it doth most delightfully teach, and so obtain the very end of poetry." In the eyes of the Elizabethan court and of the *literati* of the time, it was regarded as a poetical marvel, while even the critical Alexander Pope became the agent of its later publication, and earnestly recommended it to all succeeding writers for its "chastity, correctness, and gravity of style."

The first comedy in our language and first extant English play was long supposed to be the one known as "Gammer Gurton's Needle," a poem of inferior literary merit and marked by moral grossness. The earliest, as now known, is "Ralph Roister Doister," by Nicholas Udall, Master of Eton, and modeled after the plays of Plautus and Terence. It precedes our earliest tragedy by nearly a decade. It presents a graphic picture of the London manners of the sixteenth century, having a good claim to the title, "a right pithy, pleasant and merrie comedie."

“As long does live the merry man, they say,  
As doth the sorry man, and longer by a day.”

The *dramatis personæ* are a wealthy widow and her wooers, among whom is the imperturbable Ralph, who is beguiled into all sorts of misdeeds. Full of self-conceit and the passion of love, he is unsuccessful as he is ardent.

“So fervent at wooing and so far from winning.”

The course of the comedy thus runs on in the persons of Matthew Merry Greek and his compeers; full of life without being frivolous; full of humor without being coarse; while, in general style and ease of versification, it may be said to be far in advance of its time.

The English Drama is thus fully established in each of its cardinal divisions and it is certainly a matter of congratulation that these earliest examples of the tragic and the comic were as praiseworthy, mentally and morally, as they were. Sackville, the learned author of the “Induction,” was depicting the evils of political rivalry, and Udall, the eminent Master of Eton, was depicting the features of the citizen life of London. Just as in *Cædmon* and *Layamon*, of Old and Middle English days, the ethical basis of our literature was laid, so in the persons and poems of these early dra-

matists, the moral cast of all our later drama is permanently set from which, in the last three centuries, however, there has been more or less departure.

We have thus traced, in brief, the historical thread of our vernacular drama from its elementary origin to its perfected form, and have thereby opened the way for the intelligent prosecution of the history in its later unfoldings. It is not our purpose here to follow this narrative from Elizabeth to Victoria. Beginning with Mr. Symond's treatise on "Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama," and following with the study of Professor Ward's "History of English Dramatic Literature," the English scholar may readily possess himself of all the facts bearing on the subject.

A few suggestions are in place as to the inherent ground of the dramatic art and the occasion of its peculiar method. The origin of scenic representation, as already intimated, is not to be traced to any form of legislative enactment or to the growing needs of civilization, but has its basis and sufficient reason in the constitution of the race. As man is possessed of a mind that under-

stands; of a taste that appreciates; of emotions that sympathize; of a moral bias to the right; and, most especially, of an inborn imitative faculty that duplicates all it sees and sees what does not exist: so must visible representation arise, in one form or another, to meet and satisfy these various tendencies of the soul. It may take the form of Miracle Play or Morality; of Interlude or Drama Proper; of Tragedy or Comedy; of the abstract or the concrete; of prose or poetry; of oral speech or pantomime; in one way or another it will exhibit itself and be modified in its expression by the age and nation in which it appears. Substantially the same wherever seen, it is as flexible as human nature itself and fitly reflects in due succession the ever-changing manners of men. It is thus that we find this species of literature among all European peoples. Perhaps the very earliest drama founded on biblical history is that of the Exodus, written by Ezekiel, the Jew, and this in turn was based upon classic models. Dramatic art early appeared in the old pagan nations, as in Greece, where it gradually developed from the exhibitions of the traveling Rhapsodists until Sophocles, Euripides, and Æschylus perfected it. It had a place early in Rome for the pleasure of

kings and courts, while Seneca, Plautus, Terence, and others carried it to high degrees of excellence. In Italy and all the romance countries of Southern Europe, it has had a noteworthy history, especially in those forms of pantomime in which South-Europeans excel. It began in Germany in the ballads of the *Minnesänger*, and came to its fullest expression in the second classical period, in the dramas of Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller. Nor is it to be forgotten that there is very much that is dramatic existing in productions which in themselves are not dramas. Such are "The Canterbury Tales" of Chaucer and "The Pilgrim's Progress" of Bunyan. Much of the prose of Swift and the poetry of Samuel Butler is of this order, while in prose fiction throughout, this special cast is notable. Moreover, there are dramatic elements at the basis of society and of personal character which have never been and can never be visibly set forth upon the boards. The tragic and the comic lie below all external manifestation and are but partially embodied in the most highly developed characterization.

This natural origin of the drama therefore being conceded, the question of prime importance is, how to give the dramatic principle the best out-

ward expression in deference to literary taste and ethical law. In the light of the universal demand for such a form of literature and its consequent supply, it is one of the clearest teachings of history that the stage has never for any length of time assumed the highest forms possible to it either on intellectual or moral lines. We are well aware of the character of the early classical drama and its description by ecclesiastics as the very agent of Satan to mislead and defile the popular conscience. Tertullian, Gregory, Cyprian, and Chrysostom, in the first centuries of the Christian era, pronounced it accursed and deserving of church censure, and this at the very time when they acknowledged its necessity by becoming themselves the composers of dramas of a Christian character. This higher order, however, was soon outruled by a gradual process of degeneracy, and the clergy in turn became justly exposed to public scandal. In Spain, Italy, and France, as we learn from Schlegel, the history was much the same; and yet we are surprised to hear so rigid a schoolman as Thomas Aquinas declare that such amusements are necessary to human happiness, as he lends his influence to the cultivation of what he calls the histrionic art. Although the formative



periods of our drama possessed in their biblical character a more decided moral tendency, the British Isles are no exception in this dramatic history. The very name, Moralities, was distinctive of ethical content and aim, and, yet, through the Interlude various forms of looseness entered to impair the integrity of the drama. This deterioration, however, was in turn retarded by the work respectively of Sackville and Udall, as they wrote what they wrote on behalf of scholarship and sound morals. In the Golden Age of our literature, the scholarly character of the English drama may be said to have been fully sustained, in that nearly all the dramatists of note were university men, presenting on the stage their own productions. By this union of author and actor in one personality, great mental and literary advantages were gained. Thus it is in the French drama, that while the tragedies of Corneille and Racine are simply referred to as specimens of high classical style, the comedies of Molière, the actor and author, may be witnessed still in the capital of France. There is an indefinable influence that is thus expressed, and it was specially prominent in the drama of Elizabeth. Strange to say, however, this principle which wrought such

masterly effects on the intellectual side seems to have been the very principle which corrupted dramatic morals. By repeated appearance on the stage, authors were exposed to the subtle temptations of the stage, and yielding too often, as many of them did, reproduced in their subsequent authorship the worst phases of London life. While thus securing increased oratorical and stage effect, they also came under the power of evils to which they had hitherto been strangers, and, as usual, the balance was in favor of the impure and debasing. Hence the mental giants and the moral imbeciles of that brilliant histrionic age, as the public sentiment of the time classed the acting playwrights among the "rogues and vagabonds" of the country. The gifted Marlowe was no more notorious for his wit and liberal culture and high dramatic art than for his blatant infidelity and disreputable death. We are aware of the unseemly condition of things in the days of the Commonwealth and the Restoration, when ill-advised fanaticism, at the one extreme, opposed all forms of dramatic art, and unbridled license, at the other, opened the way to the wildest debauchery. Otway and Southerne, Lee and Wycherly, reduced the English stage to the lowest level, while the bril-

liant compositions of Shakespeare and Massinger gave way to the puerile and revolting dialogues of third-rate versifiers. For a time, the home drama was thoroughly corrupt, and marked as well by a low order of mental power. It was what Macaulay would ironically term "the golden age of dramatic profligacy and imbecility"; defeating the original purpose of the drama itself and pandering to some of the lowest instincts of human nature. Whether the reformation of the modern English drama is possible or not, it is beyond question urgently desirable, while the question of its feasibility is one that should earnestly engage the attention of the educated and Christian world. The failure of all such attempts at stage reform hitherto, and the speedy return from the Shakespearian drama to subordinate forms, should not be sufficient to discourage all future effort in this worthy movement. Nor will such a result be brought about either rapidly or directly, but by gradual process and by agencies somewhat indirect. Such an end cannot be attained until, first of all, and as an essential preparative, there come radical changes in the general moral tone of English and American society; until modern English literature itself takes on a purer cast and addresses

itself more directly to the higher sentiments of the people; until, in fine, a distinctively Christian order of things asserts itself more emphatically, and purified public opinion openly calls for the repeal of patent moral abuses.

### III

#### THE TRANSITION TO MODERN BRITISH POETRY

THE history of a nation's literature may be justly divided into periods of comparative permanence and periods of transition. As far as the history of English Literature is concerned, the first series of periods may be said to include the eras of Chaucer, Spenser, Pope, Burns, and Tennyson.

They are, in every true sense, *established*. As to their historical limits, the authors who adorn them, the forms of poetry which they respectively exhibit, and the causes of their permanence, they may be studied as periods complete in themselves. Whatever their relation to that which precedes and follows, they are so fixed in character and outline as to admit of careful investigation on the part of the literary student and yield invaluable results for scholarly reference. They have, therefore, been made the subject of critical study on the part of all who have taken in hand the explanation of our literary history, and may be said to be substantially understood. Not so, however, with

the periods of transition, which in many of their aspects are as full of interest and valuable suggestion as the more permanent ones. Why they are so numerous and, often, so protracted; why they so often occur simultaneously in different nations; why they are now from the worse to the better and now the reverse; why with all their want of regularity they seem to proceed somewhat by historical and logical methods; and why, though generally explainable, some of them defy all attempts at solution — such are some of the many questions that arise as we study them. While from the very fact that they are transitional, they have been neglected, it is also because of this very fact that they have a peculiar attraction and import. Transitional as they are, they have a character, content, and history of their own, whose careful study will amply repay us. So important, moreover, are they in their historical and philosophical connections with the eras before and after them, that they often hold in possession the only key which will open the full explanation of these eras. This is signally true in our own literature, and just here lies at present one of the most attractive lines of study for the English scholar. The judicious and critical Hallam, in referring to the general history

of the European mind, is speaking of these very transitions in literature when he says: "There is, in fact, no security, as far as the past history of mankind assures us, that any nation will be uniformly progressive in science, arts, and letters." These transitions are as natural as life itself, and must be taken into account by all who hope to give a true interpretation of the human mind as expressed in literature. They serve to illustrate what Mr. Disraeli has called "Crises and Reactions"; and did they not occur, would seem to point to something abnormal in the growth of letters.

As to English Literature, and with special reference to our present purpose, these transitional epochs down to modern times may be thus stated: Chaucer to Spenser and Milton; Milton to Pope; Pope to Burns.

The first extends over two centuries, from the reign of Edward II. to that of Elizabeth and James I., and was a transition from the highest form of descriptive verse, as given in "The Canterbury Tales," to the highest form of creative verse, as given in the dramas and epics of Shakespeare and Milton.

The second extends through the larger part of

the seventeenth century, from the reign of Charles I. to that of William and Mary, and was a transition from the creative to the critical, as seen in the writings of Dryden and Pope.

The third extends from the reign of Anne far into the reign of George III., and was a transition from the critical to the impassioned, as seen in the poetry of Cowper, Thomson, and Burns.

It is to this last transition, from Pope to Burns, or from the earlier to the more modern age of British verse that we propose to give special attention, noticing in order its *character*, its historical *causes*, and some *suggestions* of interest to which the discussion gives rise.

#### THE CHARACTER OF THE TRANSITION

This may be briefly expressed in the fact that it was a change from form to feeling, from the artificial to the natural. Professor Conington, in his scholarly essay upon the Poetry of Pope, remarks: "It is a curious circumstance that the advice which was given by Walsh to Pope — 'to be correct in his writing' — was precisely the advice which Horace gave to his countrymen." The thought is, that the Horatian idea of poetry was different from that which had preceded it in laying



more decided emphasis upon the external form of literature. The Roman satirist cautions his countrymen against what might be called a wild profusion of ideas at the expense of literary finish, and holds it to be the mark of a genuine poet to express himself with elegance. He rebukes the pride of Lucilius in boasting that he had produced two hundred verses in an hour. In this particular, the analogy between the Age of Horace in Latin letters, and that of Pope in English, is somewhat suggestive; while the title — Augustan — applied to the latter, is thus far appropriate in that special reference is made to the outer structure of verse. It was the Age of the English Academy, as that of Richelieu was of the French. For this corrective work Dryden prepared the way. To it Pope was born and bred. Never were the historical tendencies of an age and the natural tendencies of a poet more accordant. Pope knew his one best talent, and interpreted aright the meaning of the time, so that he was the one undisputed master, in his day, of poetic form. "We had some great poets," said Walsh to Pope, "but we never had one great poet that was *correct*." The critical versifier at once accepted the suggestion, and devoted himself to verse as an *art* — to the study and

practice of versification. He showed the timeliness of his newly accepted mission by noting the absence of this element in former poets.

“For Otway failed to polish or refine,  
And fluent Shakespeare scarce effaced a line;  
E'en copious Dryden wanted or forgot  
That last and greatest art — the art to blot.”

Pope insisted that in every literature there is the need of a critical era. If such an era cannot coexist with the creative, and authors of high inventive power cannot sit in judgment upon their own writings, then, as he argued, other minds must appear, less gifted in genius, but more gifted in critical judgment, and do the work of literary censors. He held that there was such a thing as genius in poetic art, and could not indorse the remark so often made by literary historians, that a critical age is a necessary prelude to the decay of literature. If the critical era be subordinate to the original era of which it is the judge, if the criticism itself gathers its principles from nature and aims at the highest ends, then, he argued, the results could not but be beneficent. Such formal ages as these, he added, would seem to have their place in literature as restraints upon the excesses of more imaginative periods. A purely original

age altogether devoid of the restraints of art may be said to have within it, according to Pope, some of the elements of its own destruction. Though in themselves they are epochs of inferiority, they still have a function to perform in the general development of letters.

Critical periods, however, we submit, as all others, come to the limit of their usefulness in due time, and must give place to better things. If Pope was doing a safe and necessary work in literature, scores of second- and third-rate imitators were bringing the very name of criticism into disrepute, and awakening the just indignation of all true minds. Diction was magnified above thought, and method took the place of inspiration. Much of the poetry lost its distinctive character as such, and descended to an inferior quality of prose. Verses were trimmed and fashioned to order in accordance with the latest dicta of the schools. There was a drama extensive enough to absorb the attention of pleasure-seekers, and yet nothing to remind one of Marlowe or of Jonson. There was an abundance of descriptive poetry, but nothing above the commonplace. All was correct enough, — too correct. Dryden well expresses the vice of the time, as he calls it the age—

“When critics weigh  
Each line and every word throughout a play,  
Our age was cultivated, thus, at length,  
But what we gained in skill we lost in strength,  
Our builders were with want of genius cursed,  
The second temple was not like the first.  
Poets, like lovers, should be bold and dare,  
They spoil their business with an over-care.  
And he who servilely creeps after sense  
Is safe, but ne'er will reach to excellence.  
Time, place, and action may with pains be taught,  
But genius must be born, and never can be taught.”

In the nature of the case, such a literature could not be permanent. If passion were at all evinced it was on the basis of some prescribed formula, so that the heart of the passion was taken out of it. In fact, the Augustan Age was not an age for poetry in its best form, but for political and periodical prose, so that when poetry was attempted it was didactic rather than lyric, and vigor departed as correctness entered. Hence, the few ambitious poets of the time were in eager search for poetic freedom. They felt that the strictly critical period, even at its best, had done its appointed work, and that the call for a different order of things could not pass unheeded. Light descriptive sketching must take the place of studied monotony in verse, as expressed in satire. There must be the yielding of precedent to prog-

ress, and the language of the heart must assert its supremacy. On all sides there must be flexibility, new and wide departures from traditional restraints, a standard of poetic excellence sufficiently adaptive to give the fullest scope to the personality of the poet. The main error by which this transition was occasioned, and against which it protested, was the imperious demand that the poet should surrender his individuality to the rules of this or that poetic teacher, and be anybody but himself.

The heart, after all, is the central power in human history, in life and in literature, and though for a time suppressed in its action, is sure at length to assert itself, and even more vigorously than before. It is of this reaction to poetic freedom and feeling that Taine speaks: "At length poetry has again become life-like; we no longer listen to words, but we feel emotions. It is no longer an author but a man who speaks." They could not, and would not, longer side with those who steadily set themselves against the natural expression of emotion in verse. They sighed for the childlike simplicity of Chaucer's time, and could not but remember with regret the uncurbed liberty of Elizabethan days. Even in the interval between

Milton and Dryden, a true literary freedom was more or less enjoyed, and as the bounds of human progress were widening in all directions, and the human mind was freer than ever, they felt that the poetry of the immediate future must be in sympathy with the time and become a true exponent of its innermost character and life.

#### THE HISTORICAL CAUSES OF THE TRANSITION

Among these causes, as more specific, we notice briefly:—

1. *The influence of Germany upon England.* With the first classical period in German Literature (1190–1300) — the period of the Minnesänger — we have little, if anything, to do, inasmuch as it occurred previous to the settlement of our literature as national. The second classical period (1760–1830) is almost identical in its limits with the Impassioned Era in England. Hence, its influence would be marked as to degree and character. Here we find the six most illustrious names of German poetry — Klopstock, Lessing, Wieland, Herder, Schiller, and Goethe. Their most notable followers also are found here — Lavater, Nicolai, Müller, Richter, Uhland, Tieck, Novalis, and the brothers Schlegel. Such an order of poetical tal-

ent as this would create its own fitting opportunities, and taking into account the historic relations of the two nations, nothing is more natural than the results that we see. English authors, fully aware of the literary treasures across the channel, eagerly resorted thither to bring them to Britain. Thus we find Coleridge, in 1798, a member of the University at Göttingen. Returning to England, the influence of German study is sufficiently attested by his translation of Schiller's "Wallenstein," and by his calling the special attention of British scholars to the prevailing philosophy of Germany. We find Sir Walter Scott also thoroughly aroused by the newly awakened interest in German literature prevalent in Edinburgh. Becoming versed in the language, he applied himself at once to the work of translation in the "Lenore" of Bürger; the "Erl König" and "Götz von Berlichingen" of Goethe. Among the works of Shelley, we note translations from "Faust," while upon Southey and Wordsworth the same influence is evident. This being so, the question of special interest is, How did this become a help to English poetry in the sphere of passion? The answer is partly found in the fact that English thought in all departments was quickened by contact with Germany.

The German mind, even in its criticisms and speculations, is creative and original rather than imitative, calling into play at every point all the discerning and suggestive powers of the soul. The influence was thus stimulating, calling the poets of the time away from slavish adherence to any school or literary formula, and bidding them seek a wider and freer range. The effect was all in the direction of feeling rather than form. This love of the emotional is clearly seen in the conflict waged between the schools of Gottsched and Bodmer in Germany, with their centers respectively at Leipsic and Zurich. The one contended for the poetry of form, the other for that of spirit and power. The one was the school of imitation and of culture, based on Gallic models; the other, the school of passion and imagination, based on natural feeling. It was the old historic struggle of the letter and the spirit; and the fact of interest is, that as in England so in Germany, the literature of the spirit prevailed. The lyric beauty of the early Minnelieder reappears in Schiller, gives an impassioned character to the poetry ever after, and impresses itself upon the poetry of England. The formal laws of the schools had given place to nature and human life, and the literature of Britain



was just ready to receive what Germany was ready to give — a poetry of the heart.

2. A second and more potent cause of the new awakening is found, as we think, in the *revolutionary character of the times*. The erratic Rousseau did not have reference to his own country simply when he wrote, "We are drawing near to a state of crisis — an age of revolution." Such a period was far too practical in its working and far too evident in its origin to be concealed. All Europe was more or less interested in the issues. As far back as the downfall of the Roman Empire its history is traceable. At the opening of European civilization after the Middle Ages, its presence is apparent, while all along the line of English development it is also visible. In the struggle between Saxon and Norman; between the Barons and the King at Runnymede; in the times of Elizabeth and of Charles we see it, until, in the Revolution of 1688, royal prerogative yields to popular privilege, and English liberties are, for the first time, permanently adjusted. The benefits, however, thus secured were too pronounced to be enjoyed with moderation by England. She soon begins the abuse of her freedom, and once more, at least, a revolution is needed to impress upon the British

mind the true relation of government and people. The question of moment, therefore, is, How was the poetry of the time, as impassioned, affected by the history of the time? That English poetry was greatly modified by such a history cannot be doubted. We find Wordsworth a traveler in France at the very time of the Revolution, coming fully into sympathy with the popular movement and evincing in all his subsequent writing the effect of the contact. Coleridge is at Bristol lecturing on politics. Southey, radical and conservative in turn, wrote and spoke on the questions of the hour. In noting the more particular features of this influence in the line of the emotive we remark:—

(a) That the *issues* now at stake were *urgent* and *practical*. We read in the biography of Wordsworth the interesting fact that while sojourning in France in revolutionary days, the special motive of his change from English conservatism to republicanism was, that he seemed to discern in this French national movement the ardent desire of the people for political liberty. There was a something here that appealed to all the sympathies of the poet's nature. Forgetting, for the moment, the wild excesses to which the nation was advanc-

ing, he is glad to lend his personal indorsement. In this cry for freedom, and struggle toward it, there was a deep and genuine emotive element, and its effect upon poetry was most significant. The voice of the people must ever be heard above the counsels of kings and cabinets. The authors of the age apprehend, at once, the meaning of the hour, and English poetry is henceforth to be of and to the people.

(b) By far the most important benefit accruing to the reviving literature from the political agitations of the time is seen in the fact that it was a *time of change*. The spirit of inquiry was awakened in all the departments of human thought. In Natural Science the work of the Royal Society was being zealously done. In Theology, there were special discussions by Clarke, Butler, and Warburton. In Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations," Social Science may be said to have taken its origin, while it was closely followed by the "Fragments" of Bentham, and later by the works of Malthus and Ricardo. In Jurisprudence, Blackstone was preparing his great commentary on the Laws of England; Burke and Blair, Alison and Jeffrey, were discussing the principles of Æsthetic Art, while Hume and Robertson and Gibbon were

writing Civil History. It was, however, in the domain of Mental and Moral Philosophy that this spirit of inquiry was specially manifest. Hume wrote his "Inquiry concerning the Human Understanding." A few years later, Reid followed with his "Inquiry into the Human Mind," while he is ably supplemented by Stewart and the Scottish school. From France, Locke's philosophy is returned with foreign perversions, to which are added the dangerous theories of Bolingbroke and Rousseau. Early in the century, Berkeley had given to the world his Ideal Philosophy. Toward the middle of the century Hartley appeared with his Philosophy of Association, while near its close we see the skeptical philosophy of Gibbon, the rationalism of Paine, and the gross materialism of Priestley. In the line of foreign philosophy as bearing upon British thought, there are two sets of influences. The one was started and maintained by the critical discussions of Kant, and the other, by the encyclopædists of France, who began in doubt and ended in the bold denial of all moral truth. Catching its spirit from the teachings of Voltaire, it desired to construct a system fully in keeping with the reorganizing spirit of the time. It was successful in this, in so far as its promi-

ment idea was the discovery and diffusion of knowledge. Such, in brief, was the age — an age of bold and rapid experiment, an age of revolution and excitement. The poets were seeking what all others were seeking — a breaking down of the old landmarks, and an establishment of new standards. The change in literature, and more especially in poetry, was as great as in any other sphere — the change from criticism to passion.

(3) We may mention, as a third and suggestive cause of this transition, *the revival of Early English poetry*. Such an attempt to reingraft the older poetry into the body of the later was not confined to the closing years of the eighteenth century, although it was now, for the first time, fully successful. Chaucer looks back of English literature as national to the days of Layamon. Spenser glories in drinking deeply from the well of Chaucer. In Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Comus" the influence of the olden time is most manifest, and he goes so far as to write a history of Saxon England. John Dryden, critical and classical as he was, is never weary of commending to his readers the pages of the earlier authors, while to many of our minor poets it was nothing less than their poetical education to study these primitive bards.

In 1765, Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry" was published. A few years later, Thomas Warton issued a "History of English Poetry," which, as it ends before the close of Spenser's time, may justly be called a History of Early English Poetry. Later still, Ritson produced his "Ancient Popular Poetry," while various authors of lesser note were busily at work in the same direction. The celebrated forgeries by Chatterton and Macpherson were partially induced by a growing interest in the older poetry. These over-ambitious writers felt that if they were to be in sympathy with the age and secure a general patronage, the old must be revived. This explains, in part, why such a gifted intellect as that of Chatterton should be under the necessity of borrowing the name of Rowley, or Macpherson that of Ossian. Readers were waiting to be carried back to the days of Celtic and Scottish song. The Athenian cry for something new gave way to the British cry for the old, and the merry minstrels of yore once again went about with harp and song. The people listened to the romantic story of Sir Cautline and Christabelle, and to the daring exploits of Robin Hood against the exactions of the Norman Lords. Those quaint old tales are revived on

the basis of which Shakespeare has constructed some of his works. The "Gentle Herdsman" is reproduced in the "Hermit" of Goldsmith, while we hear such familiar snatches as, "The Nut-brown Maid," "The Wandering Jew," "St. George and the Dragon," and "Fair Rosamond." Most especially, the old religious or reformation ballads in the life and passion and death of Christ were reproduced, and the people hailed their re-appearing. We can but slightly appreciate in these times the charm connected with these earlier poems. Even the statesmen of the day were affected by the enthusiasm. Referring especially to the work of Percy, Wordsworth writes: "I do not think there is an able writer in verse of the present day who would not be proud to acknowledge his obligations to 'The Reliques.'" Of the same volume Scott confesses that it awoke within him an insatiable passion for the old, and at no period in our history have the poets and the people of all classes been so essentially one in their literary likes and dislikes. The era was in every respect a true Renaissance in English Letters, as much so as that of the fifteenth century in general knowledge. It was the Golden Age of impassioned verse, so fully in accord with the temper of the

time that we might gather from a perusal of the poetry the substantial history of the era. The movers in the great revival felt as if they had been ignorant of the lyric resources of English, and that the time had come modestly and, yet, decisively to assert the independence of British Letters and the vital connection — historic and moral — of the earliest and the latest ages of our literature. It is to the genuine poetic passion of this school of poets that Mr. Whipple refers in his able review of *American Letters* in the last century, as he says: "Most of these eminent men were not only writers but powers; they communicated spiritual life to the soul, touching the profoundest sources of reason and emotion."

With them poetic feeling was, to the last degree, natural and not feigned; it was simple, deep, and fervent. Because it was in them as a part of their very life, it must be uttered to the people. Out of the fullness of their hearts they sang as they sang, and no literature of ancient or modern times can exhibit a more vigorous expression of true poetic passion than that which we see in *English Letters* from the days of Burns on to the opening of the more recent school of metrical and verbal finish. Robert Burns was himself the central figure of the



Romantic Era, and marked in his verse the highest point which genuine poetic inspiration can reach. He wrote no epic, and, perchance, could have written none. He had not the "vision and faculty divine" in the same sense in which Milton had it, but still he had it. He was a genius in lyric song as Milton was in epic, and in so far as natural poetic instinct and genuine poetic emotion are concerned, has no peer in English verse. He could not but be natural.

#### SUGGESTIONS

1. We note the importance of the *impassioned element* in poetry. It is safe to say that the lyric element is as essential to the inner character of poetry as meter is essential to its form. Even in the highest examples of creative verse, so necessary is the presence of this element that it makes the dividing line between the two orders of verse an extremely delicate one, and, at times, well-nigh invisible. In fine, if we reduce terms to their last analysis and mean precisely what we say, we must regard poetry as essentially impassioned. The differentia of verse as to its quality is, that it is *emotional*. Hence, it is not strange that so many critics have defined poetry in terms of the impas-

sioned element. Byron speaks of it as the "feeling" of past and future worlds. Milton terms it "sensuous and passionate." Aristotle calls it an imitative art, imitative of the manners and "passions" of men; while John Stuart Mill, viewing it as the influence of feeling over thought, holds that feeling is the prime element in all poetry. In the light of such criticism it is naturally an open question with some as to the comparative importance of the epic and the lyric. It is urged by them that the precedence of the creative has been accepted rather than proved; that as the lyric is the oldest, simplest, and most frequent form of poetic expression, so it is the most characteristic and, in that sense, the highest form; that Milton's "L'Allegro" answers more fully to the true ideal of poetry than either of his epics. If it be objected to such a view that the door is thus opened for the indulgence of vapid sentiment and the subjection of intellect to impulse, it is answered that if the emotion be simple, genuine, and profound, there can be no danger in the line of the purely sensational. It is not our purpose to indorse this extreme view as to the rank of lyric verse. As long as the intellectual is superior to the emotional, any form of discourse in which it is prominent must,

for that reason, claim superiority. It is especially important to maintain this position in the present age when the tendency to meaningless verse is so strong. There is another extreme, however, against which we are to guard. It is too often assumed that in lyric poetry feeling and intellect are always in the inverse ratio; that lyric verse is thereby devoid of mental life and has no higher purpose than the expression of shallow emotion for trivial ends. The school of poetry before us is a sufficient answer to this superficial theory. Arising at a time when the thoughts of all men were necessarily turned to living issues and indifference or unnaturalness could not be brooked, there is the utter absence of the conventional and superficial. The poetry of the era is as fresh and tonic as the air of an October morning, and the master bards of the time are examples of all that is healthful and stimulating. The difference between creative and impassioned verse is not that the one is intellectual and the other emotional, but that, each being under the supremacy of mind, there is a freer play of the emotional in the latter, a more direct expression of heart-life and a somewhat wider departure from established literary law. So long as the lyric portion of our poetry is what it

is, and the impassioned lines of Burns and Scott are kept vividly in mind, the different forms of poetry will be assigned their proper respective rank, and the charge of mental weakness be fully met as applied to the poetry of feeling. Oratory has been defined as "thought with an impulse in it." If we add the characteristic of meter, the definition will apply to lyric verse. It is the metrical expression of ideas in impassioned forms.

2. What will probably be the next important transition in English poetry? Our poetry may be said still to retain something of its main characteristic as a poetry of feeling, distinct, on the one hand, from the creative school of Elizabethan times, and, on the other, from the critical school of Queen Anne. The true poetic passion which poured into the language through the writings of Goldsmith and Thomson, of Cowper and Burns, is to some degree exhibited in many of their immediate successors. This is especially seen in the writings of Byron, Scott, and Moore. They were impassioned in the same sense and to the same degree in which Burns was; the very name "romantic," as applied to the school of Byron, marking it sharply from all that is conventional and formal. The noonday glory of this poetry of

true sentiment is no sooner reached, however, than we can see the signs of its temporary reign and possible decline. Even the Lake Poets are reflective in their verse rather than emotional. Though it was their purpose and their pride to write in the interests of human life and the beauties of natural scenery, the cast of the lines is too contemplative to admit of the freest expression of feeling or to remind one in any striking manner of lyric ardor. Just at this time, moreover, in the very heart of the era, arose what with justice may be called the revival of the poetry of Pope in real Augustan form. We see this in the classical school of Gifford, Rogers, Campbell, and Landor — no one of whom, whatever his lyric fervor may have been, at all approached the natural sentiment of Byron. Glancing down the line of our more modern English poets the same critical order of verse is too apparent to be without its prophetic teaching. The very names applied by literary historians to these modern schools — the Alexandrine, the Androtheistic, the Realistic, and the Art school — teach the same lesson. We plainly see this classical bias in Keats and Robert Browning; in Arnold, and, to some degree, in Tennyson. Mrs. Browning, more than any one, in this later era, reminds us

of the deep pathos of the earlier. All this is suggestive, and gives us fair warning, that since the days of Scott a transition has been in progress from the impassioned order of poetry. Is the transition to be partial and temporary or complete and prolonged? Here we are inclined to take a hopeful attitude, as the later Victorian lyrists evince a tendency to recall their age to the idyllic excellence of earlier days. It is along this line of impassioned song that Watson and Masfield and Noyes and the English laureate, Bridges, are working.

## IV

### ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM

THE object now before us is to sketch this interesting history from its earliest period, in the Golden Age, on through the following centuries, to the days of Coleridge and Matthew Arnold,—the chief exponent of the more modern era.

#### THE AGE OF SIDNEY AND BACON (1550–1625)

The earliest substantive expression of English criticism takes us back to the days of Elizabeth, to the middle years of the sixteenth century. Just here it is significant to note that the rise of English criticism, as a separate form of literary art, is thus coterminous with the rise of Modern English, both as a language and a literature, as distinct from that of Old and Middle English.

The importance of this concurrence lies in the fact that it confirms the natural relation of original authorship and the judicial examination of it as a finished product. This is not to affirm that the literary criticism of Elizabethan days was at

all as high in quality as was the creative product which it examined, but that as soon as English literature had fairly established itself as a national type, English criticism, also, historically arose, as if, from the outset, to guide and guard its unfolding history. Prior to Shakespeare, we look in vain for any authoritative example of criticism on the literary side. It is not found in Caxton, as the first English printer and editor; nor in More, nor in Ascham, though in the educational reflections of his "Schoolmaster" he borders on the realm of the critic proper. Even in the days of Elizabeth, but few names can be cited, these few having the honor of doing pioneer work in this new departure and opening the way for all later effort. Chief among these are Sidney, Puttenham, and Webbe, authors, respectively, of "Apologie for Poetrie," "Arte of English Poesie," and "Discourse of English Poetrie." It is noticeable that each of them, as critic, dealt with poetry, discussing both its general aspects as an art and its special expression in English letters. Herein is revealed the fact of the primacy of poetry in the Elizabethan Age, and, also, that there is a sense, tacitly accepted, that in poetry, as a specifically æsthetic product, there is found an especially ap-



propriate field for the offices of the literary critic. It was so in the time of Aristotle and Horace, in classical letters, as with Lessing and Boileau in modern European letters. The critic seems, first of all, to be a critic of verse. It is, moreover, noteworthy that these three pioneers should have arisen together, and that each of them, as a university man, served to establish English criticism, in its beginnings, on a stable and scholarly basis. Of this notable trio, Sidney was not only the first one to prepare his treatise, but by far the first in the line of mental and literary competency, his "Apologie," as Morley has stated, "being the first piece of intellectual literary criticism in our language." It was specifically, as the name implies, a critical work on the defensive, a work in poetic apologetics, occasioned by what the author regarded as an unjust attack on poetry by Gorson in his "School of Abuse," dedicated, by way of banter, to Sidney himself. It was an attack, more directly, on dramatic poetry, then the dominant type, and on the stage itself. Gorson, however, later modified his views, in his "Apologie for the School of Abuse." He was the Jeremy Collier of the Golden Age.

As to the content of the "Apologie," suffice it to

say, the subject is presented in three primary sections. In the first, a general defense, he contends that poetry is the oldest of all compositions, that the poet is a creator, and the best moral teacher among men. In the second section, he answers objections, among others, as to the uselessness, falseness, and immoral tendencies of poetry, insisting that Plato's banishment of it from his commonwealth had reference to its abuse only. In the third section the critic reviews the status of English poetry in his own day and the reasons for its decline, Shakespeare not yet having written. "Before I give my pen a full stop," he quaintly says, "I am to inquire why England, the mother of excellent minds, should be grown so hard a stepmother to poets." It is at the close of this portion that he breaks out in high eulogium of his native English, as he says, "For the uttering sweetly and properly the conceits of the mind, which is the end of speech, that hath it equally with any other tongue in the world." Ending in the line of pleasantry, he wishes the despisers of poetry no greater curse than that, when in love, they have no sonnet to celebrate it, and, when they die, no epitaph in verse to perpetuate their memory.

With the name of Sidney is always identified

that of Puttenham. The special occasion of his work, as that of Sidney's, was the low state of poetry in the earlier years of Elizabeth's reign. As Sidney, also, he divides his treatise into three books or sections. In the first he discusses, among other topics, what poetry is; insists that poets were the first priests, prophets, legislators, and philosophers; examines the causes of poetic decline; how poetry has been made the medium of praise and censure; and, in his mention of the most notable English poets, such as Chaucer, Langland, Wyatt, Surrey, and Sidney, selects Chaucer as the "most renowned of all," and speaks of Sidney's and Spenser's special excellence in "pastoral poesie."

Of the second and third books, respectively, on Meter and Ornament, we need not speak in detail. It is thus clear that Puttenham and Sidney were engaged in the same great work of redeeming English poetry from the reproach into which it had fallen and placing it on a plane of deserved respect. Webbe's "Discourse of English Poetrie" was written with the same intent. To these three pioneers the names of two contemporaries greater than any one of them should be added. The one is Ben Jonson, "the great classic dramatist of the

English Renaissance," who "first clearly stated the chief principles of classic criticism, that the knowledge of law is as efficacious for the poet as for the critic." It is in his "Discoveries" that he discourses on such topics as the Criticism of Poets and Poetry, and Shakespeare, whose memory he honored "this side idolatry." His comments as a critic on style are well worth heeding to-day, that for a man to write well there are three necessities—"to read the best authors, observe the best speakers, and exercise much his own style." In his "Conversations with Drummond," he reviews his contemporaries, Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, and such foreign authors as Petrarch, Guarini, and Lucan.

The other name is Lord Bacon, who, especially in his "Essays" and "Advancement of Learning," renders invaluable critical service, "sketching the outlines of a criticism, liberal in spirit, philosophical and historic in method." The special significance of the work of Jonson and of Bacon is seen in the fact that they were critics on the side of prose and the first of this order in our literary history. These were the pioneers in Elizabethan criticism, deferent to the past in so far as it was helpful to the new science that they were estab-

lishing and, yet, loyal enough to the spirit of the new era to present, at length, a body of critical canons suited to the new awakening in English letters. This is not to say that the first age of the critical art in England was of a brilliant order, but that, in its place and time, it marked a distinctive result along an untried line, definitely opened the history of English criticism, and made it possible for all later critics to carry on the art to better issues.

#### THE AGE OF DRYDEN (1625-1702)

We are now brought, in historical order, to the second great era of English criticism, in which the central figure is Dryden. Although, on the principle of action and reaction in literature, the creative epoch of Bacon and Spenser would naturally be followed by an era of criticism, that part of the seventeenth century that lies between the death of Shakespeare (1616) and the restoration of Charles the Second (1660) was, in the main, a non-critical era, in so far as any substantive advance was made over the results already reached. In so far as literary criticism did exist, it marked a decline from established principles, and expressed itself either in the metaphysical

conceits of Donne and his school, or the poetic conceits of Rymer and his followers. The stormy days of the early Stuarts, and the equally restless era of the Commonwealth, were quite too unfriendly for anything like the judicial habit of mind. It is only when we come to the name and work of Dryden (1632-1700) that we are at all reminded of the critical canons of Baconian days, and find Sidney and Jonson themselves superseded by our first English literary critic in the modern sense of that term. In Dryden's work, as we are correctly told, "there culminated a century and a half of critical progress, through which the thought of an earlier England became a shaping force in the eighteenth century." Though having, as opposing elements, the undue prevalence of foreign models, and a consequent corruption of literary taste, Dryden still was successful in reinstating the scientific method of earlier days, and, through the new awakening of the Age of William the Third, laying broader foundations for all his contemporaries and followers. If he cannot be called the father of modern English criticism, he was, certainly, its most notable herald and forerunner, and is still contesting the field with Doctor Johnson and Coleridge. He is our

first example of what Brunetière has called "applied criticism," a criticism "which seeks in the works it examines to discover the laws of their genesis"—in a word, scientific or philosophic criticism. If Milton is "the last of the Elizabethans" in general letters, Dryden is such in criticism. Standing midway between the old and the new, he caught and reflected the best features of each, as he, also, happily acknowledged, and without inconsistency, the excellence of the best classical and Continental models, being alike loyal to Aristotle, Horace, and Corneille, and to all his English predecessors. It was singularly fortunate that when French taste was dominant in England Dryden should have enjoyed the interpretation of such taste by the celebrated French critic, Saint-Evremond, who, by reason of his long residence in England, may be said to have imbibed the English spirit and delivered his decisions as an impartial judge. Indeed, Dryden's superiority to his age is nowhere more apparent than along this line of literary effort, acknowledging and establishing standards of taste quite above the governing temper of the time, demanding new canons of literary art when authors were content with the old or indifferent to any, and insisting, amid all

opposition, that the time had now come to follow other nations "at a distance" and announce a declaration of literary independence in England. It is in this spirit and with these ends in view that he wrote his famous Critical Prefaces, and, more especially, in 1667, his "Essay of Dramatic Poesy," the first English critique in verse, after the Elizabethan Age, and the first in merit and influence as related to the developing history of criticism. To quote, at any length, from this notable essay is unnecessary. Represented in the form of dialogue, among four distinct characters, of which Dryden himself is one, they discuss, as they row up and down the Thames, the nature and value of poetry in general, and, more particularly, of dramatic poetry; the comparative excellence of classical and of English verse; of the present age of English poetry and that preceding; and of the French and the English drama. It is in this connection that Dryden says of Shakespeare, that "he was the man who of all modern and, perhaps, ancient poets had the largest and most comprehensive soul, naturally learned and always great." Of Ben Jonson he writes, that "he was the most learned and judicious dramatic writer which any theater ever had." Shakespeare he



calls "the Homer," and Jonson, "the Virgil," of dramatic poets; and, he adds, "Jonson, I admire, but Shakespeare I love." The "Essay" having been subjected to adverse criticism, Dryden hastens to justify himself in his treatise "A Defense of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy," in which he combines sound reasoning with the most generous pleasantry, and shows that he has the courtesy as well as the ability of the true critic. In fine, if we will thoroughly traverse the province of Dryden's critical study, it is safe to say that we will find more sound suggestion than, as yet, had existed in English letters, and will also find the solid basis now laid, for the first time, for the developing criticism of the later writers. It is largely to Dryden's credit that while Sidney and Puttenham and Webbe were critics of poetry only, and Jonson and Bacon of prose only, he covered, for the first, the comprehensive province of general criticism, and thus justifies the judgment of many English students that the science of English criticism was fairly established by his early and eminent offices.

Closely connected with the antecedent work of Dryden in criticism and preceding Johnson, there are a few names that deserve a word of comment. Sir William Temple, whose death in 1698 was al-

most coincident with Dryden's, continued the old discussion in his "Essay on Ancient and Modern Language," a subject which Jonathan Swift also took up in his famous "Battle of the Books." It is significant, as to Swift, that, despite his cynical temper as a man, he insisted that the end of criticism was the detection of merit, while it was only in the light of the abuse of criticism, at the hands of Bentley and others, that he called it "a malignant deity." It is in his satire "The Tale of a Tub" that he says, "Every true critic is a hero born, from whom the commonwealth of learning has in all ages received immense benefits." Early in the eighteenth century, Addison's *Spectator* and *Tatler* appeared, with their weekly reflections on Augustan life and letters, critically discussing such topics as words, taste, style, poetry, art, imagination, language, education, beauty, sublimity, and criticism itself as a literary method and function, presenting it, for the first time, in untechnical and attractive form, so as to make the reader quite unaware that he was sitting in judgment on books and authors. In his paper on "Taste," he gives us a definition that unifies all conflicting claims, as he says, "It is that faculty of the soul which discerns the beauties of an au-

thor with pleasure and his imperfections with dislike." This is an apt illustration of the real Addisonian spirit, through the expression of which the Augustan public of his time was rebuked without being offended, and was led to believe that, with all their faults, the better element prevailed in life and letters. Addison's chief critical work, however, was his acute and comprehensive review of "Paradise Lost," by which he not only justified his own claims as a critic, and exalted the great Puritan poet in the eyes of his contemporaries, but also extended and applied the principles laid down by Dryden and his co-workers. The introduction to the critique is itself a valuable piece of literary criticism, in which, among other subjects, he discusses the wide topic of epic verse, the merits and defects of Milton's great poem, and criticism itself as a literary process and province. In writing of criticism, it is of interest to note that he insists on certain qualifications as essential — that the critic should be versed in classical poetry; that he should have a clear and logical head, and that he should dwell upon merits rather than on defects. No criticism of any separate English work or author, at all comparable to it, had hitherto appeared, and none in which the historical and lit-

erary progress of English criticism as a science and art is better shown. It is greatly to the credit of this Augustan essayist that he should have deemed it both safe and essential to devote eighteen papers of a popular weekly periodical to the discussion of so exalted and difficult a theme, while it is no less to the credit of the general literary public of the time that the criticism was welcomed in English drawing-rooms and clubs. In no particular was Addison's work more suggestive and promising than in the combination it evinced of the best traditions of the past with the newly awakened movements and forces that were now visible in England, being liberal and conservative in such wise as to make him a safe guide to all classes in matters of taste. It is also greatly to the credit of Doctor Johnson that, in spite of all the adverse comments of which Addison was the subject, he insisted that Addison as a critic filled a place and did a work which no one of his contemporaries could so successfully have done.

Another name of special excellence in this era is that of Alexander Pope, the most representative classical poet of the age. Poet that he was, he was a critic as well, the union of criticism and satire being one of his distinctive features, and

giving him thus a unique place in the literary history of the time. It is in his justly celebrated "Essay on Criticism," published in 1711, when he was just past his majority, that he appears in the special rôle of an English critic, connecting a history of the science with a statement of what he conceives to be its leading laws and purposes. He discusses the topic under three divisions—the Basis of Criticism, the Causes Opposing It, and the Canons Producing It. In the first he contends that as much ability is needed for criticism as for creative production; that taste is as rare as genius; and that nature is the best guide to the judgment, though it should be fortified by training. In the second he emphasizes pride of opinion, partiality, imperfect education, and a superficial method as the special hindrances to a sound judicial process in literature. In the closing section he adduces, among the aids to a true criticism, candor, modesty, and good breeding; descants on the character of a good critic, and refers his readers to Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, and Boileau as among the great critics of classical letters. Appearing at about the same time as Addison's great critique, it did for general criticism what that critique did for the science as applied to a concrete product; so

that, as contemporary contributions to the developing art, their value cannot be exaggerated. It is pertinent to note, just here, that, though Dryden was Pope's ideal and accepted guide, this is not to say that English criticism had not advanced since the days of Dryden, nor is it to affirm that in this special province the work of Pope was not one of the indications of this advance.

#### THE AGE OF JOHNSON (1700-1800)

We reach, at this point, the third representative historical stage in the history of English criticism, and its third great exponent, Doctor Johnson. He sustained the same relation to the eighteenth century that Dryden did to the seventeenth, and Sidney and Bacon to the sixteenth, though differing decidedly from any one of them in his closer relation to the opening of the Modern Era Proper and in the almost autocratic position that he held among the authors of his time. Born at the opening of the century (1709) and living well on toward its close (1785) he may be said to have dominated its literary life, as Sidney and Bacon in no sense did that of their time, or Dryden that of his century. This in itself was enough to have made him a critic of men and books, even if by

natural bent and training and definite purpose and a happy conjunction of events he had not been made such. He was the self-appointed and accepted literary dictator of his time, to whom the rising authors of the day naturally looked for needed counsel, and whom it was somewhat unsafe for the most experienced writers to ignore. Criticism, moreover, was as congenial to him, as it was by necessity made a part of his literary work. So independent an author as Reynolds, in speaking of his own "Discourses," writes that "whatever merit they may have must be imputed in a great measure to the education I may be said to have had under Doctor Johnson"; and, he adds, "no man had like him the faculty of teaching minds the art of thinking." Goldsmith and others were completely under his sway. Thus it is that whatever he wrote was in a sense critical, an independent judgment on the topic in hand. His most discursive essays as given us in the *Rambler* and *Idler* and *Adventurer* are full of distinct critical suggestion, so that their pages might easily afford a good manual on the critical art.

The satirical reflection of Macaulay, that Johnson's criticisms were valuable on topics that were treated in the line of his own preferences, is

scarcely tenable. Johnson's immense learning and judicial habit of mind and ingenuous interest in literature saved him from such a narrowness of insight and purpose. In his essays he makes a special study of English diction, though inclined unduly to favor the Latin. Simplicity of language was the feature that he most emphasized. "If an author writes to be admired," he says, "rather than to be understood, he counteracts the first end of writing." He calls it the "bugbear style, by which the most evident truths are made obscure." By way of justifying his own apparent violation of this law of clearness, he writes, "When common words were less pleasing to the ear or less distinct, I have familiarized terms of philosophy, applying them to popular ideas." In other words, he would say that his final purpose was clearness, and that there were times, and not infrequently, when the longer word was the better word, and the word of Latin origin better than the one of English. His notable "Dictionary of the English Language" (1755) should not be omitted in any estimate of his critical labors, as he deals, in his preface, with the history of the vernacular. It is here that he says that "our language for about a century has been deviating toward a Gallic struc-



ture and phraseology from which it ought to be our endeavor to recall it." He indicates the true relation of native and foreign factors in English when he says, "I believe that whoever knows the English tongue in its present extent will be able to express his thoughts without further help from other nations."

This linguistic side of Johnson's training was an important feature in his critical work, in that it showed the true relation of language to literature; emphasized the fact that good diction, after all, lies at the basis of all good writing, and that English authors, if true to their lineage and advantages, would turn their eyes less and less backward to classical models and prove by example the sufficiency of their own mother tongue. At the middle of the eighteenth century this order of suggestion was eminently timely.

The most characteristic work of criticism from Doctor Johnson is his "Lives of the English Poets," a work distinctively literary, and the one in which he aimed to set forth his particular views on the poetic product of those whom he regarded as the chief versifiers of English letters, strangely including such secondary names as Denham, Rochester, and Sheffield, and even more strangely

omitting any discussion of Shakespeare, the greatest poetic personality of English literature. Among the most important papers are those on Milton, Dryden, Addison, Swift, and Pope, authors of national repute, and most of whom, as his contemporaries, were contesting with him for the literary honor of their time. Nowhere more than in these pages does he show himself to be the master of the literary history of England, even though, at times, he seems to interpret that history from the standpoint of personal prejudice. Absolute independence of judgment is his dominant characteristic as a critic, a deliverance of opinion in his own way quite irrespective of tradition or the concurrent conclusions of others.

A comparison of Macaulay's critiques of Milton and of Addison with those of Johnson will show how much farther the sage of Lichfield carried his independence than Macaulay did, never for a moment pausing to inquire what others had said on the subject. Of Milton's shorter poems he speaks in high terms, while of "Paradise Lost" he writes that "with respect to design, it may claim the first place, and, with respect to performance, the second place among the productions of mankind." In his paper on Dryden he empha-

sizes the author's work in the line of literary criticism, "a kind of learning," he says, "then almost new in the English language." He calls Dryden "the father of English criticism, the writer who first taught us to determine in principles the merit of composition, his 'Essay on Dramatic Poetry' being the first regular and valuable treatise on the art of writing." One of the most notable features of this critical review of Dryden by Johnson is his frequent and favorable reference to Shakespeare, whom he calls the greatest preceding dramatic poet of England, and whose enthusiastic eulogy by Dryden he thoroughly indorses, as "a perpetual model of encomiastic criticism." His failure to include Shakespeare in his "Lives" is thus all the more remarkable. In his paper on Addison he often comes to his defense when we would least expect it, as in his comments on "Cato" and the "Essays." Of his general style as an essayist, he writes, "His prose is the model of the middle style." It is in the closing words of his critique that he uses the oft-quoted sentence, "Whoever wishes to attain an English style familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." Of Swift's character and work he

speaks as charitably as justice will allow, rightly regarding simplicity as the governing quality of his style, and wondering how, under such adverse conditions of temperament and habit, he could have reached the eminence he did. His paper on Pope is full of interest, as he calls Pope's "Iliad" "a poetical wonder," speaks of his genius and good sense, while his elaborate comparison of Pope and Dryden is one of the most instructive in English letters. Of his "Essay on Criticism" he says that, "if he had written nothing else, it would have placed him among the first critics and poets."

In fine, Doctor Johnson, in these "Lives," has proved his right to be called our first great literary critic in the modern sense, as much in advance of Dryden as Dryden was of Sidney, improving on the critical methods hitherto prevailing and establishing new canons of critical procedure. It must be said, however, that Johnson's independence led him into some errors of judgment so radical and pervasive that their force will probably never be fully spent. We refer to his narrowness of view and his want of sympathy, after substituting his personal opinion for that of scholars in general, and cynically, and at times contemptuously, ex-

posing the faults of authors under review. When he speaks of Milton as "vaporizing away his patriotism in a private boarding school," or of the "wild dramas" of Shakespeare, or of Dryden, that "it would be difficult to prove that he ever made any great advances in literature," he carries the courage of his convictions to the extreme, and must, moreover, be charged with inconsistency. Despite all this however, his prevailing spirit was charitable, and most of his judgments were catholic, so that he rendered an invaluable service in the line of critical development.

A few names of note should in justice here be cited as working along the lines that Johnson laid down and hastening the incoming of the later eras of literary criticism. Edmund Burke, in his "Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful," explained the laws and principles of the æsthetic arts with a scientific accuracy hitherto unknown. Bentley, in his "Dissertation on the Epistles of Phalaris," aimed to show that these were modern forgeries, and thus provoked one of the most violent controversies of literature. His "Observations on the Faerie Queene" should also be mentioned as possessing exceptional merit. Thomas Warton's "History of English Poetry" was the first of its

kind, and opened up the way for all subsequent discussions in this direction. Alison's "Essay on Taste" was in the line of Burke's reflections, while Lord Kames, in his "Elements of Criticism," sought to establish the canons of taste in art and letters. The critical work of Gray, though limited, was of a scholarly order, and exhibited the best features of the developing art. All these critics and their less distinguished co-workers may be said to have constituted the transitional school between the earlier and the later eras of English criticism, between the somewhat preparative work of Dryden and Johnson and the more highly elaborated methods of Coleridge and his followers.

Thus does the expanding record of our vernacular criticism run from Sidney and Bacon on to the days of Matthew Arnold, and the contemporary work of Morley and Bagehot and Saintsbury and Dowden and our own American Stedman. Nor is it a history of which the English people need be ashamed, safely developing, as it has done, from the sixteenth century to the twentieth, along the course of our general national progress, and our more specific literary advancements, never divorced, for any length of time, from the creative work of our greatest authors,

and rarely forgetting the fact that the just object of criticism, as of literature in general, is, what Arnold declares it to be, "a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world."

The later era of English literary criticism may be said to have two well-defined periods, the first extending from 1800 to 1850, and the second from the middle of the last century to the present.

#### THE EARLIER ERA — THE AGE OF COLERIDGE

This opens with the name and work of Coleridge, a name which recalls to the mind of the English student the entire content of antecedent English criticism, the greatest critic of his time, and greater by far than any who preceded him, the influence of whose thought and life seems to widen and deepen with the years. One of the many significant facts connected with his critical work is that it comes to prominence just at the opening of the nineteenth century, just at the border line between the older and the younger schools, and inaugurates the Modern Era Proper. Coleridge stands in his day as a critic much as Spenser stood as a poet in the time of Elizabeth, having in hand the difficult problem of adjusting the

old and the new, the conservative and the progressive; a problem, we may add, more successfully solved by the critic than by the poet.

Another fact of importance as to Coleridge is that of the general relation of English literature to the German, and their special relations within the sphere of criticism. So decided is this relation that a recent American critic dwells upon "The German Sources of Coleridge's Criticism," stating what these sources are and to what extent the great English critic availed himself of them. First of all was the accepted fact that Germany stood for thought and thinking, for a new form and measure of mental life as distinct from the superficial habits of mind that had so largely prevailed in Europe. It was this specifically intellectual quality that at once attracted the contemplative Coleridge, inciting him to new ambitions in philosophy and letters, and making it necessary for him to resort to Germany in 1798 as a university student in order to bring himself in fullest contact with the scholarly activity that there prevailed. As Dryden had resorted to Corneille and other French masters as a model, Coleridge under the newer impulse from the Continent looked back to Lessing and Schelling and kindred



authors, who in their study of philosophy and literature and art based their researches on fundamental principles and followed a logical method. Indeed, so captivated was Coleridge by this new awakening in Northern Europe that he was accused of being under the dominance of it. The Introduction to the "Biographia Literaria" was devoted to a defense of the critic against the aspersions of *Blackwood's*, especially as to his use of Schelling's ideas. Nothing in the line of plagiarism was ever proved against him.

In noting the specific work of Coleridge as a critic, there are two of his productions that deserve special study, the "Biographia Literaria" and his "Lectures on Shakespeare."

Some of his topics and statements in the "Biographia" may be noted. In writing of the poetry of Pope and his school, it is clear that he is out of sympathy with it as too artificial and too dependent on French authority, even though he speaks of Pope's "Iliad" as "an astonishing product of matchless talent and ingenuity." He affirms a significant literary law as he states that "not the poem which we have read, but that to which we return with the greatest pleasure, possesses the general power and claims the name of

essential poetry." In discussing Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads," he strangely asserts that "a poem contains the same elements as a prose composition," the difference consisting in a "difference of combination of these elements and a different object in their expression." He defines a poem as "that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure and not truth." In comparing the poets of his own time with those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, he is clear in avowing his preference for the former, but adds that "an enviable reputation awaits that man of genius who should attempt and realize a union of these two orders of verse."

Much of the "Biographia" is appropriated to the study of the poetry of Wordsworth, partly by reason of the personal friendship of the two poets, but mainly because he conceived that herein lay the whole discussion as to the true theory of verse. He insists that Wordsworth is wrong in his main contention, that poetry can be reduced to the level of the common people. He contends that the language of Milton and Shakespeare is far more the language of real life than that of shepherds, and that Wordsworth in his efforts to escape the stilted

formalism of the classical school had passed over to the more dangerous extreme of lowering the level of poetic expression to the shop and market-place.

Of Coleridge's celebrated "Lectures on Shakespeare and the Drama" we cannot write at length. No longer was it in English literature an open question who Shakespeare was and where he stood among his poetic colleagues; nor did any critic have to assume the language of apology in the discussion of his name and work. Through his own study, and by contact with the best minds of Germany, Coleridge had come to a full appreciation of the great dramatist's genius, and he engaged in no work that gave him more pleasure than the preparation and delivery of these lectures; nor is there any in which he appears to better advantage as a critic. "He was not only a great poet," he says, "but a great philosopher." He speaks of his wit and imagination; defends the essential morality of his plays; states that no author equals him in using the language of nature; notes his happy combination of the dramatic and lyrical; and mentions as one of his great characteristics that "he always keeps on the high road of life," far above the commonplace. He sums it

all up by saying that "he is the greatest genius that human nature has, perhaps, yet produced, our myriad-minded Shakespeare." It is in this connection that he lays down some of the vital principles of criticism, such as the following: that the critic must distinguish between what is inward and essential and what is circumstantial, and that he must ascertain how far an author has been affected by his surroundings. Apart from his Shakespeare papers, his discussion of style is noteworthy. He speaks of the terse style of Latimer's time; of the dignified diction of the Elizabethans; and of the individual idiom of the pre-Restoration authors. From the current view of the excellence of Augustan English he dissents; praises the prose of Dryden and Jeremy Taylor, and remarks of Swift's style that "the manner is a complete expression of the matter." Of Johnson he writes, that "he creates an impression of cleverness by never saying anything in a common way," Gibbon's literary manner being open to rebuke. On style in general he offers some striking comments: that it is nothing else but the art of conveying the meaning "appropriately and with perspicacity," and that writers are not to attempt to express themselves in language "before they

thoroughly know their own meaning." "The source of bad writing," he adds, "is the desire to be something more than a man of sense. If men would only say what they have to say in plain terms, how much more eloquent they would be, accuracy of style being near akin to veracity." Such was Coleridge as a literary critic,—always sensible, honest, and reliable, suggestive and stimulating, setting the faculties of his readers at work, and encouraging them to independent study.

The name of Coleridge as a critic cannot be mentioned, nor the new critical awakening that he represented be rightly studied, apart from a reference to the *Edinburgh Review* and similar organs of critical opinion. Originating at the opening of the century—the *Edinburgh*, in 1802; the *Quarterly*, in 1809; *Blackwood's*, in 1817; the *Westminster*, in 1824,—the history of these Reviews is inseparably linked with that of Modern English criticism. They, in fact, contain a substantive body of such criticism. Of these, the *Edinburgh* is the first in date and influence, and especially as related to Coleridge. It is of this Review that Coleridge himself writes: "It has a claim upon the gratitude of the literary republic for having originated the scheme of reviewing those books

only which are susceptible and deserving of argumentative criticism." It was this new method of "argumentative criticism" that marked the work of Coleridge. As to the special manner in which these Reviews were conducted, we find that they all erred on the side of partial and extreme criticism, going, at times, to the limit of malice and personal ridicule. Modern criticism was just beginning to find its ground. What were the best principles and processes of literary criticism was as yet largely an open question. In fine, these initial efforts at the opening of the century were largely experimental, and as such were subject to imperfection and needed revision. All errors conceded, however, a decided advance was made in the critical art. The critics themselves were quick to discern their own mistakes and to correct them, so that by the close of the first quarter of the century much that was crude had been eliminated and stable conditions secured. In connection with Coleridge and these various Review editors as prime factors in this earlier critical movement there are some other names of essential import. One is Wordsworth, who in the Preface to his "Lyrical Ballads," published in 1798, had newly awakened the critical spirit of his contemporaries,

who at once addressed themselves to the examination of his "Theory of Verse." It is needless to state what that discussion was in its continuance and evidence. Even Coleridge felt himself obliged to oppose his fellow-craftsmen in the art of verse. Christopher North, in his "Noctes Ambrosianæ," examined the literary questions of the day, treating them, however, with so deft a hand as to make them popular and impressive. Lord Byron, in his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," sustains an important relation to this critical movement, in that it was the furious attack of the *Edinburgh Review* upon his "Hours of Idleness" that provoked his bitter retort and opened up an entirely new chapter in his literary life. It is clearly seen, however, that Byron was out of his element in the rôle of a critic, and he wisely confined himself to other and more promising spheres. William Hazlitt deserves a place in this critical list, on the ground of such works as his "Lectures on the English Poets," his "Characters of Shakespeare's Plays," and his "Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth." His discussions of Bacon and Taylor, of ancient and modern literature, and of the German drama, are all in the line of the later and better method. Hallam, in his "Introduction to

the Literature of Europe," has placed all subsequent criticism under obligations to him for the use of the comparative method in literary study, traversing, as he has done, the entire circuit of European letters. He may be said to be the pioneer in this historico-literary method, so that literature proper finds ample illustration in the pages of Froude and Lecky and Green and Freeman. Charles Lamb, in his "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets" and "Characters of Dramatic Writers," reveals his right to be called a critic. Macaulay, also, must have place here in the province of the critical essay, as a literary product. His paper on Milton, in 1825, served to connect English criticism with the *Edinburgh Review*, and justified the claim of English literature in having already established a worthy critical record. Macaulay's faults as a critic conceded, it cannot be denied that he was deferent to the best traditions descending from Johnson and Coleridge and substantially furthered the interests of English literary art and taste.

Here belongs the name of De Quincey, whose death in 1859 was coincident with that of Macaulay's. In his "Biographical Sketches" and "His-



torical Sketches" there is a distinctive critical method and spirit. In the special sphere of literary discussion he is most at home, and one is at a loss to know how the English language could be used to better effect than in such papers as "Greek Tragedy," "Wordsworth's Poetry," "Rhetoric and Style," and "Jean Paul Richter." "No English writer," says Masson, "has left a finer body of disquisition on the science and principles of criticism"; and no English writer, we may add, has more successfully exemplified those principles. Shelley, in his unfinished "Defense of Poetry," has well-deserved mention among our abler critics. Recalling the famous critiques of Sidney and Dryden on the same subject, it vitally connects the nineteenth century with the sixteenth and seventeenth. He defines poetry as "the expression of the imagination"; holds that poets are "the institutors of laws and the founders of civil society"; that they "participate in the eternal and the infinite"; that "poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure," and that it is essentially moral in effect; and he closes his discussion in enthusiastic strain, that "all high poetry is infinite, the center and circumference of all knowledge," the

“record of the best and happiest movements of the best and happiest minds.” While insisting that the world might live on in peace and comfort had the philosophers and scientists never lived, it could not live without the poets. These are just the sentiments we should expect from Shelley, and it is more than a pity that the second part of this subject “Defense” was not completed at his untimely death.

It is thus that Coleridge and his colleagues did a most essential work in the cause of general letters and English criticism, enunciating still more clearly the fundamental principles of criticism and infusing a new spirit into all judicial literary work. This was the best result of Shelley’s labors, that they connected criticism as a science with literature as a vital product, minimized the distance between authorship and the examination of authorship, so that, as we stand at the close of the earlier modern era, in 1850, it is easy to see what decided an advance English criticism has made since the days of Dryden. The publication of Arnold’s “Essays in Criticism” brought him to the front of the criticism of his time, and the later era of Modern English criticism was fully opened.

## THE LATER ERA — THE AGE OF ARNOLD

A study of the critical work of Matthew Arnold as related to that of Coleridge, how it resembled it and how it differed from it, would be a subject of the deepest interest in the developing history of criticism. Suffice it to say that each of these great authors was a representative English critic in the age to which he respectively belonged; that each of them was true to the best traditions of the older schools of Dryden and Johnson; that each of them in his literary personality illustrated the true relation of authorship to criticism; and that each of them made such decided contributions to the cause of English criticism as to leave it stronger and richer than he found it. If the element of difference between them is pressed, it may be said that Coleridge represented the philosophical side and Arnold the æsthetic side of critical work; that Coleridge was the more intellectual and Arnold the more literary; that the one found the best province for his effort in prose and the other in verse, and that thus they together expressed all the essential elements of the art. Though Arnold was always and everywhere a critic, there are some of his writings that espe-

cially mark his character as such; as, his "Essay on Translating Homer," his "Essays in Criticism," "The Study of Celtic Literature," "Culture and Anarchy," and "Discourses in America," in each of which he often recurs to his favorite literary theories. He never allows the reader to lose sight of the fact that the critic must be a thoroughly informed man, and that criticism, rightly viewed, is a high and serious function. It is only in the sphere of theological discussion that he belies any of these essential principles and evinces both mental and literary narrowness. It is not in "Literature and Dogma" and "God and the Bible," but in the study of poetry and prose, that this British censor finds his proper province.

To cite the names of his contemporaries and successors would be, in a sense, to pass in review the entire content of later Victorian letters, emphasizing such names as Ruskin, Landor, Carlyle, and Pater. Mention has been made of the relation of the earlier modern school to the rise of the *Edinburgh* and similar Reviews as organs of critical opinions. It is significant that in the later school the same kind of criticism appears, and we note the beginning of the *Fortnightly*, the *Contemporary*, and the *Nineteenth Century*, while it is

not aside from truth to say that English literary criticism has marked steady progress since Coleridge and Arnold, down to the contemporary work of Morley and Dowden and Bagehot. The optimistic spirit with which Shelley closes his "Defense of Poetry" may well characterize the literary student as he sits down to a candid examination of our critical development as the twentieth century opens up before him.

## V

### BRITISH POET LAUREATES

It is, of course, natural to look outside of England and to a period prior to the establishment of English literature as national for the origin and earliest bestowals of this historic literary honor of the laureateship. As has been said, "The custom of crowning poets is as ancient as poetry itself," to which it may be added that the custom of honoring authors in prose or verse, or those distinguished in general letters or in some particular branch of scholarship and liberal learning, is as old as literature and education. Hence, it is appropriate to find the earlier and later institution of such honors connected with the universities of Europe, "France being the only country in Mediaeval Europe in which the title was not known." As far back as the thirteenth century, Bachelors and Doctors on receiving their degrees and titles from the universities were crowned with the laurel, this custom still obtaining in Europe. As Morley tells us, "Tradition of the Middle Ages

held that Vergil, Horace, and Statius had been so crowned, and that it was a custom dropped out of use by decay of the Roman Empire, but which had been revived in the thirteenth century." It was at this era, in connection with the revival of learning and literature in Southern Europe, and at the time of Petrarch, more particularly, that the more modern type of this honor was instituted in the person of Petrarch himself, "who first gave life to the office of Poet Laureate." It is highly significant that the state and the university were both represented in this bestowal, the Roman Senate summoning Petrarch to Rome, in September, 1340, and the Chancellor of the University of Paris summoning him to Paris, at the same time, to be publicly crowned. It is thus a matter of record that this great Italian author, after submitting himself to a rigid public trial before King Robert of Naples, was solemnly crowned Poeta Laureatus by the king, April 8, 1341. The honor was a tribute to him both as a poet and an historian, and he became thereby a citizen of Rome. At no period since that date has the honor been more worthily bestowed nor has it ever been attended with more fitting and impressive ceremony. It is probably to this imposing and merited cor-

onation that Chaucer refers in his Prologue to the "Clerk's Tale," as he writes:—

"Fraunces Petrarck, the laureat poete,  
Hightè [was called] this clerk, whos rethorique swete  
Enlumyned al Ytaille of poetrie."

The wide scope of the office and honor is indicated as we read the language of the gift—"granting him, in the poetic as well as in the historic art, and generally in whatever relates to the said arts, the free and entire power of reading, disputing and interpreting all ancient books, to make new ones, and compose poems, which, God assisting, shall endure from age to age." Such conditions as these are a credit alike to the Roman Senate and King Robert of Naples, to the poet himself and the age in which he lived. We are now prepared to note the rise and history of this office as obtaining in England proper. Here, as on the Continent, the civil and the literary are alike represented. The honor is, in one sense, a political one, as conferred by the king or queen, and a literary and an educational one, as connected with the universities. As it seems, the laurel was first given by the English universities to students excelling in rhetoric and poetics. As one states it, "The king's laureate was simply a graduated



rhetorician in the service of the king." The honor was thus conferred not exclusively on the basis of poetic merit or skill in versification, but on the ground of general literary merit. Required, at first, to compose appropriate odes in honor of the sovereign's birthday, or the nation's victories, or some similar civic event, these specified duties at length became a dead letter and the incumbent was at liberty, in his own time and in his own way, to fulfil the obligations of his trust. As to English poets who have held this office, there must be more or less conjecture, dependent, in part, upon the particular meaning assigned to the title. Thus Chaucer and Gower are said to be

"Superlative as *poetes laureate*  
In *rhetorique* and *eloquence ornat*."

In the reign of Henry the Fourth, Henry Scogan, to whom Chaucer addressed one of his poems, is mentioned by Jonson as one who "writ in ballad-royal." In the reign of Edward the Fourth, John Kay(e) is called the "versificator" of the king, supposed by some critics to have been the first English laureate in any well-understood sense. He calls himself "humble poet laureate." André Bernard, of the time of Henry the Seventh, is said to have been "the first man whom an English king

named as his poet laureate." John Skelton, who is proud to call himself "Poeta Skelton Laureatus," was poet laureate of Oxford and of Cambridge. Of one Robert Whittington, an Oxford graduate, we read that he applied, in 1513, for the degree of Laureate on the ground that he had spent several years in the study and teaching of rhetoric, and that his request was granted. He was said to have been "the last man who received a rhetorical degree at Oxford." In all these cases it will be noticed that the term "laureate" is used with considerable latitude, applying both to prose and verse, to literature and education, "the present dynasty of poet-kings" beginning, according to Shaw, with Edmund Spenser, who, in 1591, was pensioned by Queen Elizabeth, and who in one of his sonnets refers to the "laurel leaf" as "the badge that I doe bear." Spenser seems to have held this office till 1599, being followed by Samuel Daniel, who, in 1619, was followed by Ben Jonson, "the first who received formal letters-patent appointing him to the office." All preceding incumbents were known as volunteer laureates. It was at this time that the yearly allowance to the laureate seems to have been fixed at a hundred marks, and varied during Jonson's incumbency to a hun-

dred pounds sterling and a tierce of wine. In the days of Pye and Southey, this grant of wine seems to have been changed into that of money, equaling twenty-seven pounds a year. The pension of fifty pounds a year given to Spenser by the Queen in 1591 may have been given him, in part, at least, as a poet of her reign and court.

At the close of Jonson's office as laureate, in 1637, there seems to have been an unfilled interval of twenty-three years, till the appointment of William Davenant, in 1660, the year of the Restoration of Charles the Second and the incoming of Gallic influence. Davenant was succeeded, in 1670, by John Dryden, though it appears that Dryden was the recipient of the yearly salary of a laureate from 1668 to the close of his term in 1689. His long poem "Annus Mirabilis," written to commemorate the startling events of the preceding year—the Great Plague and the Great Fire and the war with the Dutch—was naturally the occasion for an excessive eulogium of the King, and of the nation at large, as a conquering naval power. His "Astræa Redux"—"A Poem on the Happy Restoration and Return of His Sacred Majesty, Charles the Second"—is sufficient to show to what depths of base servility a

dependent author may stoop. So, his "Heroic Stanzas" to Cromwell, written in a less objectionable strain, prepared the way for his work as a laureate and, indeed, contributed to his appointment. His elegy, "Threnodia Augustalis," was written on the death of Charles the Second. His "Britannia Rediviva," composed on the birth of a son to James the Second, is a good example of a distinctive laureate poem, though his honors and emoluments were soon all lost by the banishment of James and by the accession of William. From Dryden's incumbency on for a century and a quarter, to the year 1813, we note such names in the laureateship as Shadwell, Tate, Rowe, Eusden, Cibber, Whitehead, Thomas Warton, and Pye,—a list, as Shaw indicates, which "will awaken strange reflections as to the wisdom shown by English rulers in their choice of literary monarchs." "The bays," as it was said, 'became a sure badge of mediocrity.' Shadwell is chiefly known as the hero of Dryden's "Mac Flecknoe"; Tate, as conjoint editor with Brady of "The Psalms of David"; Rowe, as one of the earlier editors of Shakespeare; Eusden, as one of the victims of the satire of "The Dunciad"; Cibber, as a dramatic writer and an actor; Whitehead, as the author of

unread poems; Warton, as the author of a "History of English Poetry," and Pye, as the author of "Alfred," called by accommodation an epic. Rowe and Warton excepted, there is no name here indicative of more than ordinary talent either in literature or general culture.

The appointment of Robert Southey in 1813 (the offer of the honor having been declined by Scott) may be said to have given new character to the office and to the honor, his retention of the laureateship for thirty years down to his death serving to show his acceptability at the courts of four successive sovereigns,—George the Third, George the Fourth, William the Fourth, and Victoria. Indeed, his extreme adulation of the reigning powers reminds us too often of the servility of Dryden at his worst. What has well been called "his deification and beatification" of George the Third exposed him to the merciless attacks of Byron and the critics. This ill-timed and almost blasphemous tribute is given in "The Vision of Judgment," a poem on the death of George the Third and his reception in Heaven.

In such an ode as his "Carmen Triumphale" he appears at better advantage than in the "official lyrics" of the court. His "Battle of Blenheim,"

in which he celebrates the victory of the English over the French, is of a genuine martial order.

In 1843, Wordsworth was honored with the laureateship and, also, honored it till the date of his death in 1850, an English laureate who, in a true sense, first fully magnified his office and, while true to his sovereign and the nation, also maintained his own dignity and independence and wrote what he wrote as an author and a man, rather than as a dependent of the court. He accepted the honor on the condition that no official verses should be required of him. A comparison of Wordsworth's ode "On the Death of George the Third" with Southey's on the same theme is sufficient to mark the difference between literary independence and servility; between natural poetry and verses made to order. Indeed, it may safely be said of Wordsworth that his appointment to the laureateship made no apparent difference whatsoever in his attitude to the Victorian court or the nation at large, nor did he, in fact, go out of his way to pen odes and sonnets simply as a laureate. His sonnets, as their title tells us, were dedicated to Liberty and to the cause of truth, rather than to this or that personage or specific national event.

At the death of Wordsworth, in 1850, Alfred Tennyson was in the vigor of his middle manhood and his poetic fame, this being the year of the publication of "In Memoriam." Several years prior to this, as we learn from the poet's latest biography, Hallam, the historian, had called the attention of Sir Robert Peel to Tennyson's superior merit and his need of official aid, with the result that, in 1848, he received an annuity of two hundred pounds "as a mark of royal favor to one who had devoted to worthy objects great intellectual powers." In 1850 the laureateship was offered him, mainly, as we learn, on the basis of his "In Memoriam," which so appealed to the Prince Consort and the Queen. The language of the Queen's Secretary in the proffer of the office is full of interest as it reads: "The ancient duties of this office, which consisted of laudatory odes to the sovereign, have been long in abeyance, and have never been called for during the reign of her present Majesty. The queen, however, has been anxious that the office should be maintained; first, on account of its antiquity, and, secondly, because it establishes a connection, through her household, between her Majesty and the poets of this country as a body."

Though Tennyson for various reasons hesitated in accepting the honor, he at length assented, and to the year of his death, in 1892, gave the office historic repute, opening his work as laureate in 1851 by the dedication of his poems to the Queen, and, in 1852, with his "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," followed, as it was, by the dedication of the "Idylls" to Prince Albert and by his "Welcome to Alexandra." As in the case of Wordsworth, his "official verses" were purely voluntary. His gracious tribute to Wordsworth, on receiving his appointment, is one of the pleasantest surprises of literature, as he wrote:—

"The laurel greener from the brow  
Of him who uttered nothing base."

Such examples as his "Charge of the Light Brigade," "The Defence of Lucknow," and "A Ballad of the Fleet," while not technically laureate poems, are of this commemorative order.

At the death of Tennyson the question of the maintenance of the laureateship was opened by the English public, there being no living author, in the judgment of many, worthy to receive the laurel from his brow. To Morris and Swinburne alike, serious objections were raised and on other than literary



grounds, nor was the enthusiasm of the public aroused by the name of Edwin Arnold. To William Watson and Alfred Austin the eyes of many were turned, and yet in neither case did all the conditions of such a function seem to be met. Each of them was all but too willing to acknowledge himself a disciple of the departed master and unworthy to follow in his footsteps. Each of them had paid fitting tribute to his memory, in their respective elegies and eulogies, "Lachrymæ Musarum" and "To Lord Tennyson." The difficulty was finally settled by the appointment in 1896 of the poet Austin, only to elicit from most English-speaking circles a temporary protest. In the view of some, however, the honor was well bestowed, it being as illogical, they averred, "to demand that every laureate be as great a poet as Tennyson as to insist that no man less than Alfred shall be king."

No sooner had the appointment been made and accepted than the newly inducted laureate naturally became the study of critics and the general English world as to his personality, poetic product, and possible future. When it was said, at the time "that he is at once a live poet and a true Englishman; in perfect accord with his govern-

ment and the conservative traditions thereof; that he is sound, safe and of high character as man and artist; and that nothing that he has written or is expected to write will ever tend to debase the true moral or intellectual taste of English reading people," enough was said, perhaps, to justify his selection and to insure for him an ever more generous criticism and indorsement. His ardent tribute to his sovereign in his eulogy "Victoria, the Good" reminds us not a little of Tennyson's stanzas "To the Queen," as we read:—

"She shared her subjects' bane and bliss,  
Welcomed the wise, the base withstood,  
And taught by her clear life it is  
The greatest greatness to be good."

A writer both of prose and verse, it is somewhat anomalous that he, for a time, worked quite exclusively within the sphere of prose, thus departing widely from the traditional functions of the laureate, as an author in verse. The fifteenth officially appointed English laureate, he did something, at least, to sustain the goodly succession from Ben Jonson down, and unite the twentieth century of English letters and the reigns of Edward the Seventh and George the Fifth with "the spacious times of great Elizabeth."

The fervent affection which Tennyson and Austin alike have expressed for Wordsworth and his verse is enough in itself to link their names in the grateful regard of every English-speaking people and hallow the office of the English laureateship. Upon the death of Alfred Austin, literary curiosity was again excited as to whether the laureateship would be allowed to pass into abeyance, or if not, upon whom the traditional honor might be conferred, the poet, prose writer, and critic, Robert Bridges, receiving the appointment.



PART SECOND

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SPECIAL DISCUSSIONS



# I

## THE ELEMENTS OF SHAKESPEARE'S GENIUS

THE definition of genius is almost as diversified as is the personality of men of genius or that of leading literary critics. Just because in its characteristics and expression it is a something thoroughly unique, it is quite impossible to reduce it to an exact statement. Hence, the variety of view that we find. According to Johnson, "a genius is a mind of large general powers accidentally determined to some particular direction." In Schlegel's view, it is "the almost unconscious choice of the highest degree of excellence." "To believe your own thought," says Emerson, "to believe that what is true for you is true for all men, this is genius"; while the French critic Cousin states it thus: "The rapid and vivid perception of the proportion in which the ideal and the real should be united." In these and similar declarations there are enough common features to cast some clear light on the nature of genius, and yet enough differences to leave the subject open to the judgment

of the individual student. For our purpose and as applicable to Shakespeare, genius may be said to be the possession of extraordinary gifts and powers and the ability to utilize them in extraordinary forms. However specific and personal the genius of Dante or Homer or Milton or Shakespeare may be, as determined by heredity and environment, they were alike in this, that they possessed extraordinary faculty and function. Nor is it to be forgotten that genius, because it is unique and original, must have a much wider area of liberty than ordinary mental power — must be, at times, a law unto itself and consistently transgress or ignore established law. Herein lies the main distinction between genius and talent; between creative and mere constructive ability; between exceptional and average faculty. We are now prepared to note the specific elements of Shakespeare's genius, — more especially, as evinced in the sphere of the drama. As it was here that he was eminent, it is here that he is to be studied and estimated.

1. *A profound knowledge of man and men:* of man in the abstract as involving a study of human nature in general, and of men in their concrete individuality, national and personal. He believed, with Pope, that "the proper study of mankind is



man," that literature and life were to be mutual interpreters. In the Historical Plays, we have an expression of this knowledge which is objective and visible, and character is revealed through some incident, event, or action. In the Tragedies and Comedies, this knowledge is more interior and acute. Motives, dispositions, mental and moral qualities, are examined. In fine, the psychology of human nature is now studied. In his Sonnets, this particular type of study becomes still more introspective, inasmuch as the autobiographical element enters to color and intensify it. When it is said by Sprague that "he looked creation through," the reference is not merely to his observation of external phenomena, but to his study of subjective life. It was an outlook and an inlook, and these together, so that the result was a thorough and comprehensive examination of men and the world. First and last, Shakespeare was an interpreter of man to man, a mediator of the truth.

2. *A knowledge of truth as truth*, in addition to a knowledge of it in its relations and applications. To inferior and even to average minds truth, to be seen at all, must be presented under certain well-established forms, in current, conventional ways. Shakespeare looked at truth directly

and immediately. As a writer has expressed it, "He thought in the lump," and not through the medium of detached statements and formal comparisons. He was conversant with what is called a body of truth, truth in its essence and entity, as the sum-total of human thinking and experience. Hence the "immense suggestiveness" of the poetry of Shakespeare, meaning so much more than it affirms, thus inviting and rewarding investigation, as fresh now as when first penned, and insured beyond the possibility of decline. When Schlegel tells us that "in profundity of view he was a prophet," there is a reference to this penetrating vision which the great dramatist had of essential truth and verities, so that he was not and could not be superficial. He saw truth and life "steadily and saw it whole."

3. *Mental Affluence and Versatility.* It is with the many-sided and myriad-minded poet that we are here dealing. Nor is it simply meant that Shakespeare wrote so many sonnets and plays. Other English authors have written more in verse and prose. His versatility was mental rather than literary, capable of producing vastly more than it did, had the occasion demanded it. His affluence was a latent resourcefulness, equal to any call that

might be made upon it. The Elizabethan dramatist Webster speaks of "his happy and copious industry." His intellectual ability was copious, full of cumulative power, of which, after every exercise of it, a surplus always survived, as the guarantee of renewed expression. Hence we fail to discover in Shakespeare's mental personality the ordinary evidences of limitation and diminishing resources. He was a kind of general specialist, taking, as Bacon would say, all truth and knowledge for his province, his purpose being the intellectual expansion of his fellows.

One of the best tests and evidences of this intellectual affluence is found when we inquire, Where was Shakespeare the ablest? What was his forte? Was it in tragedy or comedy? Was it in conception or construction of plot or in the sphere of characterization? These are still unsettled questions and defy final solution. The fact is, his power was so general and central and symmetrically developed that he was confessedly conspicuous in no one feature above another, the only exception being that in his lyric poetry he is not as great as in his dramatic verse. In this mental affluence is also explained the fact that the study of the Shakespearean drama is one of the highest

forms of mental discipline, and he who approaches it in any other spirit fails to approach it aright. A mere drawing-room acquaintance or æsthetic coquetting with such productions as "Hamlet" and "Othello" is one thing. A study or mastery of them is another. If the modern stage cannot present and maintain this old Shakespearean drama, so much the worse for it and for the public to which it appeals and on whom it relies for patronage and stimulus. This fact is itself a tribute to the great dramatist's work, as the product of a master-mind and requiring a good degree of mental vigor and literary culture on the part of the modern public.

4. The *imagination* of Shakespeare is to be studied. The "vision and faculty divine" was his, one of the marks of genius being that it is, on the imaginative side, both a vision and a faculty. One of the main features of Shakespeare's imagination is seen in the fact that it expressed itself in no one exclusive form, philosophic, historic, or poetic, but in all of them conjointly, as with Homer and Dante and Milton. Of Chaucer and Spenser and Pope and Wordsworth this cannot be affirmed, nor of any but the few world-poets. There was in his imagination at its highest the union of the natural

and supra-natural, the real and the ideal, the present and the future, in such wise as to give to each its proper place and make the fusion all the more effective. He had thus the high inventive functions of the poet, "bodying forth the form of things unknown" and "giving to airy nothing a local habitation and a name." At times, he was excursive and descriptive, his eye "with a fine frenzy rolling" through all space and time. He was thus the greatest seer of English verse, presenting and re-presenting truth as he saw it in earth and heaven, in man and nature, in history and romance. Hence, the reality and ideality of his plays, realistic and romantic in one, their basis laid in truth and fact, and their superstructure rising to mid-heaven. Striking examples of figurative usage are thus seen in such an historic drama as "Julius Cæsar," as examples of historic fact are found in such a comedy as "The Merchant of Venice" or such a romance as "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

5. *Pathos* and *passion* are notable elements. The phrase "an impassioned imagination" is here in place, and expresses a radical principle that true feeling may be awakened and sustained, as it may be allayed and repressed, by the direct action of

the imagination. Pity is engendered by holding up the object of pity clearly before the eye of the mind as a present reality. So love and hate, friendship and patriotism and religious zeal, are awakened. The mental picture which the Crusaders formed of the Cross and the indignities to which it was subjected at the hands of infidels filled the armies of Europe with soldiers eager to avenge the repeated insult. In Shakespeare we naturally look for such an emotive element, as true genius never violates a fundamental law, nor omits to emphasize a normal principle of human nature. What especially marks the Shakespearean passion is, that it is an integral portion of the play in which it is present and is always under the control of reason, good sense, and the central object of the play. In the most intense passages of the tragedies this is as true as in the more subdued and restrained utterances. Lear and Hamlet may be mad, but Shakespeare never. Timon, the misanthrope, may curse his birth and the world in truly pessimistic strain, but Shakespeare always preserves his serenity. His verse is thus, indeed, an inspiration, an embodiment of genuine sentiment, whether expressed in the quieter form of

pathos or in the more demonstrative outbursts of tragic passion.

6. *His twofold relation to his characters.* On the one hand, he succeeds in identifying himself with them, while, on the other, he preserves, intact and distinct, his own poetic and human personality. When reading such an interpretation of character as is Shylock or Wolsey, the hand of Shakespeare is manifest in all, and yet thoroughly concealed, in so far as to interfere in any way with the full expression of the character itself. The Jew and the king's cardinal are themselves in the drama, and yet the poet gives us, in his own way, his personal estimate of such a vice as avarice or unrestrained political ambition. His characters are thus great generic types. They are not only personal characters, but corporate and collective, representative of a class of men and principles or of abstract virtues and vices, a kind of generalization in verse of that study of separate traits and tendencies of which he was such a master. Shakespeare's characters were characteristic, indicative of central qualities, a carefully conducted study in the philosophy of life. Hence his characterizations cannot be imitated with any degree of success. There is but one Hamlet and one Lear and one

Juliet in literature, in the Shakespearean sense of that term, as unique as the Faust of Goethe, even though Marlowe's "Faustus" is a work of special merit. The mastery of the masters is nowhere more evident than here, as we find but one "Divina Commedia" and one "Don Quixote" and one "In Memoriam" and one "Canterbury Tales," no one of them being approximately imitable, but severely singular and exclusive. Shakespeare was thus a poet of poets more truly than Spenser was a teacher of teachers. That he founded no school is to his credit. He was too great for any such pedagogic mission. A standard author himself, he did not impose a standard upon others or even invite the following of any class of literary craftsmen.

7. *Truth to nature and life is noteworthy.* There is an unstudied frankness in Shakespeare which at once impresses the reader and commands his interest and assent. There is the marked absence of effect for the sake of effect, of any device of word or phrase to mislead the reader. There is no taking advantage of what is allowable in dramatic verse in the line of impersonation. Nothing of the "start theatric" is present to surprise and overawe with what is called sen-



sationalism. It is this ingenuousness that Pope has in mind when he says, "It is not so much that he speaks for nature as that she speaks through him." Shakespeare was thus true to the truth, whether it was found in the world without or in the soul of man. With all his genius, it was not his prerogative to impose upon truth any new meaning, but simply to act as an amanuensis and a messenger. He was thus a pronounced realist in the realm of dramatic verse. He held the "mirror up to nature" and faithfully recorded what he saw without bias or secondary motive. While there is a sense in which his sonnets are autobiographical, in the plays he loses sight of himself in the exposition of the truth. Hence, that unity of impression, that "inner unity" of all forms of truth, of which Lessing speaks, and which, according to Guizot, is "the chief principle of dramatic art," the unity of truth in the world and in man, in literature and life.

#### INFERENCES

From the brief examination thus presented, certain inferences arise, which seem to admit of varied interpretation as applied to Shakespeare.

1. As to whether Shakespeare has given us in

his plays his best possible work. What is the relation of his expressed to his concealed power? With Shakespeare, as with Dante and other literary masters, it is quite conceivable that what is given us upon the printed page is but a fraction of the wealth of treasure stored in the mind and awaiting suitable verbal embodiment. The principle of latent heat or conserved energy in the physical world has its mental counterpart here. Inferior minds often express more than they really possess, making up for the lack of ideas in mere verbiage. In the highest order of minds, however, thought is deeper than language and, let the author do what he may, there is left a large residuum of unexpressed and unexpressible material. Thus "Paradise Lost" is Milton's best extant work, but not as a matter of capability. So Shakespeare in his great tragedies struggles to embody approximately, at least, his ever-accumulating thought. Such a masterpiece as Hamlet is no higher in its mental reach above the productions of an ordinary playwright than is Shakespeare's dramatic possibility higher than Hamlet or Lear.

2. Whether we are to expect in the near future any worthy successors of Shakespeare. *A priori*, we should answer in the affirmative. If

Shakespeare at his actual best was far from his possible best, why should there not arise another gifted poet of similar and even greater power, who might make even nearer approximation to the full expression of his thought? When Collier calls him "the perfect boast of his time," and Schlegel affirms that "Shakespeare and Calderon are the only two poets entitled to be called great," we are not to argue that the end of all literary perfection has been reached. *A priori*, the limit is undiscoverable and recedes as it is approached. One age is but the preparation for another. One author is but the herald of another and a greater. In fine, the literary world is supposed to move. Historically, however, the question assumes a different form. If such another genius is possible to the English race, why has he not appeared in the last three centuries? Why not, especially, in the last century? Numerous factors enter here—the law of action and reaction; the principle of race, epoch, place, and personality; the change of civilization in its type, and the element of divine providence in human history through the complex development of a people's life. This, at least, is true. There is no immediate prospect of another such dramatic age or master. The signs of the time point in dif-

ferent directions, though it is possible that out of the present dominance of realistic fiction some type of new dramatic power may yet emerge. The fact is, that the appearance of Shakespeare in the Elizabethan Age, still remains a mystery. That poetry should have taken dramatic form in the new awakening was not so surprising, but the masterfulness of it is not so easily explained. As to Shakespeare, the surprise is increased when it is remembered that the stage was not at the time in high repute, that playwrights wrote mainly for bread, and that though the age was Golden as compared with the century and a half preceding it, it was, in many respects, an age of crudeness and partial development and faulty literary standards. Herein, indeed, is some basis of hope as to England's dramatic future, and herein lies the faith of those few prophets among us who are looking for the dawn of such a day and are bidding us be on our guard lest it take us by surprise.

3. As to whether Shakespeare was conscious of his gifts. In one of his sonnets, he writes:—

“Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,”

thus acknowledging his inferiority to some of his contemporaries. We note with surprise his care-

lessness as to the publication and presentation of his dramas, written apparently for the time only, and with no reference to fame. Never has a poet written with less idea of literary repute. Indeed, Shakespeare wrote and acted, as Jonson, Marlowe, and others of his contemporaries, for monetary ends. He went from Stratford to London in 1585, as other young men went to London, to seek and find a lucrative mission, preferring to find it in the composition and rendering of plays and as a shareholder in the Blackfriars Theater. Having accomplished this practical end, we do not find him continuing his residence in London and writing dramatic verse from the love of it. He returned to Stratford in 1610 with a competence, and for the enjoyment of a well-earned leisure, though it lasted but six years. Moreover, in Stratford, as late as 1600, plays were officially prohibited. Dramatists themselves did not hold their professions in high repute, and we cannot wonder that Shakespeare aimed at financial ends only. It has, in fact, been reserved for later eras to ascertain how gifted a genius Shakespeare was. So capricious is earthly renown.

4. As to how to account for the tardy recognition of Shakespeare and his work. We are not

dealing with an author whose literary product is inferior or undeserving, but instinct with genius. In the Elizabethan Age he was but one among numerous dramatists; and if, here and there, there seemed to be the acknowledgment of his superiority, there was, also, an occasional thrust by way of satire against the attribution to him of any special gift. Even Dryden, a century later, wrote that his idiom was "a little out of use." Later still, Dr. Johnson, the critical authority of his day, omits his name in his "Lives of the English Poets," discussing rather the work of Cowley, Denham, Waller, and Rowe. From Elizabeth he received some notice, indeed, but quite too little, and more for the sake of the court than out of regard for the genius of the dramatist. In 1707, "King Lear" was spoken of as "an obscure piece," while Voltaire was not the only critic who classed him with the inferior poetasters of the nation, stating that "he wrote a number of farces called tragedies."

In seeking reasons for such neglect we note: The prevalence of foreign tastes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the dominance of euphuism as a false conception of literature; the civil wars and commotions of the early Stuart

Dynasty; and the excesses of the Puritans in the days of Cromwell. All of these, in connection with the low status of the stage and dramatic art, would largely account for the comparative indifference of the age to its greatest author. The fact is, Shakespeare did not know himself in the fullness of his power, neither had the age come to the knowledge of itself — what it was as the first of the modern periods, and what it possessed in its more eminent authors. It was not till the eighteenth century, and partly through the influence of Germany, that English literature knew what it had in Shakespeare and began in earnest to defend and diffuse his fame.

The place of Shakespeare in English letters is now conceded by acclamation. "Milton and Shakespeare," says Walpole, "are the only two mortals who ventured beyond the visible and preserved their intellects." A genius, in every well-understood sense of the word, looking higher and deeper than other men, revealing man to himself and the world, writing for all men and all time, he justifies the eulogium of Milton,

"Dear son of memory, great heir of fame."

When Coleridge, in his "Table Talk," tells us

that "Shakespeare has no manner," he simply means that he is "universal," a poet of man and nature, one of God's ordained priests to minister at the altar of truth, and one of his ordained prophets to interpret the mind of God to men.

The main occasion, after all is said, of the so-called Baconian Theory of the Plays is seen in the fact that it is one of many attempts to account for such a genius on any known laws of human history and character. The English world has practically ceased to account for him, but accepts him as he is in his unique personality and work.



## II

### SHAKESPEAREANA

By this term are meant all those facts and incidents pertaining to Shakespeare's life and writings and influence, of less or greater interest, expressed in written form or current in the shape of oral tradition, which may serve to throw any light on this unique and supreme author, or in any way increase the interest of the student in the examination of his works. The number and character of these fugitive data are such that entire libraries may be said to be made up therewith, as, also, separate lectureships have been established to collect, arrange, and interpret them. These collections and courses may be found in almost every university center, so that Goethe's suggestive phrase, "Shakespeare und kein Ende," is fully illustrated in Germany and throughout Europe. "Shakespeare Once More" is found as an essay among Lowell's literary papers, and yet once more, and yet again, will this imperial man be studied. Ben Jonson speaks of his respect for him as "something this side idola-

try." Schlegel, as representing German criticism, writes that "for centuries to come his fame will gather strength at every moment of its progress." Guizot, as a French critic, calls him "a prodigious genius," while even Taine speaks of him as "the greatest of all artists who have represented the soul in words." The opening sentence of Taine's chapter on Shakespeare is even more suggestive. It reads: "I am about to describe an extraordinary species of mind, perplexing to all the French modes of analysis and reasoning; . . . a nature inspired, superior to reason, so impetuous in his transports that this great age alone could have cradled such a child." In view of tributes such as these we may say, as Hazlitt said of Milton, that "he never should be taken up or laid down without reverence." The study, therefore, of what we term Shakespeareana is at once invested with an interest that belongs to no other separate subject in English authorship. It is noteworthy, first of all, that the data as to some of the leading facts and phases of his life are, in their number and value, in the inverse ratio of his genius and work, such facts being scattered here and there in the local history of the time, and so meager at best as to leave forever unsettled some questions of pressing

moment. These pertain alike to what Dowden calls "his external life of good and evil fortune" and "the inner life of his spirit."

Shakespeare's early life at Stratford, dating from his birth in 1564 to his majority, need not long detain us. At the free school he received the elements of an English training with some admixture of Latin and, possibly, French and Italian. Tradition has it that for a time he engaged in the practice of law, and even essayed the rôle of a schoolmaster, the stress of financial need forcing him at length to London—perhaps to publish plays already written, or to be connected with some of his townsmen or London friends in dramatic work, or, indeed, to assume the function of an actor, as we know he did in "Hamlet" and "As You Like It" and some of Jonson's comedies. Beginning his London life in 1585 as a servant and herald at the old theater in Shoreditch, we find him, in 1592, a playwright and player in the chief dramatic guild of the time, writing and acting for profit more than for fame, his advice through Hamlet to the players clearly showing that he had, in theory at least, the correct view as to dramatic art and just what the stage was expected to do in making the composition the most effective.

Moreover, he fulfilled what the late Henry Irving so emphasized as the essential condition of composing a play for the stage — an intimate knowledge of all the details of theatrical method and management. Even yet, however, the material side seemed to dominate the mental, and we anxiously await the full dawning of the fact in Shakespeare's consciousness, who in reality he was, what he was doing and could do in dramatic and histrionic spheres, and what his real relation as an author was to the expanding volume of English letters. Not as yet had he fully "come to himself" nor to his great mission, for which the way was soon to be made through the agency of royal and general recognition. In Paris with the Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated his "Venus and Adonis" as "the first heir of his invention"; acting for the pleasure of the Queen and court at Greenwich and Richmond Palace and at Whitehall, before the jurists at the Inns of Court, as well as before James I., his career was now successfully opened as at the Globe Theater and Blackfriars he prosecuted his high calling. From the publication of "King Richard II.," in 1597, well on toward his death, in 1616, play after play appeared in rapid succession and the rare dramatic repute of

Elizabethan England was assured. His reasons for leaving London at the zenith of his fame need not be examined, if, indeed, they can be known; whether because of sufficient income and sufficient reputation or an increasing desire to enjoy the retired leisure of an old English town. Such a leisure he in part enjoyed during the half dozen closing years of his life, spending his time, according to Lowell, "in collecting his dividends from the Globe Theater, lending money on good mortgage, and leaning over his gate to chat with his neighbors," it being a strange coincidence that when back at Stratford to live and die theaters were closed by process of law. At the untimely age of fifty-two Shakespeare died, a man—as Mrs. Browning in her "Vision of Poets" strongly states it—"on whose forehead climb the crowns of the world."

In the survey of Shakespeare's life some questions of special interest emerge.

1. First, as to his *education*. It is known that he was not a university man. In this respect he was exceptional, as an Elizabethan author, though in company with Jonson and Middleton. In his works, however, there are found accurate descriptions of countries and customs, the use of classical

terms in etymological senses, delicate verbal distinctions, and a use of technical terms common only to a scholar, as seen in his free use of medical and legal phraseology. This, it is argued by some, was a part of his natural endowment, due to genius pure and simple. Dryden says that he was "naturally learned." He had, says Drummond, "natural brain," or, as Denham styles it, "old mother-wit." He speaks, himself, of his "untutored lines." Such an explanation, however, does not meet the issue. Genius itself has its limitations. It cannot impart technical knowledge, though it may exceptionally utilize it when secured. Not that the man of special endowment may not possess the acquisitive faculty in peculiar power, so that he sees more quickly than others, discarding all tuition and external aid. But the genius of acquisition is not that of invention; it takes for granted a process of training and study to compass the results toward which it is reaching. Still again, it is said that he was a borrower at large, applying at pleasure the material he needed for the special purpose in hand. That he used all needed material in the evolution of his plans is conceded, but this is, after all, nothing other than securing such material by unwearied industry. He had ac-

cess, as others had, to the open storehouse of known truth. Shakespeare's learning was acquired by ordinary process. He may have had, as Jonson tells us, "small Latin and less Greek," but he utilized in phenomenal ways that which he had. A comparison here between Shakespeare and Burns, each a genius and each without liberal training, will reveal the immense superiority of the former both as to the acquisition and use of literary material. This difficulty of accounting for such learning has given some basis to the Baconian theory of the plays, with regard to which it may be said that if by this we escape one difficulty we invite another equally serious, in that it is as difficult to account for the possession of Shakespearean genius by Bacon as it is to account for the possession of Baconian learning by Shakespeare. Moreover, scholars are slowly conceding that liberally educated men have no monopoly of truth, and that often, as they sit dreaming over their books in fancied possession of special privilege, these untutored minds—so called—are looking at the world of life and fact with their eyes wide open and taking in all they see and hear.

2. A second question pertains to Shakespeare's *religious beliefs and life*. Here again there are

extreme views. That he was an essentially godly man, after the type of Knox and Fox and the English reformers is the view of some. Hence we are told that his plays are a kind of second Bible, as Mr. Rees, in his "Shakespeare and the Bible," sets forth. Hence his allusions to Christ, the Deity, and the atonement, as set forth by Bishop Wordsworth, are magnified by critics in support of this view. "The Tempest," we are told, is the dramatist's account of Paul's voyage and shipwreck. In fact, in these biblical references there is nothing conclusive, since Shakespeare used them, as he used the facts of history, as purely literary material. As he himself tells us, even "the devil can cite Scripture for his purpose." The Bible and theological teaching took their place, in his view, with all other sources from which he drew at pleasure. A more dangerous extreme asserts that Shakespeare was a wild and reckless youth, defying all human and divine law, dissipating at Stratford and in the clubs of London. His death, it is said, was due to a fever contracted at a "merry meeting" with Jonson and Drayton; "a native wit," says Taine with irony, "not shackled by morality." Most of this gratuitous criticism is based on pure conjecture, and should receive no in-



dorsement at the hands of the careful student of English letters. The modified and more charitable view is that Shakespeare had a creditable knowledge of the Bible, that he had been Christianly instructed and trained in the Protestant faith, and, at the close of his life at least, appears as a thoroughly upright citizen and a worthy man of the world. Not a Christian by open profession, he looked at truth and duty in his own way, maintained an honorable attitude toward the church and the prevailing faith, and aimed in what he wrote to elevate the moral standards of the time. As Chaucer before him, he never posed as a reformer, announced no creed, and championed no special moral movement, and yet, as Guizot writes, "was the most profound and dramatic of moralists." Neither a pessimist nor an optimist, he stood on the safe ground of meliorism, believing that all was working steadily for the better. Despite the fact that his pages must be at times expurgated to meet the somewhat fastidious taste of modern times, no one can rationally accuse him of a willful purpose to corrupt the conscience or shock the most delicate sensibilities of his readers. Here, as elsewhere, he was immeasurably above the standard of his fellow-dramatists. Such a play as

“Macbeth” is a study in moral science quite impossible to an author who was not well versed in ethical distinctions and anxious to throw the weight of his influence on the side of truth and right. As to Shakespeare’s religious beliefs and life, however, this is to be said as a final word — that they lie properly outside the sphere of the literary student as such. It is questionable whether, if asked to do so, he could have formulated his own doctrinal creed, while he lived his private life in accordance with what he conceived to be the essential principles of Christian morality. His religious personality is as much concealed in his plays as his mental and social and civic or, indeed, his literary personality. He writes as an interpreter of general truth to men and not as a revealer of his own states of mind or ethical conditions.

3. A further topic of interest included under our caption is the *English* of Shakespeare — as an example of sixteenth-century or Elizabethan English, or of that “New English” of which Oliphant speaks as representing the opening of the Modern English era as distinct from the Old and Middle English of Alfred and Chaucer. It is to this that Meres, in his “*Palladis Tamia*,” refers when he says that “the Muses would speak with Shake-

spere's fine-filed phrase if they would speak English," or, as Wordsworth expresses it,

"We must be free or die who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spake."

Including in his vocabulary about fifteen thousand of the fifty thousand English words then current, making a happy combination of the literary and the popular, using words in primitive senses and yet in obedience to the demands of the verse, giving due deference to the claims of the older English while fully in line with the developing history of the language, above all, using a diction thoroughly suited to his own personality and purpose as an author, the phrase "Shakespearean English" is rightly regarded as one synonymous with good English. Attention has been directed indeed to the so-called ungrammatical character of the dramatist's diction; to omissions and inversions and violations of standard structure, with consequent crudeness and lack of verbal finish. In a word, Shakespeare is said to be an incorrect writer and his English an unsafe model to students of our language and style. But such critics forget that in dealing with the English of Shakespeare they are dealing with an order of English three centuries back of us, and just at the formative period

of our language as modern. To expect to find an English vocabulary, diction, and structure similar to that now obtaining is to expect the impossible. It would be as natural to look for the dominance of Chaucerian English in the sixteenth century. Historically and naturally neither of these conditions could exist. It was the shaping, transitional English of the new awakening, partaking alike of old and new elements, with the increasing emphasis of the new. What would not be allowable now was allowable and necessary then, while a part of the genius of Shakespeare as an author lay in the fact that he clearly comprehended the character and the needs of the new era; knew just where he stood, and knew what he was to do and did it. The fact that we now need an Elizabethan grammar and glossary fully to interpret the diction and structure of the plays is no discredit to Shakespeare, but the best evidence that he knew his place as an Elizabethan, the compass and limitations of the language he was using, while at the same time so loyal to its intrinsic nature as to render these very plays comprehensible to every intelligent modern reader. A comparison here, again, between Shakespeare and the minor dramatists will reveal the vast difference between the use of

English in its idiomatic strength and richness and its use as modified by various classical and Continental influences. One of the unanswerable arguments against the Baconian authorship of the plays is found at this point: that, in so far as we have an example of Baconian English in Bacon's works, it is an order of English far below the Shakespearean as to its native idiom and range. Bacon could not have written "Cymbeline" or "The Winter's Tale," even as Shakespeare could not have written "The Advancement of Learning." Even in the sixteenth century an author three fourths of whose literary product was in Latin was not the author to use the native language as the great dramatist did. In the use of terse and trenchant words, in the nice adaptation of the word to the idea, and of the word to the specific character at the time uttering it, in the use of what Whipple has called "suggestive terms," in the large place given to the Old English element, and in the pervading euphony of the language, this order of English was without a parallel in its own day, and has as yet no superior. The justifiable inference is that, in whatever later period Shakespeare might have lived, he would have been as true an exponent of the best English of the time

as he was in the transitional age of the Tudors.

4. Special attention should be called to Shakespeare's *use of figure*. Figurative language finds its best expression in verse, as the more imaginative form of literature, and in verse itself comes to its best expression in the drama, so that the student of symbolic terms could gather from these thirty-seven plays alone a sufficient number and variety of figures to constitute a manual for educational use. His pages abound in simile and metaphor and allegory; in antithesis and epigram; in irony, hyperbole, personification, and climax; in all the varied forms of metonymy, there being a notable combination of the milder with the more vigorous figures of pictorial literature. Even in the historical plays, so didactic in method and style, there is a rare use of symbolism, as, especially, in the great dramas founded on Roman character and life. To attempt a selection from such a mass of symbolic wealth is almost invidious, it being safe to say of Shakespeare, what cannot be said so fully of any other English poet, that any page of his verse, opened at random, will furnish some fitting example of this graphic diction, such a play as "A Midsummer Night's Dream" being almost one continuous expression of figurative phraseology.

So frequent and pertinent is this tropical use of language that the reader is at times at a loss to know which is the controlling factor, the literal or the symbolic. So deftly are they interwoven that the nicest scrutiny cannot dissever them. Here, again, Shakespeare's use of figure rises to the plane of genius, the figure, moreover, never being used for its own sake, but only as an adjutant to the thought, to make it clearer and more impressive.

5. Another subject of interest is found in the study of Shakespeare as a *dramatic artist* — a phrase that has become more current of late by the suggestive use made of it in a treatise by Professor Moulton, the emphasis being laid on the word "artist." In the preface to his work the author writes of the wrong impression among English readers that "Shakespeare is careless as to the technicalities of dramatic art," insisting that he was as masterly in this as in any other expression of his genius, so that he really created a revolution in the province of dramatic technique and criticism. Hudson, in his standard edition of Shakespeare, refers directly to this, as he writes, "First and foremost of the things in which Shakespeare is especially distinguished is dramatic composition," by which he means dramatic art, of which

he alleges there was no intelligent view in England prior to the sixteenth century and Shakespeare himself, who illustrated in his plays that a drama is "an organic structure" and not a mere fortuitous collection of scenic material; as he also evinced an ability well-nigh intuitive of conceiving and developing character. While the conception of the character belongs, in a sense, to dramatic genius, what is known as characterization, or the portrayal of the character, belongs to dramatic art, and in Shakespeare the latter is as pronounced as the former. A most suggestive sentiment from Lessing, the German critic, is here in place, that "the artist of genius contains within himself the best of all rules." Not that he is above all literary law — Lessing does not assert this — but that, the law being present and accepted and applied, the test of its fitness and force is found not in the schools, nor in this or that consensus of literary opinion, but in the inherent artistic sense of the poet himself, who instinctively accepts or rejects that which is offered to his suffrage. Genius that Shakespeare was, he was none the less an artist, but "an artist of genius," and no view can be farther from the truth than that this great thinker and writer did what he did without effort, or de-



sign, or deference to literary statute, by the sheer unguided action of innate tendencies and taste. No more laborious student and worker than he was in the days of his middle manhood lived in London; a student in the conception and composition of plays, in adjustment of part to part according to a definite plan, in the revision and criticism of his own work, so that he might present a resultant in which nature and art, invention and execution, had each its place and were mutually helpful.

6. A word as to the *limitations* of Shakespeare's genius, the elements of which we have already discussed. Addison in his criticism of "Paradise Lost" remarks that he has "seen in the works of a modern philosopher a map of the spots in the sun." So even Shakespeare has his defects, though they may be "the defects of his virtues." It is somewhat surprising, for example, that he ever could have written, the Sonnets excepted, his non-dramatic poems, which, as a whole, seldom rise above the veriest commonplace either in thought or structure. In few instances, if any, has Coleridge so forgotten himself as when he assigns to these productions any high order of merit. The titles of these poems — "Venus and Adonis," "The Rape of Lucrece," "A Lover's Complaint," and

"The Passionate Pilgrim"—indicate their character as not only cynical but sensuous, even verging close to the line of error in æsthetic art and not infrequently crossing it. It would be difficult to find any considerable number of stanzas in them that remind us even indirectly of Shakespeare. Here and there we find a line or couplet indicative of the master, some of the most notable lines being justly assigned to Marlowe. It is in these poems that the charge of euphuism, or overwrought sentiment and expression, finds its fullest justification. It is to this that Hazlitt alludes as he speaks of Shakespeare's use of "all the technicalities of art . . . where words have been made a substitute for things." So Dowden remarks, in writing of "Venus and Adonis," that Shakespeare's endeavor was "to invent elaborate speeches in that style of high-wrought fantasy which was the fashion of the time." It is to this euphuistic feature that Jonson refers when he wishes that Shakespeare "had blotted a thousand lines" from the completed text of his plays. "I am ready to grant," writes Lowell, "that Shakespeare is sometimes tempted away from the natural by the quaint; that he sometimes forces a partial, even a verbal, analogy between the abstract thought and the sensual image into

an absolute identity." Frequent reference has justly been made to the presence of this error in the character of Shakespeare as a wit, when, leaving the safer and more natural province of humor, he plays upon words and fanciful resemblances so as to direct attention from the thought to the mode of stating it. In these lighter poems of mere sentiment the temptations to such forced conceits are too potent to be resisted. Nor is the error confined to the non-dramatic poems. When we are told by White that "Titus Andronicus" is a "tragedy filled with bombastic language," that "Love's Labour's Lost" is "an almost boyish production," that "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" shows that the "poet had not freed himself from the influence of the prose romances of his early days," special reference is made to this sin of diffuseness with all its attendant evils. The greatest of minds, however, are at times off their guard, and at times purposely below their best selves, so that, all errors conceded at this point, justice demands that Shakespeare be judged rather by his own protests against euphuism and his incisive caricature of it than by occasional fault in this direction. Even where at times he seems to be purposely euphuistic, a closer examination reveals

the fact that he is acting in the rôle of an impersonator of character, hoping, in this indirect manner, the better to expose and condemn a current Elizabethan error.

7. Hence we turn with renewed interest to a final topic — Shakespeare's *pervasive presence* in Modern English literature. The statement has been made respecting Emerson and the Emersonian influence has become a substantive part of American literature. The same remark may be made as to Shakespeare's personality in English letters. It is a pervasive presence, a sort of pan-anthropism in our literary product. Read where we will, we see it in prose and verse, in epic and drama and lyric, in mind and art, in English civilization and social history. English poetry, especially, is thoroughly Shakespeareanized. The forms or evidences of this presence are varied. We see it first of all in the extended number of quotable passages that have been taken from his works. From other poets we select here and there and at length come to the limit of our choice. In Shakespeare, however, we come to no end. Passage follows passage, each appearing more apt and forcible than the preceding. Some of his plays are admissible almost in their entirety, the exception being

as to the portions that may not bear citation. Volumes of extracts are thus to be found in our libraries, while the way in which the body of English literature is interspersed with these passages is quite phenomenal. A further testimony to this presence is seen in the fact that the best of authors have their place and prime, and the reason of their decadence forms a part of our literary study. Shakespeare is growing younger as the centuries pass and students are now vying with each other as never before to present his work in all possible forms for popular and educational purposes. The question of the regeneration of the modern stage is before the modern public, and after various theories have been broached the critics are coming back to the only tenable one—the reinstatement of the Shakespearean drama, and in ever fuller form, that the twentieth century may learn from the sixteenth to what a high function dramatic composition may rise. No higher tribute than this could be paid to this master of masters. In the classification of our English poets Shakespeare must be allowed to stand alone. There is none like him or approximately like him. The fact is that as an interpreter of human life Shakespeare meets so general and profound a need that it is inconceiv-

able that his influence should ever materially decline, nor is there at present any sign of such decadence. He is, by way of eminence, the minister of truth to men, and his ministry is indispensable. His plays are not so much specimens of dramatic poetry and a specific part of general literature as they are a medium through which he offers to men what they need in the line of characterization and insight.

Of all authors Shakespeare must be known personally, must be communed with in secret by the reader himself, must be asked to interpret his meaning to us in his own way, that so we may, in some measure, understand what God did for the English race and the world at large when he gave them a man and a poet of such supreme endowment. Thus Matthew Arnold penned his impressive tribute as he abandoned all attempt to account for this imperial poet or to compare him with any other dramatist:—

“Others abide our question. Thou art free.  
We ask and ask. Thou smilest and art still,  
Outtopping knowledge. For the loftiest hill,  
Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty,  
Planting his steadfast footsteps in the sea,  
Making the heaven of heavens his dwelling place,  
Spares but the cloudy border of his base

To the foiled searching of mortality;  
And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,  
Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honored, self-secure,  
Didst tread on earth unguessed at. Better so!  
All pains the immortal spirit must endure,  
All weakness which impairs, all griefs which bow,  
Find their sole speech in that victorious brow."

### III

#### THE EPIC VERSE OF MILTON—"PARADISE LOST"

IN the study of Milton as a poet we mark two distinct periods. The first (1608-38) ends with his return from Italy. In this, we note the composition of his earlier and shorter poems, including such notable specimens as "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso" and "Comus," these last three appearing, naturally, at the close of the period (1634). Passing the intervening era of prose production (1640-60), we come to the second and more distinctive poetic period, extending, practically, to the close of the author's life, in 1674. In this era, he composed his three elaborate poems — his two epics, "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained," and his semi-dramatic poem, "Samson Agonistes." It is with his epics, and, most especially, his "Paradise Lost," that we now have to do — "that extraordinary production," as Macaulay states it, "which the general suffrage of critics has placed in the highest class of human compositions." Some such



a poem was among the earliest plans of his life. He promises his countrymen that it will appear in due time. Even in boyhood he was fond of romance and chivalry and loved to read of the semi-historical King Arthur of Britain. When at Cambridge, he speaks of his possible treatment in the future "of some graver subject" than that which occupied his mind in university days—

"Such where the deep transported mind may soar  
Above the wheeling poles; and at Heaven's door  
Look in."

In his complimentary letter to Manso, Tasso's patron at Naples, he hopes for such a friend at court, if he ever shall sing of Arthur and his knights. So to Diodati's memory he speaks of his "pipe, sounding strains of an unknown strength." In this same connection, the well-known "Cambridge Manuscripts" have an important place, wherein he jots down themes for possible discussion and looks far ahead to some worthy topic. Amid the distractions of civil war, his mind is still upon an epic. He first planned a national epic with King Arthur as hero. Among these partially projected schemes are no less than four separate plans of "Paradise Lost," a quarter of a century prior to its publication. Even in his prose writings

this poetic tendency appears. In his "Apology for Smectymnuus," he says that "he betook himself to lofty fables and romances which recount, in solemn cantos, the deeds of knighthood." He hopes to write yet, as he says, "in a still time, when there shall be no more chiding." In his "Reason for Church Government" he speaks of "an inward prompting growing daily upon him, that by labor and study, joined with a strong propensity of nature, he may perhaps leave something so written to after times as that they should not willingly let it die." In this coming composition, he adds, that "he shall fix all the industry and art he can unite to the advancing of his native tongue, that what the Greeks and Romans and Italians and Hebrews did for their respective vernaculars he, in his proportion, must do for his." The worthier the theme, the more desirous he is that it shall be presented in his native English and not in the Latin or Anglo-Latin diction of the schools. In the same connection, there follows an account "of what the mind, at home in the spacious circuits of her musing," hath proposed to herself to accomplish, however difficult the undertaking may be. He wonders whether it shall be Homeric or Vergilian; whether like to Tasso and Job, or, perchance, Aristotle;

and what personage prior to the Conquest would be an appropriate hero. He questions whether this outlined poem shall be dramatic, after the method of the great Greek tragedies, or lyric and descriptive, like to the Canticles of Solomon or Saint John's Apocalypse. On such open questions his active mind is musing. "As far as life and leisure will extend," he says, "so soon as the land has freed herself from her present bondage, under which no splendid work can flourish," this governing ambition is to be fulfilled. Such may be said to have been the antecedents and anticipations of Milton's epic work and such his partial preparation for it.

The original form of "Paradise Lost," published in 1667, was in ten books. In the second edition of 1673-74 it was issued in twelve books, after the plan of "The Faerie Queene" and the "Æneid." It is to the credit of Addison as a literary critic that, early in the year 1712, he devoted eighteen separate papers of the *Spectator* to the examination of this as yet only English epic of note. He may justly be said thereby to have introduced Milton's poem with special favor to the English public of his day, and to have laid the foundations for that continuous and appreciative criticism which

it has since received. This generous comment was especially timely, inasmuch as the epic had been waiting forty years and more for just such an exponent and friend. It was alike to Addison's praise and to his good fortune that he thus was inclined and enabled to do for Milton what John Dryden in the previous century did for Shakespeare and the English drama in general.

Addison goes on to examine the poem, as he states, "by the rules of epic poetry," and tests it, thus, according to the three Aristotelian essentials — Unity, Completeness, and Sublimity, favorably comparing it, in each of these particulars, with the "Iliad" and the "Æneid," discussing its contents, its characters, its sentiments and diction, its merits and defects. To this day, no student of English verse who desires to form a just estimate of Milton's epic work and place can safely neglect this notable critique, far in advance, as it was, of anything as yet attempted in the line of literary criticism.

The tradition that Milton did not receive more than a few pounds for his epic seems to be well founded. According to Gladstone, it was the first instance in English literature of actual payment for literary work.

The most concise analysis of the scheme of the poem is that which divides it into three sections, of four books each.

In the First Section (books i.-iv.), this world and the two worlds beyond, of good and evil, are revealed and man is seen in his relation to these two conflicting agencies. It is the old Persian idea of dual forces warring for mastery. In the Second Section (books v.-viii.), Raphael appears and speaks of what occurred prior to the creation of Adam and in what way those far-distant events affected the later history of the human race. In the Third Section (books ix.-xii.), the Fall of Man is revealed and its dire results shown, and in the place of Raphael's narration of the past, the future is disclosed through the agency of Michael, the archangel. This vision involves the revelation of God as Redeemer: his plan for human salvation, and the way in which he upholds and applies that plan in the fullness of time and in obedience to the demands of justice and the divine government. A more minute analysis of the poem is given by Milton himself, in the second edition of 1673, in the form of what he calls "The Arguments" prefixed to the several books, as a logical and literary outline or Table of Contents. From such an out-

line the reader can form some correct estimate of the mental and literary character of the epic and the degree of success with which the poet has compassed and completed his original plan, and thus be enabled to view intelligently the place which it holds among its historic rivals. It is from the study of "Paradise Lost" that the close relation of Milton to Homer and Dante and Shakespeare has been urged and the question opened whether or not he belongs with Shakespeare to the same literary order, or is to be classed as the first name in the second list of English poets, including such notable examples as Tennyson and Robert Browning. In so far as tradition and the history of opinion are concerned, the names of Milton and Shakespeare are inseparably joined, as indicating the highest attainment of poetic art in England. Nor is there as yet any indication of the reversal of this conclusion. Such a high estimate of Milton, it is to be urged, is based on his entire literary work, in verse and prose, in lyric and descriptive, as well as in epic poetry, in his "Areopagitica" and "L'Allegro" and "Comus" as in his epics and his "Samson Agonistes."

In the study of "Paradise Lost," one of the first and most fruitful questions confronting the stu-

dent pertains to the Sources of the author's epic material. Not only must we concede that Milton made use of material gathered from various quarters, but that he did so openly and with a definite literary purpose. As he himself stated it, "To borrow and to better in the borrowing is no plagiary." Despite this frank confession, it seems to have been the rare delight of some over-sensitive critics, such as Mr. Gosse, to substantiate a charge of plagiarism against Milton and trace all that is best in his works to foreign authors. This theory has been pressed with special zeal against Milton in his composition of "Paradise Lost," his alleged indebtedness to Vondel's "Lucifer" being said to be extreme and wilful, while an ingenuous critic would see here nothing more than the natural and legitimate use which one writer would make of another, writing a few years before him on a similar topic. Moreover, Milton's plan was substantially perfected long before the appearance of "Lucifer" in 1654, while the epic of the Dutch poet bears on but a small portion of the English poem.

Some of the legitimate Sources of the epic may be studied.

1. The first was *Scripture*, especially as represented in the history, prophecy, and poetry of the

Old Testament. Here he had a spacious field and freely used it. This was, partly, because of his wide acquaintance with Hebraic and Oriental studies; partly, because the epic he was writing was characteristically a biblical epic; and partly, also, independently of these considerations, because he found in the Bible, as nowhere else, that wealth and aptness of poetic imagery of which he was in urgent need. The most hasty reader of the poem is impressed with the free and yet reverent manner in which, on the basis of some sublime scene in Ezekiel or in the Apocalypse, he has risen to the highest summits of his verse and produced poetic effects possible by no other agency. Not only does Addison in the *Spectator* tell us of the indebtedness of English to Hebrew for pathetic terms, but acknowledges and illustrates it by way of diction and structure and general style, and with reference to what Longinus calls, elevation of sentiment.

2. Next to the Bible, the *Greek and Roman classics* furnished Milton with the suggestions he was seeking. Nor is this use of pagan literature in setting forth religious truth at all denied or concealed. From the first of his eighteen papers on "Paradise Lost" on to the last, Addison is



speaking of Homer and Vergil, of the "Iliad" and the "Æneid," and is careful to show that Milton resorts to them with a settled purpose and the better to compass his literary ends. It must be added, however, that the English critic is also careful to show that of the three epic writers Milton takes the precedence, and of the three epics Milton's is the greatest, especially in its grasp and spirit. Of all the ancients Homer was to Milton the first; and, when outside of the sphere of his own nation and history, he was more at home at the center of the old Greek mythology than in any other region open to his imagination. There was something in the Homeric conception that attracted and inspired him and incited him to his best work in epic verse.

3. An additional source of Milton's epic material was found in *general history and letters*. It is known that he was thoroughly conversant with the earlier history of England. An accomplished Hebrew and classical scholar, versed also in the Dutch and Latin and other North- and South-European tongues, a devoted student from the twelfth year of his age, compassing the great departments of politics, theology, geography, mythology, and literature, there was little in the world's

history, as it lay before him in open record, with which he did not acquaint himself, so that, when he sat down to write, these vast resources were at hand or accessible. It was thus, as Addison tells us, that "Milton's genius, which was so great in itself, was strengthened by all the helps of learning."

Moreover, his genius retained all its freshness while, at the same time, making a normal use of every form of fact and truth coming within the scope of his purpose. Thus to utilize all acquired knowledge and still to exercise one's independent judgment is itself an evidence of genius. It is a rare illustration of acquisitive and original power in conjunction. Exception has been taken by critics that we have in "Paradise Lost" a "show of learning," that the poet would have us know by his references to truth and fact at large that he had compassed the circuit of human knowledge so that nothing remained to be known. A careful study of Milton's spirit would surely correct this hasty conclusion, by which it would appear that, however dogmatic or polemic he was in his prose, he is notably temperate and modest in his verse. The pervading tone of his great epic is that of lowliness of spirit in the presence of God and the

majestic theme he is discussing, while the detailed allusions so often made to the facts of human knowledge are an essential part of his plan on the literary side and in no sense adduced to give the appearance of elaborate learning. A poet who begins his epics, as Milton did, with an invocation to the Spirit to instruct him in his ignorance and illumine him in his darkness is not the man to make a proud exhibit of himself on any side of his varied attainment. Here, as elsewhere, there are some critics whose only mission is negative and destructive, and, be the merit what it may, they will find sufficient basis for their chosen work.

As to the epic itself, a brief discussion is now in place. That it has defects and faults no conscientious student can deny. "Spots in the sun," as Addison called them, there are, and Addison himself admits and illustrates them, as to the scheme of the poem, its character, sentiments, and diction. A few of these may be cited. The successes of Satan and his allies are said to be too prominent, so as to raise the question as to whether Satan may not be the proper hero of the poem, as Dryden maintained. Some of the details of the poem as to sin and death are said to be improbable and revolting. The digressions are held to be

too frequent and conspicuous, so as to violate the accepted principle as to episodes. His characters are said to be allegorical, the sentiments too pagan, and his diction too labored, involved, and technical. There are two defects which are of greater moment.

1. The one is *the absence of sustained passion*. There is not as much of that fire and fervid force of thought and language, of poetic inspiration, as we expect to find in such a poem. The epic is too studied and methodical, too restrained and academic; in a word, too Augustan and classical, if not, at times, conventional. That emotive energy which we find in his prose is not marked. Though the general movement is inspiring and there are occasional outbursts of passion, the passion is not continuous and accumulative, as in "Comus." This is especially noticeable after the second book. It could thus be called a didactic poem, somewhat educational in type and impression, the vast amount of learning it displays being partly responsible for such a result. The interpretation of "Paradise Lost" is a study of no light character.

2. Akin to this is a second defect—*want of flexibility*, mental and literary. The poem to this extent is not popular or readable. We find it as

difficult to plod through its twelve books as through "The Faerie Queene" or "Aurora Leigh" or "The Earthly Paradise." The structure and style are not sufficiently elastic. There is too little pliancy of idea and expression to sustain the reader's interest, not enough of that literary alertness and facile fluency that entice and hold the attention. At times, indeed, we find ourselves close on the borderland of prose. It is to this that Froude, in his "Life of Bunyan," refers when he says that Milton "was only partially emancipated from the bondage of the letter." The epic is often too rigid and unrelenting to commend itself to the average English reader.

1. Turning to the leading merits of the epic, we note, first, the scope of the poem, the *greatness of its conception*. This is such as to justify his calling his epic "an adventurous song,"

"That with no middle [ordinary] flight intends to soar  
Above the Æonian Mount, while it pursues  
Things unattempted yet in prose or verse."

It is thus that he invokes the aid of the Spirit that he may rise "to the height of this great argument." Including, as it does, heaven, earth, and hell, the range of outlook is even wider than that compassed by Dante in Paradise, Purgatory, and

Inferno. In fact, the area is infinity itself, and, as such, while it accounts for some of Milton's most signal defects and errors, also magnifies the type and capacity of that genius that could construct an epic on so wide a scale and even approximately realize its spacious ideal. We have here, if nothing else, the essence of creative and imaginative verse, of epic and dramatic effect in unison, in that the poet's plan embraced the universe of being and of truth. There is nothing comparable to this in Homer, Vergil, or Lucan, in "The Cid" or the "Nibelungenlied" or in any epic poet save the author of the "Divina Commedia." It is Pope's "Essay on Man" heightened and widened into immensity.

2. An additional feature of merit is seen in the *variety and boldness of the imagery*, as found in characters and scenes, constituting a real body of *dramatis personæ*. On the one hand, in the line of the personal and concrete, are the Trinity — God the Father, Son, and Spirit; Abdiel, the un-sin-ning seraph; Uriel, the regent of the sun; Gabriel, the guardian of Paradise; Michael, the arch-angel; Raphael, the divine messenger to Eden; Adam and Eve, the progenitors of the race. As exponents of evil, we see Satan, the leader of his

rebel hosts; Beelzebub, Moloch, Chemos, Astoreth, Dagon, Rimmon, Belial, and Azazel, Satan's trusted ally, and an innumerable host of fallen spirits. In the line of the more impersonal and abstract are Sin, Death, Chaos, Night, Pandemonium, The Limbo of Vanity, Hell, Earth, Heaven, the Sea, "Gorgons and Hydras and Chimæras dire"; Giants and Pygmies, Cherubs and Seraphs, Dragons and Devils; War in Heaven and Lust and Crime on Earth; and "the waving, fiery sword" at the Gate of Eden, as the banished pair go forth. All this in such vividness and graphic boldness of character and scene, of place and time, is simply colossal, supernal, and infernal—a dramatic epic of the universe with the old Persian conception of God and Satan manifested in historical and biblical perspective. It is the Old English pagan epic of Beowulf and the Dragon reproduced and ennobled in the Modern and Christian era of English letters.

3. A further feature is the *suggestiveness and stimulus* of the poem. No words can more justly express the final impressiveness of this epic than these. No one can read it in the spirit in which it is written and enter at all into what it is and what it means and not rise from the reading a stronger man, thinking more of truth and duty than ever,

more firmly resolved than ever to seek and diffuse and defend the truth and to express more and more fully its leading lesson, that obedience to the Divine will is the source of all good. Literature is nothing if not quickening and ennobling; poetry is nothing if not inspiring, and fails of its end if it does not lift the life of the reader to the highest outlook and purpose. Milton was more than an English poet. He was an English literary force, doing his immediate work midway between Elizabethan and Augustan England, but doing his real work for all times and all peoples.

Some general characteristics of Milton's verse, especially applicable to his epics, may be noticed.

1. The first is its distinctive *Christian spirit*. In this respect the poetry is but the expression of the poet's personality. Though he did not enter the church as minister or member, he carried his conscience with him into literature. In one of his prose pamphlets, in speaking of his literary plans, he says: "These are the inspired gifts of God . . . to cherish in a people the seeds of virtue." He began his poetic career with a paraphrase of some of the Psalms and verses on Christ's Nativity. The sonnets follow, full of moral teaching. "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," and "Comus" are as nota-



ble for their Christian sentiment as for their lyric and descriptive beauty. In the epics, however, and especially in “Paradise Lost,” this feature is conspicuous. In fine, he seems to have regarded poetry as a holy calling, and aimed to be what he said Spenser was — “a sage and serious poet.”

Writing to Diodati, he gives his conception of a Christian bard. After reluctantly conceding that some poets abused their trust, he adds: “But the man who speaks of high matters, let him live sparsely; let herbs afford him his innocent diet, and let clear water in a beechen cup stand near him. To this let there be added a youth chaste and free from guilt; rigid morals and hands without stain and not ashamed to venture into the very presence of the unoffended God.” Knowing, as he did, that every worthy knight swore to defend the interests of truth and justice and chastity, he adds: “Every free and gentle spirit ought to be born a knight,” and devote his days to the defense and diffusion of the truth. He speaks of “the music of the spheres.” It was in his view more than poetic imagery. He lived as if he often heard it and felt that his character must be worthy of such a high privilege. He relied, as he avows, “on the gra-

cious aid of that Eternal Spirit who enriches the mind with all utterance and knowledge."

In all this Milton was a true successor of Cædmon, and the first and second epic poets of England are alike Christian. Who can estimate the dire results that would have followed had not Milton been what he was and done what he did in behalf of good literature in the profligate days of the English Restoration! "Nothing," says Southey, "was ever so unearthly as the poetry of Milton."

2. The second characteristic of Milton's verse is its *sublimity*. "Milton's chief talent," writes Addison, "lies in the sublimity of his thought." Present as this feature is in all his poems, it is naturally most evident in his epics, and most of all, in "Paradise Lost." All the conditions of the sublime as given by Longinus, negative and positive, are here fulfilled. According to the great Greek critic, it is opposed to bombast, false passion and puerility, its essentials being elevation of diction, sentiment, and spirit. Aristotle speaks of the epic in a similar manner, as having unity, completeness, and gravity of action, variety and fitness of character, clear and elevated diction and pertinent figures. In each of these several particulars, Milton

is seen to comply with the criteria of the masters relative to that which is sublime and chiefly as to what is called elevation. The conception and construction and unfolding of the epic are all on a majestic scale, lifting the thought and feeling of the reader above all that is earthy and trivial to the celestial and inspiring. "The sublimest of men," says Channing, "his name is almost identical with sublimity." "It seems," write the brothers Hare, "that nothing could dwell in this mind but what was grand and sterling." He had what Arnold calls "the grand style." His mental and moral constitution were great, so that when he wrote most naturally he wrote inspiringly, as Homer and Plato did among the Greeks. The Miltonic style is essentially Homeric, essentially elevated and impressive—an epic order of style by way of distinction, whether in verse or prose, the best example extant in English of dignity in literary art.

In all this there is something of the old Puritan temper and habit, that "intellectual seriousness" that marked the Cromwellian era of our native literature, degenerating, at times, into undue severity of manner and utterance, but, in the main, ex-

pressed in normal form and conducive to the best results in church and state, society and letters.

3. A most suggestive additional characteristic of Milton's verse, had we time to discuss it, is found in the *union of epic and lyric qualities* that he so successfully effected, the practical fusion of sublimity and beauty—not so much that he passed with consummate ease from the graver strains and methods of heroic verse to the lighter strains of the lyric, as that he unified and fused them into a common literary product. It is with this in mind that Seeley writes, that "Milton is the only poetical genius which has yet arisen in the Anglo-Saxon family combining, in Greek perfection, greatness with grace." If we find lyric sweetness and charm in his epics, we find epic elevation and grandeur in his lyrics. Here we see the magnificent measurement of his genius, the latitude over which it ranges, the height to which it soars, and at this point, at least, he was superior to his great dramatic predecessor. Milton is more uniformly sublime than Shakespeare. As Thomson sings:—

"Is not each great, each amiable Muse  
Of classic ages in our Milton met,  
A genius universal as his theme!"

It is Charles Lamb who suggested that, as a fitting preparation for the study of Milton, "a solemn cathedral service of song should be indulged in." Such a service would be equally befitting at the close of such a study, and in the line of fervent gratitude that such a man and such a poet adorns the annals of English letters—

"God-gifted organ-voice of England—  
Milton, a name to resound for ages."

## IV

### THE POETRY OF JOHN KEATS

WHEN we are told by Lord Houghton that Keats was "born in the upper ranks of the middle class" the language must be interpreted with a good degree of charity, in that he was in reality the son of an English hostler, Thomas Keats, and born in Finsbury, in the stable of Jennings, his father's employer, his mother being the daughter of said Jennings. Still, father and mother alike are reported to have been clever, sensible, and upright people, good specimens of the English yeomanry, the middle-folk of the country, even though not necessarily of the "upper ranks." Of an Anglo-Celtic stock, he inherited his impulsive nature from the one branch, and his sober, straightforward habit from the other, and, though he came into the world prematurely (October 31, 1795) he came legitimately, and under fairly favorable auspices. As to education, Keats was denied the privileges of university training, his father's narrow resources rendering this impos-

sible, even though, as we learn, his parents were keenly desirous that he should be thoroughly taught, if not at Oxford or Cambridge, then at Harrow or one of the great English secondary schools. We find him, in due time, at school at Enfield, under the care of a clergyman by the name of Clarke, the same school to which afterward his younger brothers naturally went. His school life, as far as the records go, was happy and profitable. A sensitive, high-spirited, and whole-hearted boy, a kind of acknowledged champion in the school, and yet shy and tender and easily discouraged with himself and his work, he was steadily gathering knowledge, disciplining his mental faculties, and preparing himself for his great future in the field of letters.

Here, again, history repeats itself, and we learn of the old story of passionate fondness for books, for good literature wherever found, for romance and mythology, while he was student enough in the sphere of classics to render the entire "Æneid" into prose. Called from school to become a surgeon's apprentice at the neighboring town of Edmonton, he still loved books far more than bandages and hospitals, catching some of his best inspirations from the reading of "The Faerie

Queene" and shorter poems of Spenser. Thus we learn that "it was 'The Faerie Queene' that awakened his genius," his poem entitled "Imitation of Spenser" evincing this pleasing and early dependence. Even though completing his medical studies and passing the requisite examination for hospital service, his purpose was still literary, while he impatiently awaited the opportunity to realize it. Thus from 1817 to the year of his death, February 23, 1821, his poetic work went on, impeded, as it often was, by increasingly impaired health and embittered by the cruel attacks of the critics. English criticism has rarely gone to greater lengths of personality and coarse abuse than it did in the pages of *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly*. The merciless utterances of Lockhart, Wilson, and others against the so-called "Cockney school" of poetry, as represented in Leigh Hunt and Keats, and the equally extreme thrusts of Gifford and his colleagues, seemed to have no other origin than a malicious desire to wound the feelings of these rising poets. It is to the lasting credit of Keats that under the lash of these unjust attacks he could say, "Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic



of his own works." Naturally mindful of the fact that his work had in it some essential merit, he may be pardoned for adding, "This is a mere matter of the moment; I think I shall be among the English poets after my death," a prophecy fully confirmed by the appreciative language of Lowell, "Enough that we recognize in Keats that indispensable newness — that we call genius. His poems mark an epoch in English poetry." That he was wounded by these criticisms, however, cannot be doubted, nor would it have been natural not to have been. They were inflicted purposely as a punishment, and not at all on behalf of the cause of good letters in England, and the punishment was especially felt by Keats's sensitive nature as a rising and an aspiring poet, the Sidney Lanier of his time. Nor is it quite satisfactory or fair to charge his wounded feelings, as Whipple does, to his lack of force and courage and kindred elements of character. "Had he possessed a great nature," says Whipple, "he would not have been wounded, though all the critics of his time had leagued against him, and he would have defied them as Milton did." Keats and Milton, we submit, cannot be tested by the same standards; and if we insist on so testing them, we must urge that, as

Milton was of too tough a fiber to have felt hurt by the severest onslaughts of the critics, Keats was of too tender a fiber not to have felt hurt. In the case of the two there exists simply a radical difference of character, and each must have its place and value.

If we inquire as to the actual amount of Keats's poetic product, it cannot be said to have been large, nor in his brief life of twenty-five years could it have been so without unwonted mental development. The classification of his verse given us by Arnold is as follows: the volumes of 1817, including his earlier poems; "Endymion," his longest poem; the volume of 1820, including his more important additional poems, such as "Lamia" and "Isabella"; and, finally, his posthumous poems. An equally just classification would be: his longer poems, such as "The Eve of Saint Agnes" and "Hyperion"; and his shorter poems, including odes, epistles, and lyric sketches, such as the lines "On a Grecian Urn" and "The Eve of Saint Mark." It will thus be seen that the range of his poetic power was limited practically to the lyric and descriptive. Poetry of the epic order is, indeed, seen in "Hyperion" and some shorter selections, and historical verse of the dra-

matic order is seen in "Otho" and "King Stephen," but his talent was still of the idyllic type, and his success was within that special sphere. His poetic power as an evidence of mental endowment was not continuous enough to meet the highest conditions of either heroic or histrionic verse, nor was there any promise, at the time of his premature death, of any larger results in these directions. As fond as he was of the mind and art of Homer, his gift was less Homeric than Theocritean or Sapphic. Though he wrote to his friend, "One of my ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting," he did not make, nor could he have made, any such "revolution." The needed gifts were not his.

In noting, therefore, the Special Features of the verse of Keats we shall have primary reference to his shorter poems.

1. The suggestion that needs emphasis is the attempt that he made, and a partially successful one, to rebuke and correct the poetic formalism of eighteenth-century verse, in favor of a partial restoration, at least, of earlier Elizabethan methods. It is this that his biographer, Colvin, has in mind when he says, "The element in which his

poetry moves is liberty, the consciousness of release from those conventions and restraints by which the art had for the last hundred years been hampered." It is thus, also, that Matthew Arnold speaks appreciatingly of him as "an Elizabethan born too late." Lowell tells us that we see in his verse "that reaction against the barrel-organ style which had been reigning by a kind of sleepy divine right for half a century." In a word, we find Keats to be, in this respect, a veritable innovator or renovator, calling his country back to primary poetic principles, to Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton; to truth and life; to physical nature and human nature; to the simple as a protest against the artificial. This, in itself, entitles Keats to an important place in the developing history of English verse—a work quite as important as anything he did in the way of writing poetry proper. His effort to revolutionize and refresh English poetry was as creditable to his literary thought and foresight as it was to the future fortunes of English letters. It was this conception of what poetry ought to be and this purpose to secure it that so attracted him to Burns and Wordsworth, as he discerned in them both the presence of genuine poetic impulse,

Hence his name cannot be overlooked in any true account of the Romantic revival in English verse at the opening of the last century. It is with his eye on the Elizabethan past and the stilted affectations of Augustan days that he wrote in the language of satire, in "Sleep and Poetry":—

"Beauty was awake!

Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead  
To things ye knew not of—were closely wed  
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule  
And compass vile: so that ye taught a school  
Of dolts to smoothe, inlay, and clip, and fit,  
Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,  
Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:  
A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask  
Of Poesy."

The evident Proofs of this higher conception of the spirit and office of verse are worthy of note.

(a) His *love of nature and outdoor life*, a feature common to his poems, is seen in such examples as the "Ode to a Nightingale," "To Autumn," "The Thrush," "On May-Day," "Walking in Scotland," "Staffia," "On the Sea," and "The Human Seasons." His early life at Enfield and Edmonton, his later life at the Isle of Wight, at Margate, Canterbury, Hampstead, Oxford, and Teignmouth, and his memorable tours through the Scottish Highlands and the English

lakes awakened and deepened this love of natural scenery until it controlled him, breaking forth in manifold lyric forms, and coloring with a rich and rare radiance all the products of his pen. One has but to attempt to cull a few choice passages of this description from his verse to see, at once, that the selection is invidious, and that the poetry, from first to last, is saturated with the freshness of the fields and hills. We know of no English poet who more beautifully touches upon natural scenery than he, or more skillfully condenses into a line or a paragraph the essential elements of a landscape. The dedicatory sonnet to Leigh Hunt, at the very opening of his verse, is full of these reflections on "early morn" and "smiling day" and "pleasant trees," his first poem beginning,

"I stood tiptoe on a little hill,"

in which poem we have that exquisite description of dewdrops:

"those starry diadems  
Caught from the early sobbing of the morn."

Equally exquisite is the poetic touch, as he writes of

"the moon lifting her silver rim  
Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim  
Coming into the blue with all her light."

So, in his sonnet "To a Friend who sent me some Roses," he sings:—

"As late I rambled in the happy fields,  
What time the skylark shakes the tremulous dew  
From his lush clover covert."

So, in his sonnet on "Solitude":—

"Let me thy vigils keep  
'Mongst boughs pavilioned, where the deer's swift leap  
Startles the wild bee from the foxglove bell."

So, elsewhere, he lovingly writes:—

"To one who has been long in city pent,  
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair  
And open face of heaven — to breathe a prayer  
Full in the smile of the blue firmament."

In his poem "Sleep and Poetry" we find some of these choice passages; as,—

"Life is but a day;  
A fragile dewdrop on its perilous way  
From a tree's summit. . . .  
Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;  
The reading of an ever-changing tale;  
The light uplifting of a maiden's veil;  
A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;  
A laughing schoolboy, without grief or care,  
Riding the springy branches of an elm."

So, in describing some quiet retreat, he says:—

"Let there nothing be  
More boisterous than a lover's bended knee;  
Naught more ungentle than the placid look

Of one who leans upon a closèd book ;  
 Naught more untranquil than the grassy slopes  
 Between two hills."

So, the verse runs on in sweetest measure, until we see, beyond all doubt, that Keats knew Nature thoroughly and loved her, and at times embodied his love in lines as beautiful as are found in English verse. Nor should it be forgotten that, deep and strong as was this love, he never passed to the pantheistic extreme of confounding God and nature, or the equally dangerous anthropotheistic extreme of confounding man and nature, but viewed each in its place and all as related in the great unity and harmony of the world. "Scenery is fine," he wrote, "but human nature is finer. The sward is richer for the tread of a real nervous English foot; the eagle's nest is finer for the mountaineer having looked into it." So, he wrote in "Endymion":—

"Who, of men, can tell  
 That flowers would bloom—  
 If human souls would never kiss and greet?"

So, in his poem on "The Human Seasons":—

"Four seasons fill the measure of the year ;  
 There are four seasons in the mind of man."

So, in the midst of his rapturous enjoyments of



nature, as he describes them in "Sleep and Poetry," he writes:—

"And can I ever bid these joys farewell?  
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,  
Where I may find the agonies, the strife  
Of human hearts."

He is thus at the same time the poet of man and of nature, and guards himself carefully against the worship of either to the exclusion of the other.

(b) An additional proof of Keats's successful efforts to restore a better literary order is found in what may be called his *poetic spirit*, the poetic sense inherent in the genuine poet, and distinguishing him thus from the mere verbal versifier. Thus, he says, "I find I cannot do without poetry — without eternal poetry." He has often and rightly been called a poet of classical taste and art, aiming to reproduce, in every legitimate way, the beauty and literary technique of the old Greek school; but this is not all. He evinces the spirit as well as the art of verse, the unstudied impulses of the ingenuous bard as well as the more æsthetic correctness of the schools. Even the Edinburgh reviewers forgot, for a while, their malicious work, and conceded that he had in him "a native relish for poetry," confirming the truthfulness of

Keats's own statement that he would write poetry "from the mere yearning and fondness he had for the beautiful." One of the clearest evidences of this poetic spirit is seen in the rich variety of meters that we find in his verse, as if he must run up and down the entire gamut of verse-forms in order to express in fitting manner the wealth of poetic life that was in him. Hence we have the couplet, as in "Endymion" and "Lamia"; blank verse, as in "Hyperion"; the eight-line stanza, as in "Isabella"; the Spenserian stanza, as in "The Eve of Saint Agnes"; the ten-line stanza, as in the "Ode to a Nightingale"; the eleven-line stanza, as "To Autumn"—in fact, all varieties of stanza and line in rich and ever-changing form, so as to suit the structure to the sense, catch the eye and ear and taste of the reader, break the monotony of the lines, and, in fact, fill the poetry with the charm and potency of the imagination in active exercise.

A still more satisfactory evidence of this naturalness is in the subject-matter of the poetry itself, especially in the lyric forms, and in those short and exquisite snatches of song for which he is so justly noted. Here, as in Spenser and Milton, it is the brief idyllic passages of the shorter

poems that most interest us, and on which we are willing to rest the reputation of the poet. Nothing more essentially poetic can be found in English verse than some of these outbursts, as in "The Eve of Saint Agnes," "Fancy," "The Eve of Saint Mark," and "Walking in Scotland." Those passages already adduced to show his passionate love of nature confirm this view, so that this poetic sentiment or sense permeates and governs the verse. Thus in the opening of "Endymion" we see it:—

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever;  
Its loveliness increases."

So, again:—

"The earth is glad: the merry lark has poured  
His early song against yon breezy sky,  
That spreads so clear o'er our solemnity."

And, again, he writes of the poet, who

"Sang [his] story up into the air,  
Giving it universal freedom."

So, in "Isabella," he describes the love of Isabella and Lorenzo:—

"With every morn their love grew tenderer,  
With every eve deeper and tenderer still. . . .  
He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch,  
Before the door had given her to his eyes."

So, in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn":—

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter."

In his exquisite "Faery Song," as in "Fancy," we have an example of the lightness and delicacy of Keats's poetic touch:—

"Shed no tear—O shed no tear!  
The flower will bloom another year.  
Weep no more—O weep no more!  
Young buds sleep in the root's white core.  
Dry your eyes—O dry your eyes,  
For I was taught in paradise  
To ease my breast of melodies—  
Shed no tear."

So, opens "The Eve of Saint Mark":—

"Upon a Sabbath day it fell;  
Twice holy was the Sabbath bell,  
That called the folk to evening prayer.

Twice holy was the Sabbath bell:  
The silent streets were crowded well  
With staid and pious companies,  
Warm from their fireside orat'ries;  
And moving, with demurest air,  
To evensong, and vesper prayer.  
Each archèd porch, and entry low,  
Was filled with patient folk and slow,  
With whispers hush, and shuffling feet,  
While played the organ loud and sweet.

The bells had ceased, the prayer begun,  
And Bertha had not yet half done

A curious volume, patched and torn,  
That all day long, from earliest morn,  
Had taken captive her two eyes,  
Among its golden broideries."

This is poetry in form and essence. Taste, feeling, imagination, and inspiration are all combined to make up a poetic product as impressive as it is beautiful, entitling its author to high rank among our native English lyrists. To this extent, at least, the poetry of Keats is possessed of the inner principle of life and rhythmic movement; free and natural, sympathetic with its diversified themes, and thus definitely aiding that great Romantic revival which aimed to break away from old restrictions into a larger literary freedom.

This is, perhaps, Keats's greatest feature as a poet, the explanation of his best work and the ground of his claim to permanent poetic repute, that he had a spirit responsive to beauty, quickly perceiving and acknowledging it and diffusing its influence and charm wherever he went. As has been said, poetry was with him "a philosophy and a religion." His theory of life was based upon it, and he never disconnected it, as Byron and others did, from truth and goodness and love. "Beauty is Truth, and Truth is Beauty" was his creed, as

he insisted that it was through beauty and love that the two worlds of sense and spirit were united and together worked in perfect harmony for the realization of the highest ends of man. It was because he saw this artistic principle in Greek art and letters that he was so attracted to Homer and the classical mythology, even though he knew but little of the Greek language as a study of the schools. When we are told that Ruskin so appreciated his poetic work as to regard it a model the explanation is found in the fact that Ruskin found in Keats's verse the satisfaction of his sense of form and love of the beautiful. It is this, also, that explains the avowed indebtedness of Tennyson and the later Victorian poetry to Keats in that he, most of all, embodied in his verse this central æsthetic principle and inspired others to attempt to secure and express it, this inspiration definitely marking the "new poetry" of life from the older verse of formalism and correctness. Hence Saintsbury, in his latest work on Victorian authors, speaks of Keats as a "germinal" poet, and adds that "he is the father directly or at short stages of descent of every worthy English poet born within the present century. He begat Tennyson, and Tennyson begat all the rest." In

this respect he accomplished more after his death than in his life, or rather lived again and to greater purpose in the work of the poetic disciples whom he influenced.

2. Keats's *relation to other English poets*, antecedent and contemporary, is a subject of interest to every student of his verse. First of all, to Spenser, partly because he was Spenser, and partly because of his place as one of the great Elizabethan poets, and thus exponential of a genuine poetic life and work. As we have seen, one of his earliest poems was entitled "Imitation of Spenser," referring to the stanza and spirit of the epic poet. One of his sonnets is written in honor of him. In some of his choicest poems, as in "The Eve of Saint Agnes," he uses the Spenserian stanza. In his "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem," he calls him "the great bard," and invokes his "gentle spirit to hover nigh [your] daring steps" as a poet. So, as to Milton, whom he reverently calls "Chief of organic numbers, Old Scholar of the Spheres," while all critics have noticed the marked influence of the Miltonic diction, especially that of "Paradise Lost," on the poetry of Keats, and chiefly as seen in "Endymion" and "Hyperion." So, as to Chaucer, back to whom

all later genuine English poets were wont to look. He introduces his beautiful poem on "Sleep and Poetry" by a quotation from Chaucer, while here and there are evident traces in diction of the early study of "The Canterbury Tales" and other poems of the great Middle English bard. That he loved the poetry of Shakespeare goes without saying. "Thank God," he writes, "I can read and, perhaps, understand Shakespeare to his depths"; while the motto or poetic heading of "Endymion," "The stretchèd meter of an antique song," is taken from the seventeenth of Shakespeare's sonnets. He calls him "that warm-hearted Shakespeare." So, as to Chapman, the translator of Homer; Browne, the author of the "Pastorals"; Chatterton, the "marvelous boy"; Landor, the classical English writer; Leigh Hunt, and, also, Shelley, who rests with Keats in the same God's acre outside the city of Rome, "united," as Devey says, "in the same belief in human perfectibility and drawing their inspiration from the same fountain, the undying beauty of the world's youth as imaged in the creations of antique Greece," and yet so unlike in their poetic relationship, aims, and work. Shelley's elegy, "Adonais," is a suffi-



cient proof of their devoted personal attachment, and

“till the Future dares  
Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be  
An echo and a light unto Eternity.”

In the light of this long list of English authors to whom Keats stands related, and often indebted, it is to be noted that there was on his part nothing in the line of slavish imitation. No English poet has been less servilely dependent on others than he. To everything he read and heard he gave the free impress of his own spirit, while he is ever glad to acknowledge the fact that there had lived such poets as Spenser and Milton, to whom, as to superior and puissant spirits, he gladly and safely resorted for needed poetic stimulus.

3. All gifts and excellencies conceded, however, Keats had his *personal and poetic limitations*. He was in no sense a great thinker in verse; in no sense a bold and successful reorganizer of important literary movements, despite the fact that he was a valuable agent with others in the poetic revival of the century. “The faults of Keats’s poetry,” writes Lowell, “are obvious enough, but it should be remembered that he died at twenty-five and that he offends by superabun-

dance and not poverty. That he was overlanguage at first there can be no doubt." "Whether Keats was original or not," he adds, "I do not think it useful to discuss until it has been settled what originality is. Enough that we recognize in him that indefinable manner and unexpectedness which we call genius. No doubt there is something tropical in his sudden maturity, but it was maturity, nevertheless." Here we see Lowell conceding the faults of Keats and, in a genuinely charitable spirit, seeking to minimize their force. To our mind, his greatest fault was the close connection which his poetry evinces of excellence and defect, so as to mar, at times, any unity of good result. It is thus that Colvin, in speaking of "Endymion," writes, "Beauties and faults are so bound up together that a critic may well be struck almost as much by one as by the other." So, Devey writes, "'Endymion' contains passages which would do honor to the Elizabethan poets, with much commonplace which would disgrace Blackmore." The same is true of "Hyperion" and "Lamia," and of many of his minor poems, as to the conspicuous absence of sustained excellence, so that the sympathetic reader is, at times, startled and shocked by the suddenness and vio-

lence of the contrasts. This is one of the reasons, undoubtedly, why his longest poem, "Endymion," containing some rare poetic passages, has not been more widely read and appreciated, its too frequent lapses from the poet's high standard discouraging the general student and reader. Here again, however, we might assume Lowell's more charitable view and insist that the principle in question proves too much — that if we apply it severely as a specific principle of poetic criticism, most of our already accepted conclusions must be greatly modified. Thus, it might be argued that "The Faerie Queene" and "Paradise Lost" and "The Excursion" and "Lalla Rookh" and "Aurora Leigh" and "Evangeline" evince a similar abrupt descent from higher to lower levels, from the sublime to the indifferent; the only difference being, perchance, that this unheralded descent is oftener made by Keats than by Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth, Moore, Mrs. Browning, and Longfellow. In any case, however, it is a fault, its character depending on its frequency and suddenness and on the manner in which in every instance the poet recovers himself and rises again to loftier levels of wider outlook and more inspiring influences.

It is in his minor poems that his *special gifts* appear. It is of his "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" that Saintsbury says, "He need to have written nothing but these two to show himself not merely an exquisite poet, but a leader of English poetry for many a year, almost for many a generation to come." It is in referring to his premature death and to his burial at Rome and, especially, to his own prepared epitaph, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water," that Saintsbury beautifully adds, "Posterity has agreed with him that it was written in water, but in the water of life." Lovely and benignant in character, unselfishly thoughtful of the interests of others, gifted with the essential spirit of poetry, and of quite too sensitive a fiber to bear the struggle of this rude world, his clear and pure personality is a perpetual blessing to the English nation, and the verse he wrote a beautiful reflection of the strength and sweetness of his life. In the "Letters" of Keats, recently published, this attractive personal side of his career is brought more prominently to view, as is also his work as a writer of miscellaneous English prose.

## V

### THE POETRY OF MATTHEW ARNOLD

UPON the details of Matthew Arnold's life it is not necessary for us to dwell, nor is it indeed possible to give such details at any length, his published "Letters," edited by Russell, and his various works giving us the only authentic facts and incidents of his life. Born in Rugby, December 22, 1822, the son of the famous educator and author — Dr. Thomas Arnold, Head Master of Rugby — and dying in Liverpool, April 13, 1888, he lived to the full maturity of his mental and bodily powers, though not in any accepted sense to the limit of old age. Educated at Rugby, Winchester, and Oxford, and graduated from Oxford with literary distinction, we find him at length, an inspector of British schools, twice sent by the British Government on educational missions to the schools of the Continent in Germany and Holland, and in 1857, when but thirty-five years of age, professor of poetry at Oxford. These few facts may be said to indicate the character and general

course of his life, it being emphasized that, from first to last, whatever his specific mission — educational, official, or professional — literature was dominant over all and the elevation of Modern English and general letters the final purpose of his effort. Devoted as he was to the cause of popular education at home and on the Continent, it was with primary reference to literary progress that he insisted on specific methods of teaching and training. Devoted also as he was to the study of theology and kindred branches, he was a man of letters first and a theologian afterward, giving us in such works as his “Literature and Dogma,” “St. Paul and Protestantism,” “God and the Bible,” and “Last Essays on the Church and Religion” the reflections and conclusions of an author on the great questions of God and man and life and death and immortality.

The discussion of Arnold’s prose we have already given,<sup>1</sup> a sphere of effort to which most of the best of his life was devoted, either as regards the time spent therein or the definite results secured in the line of literary reputation. Whatever the amount and the value of his verse may be, as

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Literature and Style*. New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son. 1890.

we shall study it, his fame mainly rests on his prose and, in prose itself, in the form of literary criticism. Not that he preferred prose to poetry; not that he regarded it as a higher and more exalting form of literary product; but rather that his appeals to public and scholarly favor were most successfully made through the province of prose, though some of his profoundest convictions and highest ideals sought their most fitting expression in verse. Moreover, as life advanced and his powers matured, prose engaged him more and more fully, the mutual influence of the two, however, being as a rule for the good of each.

The classification of his poems given in his recent edition of 1895, is as follows: (1) "Early Poems," including sonnets and other selections; (2) "Narrative Poems," such as "Sohrab and Rustum"; (3) Sonnets Proper, such as "A Picture at Newstead"; (4) "Lyric Poems," such as "Meeting" and "Parting"; (5) "Elegiac Poems," such as "The Scholar-Gipsy" and "Thyrsis"; (6) "Dramatic Poems," as "Merope"; and (7) "Later Poems," as "Westminster Abbey" and "Kaiser Dead." This sevenfold division of poems in manifest violation of logical and literary unity may properly be reduced to the three orders

of narrative, dramatic, and lyric verse, as these in turn illustrate more or less clearly the presence of didactic and descriptive elements. Hence, although the three great divisions of verse are here illustrated, Arnold cannot be said to have been a versatile and voluminous writer of poetry. His three longest narrative or epic poems, so called, are of the nature of semi-epics, and his dramas are confined to "Merope" and "Empedocles on Etna"; the latter having but two acts, and "Merope" not conforming to the accepted fullness of a play. At this point, Arnold and Emerson come into natural comparison, as to the relative amount of prose and verse which they respectively wrote, the poems of each being contained in a single volume as compared with several volumes of prose. In a wonderful degree Arnold resembles Lowell here, and Coleridge and Southey and Scott and Landor; some literary features common to Arnold and Lowell both in verse and prose being well worth the notice of the student.

A mere specific examination of Arnold's poetry is now in place, and discloses the following characteristics:—

1. *Classic taste* is at once discernible by every impartial reader of the verse before us, nor would



any tribute that the reader might pay to it have been more pleasing to the author himself. As in prose, so in poetry, this was a feature that he would under no consideration sacrifice for any apparent temporary advantage, however strongly urged. This sense of form in itself and in its relation to the subject-matter was in a degree the central principle of his literary life and work—a conscientious warfare against Philistinism, an exaltation of the humanities whenever opportunity offered, an insistence that there should be the manifest presence of Hellenic art and culture in every worthy literary product. He believed, with Keats, that beauty and truth were inseparably connected; that even prose literature should be made artistically attractive, while poetry as a fine art could not be said to exist without the pervading presence of the æsthetic. Hence, to quote from Arnold's verse in confirmation of this fact or to refer the reader to certain poems as exemplifying it would be quite invidious, in that this element of verbal refinement is inherent in all the verse. In this respect poetry, with Arnold, was simply the best medium known to him through which he could fitly express his deepest sense of beauty and art. It is in this light that the meters of Ar-

nold's poetry should be studied, exhibiting as they do all the standard varieties of feet and line from the couplet on to blank verse and related forms; the selection of the pentameter measure for any given poem depending in part upon the theme and content of the poem and in part upon its fitness as the medium of an attractive rhythmical movement and effect. It is thus that in such narrative poems as "Sohrab and Rostum" and "Balder Dead" we have blank verse, while in such as "Tristram and Iseult" blank verse gives place to the rhyming couplet and quatrain. Before dismissing this feature it is in place to state that in verse, as in prose, literary technique at times appears to be so pronounced as to become an end in itself, and thus lose its peculiar charm and defeat its own ends; the art of the poet appearing on the face of the poem, and to that extent impairing the spontaneous and natural influence of the thought. It is here that Arnold and Keats are seen to be similar, and to some extent Arnold and Lowell; while the verse of Emerson, as a rule, fails less frequently in this respect than does the classical verse of Arnold.

2. A second excellent feature of Arnold's verse is its *pronounced mental type*. Nor is what is

called "intellectuality" the only way of expressing this feature. The poetry is as a whole sensible, marked by strong thought and the presence of good judgment in its utterance. We are not alluding here to the scholarship of Arnold in this or that particular branch of liberal study, nor to the fact that a certain amount of learning appears in his verse, but are noting that it is an order of verse from a man who thinks before he writes and as he writes, whose faculties are healthfully at work in authorship and completely under control as he writes, so that on the reader's part there is required a corresponding mental activity. Here we note a characteristic complementary of the one just mentioned, taste under the control of mind; what Dowden has called "mind and art" in one expression. Hence, Arnold could not have indorsed those views of verse which make it purely impassioned or imaginative, as Shelley's poetry is "the language of the imagination," or Milton's poetry is "simple, sensuous, and passionate." He would say, with Elliott, "Poetry is impassioned truth," or, with Mill, "It is the influence of the feelings over our thoughts," the element of thought being essential.

Here, again, Arnold overreached himself in em-

phasizing the intellectual element of verse, even though believing thereby his own statement in "The New Sirens,"

"Only, what we feel, we know."

He sometimes knew more than he felt or could make his reader feel, so that there is to this extent the absence of a profound and sustained poetic impulse. Feeling involves intensity; Arnold is too infrequently an intense poet, illustrating one of his lines in "Resignation,"

"Not deep the poet sees, but wide."

To this extent Arnold is an Augustan poet of the eighteenth century — too reserved when we expect him to be demonstrative, holding in check as if by force of will those more natural impulses that arise and appeal for expression. Hence there are times when we must study Arnold's verse — though we should prefer simply to read it at sight, as an exercise of pure enjoyment for leisure hours.

3. A further merit is seen in the line of *personality*,— a decided merit in any author, and never more welcome than in these days of an easy-going imitation of writers and schools. Arnold's home training at Rugby was all in the direction of a manly independence of view. Thomas Arnold

never failed to teach his pupils that the secret of successful life was the mastery of self, the cultivation and expression of individualism in every worthy sense. More than this, he was himself unique in thinking, method, and purpose — starting and discussing his own questions in his own way, never so well pleased as when he found himself thus related to the thinking world at large. Whatever merits or faults the verse of Arnold may have, they are absolutely his own, nor does he hesitate a moment to insist that they are his. No discriminating reader would ever mistake the authorship of his verse, so as to feel that when he is reading Arnold he is reading Milton or Wordsworth or Tennyson. “Dover Beach” and “Empedocles on Etna” carry on their face and between the lines the manifest marks of their genuineness.

Egotism as a merit sometimes degenerates, however, into egotism as a fault, and Arnold is no exception to the law of decadence. Students of his prose have noticed it, while his verse is not devoid of it. Individualism is pressed to the verge of an unpleasant projection of the author upon the page, so as to oblige the reader to mark the intrusion. Arnold's portrait is thus too essential a part of his

poetry, and must be seen even before the poetry is read as an essential factor in its interpretation. The frontispiece is thus in danger of becoming an affrontispiece, and we prefer to judge the verse on its merits. There is a real, subjective element in verse, though it need not be too strongly impressed on the reader.

4. A fourth characteristic of merit may be styled *poetic dignity of diction and manner*, a feature of style and character by no means confined to his verse. Seen especially in his longer poems, such as "Sohrab and Rustum," "Balder Dead," and "Tristram and Iseult," it may be said to pervade his poetry so as to make it distinctive. At times it appears in the form of high and sedate Oriental imagery; at times a kind of semi-Homeric method; and at times in the use of bold Scandinavian legends. It is thus in the poem of "The Neckan," beginning,

"In summer, on the headlands,  
The Baltic Sea along,  
Sits Neckan with his harp of gold,  
And sings his plaintive song."

We might call it in Arnold a kind of epical elevation of tone and teaching, combined with a dramatic sobriety of movement; as in "Merope,"

“Empedocles on Etna,” and “The Strayed Revel-ler.” Not infrequently it appears in a pensive, meditative order of verse; as, in “Meeting,” “Parting,” “A Farewell,” “Isolation,” “Quiet Work,” “Requiescat,” “Youth and Calm,” “A Memory-Picture,” and similar selections. Whatever the form of verse may be, there is a stateliness about it that commands respect, while also warning the reader against undue familiarity with the author. Here we touch upon the other and less attractive side of his verse, as seen in the presence of undue reserve of person and manner, amounting at times to a studied *hauteur*, or superiority, widening the distance between the poet and the reader and perverting a literary decorum into the extreme of the supercilious. Longinus, in his celebrated treatise “On the Sublime,” or elevation in poetry, insisted on its application, not only to thought and expression, but to feeling. There is in Arnold the absence of this sympathetic quality, confirming what he writes, as to the muse of verse, in his lines on the “Austerity of Poetry.” There is this austere and, to that extent, forbidding reserve, where the reader is looking for freedom, fellowship, and even confidential relations with the author.

Hence the limited descriptive range of Arnold as a poet, especially when he attempts to portray Nature in all her varied forms. With but few exceptions, these sketches are labored and unimpressive, the work of an amateur and not that of one thoroughly at home amid the rich variety of physical phenomena and freely admitted into their secret and truer life. An ardent admirer, as Arnold was, of Wordsworth as a poet, it would have been impossible for him to have given us, as Wordsworth did, an accurate and appreciative view of the natural world of beauty. It is this mental and literary austerity, moreover, that explains, as nothing else does, the lyrical and dramatic limitations of Arnold, that lack of whole-souled spontaneous movement that we of right expect in the play or sonnet. Here and there we note a poem of some dramatic and idyllic force and fervor; such as, "A Dream," "The New Age," "The Scholar-Gypsy," and parts of "Empedocles on Etna." But these are notably exceptional, the prevailing tone being academic and studied, devoid of stirring impulse. As we read, we desire more flexibility and *abandon*, the occasional "snatching of a grace beyond the reach of art,"—in a word, an unreserved revelation of inner



thought and life. It is thus that his verse lacks impressiveness and can never be widely current — an order of poetry for the cultured and leisure classes, for men of books and learning, for literary artists and critics, but not for the average man with his trials and cares and ambitions. In one of his poems, "A Caution to Poets," he writes:—

"What poets feel not, when they make,  
A pleasure in creating,  
The world, in *its* turn, will not take  
Pleasure in contemplating."

On this principle Arnold becomes his own severest critic as to the need of feeling in verse and the fatal results of its absence. Not that he did not feel what he wrote, but that he had not the gift of embodying his soul in song and of making the lines throb with genuine passion.

5. We note a further feature in the line of *religious speculation*. Here Arnold was at home in dealing with topics that served to elicit the deepest energies of his being. In so far as his prose is concerned it is to be noted that none of his books called forth wider comment than those mainly theological, such as "God and the Bible," some critics still holding that his best work has been done in this sphere. His verse throughout

exhibits this governing characteristic. An examination of the titles of his poems and their content will fully confirm this view. This is the signal feature of his "Early Poems," in "Quiet Work," "Religious Isolation," "Youth's Agitations," "Human Life," and indeed through the list as a whole. So in later poems; such as, "Progress," "Self-Dependence," "The Buried Life," "The Future," and such memorial verse as that to Clough, Thomas Arnold, Heine, Wordsworth, and Stanley. In his poem "A Wish," this specifically semi-religious cast prominently appears:—

"I ask not each kind soul to keep  
 Tearless, when of my death he hears.  
 Let those who will, if any, weep!  
 There are worse plagues on earth than tears.

"I ask but that my death may find  
 The freedom to my life denied;  
 Ask but the folly of mankind  
 Then, then at last, to quit my side.

"Nor bring, to see me cease to live,  
 Some doctor full of phrase and fame,  
 To shake his sapient head, and give  
 The ill he cannot cure a name.

"Nor fetch, to take the accustom'd toll  
 Of the poor sinner bound for death,  
 His brother-doctor of the soul,  
 To canvass with official breath

“The future and its viewless things—  
That undiscover'd mystery  
Which one who feels death's winnowing wings  
Must needs read clearer, sure, than he!

“Bring none of these; but let me be,  
While all around in silence lies,  
Moved to the window near, and see  
Once more, before my dying eyes,

“Bathed in the sacred dew's of morn  
The wide aerial landscape spread—  
The world which was ere I was born,  
The world which lasts when I am dead;

“Thus feeling, gazing might I grow  
Composed, refresh'd, ennobled, clear;  
Then willing let my spirit go  
To work or wait elsewhere or here!”

How signally part of this wish was fulfilled in the poet's sudden death in Liverpool, without the possible intervention of physician or priest, is known to all.

Never has there been a more distinctive moralizer in English verse than was Arnold, distasteful as all moralizing was to his sensitive nature. He treated no theme or question out of its ethical relations, even though he did it unconsciously. If his purely literary type was Hellenic, his personal type was semi-Hebraic. He was never more truly himself than when profoundly speculating on the

high themes of God and the soul and immortality, nor could he have wished it otherwise. If we turn now to the practical use that he made of this speculative tendency, we shall find it to have been in the main on the side of doubt and despondency, here also being true to his general character as a man and his work as a writer of prose. Just as the major part of his verse deals in ethical and religious speculation, so the larger part of his ethical verse is on this minor and often melancholy key. In his poem on "Youth's Agitations" he closes with the suggestive couplet,

"And sigh that one thing only has been lent  
To youth and age in common — discontent."

So in "Stagirius" he sings a prayer,

"From doubt, where all is double;  
Where wise men are not strong,  
Where comfort turns to trouble,  
Where just men suffer wrong;  
Where sorrow treads on joy,  
Where sweet things soonest cloy,  
Where faiths are built on dust,  
Where love is half mistrust,  
Hungry, and barren, and sharp as the sea—  
Oh! set us free."

So in his poem "A Question" he says:—

"Joy comes and goes, hope ebbs and flows  
Like the wave;

Change doth unknit the tranquil strength of men,  
Love lends life a little grace,  
A few sad smiles; and then,  
Both are laid in one cold place,  
In the grave."

So in "Faded Leaves" he writes:—

"Before I die—before the soul,  
Which now is mine, must re-attain  
Immunity from my control,  
And wander round the world again."

In similar strain are his poems "Despondency," "Self-Deception," and "Dover Beach." In this last poem he seems to chant the requiem of his own earlier faith, as he sings:—

"The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating, to the breath  
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world.  
... for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

So in his poem "Geist's Grave," he sings in al-

most a despairing key of human life and hope and destiny :—

“ Stern law of every mortal lot!  
Which man, proud man, finds hard to bear,  
And builds himself I know not what  
Of second life, I know not where.”

Thus the prevailing tone is that of dejection and often of dismay, summoning the attention of the reader to no wider outlook than that which earth affords, and awakening in him more and more doubt the nearer he approaches the sphere of supernatural truth and reality. In one of his earlier poems, “ To a Friend,” he writes of one

“ Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole.”

Arnold did neither, his view of human life being disturbed and partial, and hence the occasion of unrest to himself and others. One of the grounds of his attachment to Clough, as he expresses it in “ Thyrsis,” is found in this dispiriting view of life common to them as men and poets.

One of the grounds also of Arnold’s limitations as a poet is found in the fact that he never had any cheerful, hopeful, message for men in their struggles and disappointments, but left all questions of life and duty as unsettled as he found them, if, indeed, not more perplexing than ever.

A few of his poems — such as “Thyrsis,” “Rugby Chapel,” “Heine’s Grave,” and “Haworth Churchyard”—are properly called “Elegiac.” There is a sense in which two-thirds of his verse is elegiac — a somber contemplation of vanished ambitions, a tribute given perforce to a something lost out of his life, he scarcely knew what. It is at this point, as much as at any other, that the superior moral personality of his father appears, a superiority which the son himself was not slow to discern, as he wrote in “Rugby Chapel” :—

“to us thou wast still  
Cheerful, and helpful, and firm!  
Therefore to thee it was given  
Many to save with thyself;  
And, at the end of thy day,  
O faithful shepherd, to come,  
Bringing thy sheep in thy hand.  
And through thee I believe  
In the noble and great who are gone.”

Such, as we estimate them, are the salient features in the poetic work of Arnold, nor are we far astray when we summarize his merits and demerits in the statement that he had high ideals as a poet which he had not the gifts fully to realize. He had the “vision divine,” though not the “faculty divine”; while no careful reader of his verse can fail to note the evidence on almost every page

of this despairing struggle to make poetic conception and poetic execution accordant. Visible as this feature is in his shorter poems, it is especially apparent in his three longer narrative poems and in his two specific attempts at dramatic writing, in no one of which poems has he approximated to Miltonic or Shakespearean effects.

Conceding as he does in one of his poems,

"The seeds of godlike power are in us still;  
Gods are we, bards, saints, heroes, if we will,"

the implanted seeds never developed to full maturity, nor did the will to become a master-bard prove sufficient to effect so great a result. In his poem "Self-Deception," he would almost seem to have conceded this limitation, as he writes:—

"Ah, whose hand that day through Heaven guided  
Man's new spirit, since it was not we?  
Ah, who sway'd our choice, and who decided  
What our gifts, and what our wants should be?"

"For, alas! he left us each retaining  
Shreds of gifts which he refused in full.  
Still these waste us with their hopeless straining,  
Still the attempt to use them proves them null.

"And on earth we wander, groping, reeling;  
Powers stir in us, stir and disappear.  
Ah! and he, who placed our master-feeling,  
Fail'd to place that master-feeling clear.



“We but dream we have our wish'd-for powers,  
Ends we seek we never shall attain.  
Ah! *some* power exists there, which is ours?  
*Some* end is there, we indeed may gain?”

Here is an acknowledgment of gift and inability in one and an almost pitiful lament over the chasm discovered by the poet himself between ambition and ability. A poet of classic culture and intellectual merit; a poet of unique personality and high poetic dignity, of marked ethical purpose and lofty ideal — he still with all his merits falls far short of masterliness in verse. Adopting his own favorite phrase, he is an “interesting,” though not a great, poet. He is interesting only because not inspiring, and he is not inspiring because not inspired.

With some superb lines and passages at distant intervals in his verse there is no extended and even flow of high poetic form in which mind and soul and art are fused in the unity of great effect, and the reader is carried aloft to the vision of truth and goodness and beauty and love. It is the constant presence of this vain endeavor to be as a poet what he longed to be that is the explanation of that dominant feature of sadness that is so clearly seen in the thoughtful face of Matthew Arnold.

## VI

### THE POETRY OF ROBERT BROWNING

OUR poet was born in the vicinity of London, in 1812, in Camberwell. After his early school-days and his later educational life at London University, he went to Italy, in 1832, spending in all not less than fifteen years in that land of song and art. It is probable that but few, if any, Englishmen have made themselves more thoroughly acquainted with the language, life, and history of medieval and modern Italy. It is, therefore, matter-of-fact prose as well as poetry when in “‘De Gustibus —’”, he writes:—

“Open my heart, and you will see  
Graved inside of it, ‘Italy.’”

*Bella Italia* was ever on his lips, as on those of Mrs. Browning, and it was their mutual delight to sing her praises and defend her interests. It would be a pleasing task to trace the history of English poetry from Edward III. to Victoria with the purpose of showing its indebtedness to Italy; to Petrarch and Boccaccio, Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso,

Bruno, and the gifted Alfieri. Under this specific poetic influence, Browning voluntarily placed himself, and cannot be appreciated as a man or a poet apart from its presence as a primal factor. Not only did his special studies in the monasteries of Venice and Lombardy make him, in a real sense, Anglo-Italian, but, also, his protracted life among the people made him such.

On the basis of natural tendencies, and from the fact that his father was a man of poetic taste and achievement, our author is said to have written verse as early as at ten years of age, thus placing himself in line with Pope and other English bards of premature development. His first production, entitled "Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession," was published in 1833, just as he reached his majority, and was fittingly called by the poet himself, "a boyish work." In 1835, at the age of twenty-three, he wrote "Paracelsus," between whose central idea as a poem and that of Goethe's "Faust" many English critics have noted points of marked resemblance. As most first efforts of such minds, these poems were purely tentative and indicative: in no high sense establishing his claim to poetic merit, and yet doing something in the line of opening up the way to worthier things. In

1836-37 the dramatic poem "Strafford" appeared, dedicated to Macready, the great actor of the day; designed for scenic representation, and, in fact, presented on the stage by Macready himself. Too irregular and indefinite to meet with public favor, it ran a course of four or five nights and was withdrawn. In 1840 "Sordello" appeared, justly pronounced by modern critics to be "a chaotic mass of word-building," the errors of which the poet himself, in later years, acknowledged, and yet insisted that with care all difficulties would vanish and its purpose be clearly seen. Between "Sordello" and his marriage to Miss Barrett, in 1846, a higher and more varied form of literary work was accomplished, especially as seen in the two collections, "Bells and Pomegranates," and "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics." Such examples as "Luria," "The Return of the Druses," "Colombe's Birthday," "A Soul's Tragedy," "King Victor and King Charles," "Pippa Passes," "A Blot in the Scutcheon," "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," and "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix" will sufficiently indicate the character of these respective collections. From the completion of this cycle of poems, in 1846, on through nearly two decades, to 1864, his pen was especially busy,

and with more than usual success. The two characteristic collections of these eighteen years are seen in "Men and Women," in 1855, containing half a hundred poems, and in "Dramatis Personæ," 1864, marking the very close of the poetical period. Such well-known examples as "Andrea del Sarto," "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Pictor Ignotus," "Cristina," "Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day," "The Laboratory," and "The Confessional" will illustrate the general topic and character of this verse, produced, as it was, in the author's physical and mental prime. Hence, the comments of Stedman and others upon its high grade of merit are justified. From 1864 on, Browning was busier than ever, and down to the date of his death, December 12, 1889, was a man enthusiastically devoted to his work. Of these later productions, "The Ring and the Book," in 1869, is the longest and most unique. No one but Browning could or would have written it. It is a matter of congratulation to English readers that he wrote it, and wrote but one of its kind—its object, according to Professor Corson, being to show that "art is an intermediate agent of personality." In 1871 "Balaustion's Adventure" appeared; in 1872, "Fifine at the Fair"; in 1873, "Red Cotton Night-

cap Country ”; in 1875, “Aristophanes’ Apology ” and “The Inn Album ”; in 1877, “Agamemnon ”; in 1884, “Feristah’s Fancies ”; in 1887, “Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their Day ”; and “Asolando: Facts and Fancies ” appeared in the very year of his death, 1889. There is fertility here, if nothing else, scarcely surpassed by any English poet; and while there is a tacit conviction, in many minds, that bulk and brains are in the inverse ratio, it is due to all such voluminous authors to defer such decision till candid examination is made. Dickens, Scott, Bulwer, and Reade maintain their rank as standard novelists in the face of such a prejudice. *A priori*, as we take up Browning’s poetry, we may logically give him the benefit of the doubt, presuming that literary affluence argues literary ability, as it certainly argues the presence of unwonted literary zeal and scope. We are now prepared to examine more minutely the poetry before us, and note,

#### BROWNING’S POETIC PERSONALITY

He has never been anything else than a poet. For better or for worse, he has never had but one supreme aim. In this, he is one of a few names in English letters — so much himself that he is never

confounded with any other. The one who most strongly influenced him was his wife, and yet, in the radical elements of character and in final literary aims, no two British authors have been more unlike. Each sacredly maintained a distinctive personality in poetry, and each was thereby the stronger. One of the main reasons why this English poet has found such a welcome in certain circles, and is named as one of the first authors of Victorian verse, is found in this individuality of soul and art. He has, as a poet, his own theory, and from the outset has pressed it right athwart many of the accepted canons of the schools. So prominent, indeed, is this feature of individualism that we find therein one of the explanations of his partial failure in the higher drama. The personal element absorbed the impersonal; the life of one man that of all men; so that just where Shakespeare, the great cosmopolitan dramatist, succeeded, Browning failed. Even where, according to Professor Corson, this idea of personality takes objective form, as in "Saul," "Luria," and other poems, the individual character is portrayed rather than the generic class of characters of which it is an exponent. Specification takes the place of generalization; the local, that of the universal. He

has thus scorned, and purposely so, all authority, precedent, and suggestion. Though his contemporaries, Tennyson, Swinburne, Morris, Matthew Arnold, Rossetti, and others, have come under the same social and literary influences, he is always himself, and takes pride in his poetic egoism. Hence, as is true of all such independent minds, he may be said to have not only readers and admirers, but followers. Not a few of the younger poets of the Victorian Era keep him in view as they write, and attempt what is quite impossible — a reproduction of his mind and method. So cautious a critic as Mr. Stedman concedes to him the honor of having founded a kind of school — “the new life-school” of modern England as distinct from the “still-life” order of earlier days. We are thus justified in speaking of Browning and his school, as of Tennyson and his school. Personality is power. As far as it goes, it always evinces some sterling qualities of soul and purpose, and, if avoiding the unhealthy extreme of eccentricity, enters as a vital factor into the sum-total of every commanding character. It is thus that Mr. Cooke, in his carefully worded contrasts among Carlyle, Emerson, and Browning, always emphasizes this personal element, as he writes:



“Carlyle deals with history; Emerson, with moral law; and Browning, with the individual man as a soul, distinct and unique.” He quotes, as in point, the language of Shelley, that “in our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the personality of the poet.” In poetry as in prose, “the style is the man himself.” The law reveals the lawgiver; the art, an artist; while this is a principle especially true in all superior natures. Such masters soon make their own world or environment. They look at men and things, at truth and beauty, through their own media, so that if they fail in their inferences and represent themselves more than the truth, they are not ignorant of the occasion of the alleged error, and, in a kind of obstinate independence, are ready to defend it.

#### HIS INTELLECTUALITY AS A POET

If we were obliged to reduce all of Browning's characteristics as a poet to one, it would be this. Various terms have been used to express it. It is to this that Domett has reference when he speaks of him as “the sublimest asserter of the soul in song.” It is in the light of this quality that nearly all modern commentators have placed him in the realistic school, as distinct from the romantic and

classical schools. He is, thus, called "the poet of psychology." Were there now, as in the days of Bishop Donne, a metaphysical school of English poets, his name would be prominent therein. Mr. Stedman calls him "the most intellectual of poets," while he may be said to sustain, in this respect, the same relation to his poetic contemporaries that George Eliot did to her fellow-authors in the province of the English novel. It is this feature in Browning's work that opens anew the question, "ill to solve," of the true relation of poetry to mental power—a question partly literary, and partly philosophic, and one as to which the ablest critics persist in differing. While conceding that there must be, in all true verse, the mental element as supreme, we hold it to be demonstrable that, in poetry as distinct from prose, the impassioned and imaginative elements should be prominent to an unusual degree. We can scarcely say, with Carlyle, "Poetry is nothing but higher knowledge." Its chief end is pleasure. Its very form as metrical is unsuited to the more didactic process of the reason, while the liberty of range open to the poet is based more on fancy and feeling than upon any specifically mental law. When Wordsworth speaks of "the vision and faculty di-

vine" as essential to the poet, the faculty to which he refers is the imagination, and not the higher reason. Hence the question whether didactic verse is indeed verse, inasmuch as instruction is the final end of it. Hence the substantial failure of such poets as Gifford, Rogers, Pollok, Tupper, and Akenside, in that the reflective controls the æsthetic and emotional. Even in the sphere of epic and dramatic verse, where genius prevails and pronounced creative ability is expected, the passionate element must be conspicuous, as also the imaginative. Too much thought cannot be embodied in verse, if it be secured that it always be mediated to the reader through taste, sensibility, and imagination. Browning is not only intellectual as a poet, he is scarcely anything else. He is what Wordsworth has ironically called "an intellectual all-in-all." "The poet's function," he says, "is that of beholding, with an understanding keenness, the universe, nature, and man." The subordination of form to idea is carried to the farthest extreme, so as to overreach its own best ends, and thus secures neither clearness of idea nor grace of form. Mrs. Browning marks, at this point, a higher type of conception and execution. No one would deny to her the possession of intellectuality, and yet so

adjusted to other gifts as to work in harmony with them and make the ultimate product symmetrical and effective. The mental never so overshadowed the emotional as to concentrate attention upon it. When we are told, for example, of "The Ring and the Book," that it is "the product of sheer intellect," we see the salient feature of most of Browning's verse, and add that whatever else the statement means or does not mean, it is not the definition of a poem. Browning's failure, as a poet, lies at this point. We must not be misunderstood when we say of him, as Brutus says of Cassius, "He thinks too much." There is too much of the abstract, philosophic method of the schools. Ratiocination, even in prose, has its limits, and may defeat its own ends. In verse it should be so concealed as to be known only by its fruits. When it is said that Browning "speaks the word of poetry for a scientific age"; that "his supreme purpose is synthetic"; that "he has the analytic spirit," we are using phrases whose primary meaning is applicable outside the sphere of verse, within the more dispassionate area of prose. Nor is this all. Intellectuality, in the best sense, means clear thinking; the faculty of mental insight and sustained mental power, the result of

which is the elucidation of truth. With Browning, it is something different from this. Thinking takes the form of the speculative and abstruse. Instead of philosophy, pure and simple, we too often find psychology, subtle and acute. Abstract and involved introspection often takes the place of lucid reasoning until we forget that we are dealing with poetry at all. In a word, Browning's intellectuality in verse is not of the most satisfactory order; so that, conceding that thought is the first element in verse, we do not thereby concede to the poetry before us the highest merit. Thought is one thing; abstraction is another. Creative genius is one thing, as in Milton; "sheer intellect" is another. Thinking is one thing; thinking clearly, logically, and toward a definite end and an ever-visible end, is another. It is not altogether unfortunate, however, that in the prevailing tendency of the verbal and superficial, the school of Browning should have arisen to check its progress by emphasizing the mental side of verse. It is still unfortunate that if the mental is to be made conspicuous, it should be magnified to a fault, and thus be made to mystify and discourage rather than attract and inspire. It is here justly questionable whether an average order of

mental endowment in the poet, normally and faithfully applied, is not better than the extreme and abnormal presence of rationality in song.

#### HIS DRAMATIC QUALITY

This special feature of our author's poetry is so prominent as to justify an accurate study. In fullest keeping with that intellectuality of which we have spoken, critics have referred to the presence in his verse of "the psychologic monologue." We note his dramatic tendency and spirit in "Paracelsus" and subsequent work. Mr. Cooke pronounces a high eulogium when he calls him "an original interpreter of life," and is never weary of confirming his tribute by a reference to Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists. Mr. Stedman, with a true literary insight, writes: "In the original sense of the term, Robert Browning is not a dramatist at all." By the "original sense of the term" Mr. Stedman refers to the essentially objective nature of dramatic art as distinct from the personal and subjective. It is a representation of character as revealed in the race, and not as found in the poet or in his preferred conception of what it is or ought to be. Masters of histrionic art must be capable of dispossessing them-

selves of themselves. Browning's mental activity was too introspective to admit of such mastery. Hence, it is eminently natural that when we come to the study of the six or eight specific dramatic poems of our author we find them to be "monodramatic" rather than dramatic; monologues rather than dialogues; soliloquies in verse rather than the objective expression of a mind keenly alive to human interests and needs. Browning has more than once ventured upon the analysis of his own mind and art. In this connection, he calls himself "a writer of plays," evincing meanwhile some ignorance as to just what is meant by the phrase, as he says of one of his collections, "Such poems come properly enough, I suppose, under the head of Dramatic Pieces, though, for the most part, lyric in expression, being always dramatic in principle." This is to say, what we find to be the truth, that in "Strafford," "Sordello," and other poems, the author was not quite sure where he was working. He simply knew that the poems were "dramatic in principle," and as such should be classified with "Othello" and "Athalie."

When we descend to the last analysis, we find that Browning's creative genius was not profound or spacious enough to meet the demands of a great

dramatic work; that his impassioned nature was not sufficiently potent or expressive for it; that his analysis of character and motive was not acute enough for it, nor his imagination constructive enough for it; in fine, that the order of his dramatic gift was not Shakespearean enough to be imposing and to command success. More realistic than imaginative, the era in which he moves is too limited for the largest endeavor and effort. Critics have spoken of his dramas as "sub-dramas" or "closet-dramas," as if produced in the old cloisters of Italy. A close study of "Luria," "The Return of the Druses," and "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon'" will reveal this lack of incident, progress, and motive which make all able representation. The characters are not sufficiently characteristic. Local scenes rather than general are presented, so that as we read we feel that we are shut in by the very terms of the poem to a definitely prescribed era of experience and observation. It is especially here that Browning stands at a wide remove from the leading dramatists of literature — from Goethe, Shakespeare, Racine, and Lope de Vega, Æschylus and Euripides. That his poems have not been successful on the English stage is no more strange than that



they have failed of wide success in English reading-rooms and parlors. As Mr. Devey remarks, "Without the progressive development of human action, there can be no such thing as dramatic representation. A drama is something to be performed, not a quality to be illustrated or a set of speeches to be spoken." We look in vain in "Pippa Passes," in "The Soul's Tragedy," in "Andrea del Sarto," and in similar monologues, for that continuity and increase of power, for that climacteric sequence of idea and form, which, to an extent, marks all high literary product, and which, in dramatic verse, is essential. We express our main objection to Browning's dramatic efforts when we say that they are mere efforts; that there is no one of them that is thoroughly finished and, as such, satisfactory. As we close their reading, we are inclined to adopt the title of one of the author's poems as we ask, "Wanting is — What?" and answer in biblical terms, "Much, every way." Dramatic grasp; deep dramatic passion and imagination; dramatic sequence of plot and action, scene and character, are wanting; so that the best we can do is to say, in the words of the same poem, "Complete incompleteness," "yet a blank all the same." We may allow the higher claim of the

poet himself, and call them "dramatic in principle," as they are not in plan, purposes, and results.

In speaking of Browning's dramatic quality, a word is needed as to the lyrical element in his poetry. Of his dramatic pieces he states that "they are, for the most part, lyric in expression." One of the earliest volumes of his collected poems bears the double name of "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics." From these and other indications it would seem as if he preferred to be called a dramatist to being called a lyrist, or, in so far as he was a lyrist, to have his character as such identified with his dramatic personality. There is, beyond question, a distinct idyllic element in the drama; a pronounced emotive element common to the ode and the play which makes it possible to combine them as dramatic lyrics or lyrical dramas or dramatic idylls. So clearly is this union illustrated in the verse before us that it may safely be said that the best feature of it as dramatic is the lyrical one. It is not creative function of a high order, nor constructive imagination and power of presentation, that is visible, but a good degree of verbal and illustrative excellence; of dignified sentiment and pathos. While he has not enough sensibility and passion for the high drama, he has

quite enough for the lyrical requirements of it. Hence, we find in some of his poems passages of exceptional idyllic excellence. Such are the songs from "Pippa Passes," as

"The year's at the spring  
And day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hillside's dew-pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn;  
God's in his heaven—  
All's right with the world."

In such examples as "Cristina," "Parting at Morning," "A Face," "My Star," "The Flight of the Duchess," "The Lost Leader," "In a Gondola," "By the Fireside," "In a Year," "The Statue and the Bust," "Too Late," "Garden Fancies," "Old Pictures in Florence," and in longer poems, such as "Saul" and "Cleon," there is more of that usual lyrical fervor—enough, at times, to make us wish that the author had given more attention to this order of verse. There is seen a good degree of what Professor Corson has seen fit to call "spiritual ebb and flow." Even at his best, however, Browning is not a lyrist of the first order. There is the same lack of symmetry, of excellence and sustained merit, that we have

noted in his dramas. There is little approach to the lyrical sweetness of Burns, or to that delicacy of touch that marks the masterly pen of Tennyson. The wonder is that, with his peculiar cast of mind and poetic ideals, he should have written as lyrically as he did. It is only when he partially forgets his intellectual self and becomes more flexible, human, and objective that he at all succeeds, where the impassioned must control the speculative. The author has written much of his best poetry when not himself; when off his guard and out of his literary routine. We could spare "Sordello" and "The Inn Album" better than the songs of "Pippa Passes"; "Aristophanes' Apology" far better than "Meeting at Night" and "The Last Ride Together." Would that our ambitious poet had better known the limit of his genius, and entered heartily into poetic competition with Tennyson and Swinburne and his own gifted partner within the well-established lines of lyrical verse.

#### HIS CLAIMS AS A POETIC ARTIST

When Ruskin writes, with his eye on Browning, that "the strength of poetry is in its thoughts, not in its forms"; when, with the same poet in

view, Swinburne writes of his "decisive and incisive faculty of thought," it is understood that Browning's mental character, as a poet, is praised at the expense of his character as a poet artist. Most of his warmest admirers are willing to yield any claim to his high merit as an æsthetic poet, if so be the other claim of mental acuteness be conceded. Corson and others take extreme positions here when they insist upon our author's special excellence in what is known as the art of verse. The language of Landor, that he wished Browning would "atticize a little," is more appropriate. Whatever influence such poets as Shelley and Keats may have had upon him, he never approximates to that degree of finish of form so notable in their best verse. We have spoken of our author's independence of method; of his scorn of precedent and tradition. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the province of literary art. He avows his freedom and acknowledges no master. He purposely looks away from what are called the established laws of verse, and would express no thanks to our American Lanier for interpreting a science of English verse. Had he lived in the Elizabethan Age, he might have written in the syllabic method of the classical poets; and had

he lived in the time of Pope, he might have used the accentual method—running counter, in each instance, to the prevailing habit of the time. He is thus a law unto himself, which means that he was subject to no law. Poetic license was with him a sacred principle. His extreme advocates justify this indifference to art on account of the wealth of his subject-matter—too copious and complex to be applied in obedience to the accepted canons of the schools. “He has so much material,” says Professor Corson, “such a large thought and passion capital, that we never find him making a little go a great way”; as if, indeed, literary art were a cunning device to conceal poverty of idea by a superabundance of words. There have been English poets with equal mental endowment who have been, as well, consummate artists of expression, and, in this respect, our author’s rightful masters. Thought only is not sufficient to constitute a poet of the first order. There must be special aptitude in its expression. Browning’s limitations may, hence, be seen in that he had no special appreciation of poetry as an art, and no special ability to realize such an ideal, had he possessed it. What Ruskin calls “his seemingly careless and too rugged rhymes” are in reality such.

He is unconscious of the purely æsthetic side of verse, as distinct from prose. When Bagehot, in his "Literary Studies," speaks of "pure art," as illustrated in Wordsworth, and "ornate art," in Tennyson, he adds a reference to the "grotesque art," as seen in Browning. Outside the narrow area of his songs and shorter dramatic lyrics, the reader may turn to almost any page of his longer poems, such as "The Inn Album," to see an example of this "grotesqueness." There is an unnaturalness of manner that is itself a violation of the first principles of art. The diction is stilted, prolix, and unduly quaint. There is the evidence of overstudy — what Mr. Hutton has happily termed "the crowded notebook style." Even in the sphere of blank verse, where the author is at his best, the violations of rhythm, accent, meter, and general structure are too frequent and flagrant to be overlooked. This grotesqueness, though admitted by his admirers, is defended on the theory that, when used, there was "an artistic occasion" for it, and that in no other way could he express the reality of his thought. This is nothing else than saying that Browning's thought was as grotesque as his art, and forces us to the sweeping conclusion that each must therefore be considered

as out of the order of nature. It is this that Mr. Devey has in mind when he speaks of the "jagged meter" of "The Ring and the Book," and of the irregularity of much of his other verse. This failure in literary art is all the more noticeable in an age where governing tendencies are in this direction — an age of structural verse, in the æsthetic sense. Contemporary with Tennyson, Swinburne, Arnold, Morris, and Rossetti, art as art has a commanding place. Conceding to Browning what has been called "a reasonable rhythm" and an occasional evidence of high poetic taste, the body of his verse is unartistic — marked by what Mr. Stedman terms "defective expression."

#### THE ALLEGED OBSCURITY OF HIS VERSE

We are still dealing with our poet as an artist, and yet this question of the clearness or obscurity of his work has become so prominent in modern criticism that we must discuss it as an independent topic. It is to this repeated charge of obscurity that the poet himself refers, and most especially in the prefatory note to "Selections" that he published in 1872. Herein he states that "he apprehends no more charges of being willfully obscure," the obscurity itself, it will be noted, not



being denied. It is with the fact of his obscurity, rather than with the explanation of it, that we have to do. When Thackeray, while in America, noted one day, on the table of his host, a copy of our poet's works, he remarked, "What, do you read Browning and understand him?" as he significantly added, "I wish I could, but I have no head above my eyes." Some of his critics have spoken of his verse as past all comprehension or apprehension. What one writes of "Sordello" might be said of each of several of his poems: "A work which very few people have tried to get through, and out of the handful who have not one has arrived at the singular felicity of deciphering its meaning." The fault is not an occasional or a necessary one, but pervasive and without cause. Others have treated equally difficult themes, have struggled equally long to interpret them, and have in the main succeeded. A glance at the number and increasing duties of what are called "schools of interpretation of Browning," such as the Browning Society of London, is sufficient to illustrate the point in question, and is in itself proof positive of the inherent difficulty, if not impossibility, of any clear interpretation. Apart from such separate schools, most of the treatises

written upon this poetry give conspicuous place to this mooted question — more agitated now than ever before. It is more than suggestive to take in hand some of these attempts at elucidation, such as Dowden's, Johnson's, Cooke's, Symond's, and Corson's, and note the "confusion, worse confounded." Some of them are strikingly called "Introductions to the Study of Browning." The commentator does not purpose to get much beyond the threshold of these poems. We read the alleged explanations, and still ask with Goethe for "more light." We read again the original, and are baffled. Thinking that if this perplexity is a mark of the earlier efforts it will disappear as the poet advances in years, we are more than discouraged when we note that obscurity increases with age and practice. Browning's latest poems defy the best attempts fully to explain them. After "Luria" and some of his earlier poems, the poet was so aggrieved by what he deemed an unappreciative public that he threatened to forego all similar efforts. Alfred Austin, the late laureate, author of "The Poetry of the Period," as also not a few writers of note in the British Reviews, preferred this charge and substantiated it. The poet, in "Pacchiarotto" and elsewhere, proceeds to

answer, and in the added obscurity of the answer itself justifies the charge of obscurity in the poems.

When we are told by Mr. Birrell, in "Obiter Dicta," that a poet may "sometimes be misty," that "we need be at no pains to find a meaning for everything Mr. Browning has written"; and when he intimates that if the lines are unintelligible so much the worse for the reader's assumed sanity, we must in self-defense turn to the quotation which the critic himself places on his title-page, as it reads, "An *obiter dictum* is a gratuitous opinion, which, whether it be wise or foolish, right or wrong, bindeth none — not even the lips that utter it." This being so, we cut loose from the critic's opinion and prefer to hold by the testimony of facts. Browning's cast of mind is ultra-intellectual, idealistic, in the Hegelian sense. He is introspective to a fault, and is more mystical in verse than are Carlyle and Emerson in prose. He seems to get hold of great truths in parts, quite unable to study them in their organic unity and as vitally related to the great body of truth. The nature of his themes, as largely medieval and visionary, insures this complexity. His methods of exposition are so unique as to be abnormal. It is not only such verbal irregularity as

the suppression of the relative, the omission of the sign of the infinitive, the substitution of indicative for subjunctive, and similar anomalies, which Professor Corson concedes only to justify; but there is so constant a presence of exceptional usage as to make it the law of usage, and thus reverse all accepted principles of structure and idiom. Mrs. Browning had quite enough of this verbal eccentricity. Her more independent husband has more than enough. In the unsettled forms of Elizabethan English, Shakespeare and others might have thus written, as they often did, without censure; but not so may our living poets write in the settled period of Modern English.

“Was it ‘clearness of words which convey thought?’” the poet asks in “Pacchiarotto”; and we answer, Clearness of words indicates clearness of thinking. However “big and bouncing” thought may be, the English tongue can express it with substantial plainness. In fine, we see in this verse too evident an attempt at overstatement. The poet is ever striving to express his ideas and ever failing, partly because he tries too severely, and partly because of the essential obscurity of the thought itself as it lies before him. We are not

to be told here that "there are readers and readers"; that reading is nowadays "superficial"; or to be told by the poet himself that his verse is not to be regarded "as a substitute for a game of dominoes to an idle man." There is such a thing as difficulty in the clear expression of germinal ideas. There are what Bacon calls "books to be weighed and considered." There is such a character in literature as the "idle reader," who without brains himself does not know the article when he sees it in others. This is all true, and yet clear ideas, as a rule, can be clearly stated. Clearness is a primal law of expression, and, as a rule, is attainable. Modern readers there are who bring enough brains to their reading to interpret the interpretable, and enough charity to condone occasional obscurity. When, however, all literary relations are reversed and cloudiness becomes a settled condition of the horizon, we submit that the reader is exempted and the poet at fault. "Genius is erratic," it is said; but if too erratic, genius then descends below the level of common ability and we crave the presence of the average man who has no more ability than he can safely carry. What Lamb has called "the sanity of true genius" is desirable, and finds its full expression

in such superior minds as Milton, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dante. The result of much of our reading of Browning is mental confusion; and this, we maintain, is an unpardonable sin. It is an example, at least, of what Mr. Collins calls "the illustrious obscure."

#### HIS RANK AND FUTURE

Browning's relative rank it is difficult to fix, as it is also to forecast his permanent reputation. He is said to have "succeeded by a series of failures." There is thus a sense in which he is great by his faults. He is, certainly, so conspicuous by reason of them as to have assumed a commanding position in modern England. It is quite unquestionable that, in current criticism, he ranks with the greatest bards of our era. There is a kind of tacit agreement to this effect. The question is still an open one, however, whether he is entitled to such honor, and whether he will be able to maintain it, if accorded him. We have discussed his excellencies and errors, his genius and want of genius, and find in such apparent contradictions the difficulty of assigning him with critical justice his deserved status. As a matter of fact, he has never been, as he is not now, a popular poet. Although

his admirers have increased of late, as also the number of those who conscientiously study his pages, the following is not large, while it must be conceded that many read him because it is, in certain circles, the *mode*. It is one of the severest reflections upon our poet's style and work that many of those who affect to understand him are not known ever to have understood any one else, so that we are tempted to credit their boasted acumen to the score of literary fastidiousness. There are a few metaphysical minds who may with truth be said to relish Browning, not because they understand him, but because they do not, or, making a mental effort to do it, think they succeed. "On the whole," he says, "I get my deserts; not a crowd, but a few I value more." That is, he is the poet of a select few, and, to that extent, a true poet. For the great body of intelligent English readers he cannot be made attractive.

Browning's future as a poet will very largely depend on literary and philosophic tendencies. If abstract speculation becomes the dominant type in verse, his constituency will increase. If literary form recede from its present prominence, and the poet's idea, clear or obscure, full or partial, be all that is needed, a similar appreciation will ensue.

If, however, as is to be hoped, an order of literature shall prevail in modern England in which the mental strength of Wordsworth will combine with the æsthetic grace of Tennyson and the impassioned fervor of Mrs. Browning, this poetry will be remanded to an ever-narrower area of influence, and have but little fascination for any save those who are never so happy as when vainly seeking to find what is "past finding out." Intellectual verse is one thing; psychological abstraction in meter is another. High thinking is one thing; verbal jugglery and trick of phrase are another. Dramatic and lyric passion is one thing; spasmodic outbursts of sentiment are another.

The highest praise we may accord to Browning, conceding all his errors, is this: that he has imparted to English poetry a good degree of mental stimulus, and has thus quickened the general literary life of modern England. While, as we have seen, he is not intellectually clear, he is intellectually suggestive; and while he is not, if we may coin a word, literarily artistic, he is literarily vital and impressive; so that even where our judgment is not enlightened and our æsthetic taste gratified, our general faculties, rational and emotional, are the subjects of a genuine and governing



impulse toward truth and goodness and beauty. English letters could as little spare such a representative spirit as it could spare such commanding names as Carlyle and Emerson. In this sense, indeed, Robert Browning is far more than a poet. He is a poetic and personal force instinct with vital energy. In this sense, indeed, what he has written is a something far greater than poetry. It is an aspiration and an inspiration — the profound and passionate outcry of the soul for the vision and the voice of God.

## VII

### A STUDY OF MRS. BROWNING

THE history of English literature, and, most especially, of English poetry, would be incomplete apart from the study of the Brownings — Robert and Elizabeth Barrett. Closely related in their literary life, quite apart from the fact of their marriage, we think of them together, somewhat as we think of the brothers Hare, of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Alice and Phoebe Cary, of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, of Calvin E. and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Whatever their relations and resemblances, however, their differences of personality and of literary product are so marked that they must be approached and studied from different points of view, on different methods, and as representing radically distinct schools and types of literary art. Mrs. Browning may thus be said to stand alone in her poetic life and work, not only as contrasted with her husband, but with the other prominent poets of the Victorian Era. If Lord Tennyson represents the artistic school in poetry and polite letters; Robert Browning, the specifi-

cally intellectual school; and Mr. Swinburne, the impassioned order of verse on the sensuous and, at times, the sensual side: Mrs. Browning is the characteristic exponent of emotional English verse in its higher and purer forms — the purest passionate poetess of Modern English letters.

#### LIFE AND WRITINGS

Born in 1809, at Hope End, near Ledberry, within one year of the birth of Tennyson, and three years of that of her husband, her literary career may be said to have begun with theirs. Nurtured in a home of wealth, with every educational facility offered her, it is not strange that, with her natural mental endowments and ever-increasing love of truth and knowledge, she should early have accomplished what she did in the line of intellectual acquisition and in preparation for the great poetic career that lay before her. Beginning her production of verse as early as at ten years of age, her first publication was in 1826, at the age of seventeen — “An Essay on Mind, and Other Poems,” written in clear heroic meter. In 1833, there followed a translation of the “Prometheus Bound” of Æschylus. Premature and imperfect as these first productions were, they had their

place as marking a tendency in her individual history, and opened the way for better results in the years to follow. In 1838 "Seraphim, and Other Poems" appeared, while in 1844 her poems were first edited in collected form. In 1846 the most significant event of her life occurred, in her marriage, when she and Mr. Browning took up their residence in Florence, the city of art, romance, and song. Again in London, for a while, in 1851, she lived in great seclusion and physical weakness, writing and reading in the intervals of suffering, and publishing, in 1856, her most elaborate poem, "Aurora Leigh." Returning to Florence, she had but a few years to live, dying in peace June 29, 1861, at the early age of fifty-two. Her grave, outside the city, has been from that day to this the resort of all travelers to Italy who know anything of the history of English verse and the part that this gifted authoress has taken therein. As far as her prose writings are concerned, it is in place here to state that they consisted of the following: "Early Letters" to R. H. Horne, 1839-43; "Chaucer Modernized," 1840; "A New Spirit of the Age," 1843-45; "Last Letters on General Topics"; "The Book of the Poets, Chaucer-

Tennyson"; "Some Account of the Greek Christian Poets."

In reviewing the life of Mrs. Browning, in so far as it can be dissociated from her poetry, it may safely be embodied in the one word "character." In whatever phase we may be pleased to study character,—in its constituent elements, in the modes of its manifestations or in its governing motives and influence upon others,—we find in her unique personality every essential of completeness. She was, in the fullest sense of the word, a woman, illustrating the strength and grace of womanhood: that fineness of perception and delicacy of sentiment and fullness of sympathy that marks the feminine ideal. English womanhood was consecrated by her life. It has been through her work and teaching a more sacred thing than ever and more intimately identified with all true culture. From first to last, she was ingenuously herself, ever acting under the clearest convictions of duty, and with that characteristic modesty that became, alike, the maiden, the wife, the mother, the friend, and the woman of letters. Shy and unobtrusive as it was possible for a person to be, she lived in her retiracy in London and Florence, bravely suffering what it was hers to suffer, and chiefly desiring

to make the world brighter and better by what she had to give it. It is this supreme element of character that marks the product of her pen. As one has well expressed it, "With her, everything was religion." What she wrote was unobjectionable, not simply in the technical, ethical sense of that term, but it was suffused and surcharged with the very essence of piety; clean and chaste and white as the snow of heaven; carrying with it, wherever it went, a gracious and subduing influence, perceptible to those only whose inner life is in harmony with hers. We can express this peculiar quality of her life and writings in no better way than by calling it spirituality; an unearthly something in all her earthly works; a "presence and a potency" of that other-worldliness by which all human effort is sanctified and lifted above the common plane of life. Hence it is that such poetry can never be widely popular in the current sense of that term. Though it would not be correct to say that Mrs. Browning's verse is unpopular in the sense in which Mark Akenside's is, or Rogers's or Tupper's is, it will, still, always be best appreciated by that chosen few in every nation who look for character in literature and for all those delicate and elevating qualities of style

that are but the reflex of character upon the printed page. Hence the attractiveness of her poetry to British and American womanhood; not simply because it is genuine poetry and, as such, fraught with interest, but, mainly, because of the radiant soul that is in it. So intensely transforming is this illuminating presence, that at times it assumes a kind of beatific charm and makes it impossible for any mind within the area of its influence to think of anything but God and goodness and truth and virtue. Mrs. Browning was constitutionally good, pre-inclined to faith, and when she sat down to express her thoughts it was simply an attempt to utter the unutterable longing within her that God might be pleased to speak through her to her fellow-men on behalf of truth and beauty. We may now appropriately turn to

#### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HER POETRY

1. Its *scholarly quality* is, first of all, noticeable. As already intimated, Mrs. Browning had all the facilities of education offered her in early life and fully availed herself of them. She was educated, as one has expressed it, "in a masculine range of studies," reading all that was worth reading, and ever adding thereby to those rich stores

of knowledge by which she was "furnished forth" in times of literary need. On Casa Guidi, in Florence, it is suggestive to read the tribute which loving hands placed there, as they accord to her, among other excellences, "the wisdom of a sage." Her profound acquaintance with the original Hebrew Scriptures is well known. There is a striking combination of manliness and womanliness, as we read of her in London, confined to her room by illness, holding her pen in one hand and some ancient classic in the other, aiming to reproduce, in modern form, the teaching and spirit of the dead. Her familiarity with the Greek poets and authors was of a high scholarly order, far different from that æsthetic and courtly knowledge of them which was possessed by Queen Elizabeth. She studied them because she loved them and because she felt that, in and through them, she could better express to the England of her day her own idea and ideal of poetry. This scholarly bent of her mind and art is best seen in the class of themes she so often presented in poetic form. The second production of her pen, as far back as 1833, was a translation of the "Prometheus" of Æschylus. In keeping with this we note, in addition, translations and paraphrases from Theocritus,



Homer, Hesiod, Anacreon, Euripides, and other Greek writers. Her thorough acquaintance with the language, literature, and people of Italy is also noteworthy, while her "Sonnets from the Portuguese," and her "Catarina to Camoens" serve still more fully to widen the scope of her classical learning. Outside of poetry, moreover, her papers on "The Greek Christian Poets" serve to confirm the scope of her studies, as also their distinctively ethical bearing. In a word, Mrs. Browning was a scholar, reaching rare results within the special province of linguistic learning, and results scarcely less conspicuous within the broader province of general knowledge. More and better than this, she was eminently intellectual; able to originate as well as to acquire, and on the basis of collected facts and truths to generalize up to salient laws and principles. Even in her work as a translator, she evinces her independent judgment and, within the sphere of original composition, so uses the suggestions of others as to make them her own. Not intellectual in the same sense in which Robert Browning is, she is, still, intellectual, and is so in fullest keeping with her character as a woman. She has that feminine order of intellectuality by which truth is

somewhat softened and subdued as it passes out through the sensibilities into external form. There is nothing of the dogmatic or even mentally masculine, as these properly belong to the intellect of the man; nothing of that cold abstraction of reason and logical process that marks most of the great philosophic thinkers, but a womanly quality of thought germane to her sex and none the less effective in its place and way. Learned without being pedantic; versed in literature without being bookish and reserved; she secured the best possible results from the collected wisdom of the ancients and practically concealed her scholarship in the generous use she made of it.

Scholarly poets are in all ages and literatures rare. Scholarly poetesses are still more so. In the current tendency to connect the art of poetry with the want of mental vigor, and the work of female authorship with the superficial and romantic, it is well to remember that, in the case of Mrs. Browning, as in that of George Eliot, sound learning and true poetic power may go together — that such a product may be possible as intellectual verse. Whatever fault Mrs. Browning's work may possess, it can never be charged with that of superficiality. She pretends to no knowledge that

she does not possess and assumes no mental attitude that she cannot sustain. What she has written is, in the best sense, studied, and, as her character must commend itself to all pure-minded seekers after truth, her multiplied attainments must commend themselves to all those who prize substance above form.

2. *Poetic quality*, or essence, is found in her verse. We mean by this nothing less than poetic genius. Whatever else Mrs. Browning was or was not, she was a poetess, "the most inspired woman," says one, "of all who have composed in ancient or modern tongues." This is high eulogium and valid concession. The most unsparing critics of her verse have not ventured to question it, but granting it at the outset, have aimed to modify its meaning and reduce the measure of its influence in the world. She was a poetess, not in the sense in which Chaucer and Burns and Wordsworth are poets, but just as truly as were they. In her sphere and manner, she possessed the poet's nature and endowment, as did they, and cannot, thus, be classified with those poets of every nation concerning whom it is difficult to determine whether or not they have a legitimate place among those who are called by the Muses to sing.

A brief examination of Mrs. Browning's poetic character and work will confirm her right to the position here assigned her.

(a) The gift of *poetic imagination* was hers. Though not devoid of that philosophic imagination which marks a high order of mental power, she exhibited far more fully this distinctively literary type of imaginative function. Whatever share of the "faculty divine" she may have had, she had a yet larger share of the "vision divine," by which, in Shakespearean phrase, she was enabled "to glance from heaven to earth and earth to heaven." She had the "poet's eye" in something of the spaciousness of its sweep and the keenness of its view. How signally this particular feature is illustrated in her "Vision of the Poets," the very name of which indicates the office of this poetic insight and outlook; in whose comprehensive view the past and the future, heaven and earth, God and man, are alike included! In "A Drama of Exile," "The Seraphim," "A Rhapsody of Life's Progress," and other shorter poems, this salient characteristic is visible, while that notable dramatic cast that appears in her translations and much of her original work is conspicuously of this delineative order. Nor is it

necessary to discuss, just here, the particular measure of this quality in her poetic nature, as compared with its expression in other English bards. It is sufficient for our purpose to maintain that she possessed it sufficiently fully to give her a commanding place among the exponents of British verse. The appellation that has been given her—"the female Shakespeare of England,"—while of the nature of extreme honor, clearly evinces the high estimate placed upon the histrionic feature of her mind and art. Her character as a woman; her constant recourse to the pages of the classical and medieval poets; the romantic circumstances of her early life and her marriage; her residence in Italy and fondness for its history and future; her physical invalidity and Christian ideals—all combined to strengthen this imaginative side of her being and make whatever she wrote more graphic and objective. Her very personality and life had so much of this supernal element that Mr. Stedman goes so far as to call her "that ethereal creature" whose home was alike on earth and in the skies.

(b) *Poetic sensibility and sympathy* were hers. It is at this point that Mrs. Browning's character and authorship assume their clearest and most sat-

isfactory forms. She was, preëminently, a woman of feeling — deep, fine, and overflowing — entering with the fullest intensity of interest into all that won her heart, and thus inspiring all around her with a corresponding love and zeal. Her womanly nature seemed to be thoroughly at home in this devotion to what Milton called “sensuous and passionate” song. If, as we are told, “the highest mission of a female poet is the expression of love,” then Mrs. Browning reached the uppermost level of possibility in this direction. When studying her pages from this point of view, we think, naturally, of all those English poets especially marked by the emotive element — of Chaucer, Burns, Cowper, Goldsmith, Charlotte Brontë, and Jean Ingelow. Critics have spoken of her “nobility of feeling” as a prominent feature. We prefer to call it delicacy and wealth of feeling. There is in her poetry that fineness of discernment and fullness of expression that bespeak a true conception of the function of verse and an ardent desire to be of service to mankind. No writer of English poetry has evinced more decided tenderness of spirit. It is seen not simply in her sonnets and shorter idyllic poems, but in the entire body of her verse, and often in verse

which from its theme and method might be termed didactic. It is found in "Aurora Leigh," as well as in "Cowper's Grave"; in "A Drama of Exile," as well as in "The Lost Bower" and "Bertha in the Lane." In fine, our poetess has no superior or formidable rival in this particular province of poetic art, and it is still an open question whether, as a writer of simple lyrics, she may not be regarded as the first of our vernacular bards. It is from this point of view most especially that the cognomen of the "priestess of modern English literature" has been given her with some degree of justice.

(c) *Poetic taste and skill* were hers. We touch here what may be termed, in one sense, the mechanical or external part of poetry; the execution of line and stanza, somewhat dependent, indeed, upon the thought behind it, and, yet, an art in itself, with its own laws and methods calling for independent study. At no stage in the discussion and defense of Mrs. Browning's high poetic character is there more serious difficulty than here. Some of her critics, and even of her admirers, have gone so far as to deny her any positive excellence in this respect. Others, as Mr. Stedman, have reasoned, "that her taste never seemed

quite developed, but subordinate to her excess of feeling"; that her diction is too often careless and unduly quaint; that verbal and grammatical elision, inversion and repetition, are far too frequent, as they give rise, at times, to the impression of affectation or studied attempt at the novel and irregular. On the one hand, we are told that there is a want of "æsthetic correctness," and then, again, that there is the presence of "an overculture," by which excessive care improperly applied defeats its own ends, and results in the apparent absence of care. There is justice in these reflections. While admitting the presence in Mrs. Browning's verse of sufficient excellence of verbal finish to call her truly an artist in her work, such excellence is not so pronounced as to enforce high eulogium or recommend her verse to students of structural English. It is, moreover, to be emphasized that the poetess herself, in her earlier literary life, seemed to be aware of her deficiency at this point. From the date of her marriage, in 1846, midway in her literary career, there is noticeable, on to the close of her work, a decided improvement in poetic execution and general æsthetic finish. Something of this progress is attributed to the personal influence of her gifted



husband; something of it, as we have seen, to her own change of view and purpose; and something, we may add, to the decided drift of Modern English verse in the direction of verbal technique and architectural beauty. Taking the sum-total of her poetry into account, and giving her, as is due, the benefit of the doubt, she had in her nature what Lathrop has called "a sense of form," and was able, in her later and better authorship, to give it some visible expression. It is thus that she may fairly be said to have possessed the three essential factors of all genuine verse — imagination, sensibility, and art. "Her whole being," says Mr. Stedman, "was rhythmic." She was a poet by nature and by profession; called to her work alike by divine and human appointment, and prosecuting that work, as Milton did his,

"As ever in my great Task-Master's eye."

To that "Vision of Poets" which she so enrapturingly saw, some later bard is yet to add another vision in which he will see the womanly form of Mrs. Browning in sacred fellowship with Milton and Keats and the other sons and daughters of song.

3. *Practical character and aim* were hers. This

is a feature in the poetry before us which is somewhat suggestive, not only because it is exhibited in the form of poetry, but in the poetry of the gentler sex. In all that Mrs. Browning wrote, there is seen a governing purpose to do good service on behalf of truth. As she states in the opening lines of "Aurora Leigh," she had

"written much in prose and verse  
For others' uses."

This is, strangely, even more apparent in the verse than in the prose, so that when, on the surface of the poem, there is little or no appearance of the practical, this utilitarian quality is found at the center of it as a controlling motive. In this respect, at least, she evinces a combination of imagination and every-day wisdom which is not so fully seen in any one of her distinguished literary successors. The fact is that the useful element in her writing was simply the expression of her spiritual nature. She wrote as she lived, "for the relief of man's estate." It was because of her deep desire to make her work subservient to her character as a Christian that it became as practical as it did. Hence the double end was secured, of an order of verse marked by mental vigor and by

a pervading principle of benevolence. This element of utility is all the more striking in view of her scholarly habit of mind. High linguistic and critical attainments are generally found to exist in the inverse ratio of the desire to be personally useful to one's generation. With this erudite authoress it was far otherwise. Her absorbing study of Platonic teachings and the old Greek and Hebrew made her none the less desirous of utilizing, to the best advantage, whatever acquisitions she secured. If we examine her various poems with this thought in mind, there are some among them that stand forth with special clearness. Such is her longest poem, "Aurora Leigh," based on the English life of her time and developed with constant reference to it. Among her shorter poems of this character are "The Cry of the Children," "The Cry of the Human," "Casa Guidi Windows," "A Curse for a Nation," "First News from Villafranca," "The Forced Recruit [at Solferino]," "Garibaldi," "Italy and the World," "King Victor Emanuel Entering Florence, April, 1860," "Napoleon III. in Italy," and "A Song for the Ragged Schools of London." So significant at times is this primary purpose of

utility that it gives to the verse a kind of civic or social cast, making it read somewhat as many of Dickens's novels read, and to be interpreted in the light of contemporary historical facts. In no one particular is such a feature more evident than in her profound sense of justice and the claims of common manhood. In those poems suggestively named by Mr. Stedman, "Humanitarian," it was not simply Italy or England whose interests she was defending, but the cardinal idea of equal justice to all, irrespective of creed, nationality, or position; and defending it all the more strenuously according to the degree in which any class or nation might be deprived of it. In the defense of this principle, she hesitated not to sacrifice health, and even reputation, for loyalty to England when she judged her country deserving of rebuke. In Modern English letters she is the poetess of the rights of man, singing, in view of any oppression: "Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers!"

It was this same womanly sensibility that did much to make her the poet that she was, to place her in fullest sympathy with distress, and to lead her to the dedication of her powers and her poetry to the alleviation of present needs.

COUNTER CRITICISM

There are two specifically adverse criticisms that demand a separate discussion:—

1. Her *narrowness of intellectual range* is noted. What we would call breadth of poetic genius is denied her. Our destructive critics readily concede all that has been said as to the high scholarly character of her verse, as to her possession of true poetic passion and imagination, and, to some approximate degree, of poetic taste. The underlying motive of her work as practical and its unsullied ethical purity are granted, while it is argued that there is a lack of that supreme poetic faculty by which the seer is enabled to rise aloft and remain there in the presence of things supernal and thence talk to men as one inspired. We are told that Mrs. Browning failed just where Wordsworth failed, in sublimity of poetic grasp and outlook, that the limit of her power was reached, as his was, this side the province of epic and dramatic grandeur. Every candid student of the poetry before us must admit that such criticism as this is substantially true. If we scan the list of her productions, from "Prometheus Bound" to "Aurora Leigh," two facts of prime importance are notice-

able: the one, that she wrote in every existing literary form of English verse — epic, dramatic, lyric, and reflective; and the other, that it was in the last two of these forms only that she may be said to have accomplished distinguished success. When we say that she was a lyric and a meditative poetess of a high order, we have said enough to give her a conspicuous place among English authors, and yet not enough to entitle her to rank with the few masters of highest song. It is true, indeed, that in "Aurora Leigh," "A Drama of Exile," "The Seraphim," "A Vision of Poets," and other lesser specimens, she entered the sphere of heroic and histrionic verse, but the results are partial, and, as such, suggestive. Here and there, evincing the hand of a true master, the general quality of authorship betokens an order and a range of faculty far below the masterful. There is the absence of that sustained continuity of power essential alike to epic and drama, a lack of that unity and comprehensiveness of view and that graphic conception of character and action that mark the greatest bards of every nation. Her success, at these points, is below that of Tennyson, and clearly defines her position as rightfully belonging to the lower but important province of the

idyllic and contemplative. As she has, at times, succeeded where Browning has failed, she has here failed where her more intellectual husband has succeeded. Whatever may be affirmed by Hillard, Tuckerman, Stoddard, Mitford, and others to her poetic gift and work, conscientious criticism has reached its limit when it styles her the first poetess of England, while having no living superior in the line of lyrical richness and strength.

2. Her *tendency to the morbid and subjective*. Some critics talk freely of her work as visionary. So discreet a judge as Stedman speaks of her "over passion," and adds, of her poetry, that "health is not its prominent characteristic." Taine and the French critics as a class find in this moroseness of spirit just what they expect to find in England and are satisfied. Various reasons are assigned for this state of mind. With some it is found in the fact of her feminine nature and sympathies passing easily beyond safe limits into the region of the romantic and unhealthful. Some plausibly assign it to her early and prolonged invalidism and her enforced retiracy; to the startling shock experienced at the drowning of her brother, as well as to other personal bereavements. Others, still, attribute it to the peculiar type of

her religious faith and life, especially in its sympathy with the semi-historical theology of Swedenborg, or to the profound sensitiveness of her nature to the wants and woes of the race. Here, again, we touch upon a point of criticism which every ingenuous student of Mrs. Browning must examine. Agreeing with it in so far as to admit that there is too much of the plaintive and passive in her poetry, we can go no further. All that we have said as to the intensely practical aim of her verse disproves it. The fact that she wrote much in the very center of the scenes that inspired it would disprove it. Her diversified life between England and Italy, between maidenhood and wifehood, between her natural ability as a woman and her indebtedness for stirring intellectual impulse to Browning, would also disprove it. A candid examination of her poetry disproves it. While it is true that she was in no sense a humorist, that her verse has too little of pleasantry to make it widely current, and that her warmest admirers could wish to see the presence of greater flexibility, spontaneity, and life — this is not to say, that she thereby passed to the extreme of despondency or that her poetry is what Lowell would call “parochial.” Our only marvel is that, in view of her



peculiar history, she wrote as freely and cheerfully as she did and ever kept in view the good of others. In those poems that are directly elegiac and plaintive we fail to discover the presence of an abnormal experience and see nothing save a genuine sympathetic tenderness of soul. In such a selection as "Casa Guidi Windows" the pitiful never borders on the pessimistic, while, in much of this politico-literary verse, there is the very highest expression of heroic hopefulness for Italy and the progress of man. In rare instances, such as "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," and "Bertha," and in some of the sonnets, we can detect a playful pleasantry, fully in keeping with the introspective tendency of her mind. In a word, the general type and final effect of her verse is hopeful and helpful, appealing to every thoughtful mind and grossly perverted from its main intent when quoted as an example of goodness over-good. There is nothing of that sad dejection of spirit that marks the prose of George Eliot, but much of that sweet sobriety of temper that pervades the pages of Charlotte Brontë.

Mrs. Browning filled the place and did the work assigned her. Modern English literature would sadly miss her name and influence. Sufficiently in

sympathy with the literary tendencies of her time to utilize them, she was, also, sufficiently out of sympathy with them to do a needed reformatory work and purify the springs of authorship. So long as scholarship, fancy, feeling, and rhythmic beauty are essentials of verse, and the moral good of the people is the highest end of authorship; so long as character and culture coëxist and make up the perfect personality; so long will it be necessary for us to hold the writings of Mrs. Browning in high regard as marking the farthest limit yet attained by any British poetess.

## VIII

### THE POETRY OF SWINBURNE

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE was born at Holmwood, near Henly-on-the-Thames, April 5, 1837; and is, thus, the youngest, by several years, of that distinguished circle of nineteenth-century British poets with which his name is intimately connected. Born a quarter of a century after Tennyson and the Brownings, his life and work are, in fact, more closely related to that order of authors of which Morris, Clough, Jean Ingelow, and the Rossettis are representative members. He may be said, however, to be virtually contemporary with each of these groups; to partake, in a sense, of the qualities of each, and yet so to differ from them as to stand somewhat isolated and to maintain a place and personality thoroughly his own. He may be viewed as an author of culture and scholarly instincts, basing his work, to some extent, on classical and Continental teachings, and yet never forgetting the historical relation of the modern to the ancient; of the native English to

the foreign; and of the man of letters to the man of affairs. It is suggestive to note, at the outset, that his education was begun in France, the traces of which country and language are, to an extent, discernible in his subsequent work. Afterwards, at Eton College, he entered Oxford in 1857, as a Commoner, and, though taking no degree in regular course, received the full benefit of university study. "A natural scholar and linguist," as he has been called, he took pains to justify and enlarge these natural endowments by a prolonged system of academic training. In this respect he but adds another proof of a notable fact in English letters, that its most conspicuous names are as remarkable for broad and accurate scholarship as for original poetic gift. Even among other names of lesser note, there are not a few who have been scholars as well as authors, and have thus maintained the historical reputation of our literary men.

In turning to Swinburne's specifically literary work, we mark a career of continuous prose and verse production from the appearance of his earliest writings, such as "The Queen Mother," "Rosalmond," and "Atalanta in Calydon" (1861-65), on to his latest contributions to contemporary British letters — a period of creative and critical work ex-

tending through four completed decades of the nineteenth century. His "Atalanta in Calydon," though produced in the very opening of his life as an author, is still justly regarded as one of his ablest dramas. Full of the old Greek spirit, it emphasizes the impressive truth that the gods cannot be successfully resisted. Thoroughly Hebraic in its serious severity, it is equal in spirit and poetic merit to anything of a similar classical character from the pen of Arnold or Shelley or the Anglo-classical school. In 1865 "Chastelard" appeared. It might justly be called "A Tragedy of Mary Stuart." When we learn that it was withheld from publication some time after its preparation, it must be conceded that the author's reputation would have been materially enhanced had it been altogether withheld. This is also true of the volume "Laus Veneris," as a whole, in so far as its animal grossness is concerned — a volume that for the time embittered the poet's critics and served to turn many well-disposed readers permanently away from anything he might produce. It stands related to Swinburne's work and fame much as "Leaves of Grass" does to Whitman's. This is true, though in the first edition of "Poems and Ballads" some of his choicest verse is found. In

rapid succession appeared "A Song of Italy," "Ode on the Proclamation of the French Republic," and "The Songs of Two Nations," of whose history and people he was never weary. Then followed "Songs before Sunrise," which in their distinct democratic strain might almost be classed under the head of Civic Odes. Much of the best work that Swinburne has done is seen in some of these shorter specimens, as in poetic spirit and wealth of utterance they have yet to be surpassed. In 1874 appeared "Bothwell," a tragedy to which the epithet "prodigious" has been fitly applied, so elaborate in its plot as somewhat to tax the patience of the reader. The following year "Erechtheus" appeared. In 1878 we note a second series of "Poems and Ballads," followed in rapid succession by such collections as "A Century of Roundels and Other Poems," "Songs of the Springtides," "A Midsummer Holiday, and Other Poems," "Marino Faliero," "Tristram of Lyonesse, and Other Poems," and "Studies in Song." In 1887 "Lochrine" was published. In addition to these poetic works along lyric and dramatic lines, Swinburne has done an order and amount of work in prose criticism and miscellany that entitles him to high repute, and which must always be taken

into account by those who are seeking to assign him his true place in the literary world. Such are the collections, "Essays and Studies," "Under the Microscope"—a critical estimate of Poe, Whitman, and other American authors, "A Study of Ben Jonson," "A Study of Victor Hugo," "A Study of Shakespeare," "A Note on Charlotte Brontë." Here is seen, in verse and prose, a substantive body of authorship, indicative of a wide mental range and a high literary ideal. Swinburne is not a versatile and voluminous poet in the sense in which Browning is, nor a versatile prose critic and essayist in the sense in which Matthew Arnold is, but he has written enough in each of these domains to give him notability and to justify that order of criticism which insists on connecting his writings with those of the Tennysonian school.

In entering upon a critical view of his merits and limitations, we shall purposely confine ourselves to his authorship as a poet.

1. The first of his merits that impress us is his *poetic passion*. This is one of the radical factors of all genuine verse. What may be called the three primary poetic forms are the Creative, the Impassioned, and the Artistic, emphasizing, in turn,

the sense or subject-matter, the spirit, and the structure. It is the second of these characteristics that we are now noting in Swinburne. It is the spirit of poetry and of the poet, including all that pertains to sentiment and sensibility, as distinct from the mental content of the poem or its metrical structure and beauty. Most of the historical definitions of verse have thus represented it. Aristotle holds that poetry is "imitative of the passions and manners of men." Byron called it "the feeling of past worlds and present." Milton insists that it is "simple, sensuous, and passionate"; while Mill suggestively combines the three essential elements when he speaks of poetry as "the influence of our feelings over our thoughts, embodied in metrical language." Such passion Swinburne's verse evinces more fully than does that of Morris or Tennyson or Robert Browning, and is more in keeping with that of Mrs. Browning. There is no trace in his lines of what has been called the "poet-reasoner."

A specific examination of some of the author's poems will confirm this judgment, especially his dramas and lyrics, which as poetic types are particularly emotive and expressive. It is thus with "Chastelard," "The Queen Mother," "Atalanta in



Calydon," "Bothwell," "Lochrine," and other dramatic examples, in which there are not a few lyrical outbursts of exceptional power and beauty. There is what Devey has called "a fire and dash" of movement that impresses the reader and hearer, an undercurrent and overflow that, at times, carry all before him and invest the verse with the deepest interest. Such passages in "The Queen Mother" are some of the dialogues between Catherine and Charles; between Henry and Margaret; between Denise and Yolande. In "Atalanta," the language of Althæa, the Queen of Calydon, is deeply emotive; while the different choral utterances with which the play is interspersed are notable instances of that faculty of Swinburne's by which dramatic sequence of movement is ever and anon relieved by the most flexible and idyllic passages. In "Bothwell" one can scarcely go astray in the search after the emotional. It pervades the acts and scenes as an inherent literary quality, and makes the poem essentially dramatic on the side of tragic feeling. The death of Rizzio and the impassioned outbursts of the Queen, within and without the castle; the scenes in connection with the murder of Darnley, and, above all, the fiery invectives of Knox, are but a few examples of that

emotive order of verse of which we are speaking. In "Marino Faliero," the speeches of the Doge and the Duchess, of Lioni and Stino, are of the same demonstrative nature. In fine, this is the controlling feature, and thus finds its most natural and frequent manifestation in tragedy. We can scarcely conceive of Swinburne's emotional nature embodying itself in the comic drama. Not only is his method too bold for such verse, but his passion is too intense and sweeping.

Still more apparent, if possible, is this poetic passion in the sphere of lyric verse — its true and native air. The very titles of the various collections will indicate this. Apart from any pronounced devotion to what is called beauty of nature, as seen in the lines of Chaucer, Burns, and Wordsworth, his deepest sensibilities are awakened by all other forms of beauty, so that the range of his idyllic verse as emotional may be said to include all possible expressions of human feeling. Not only is woman, as an exponent of human affection, one of his prevailing themes, but love, in one or another of its phases, may be regarded as the keynote of his lyrics. One of the forms of its embodiment is in that of loyalty to his country, or personal devotion to the rights of man. It would

be a study of no little interest, and one essential to the full interpretation of Swinburne, to examine his lyrics with this fact in view. "The Songs before Sunrise," dedicated to Mazzini, are full of this civic devotion, as seen, especially, in "The Eve of Revolution," "A Watch in the Night," "Hymn of Man," and "The Litany of Nations." In "A Midsummer Holiday" brilliant examples of lyrical satire on behalf of the people are seen in such specimens as "The Twilight of the Lords" and "A Word for the Country." In his collected "Poems and Ballads" we note "A Song in Time of Revolution, 1860," "A Song in Time of Order, 1852." "Songs of Two Nations," as the title indicates, are specifically national or civic odes as related to the political life of France and Italy. The dedication of some of his best poems to great national leaders suggests the same patriotic and philanthropic ardor, while the many poems personally addressed to such champions of human rights as Kossuth, Victor Hugo, and Mazzini are but another exemplification of this intense interest in all that affects the common weal. Swinburne's exaggerated praise of our American Whitman, as among the first names in our poetic annals, is chiefly explained on the ground of his dis-

tinctive democratic themes and ideals. The name "androtheistic," which has been applied by some critics to Swinburne as a poet, is to this extent a fitting one, that the human feature is everywhere prominent. Apart from the political sentiment, our author has been and is the exponent of poetic passion. Such poems as "In the Bay," "A Vision of Spring in Winter," "A Song in Season," "Four Songs of Four Seasons," "Saint Dorothy," "Before Dawn," and "The Garden of Proserpine" signally evince it. In "Songs before Sunrise," such selections as "Mater Triumphalis," "Siena," and "An Appeal" evince it. In "A Midsummer Holiday," "Cradle Songs" and "A Ballad at Parting" are lyrics of passion. In "Songs of the Springtides" may be cited "On the Cliffs" and "Thalassius," while in "Studies in Song" the two poems "Off Shore" and "By the North Sea" especially illustrate the presence of feeling. In addition to these titles, every careful reader of our author's lyrics must have noted the emphasis of the plaintive and memorial, a tenderness of pathos of the elegiac order so marked and pervasive as to give a serious and pensive cast to his idyllic verse. In "Songs of Two Nations" there are no less than seventeen specific lyrics under the caption

“Diræ.” Such examples as “Tenebræ,” “Mater Dolorosa,” “Non Dolet,” “A Year’s Burden,” “A Wasted Vigil,” “Age and Song,” “Dolores,” and “The Triumph of Time,” are of this subdued and chastened tone, while the commemorative poems on Mazzini, Baudelaire, Gautier, and others naturally fall under the same category. In addition to the forms of emotive poetry already cited, there remains an order of lyrical verse in which Swinburne may be said to have done his best poetic work, and in which, indeed, it is safe to say that he is yet to be surpassed. We refer to his songs, scattered with exquisite taste and in rich abundance through his dramatic and lyrical productions. In “Atalanta” these are found in their highest expression. To the first of them Stedman affixes the epithet “divine,” and adds that “it marks the height of the author’s lyric reach.” The others are almost as notable, opening, respectively, with the lines:

“Before the beginning of years.”

“Who hath given man speech?”

“We have seen thee, O Love, thou art fair.”

“Not as with sundering of the earth.”

Enough has thus been said to show the distinct place of poetic passion in the verse under review.

With Swinburne, poetry is, first and last, emotive. It is seen, at times, in extreme and dangerous and repellent forms, and it made it all the easier for him to commit some of the errors of which he has been guilty; but, in the main, it has been under the governance of good judgment.

2. The second great feature of merit in the verse before us is seen in *its poetic art*. It is a feature of the verse because in the literary constitution and ideal of the poet himself. "I confess," he writes, "that I take delight in the metrical forms of any language simply for the meter's sake." In his published "Essays and Reviews," when discussing such poets as Morris, Arnold, Shelley, Byron, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he is at special pains to call the attention of the reader to the external structure of the verse, to poetry as an art. It would be possible from this collection alone to gather a comprehensive and scholarly system of principles pertaining to the structure of verse. In his paper on Rossetti he suggestively writes that "his poetry has all the grace of force and all the force of grace. It is light, flexible, delicate and rapid, its impulses always being toward harmony and perfection." Nothing offends Swinburne more than to speak of poetic form as mere

form, apart from the subject-matter and spirit beneath it, while he severely satirizes those one-sided and but partially informed critics who hold that "a man may have a strong and perfect style who has nothing to convey with courage under it." That "brilliant faculty of expression" of which Stedman speaks as belonging to our author must be seen and appreciated by any careful reader of his writings, whether in verse or in prose. In an age notable for the poetry of form he has not only held his place among his distinguished contemporaries, but has really opened the question as to his possible supremacy. It is by reason of this lack of formal grace and constructive art that he sharply rebuked the poet Morris and gave to the late laureate his warmest praise. This skill of hand is seen in the richness and aptness of his English diction; in the nicely adjusted relation of part to part in the architecture of a poem or an essay; in symmetry and naturalness of outline; in fact, in all that properly belongs to versification in poetry and to construction in prose. As a poet he is, in the best sense, a versifier, a maker of verse, as a painter makes a picture, or a sculptor a statue. In the Old English sense of the word "poet," he is a shaper of material, a finished mechanic in the

technic of the work, an artist in verse, happily combining, as few combine, the spontaneity of song with the perfection of verbal structure. In no one particular of such workmanship is he so masterful as in that of rhythm. That melodious flow of verse which follows with unvarying regularity the accentual intervals of tone and syllable has never been carried to greater relative completeness. So resonant is the movement that nearly all his lyrics might be called songs. As we read them, we are inclined to sing them, in that they are musical as well as metrical, in accordance with the theory of Poe and Sidney Lanier. They have that quality of sonorousness which marks all highly rhythmic verse, and which thus adapts them to oral and vocable expression. In reviewing his poetry for proof of this artistic excellence, it is quite invidious to make selection. The poems throughout are so marked by it that the reader may be asked to read them as they stand upon the successive pages. Conspicuous, perhaps, above all others are the choruses of the best dramas. Next to these are the collections of lyrics, "A Midsummer Holiday," "Songs of the Spring-tides," "Songs before Sunrise," "Songs of Two Nations," "Century of Roundels," and "Poems



and Ballads." These idylls and lyrics are as delicate and beautiful as they are impassioned, revealing the almost inimitable way in which the poet has expressed the deepest feeling in the choicest phrase and line. The word "exquisite" would well describe it. Despite an occasional quaintness of language and an unduly free use of epithet and alliteration, and what has been called "expression," the poems as a whole will bear the closest critical inspection. No Victorian verse will more successfully abide such a test. How striking and beautiful is the variety of meter which the poet employs, purposely relieving, at frequent intervals, the attention of the reader, and carrying him on by natural transitions from one metrical structure to another! In such a collection as "A Midsummer Holiday," with the nine separate selections, we note a wonderful wealth of metrical and rhythmic art. The opening lines of a few of them will indicate his resonance:—

"The sea is awake, and the sound of the song of the  
joy of her waking is rolled."

"Spray of song that springs in April, light of  
love that laughs through May."

"East and north, a waste of waters, south and west."

"The sea is at ebb, and the sound of her utmost word."

All is thus varied and facile and artistically attractive, and it is musical. Even in the author's prose writings, though most of them are in the form of didactic criticism, the hand of the poet is visible. It is an order of prose so rhythmical that it is not only poetical prose, as is that of Hawthorne, but almost divisible into foot and line. In a word, Swinburne is preëminently a poet, in that what he conceives he conceives through the imagination rather than through the intellect, and in deference, first of all, to the most exacting demands of æsthetic taste. He has the instincts and the culture of the bard, -inspiration and execution in due relation and joint activity. He may thus be classed with Burns and Mrs. Browning, as also with Keats and Tennyson, and is a master in more than one department of poetic expression.

Thus far by way of praise; but there is also needed a word of adverse comment, pertaining particularly to the personality of the poet as it reveals itself in the character and impression of his verse. We note two blemishes of special prominence.

1. The first blemish is *the undue presence of the sensual*. Mr. Selkirk, in his able discussion "Ethics and Æsthetics," would sharply rebuke our

author here for his unnatural divorce of these two forms of literary art. Even so free-handed a critic as Le Gallienne, in his "Religion of a Literary Man," would rebuke it. Devey speaks of his verse as "pagan and voluptuous," belonging to the "blasé style of the modern school of French novelists." He represents that "fleshly school" of English and Continental verse which even yet has far too large a following. That poetic passion of which we have spoken, so commendable in its place, is thus, at times, grossly abused in the line of the lower instincts. Genuine sentiment is too often confounded with sensuality. That "sensuous" element of which Milton speaks as essential to verse is totally different from that sensual element that finds its most congenial exercise in the morally questionable, and aims directly at the exaltation of animalism. In the review of this blemish, however, upon the good name and work of Swinburne, care must be taken lest the rebuke be too sweeping. As to the author's earliest verse, no apology should be made. It is low and carnal, and as unworthy in itself as it is of the better antecedents of English letters. So decided is the offense against literary ethics that it is possible that the poet may never wholly redeem

his record in the eyes of the soundest criticism. Swinburne's later verse is substantially free from these violations of moral law. "Not a note has been uttered," says Stedman, "to which the most rigid of moralists can honestly object." Existing objections, therefore, must refer less to any open transgressions than to the absence of high spiritual tone, that exalted refinement of thought and word which would seem to be germane to the very nature and ideals of poetry as one of the fine arts. Critics thus rightly contrast Swinburne and Tennyson as to their respective representations of womanhood and, in general, as to what may be styled their respective ethical attitude and outlook. It is quite too evident, as we read, that the surviving poet is still under Continental influence more fully than it is safe to be. It is this that gives to his conception of love that peculiar quality and feature that connects it with the lower rather than the higher view, and inclines us to repair to the more tonic and wholesome pages of Mrs. Browning and Robert Browning and the clean-minded author of "Godiva" and "Enoch Arden."

2. A second blemish is found in *the undue presence of the skeptical*. In this particular, there has been far less change for the better in the poet's

later work. Though he has not shocked the moral sense of England as he did at the outset, we look in vain for any radical change of view or purpose. We note, throughout, a strange unreligious medley of pantheism, materialism, and bald atheism, anything but biblical theism. Poetic passion at times overreaches itself in vindictive utterances against the accepted doctrines of Christendom, if not, indeed, of natural religion. As has been said of him, "He tramples upon Christian dogmas with the spirit of Celsus." In some of his shorter poems, as "Ilicet" and "The Garden of Proserpine," this objectionable, non-religious sentiment finds place, as we read in the latter:—

"From too much love of living,  
From hope and fear set free,  
We thank with brief thanksgiving,  
Whatever gods may be,  
That no life lives forever;  
That dead men rise up never;  
That even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere safe to sea."

This is blank and cheerless sentiment, expressed in terms of the baldest indifference, as to what is or is not, as to what may or may not be. So in his poems "Before a Crucifix," "Hymn of Man," "Genesis," "In the Bay," "Felise," and others.

All this is Byronic, and reminds us, in parts, of the days of Dryden and Charles the Second. There are separate passages, and even poems, in Swinburne that seem to be purely theistic. There are many places in which, as he now confesses, Romanism is accepted as preferable to that Protestant faith and order which he is inclined to satirize. He praises Robert Browning and Cardinal Newman in that they have escaped "such viler forms and more hideous outcomes of Christianity." He congratulates Rossetti in that his name is not to be found among "those passionate evangelists of positive beliefs" who dwarf themselves and their fellows by the restrictions of creed. In fact, the poet takes his own way, despite all English tradition and teaching to the contrary, and persists in his unchristian and anti-christian attitude. He is an out-and-out free-thinker in the sphere of verse, and, even when employing an evangelical terminology, is in spirit defiant enough to lead his devotees straight to the negation of all accepted beliefs. All this is perilous to what is best in modern letters, and doubly so from the fact that the sensualism and the skepticism alike are embodied in finished form and express, in many instances, the highest results of ar-

tistic skill in verse. It is singularly fortunate, however, that among our eminent modern poets Swinburne stands alone in this regard, widely separated, as he is, from Morris and Tennyson and the Brownings, as also from such of his contemporaries as Edwin Arnold and William Watson and Alfred Austin, — a signal example of a literary monopolist in the abuse and misuse of special trusts and gifts.

As to the prose of Swinburne, it is not our purpose to write at length, as this part of his authorship is seen in his "Essays and Studies," "Miscellanies," "Studies in Prose and Poetry," and studies, respectively, of "Ben Jonson," "Victor Hugo," and "Shakespeare." It is, however, important and gratifying to state that he is in his prose often at his best, intellectually and ethically, and has made a valid contribution to British letters. Characteristically free, as the discussions themselves demand, from any overt violation of moral propriety, and pervaded by a clearly defined purpose to enlighten and stimulate his readers, they serve to institute an amount of difference between the poet and prose writer rarely seen in literary annals, and not at all in those of England. Despite the most conspicuous faults of his prose,

a degree of undue ornament, and an over-statement and verboseness, and one-sided judgments, his various essays and studies well deserve the attention of every student of our vernacular literature.

Some of our best critics see no evidence of lasting fame in the poetry of Swinburne, and assign it well down in the secondary order of English verse. A more generous criticism regards our author as "the foremost of the younger school of British poets," the exponent of "another cycle of creative song." In determining, therefore, the rightful status of such a poet, it must first be clearly ascertained just what we mean by poetry. If it consists in the emotive and æsthetic only, Swinburne's place is assured among the best of bards. If it involve, also, high creative function and philosophic imagination, his rank must be lower. The test is just here. A careful study of his poetic work will show us, as we have suggested, that he writes upon the level of sentiment and structure rather than upon that of original conception and ideal. There is here, therefore, a clear limitation of range. Not only has he written no epic, but could not, in so far as we can see, successfully have produced one, any more than Burns could have done so. He lacks the epic reach and



function, though some critics have strongly insisted that they detect in his verse an epic feature and ability. He finds his province and his limit within the lyric, idyllic, and semi-dramatic. If he has, in a sense, succeeded as a dramatist in "Atalanta" and "Bothwell," he has failed in other dramatic attempts, and sufficiently often to mark the absence of that sustained histrionic power which indicates the master. As already suggested, it is in prose criticism and description, as in his "Study of Shakespeare," that his mental powers find their fullest exercise. If confined, however, to his poetry, we must assign him to the second group of nineteenth-century authors, by reason of his failure in the line of the inventive and constructive. There is no "faculty divine," no wide dramatic outlook, no profound lyric note, nothing of that Dantean order whose native air is among things supernal and inspiring. We find in Swinburne an exquisite artist of what Sidney Lanier has called, the science of verse. We find lyric feeling, delicacy of taste and tone and touch—in a word, finish, form, art. Swinburne is a litterateur in the South-European sense of the term; an exponent of harmony and poetic culture; a stylist in verse. Just to the degree in which the poetic drift of the age

is toward verbal affluence and æsthetic elegance of phrase and line, he may be said to be in sympathy with it, as he is also unfortunately in sympathy with it just to the degree in which the philosophic and religious drift is toward indifferentism and the bold negation of fundamental truth. To the degree, however, in which the poetic drift is toward a broad and high intellectual outlook, and the philosophic and religious drift is toward evangelical faith, or what Mr. Balfour calls the foundations of belief, his verse is out of touch with his time, and cannot minister to us in the hours of our deepest needs.

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