

TWELVE YEARS OF BRITISH SONG.*

THE TYPICAL VICTORIAN PERIOD.



WITH respect to the poetry of Great Britain, the fancy may be indulged that this year's festivals not only celebrate the rounding of a brilliant and distinct period, but stand for a kind of Secular Games as well.

It is just a century since Burns and Coleridge and Wordsworth were in the joy of that new dawn, when

“To be young was very heaven”;

and no other land than theirs, meanwhile, has shown a more unbroken procession of imaginative poets. There was a brief nooning between the early and later rehearsals, but the music of great voices has never wholly stopped. This still is heard, though more than a decade of years ago it seemed, and rightly, as if the typical Victorian era were complete. But in the summer of the North the last hours of a day whose wings of light come near to touching its successor's,—although the winds fall and the chief workers mostly go to rest,—have a luster of their own. The survival of influences that long since became historic is a chance coincidence with the prolongation of a fortunate reign, and due to veteran leaders whose strength has been more than equal to their day.

Tennyson and Browning, although two generations of younger men pay homage to them, have been, with the exception of Swinburne, the most unflagging poets of the recent interval. Moreover,—and maugre the flings of wits who judge them by trifles and failures, and who neither care for nor comprehend their important work,—they have given us much that is up to the standard of their prime. In no respect have they been superannuated or piping out of date,—little as they have had to do with the jest and prettiness, the vivacious experiments, with which youth busies itself ere an hour comes for serious attention to the conduct of a new movement.

Yet if literary eras, like those of Elizabeth and Anne, are characterized by a special style or spirit, that for which the Victorian is already historic, on its poetic side, results from certain idyllic and reflective tendencies, with their in-

terblendings and outgrowths. It ceased to be dominant before 1875, going off, as I pointed out, into æsthetic neo-Romanticism on the one hand, and a sub-dramatic or psychological method on the other. If life may be judged by its mature and most prolonged activities, the Victorian school will be recognized as we have recognized it. It is beyond ordinary precedent that its two chief poets are still in voice, and still preëminent. Of Browning it may be said that he has bided his time, and now is the master of an enthusiastic following. But even Tennyson has charged his later idylls with passion, and succeeded in making at least his lyrics dramatic. On the technical side, recent craftsmen take their cue from the forms, melody, color of Swinburne and Rossetti. What differs and is strictly novel, though much in vogue, seldom aspires to the higher range in which these elder leaders have moved almost alone.

The conjectural length of a poet's life doubtless is not yet reckoned in the tables of insurance actuaries. But the longevity of modern poets really seems to have been governed by their mental cast. The romancers, and the lyrists of great sensibility or intense experience, quicken their heart-beats and often have died young. Many poets of “self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,” whose intellect is the regulator of well-ordered lives, have lived long: such men as Emerson and Longfellow in America,—as Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning in England. The recent drift—and they have strengthened it—has been toward the rule of intellect over passion, and the brain-power of such masters has maintained them in wonderful vitality and productiveness to an advanced age.

However this may be, the most suggestive portion of the record now before us is that concerned with the last-named poets. England alone can now boast of two so equal in years and fame, yet so distinct in genius, and still producing works unsurpassed by the efforts of their juniors. Like two noble galleys they still head the fleet, and with all sails spread, though the mists of an unknown sea are straight before them. As for the laureate, all England knows him by heart. Successive ranks of generous and cultured youth have doted on his works, so that his gradual age is watched and understood, somewhat as in a family the

* This paper consists of extracts from a forthcoming Supplement to the next edition of “Victorian Poets,”—a book first published in 1875, much of whose contents

originally appeared in this magazine. From the sections here given, the writer's notices of many poets, dramatists, etc., are necessarily omitted.

bodily and mental changes of its revered master are observed by the household. At times his verse, and oftener than that of his more dramatic compeer's, has sprung from sudden outbursts of feeling, and never more so than in the fine heat and choler of his later years. New readers may not comprehend these moods, but they are intelligible to those who have owed him so much in the past, and do not affect our judgment of his long career.

TENNYSON.

A GOOD deal of force has been expended by the laureate to disprove the claim that he would not greatly excel as a dramatist for either the closet or the stage. His mental and constructive gifts are such that, if he had begun as a "writer of plays," he doubtless would have been successful,—but never, I believe, could have reached his present eminence. His first drama, "Queen Mary," seemed to confirm an early prediction that he might yet produce a tolerable work of that kind, though only by a *tour de force*. Since then, through sheer will and persistency, he has composed a succession of dramas, historical and romantic; but neither will nor judgment, nor the ambition to prove his mastery of the highest and most inclusive form of literature, has enabled him in the afternoon of life to triumph as a dramatist. The first actor of England, with matchless resources for theatrical presentation, was able more than once to make the performance of a play by Tennyson a notable and picturesque event, but nothing more; nor have those produced with equal care by others become any part of the stage repertory. There are charmingly poetic qualities in the minor pieces, and one of them, "The Cup," is not without effects,—but even this will not hold the stage,—while "The Falcon" and "The Promise of May" are plainly amateurish. They contain lovely songs and trifles, but when a great master merges the poet in the playwright he must be judged accordingly. "Harold" and "Becket" are of a more imposing cast, and have significance as examples of what may—and of what may not—be effected by a strong artist in a department to which he is not led by compulsive instinct. Their ancestral themes are in every way worthy of an English poet. "Harold," in style and language, is much like the Idylls of the King, nor does it greatly surpass them in dramatic quality, though a work cast in the standard five-act mold. There is a strong scene where the last of the Saxon kings is forced to swear allegiance to William of Normandy. As a whole, the work is conventional, its battle-scenes reminiscent of Shakspeare and Scott, and the diction tinged with the

author's old mannerisms. "Becket," seven years later, is his nearest approach to a dramatic masterpiece, and at a different time might have ranged itself in stage-literature. It is quite superior, as such, to pieces by Talfourd, Knowles, etc., that are still revived; but this is poor praise indeed for one of Tennyson's fame, and assuredly not worth trying for. It must be admitted that years of self-abstractness, of intimacy with books and nature, are not likely to develop the gift of even a born novelist or dramatic poet. Human life is his proper study: his task the expression of its struggle, passion, mirth and sorrow, virtue and crime,—and these must be transcribed by one that has been whirled in their eddies or who observes them very closely from the shore.

In striking contrast, Tennyson's recent lyrical poetry is the afterglow of a still radiant genius. Here we see undimmed the fire and beauty of his natural gift, and wisdom increased with age. What a collection, short as it is, forms the volume of "Ballads" issued in his seventy-first year! It opens with the thoroughly English story of "The First Quarrel," with its tragic culmination,—

"And the boat went down that night,— the boat went down that night!"

Country life is what he has observed, and he reflects it with truth of action and dialect. "The Northern Cobbler" and "The Village Wife" could be written only by the idyllist whose Yorkshire ballads delighted us in 1866. But here are greater things, two or three at his highest mark. The passion and lyrical might of "Rizpah" never have been exceeded by the author, nor, I think, by any other poet of his day. "The Revenge" and "Lucknow" are magnificent ballads. "Sir John Oldcastle" and "Columbus" are not what Browning would have made of them; but, again, "The Voyage of Maeldune" is a weird and vocal fantasy, unequally poetic, with the well-known touch in every number. Five years later another book of purely Tennysonian ballads appeared. Its title-piece, "Tiresias," may be classed with "Lucretius" and "Tithonus," yet scarcely equals the one as a study, or the other for indefinable poetic charm. "The Wreck" and "Despair" are full of power, and there are two more of the unique dialect-pieces, "To-morrow" and "The Spinster's Sweet-arts." A final Arthurian idyll, "Balin and Balan," is below the level of the work whose bulk it enlarges. "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade," much inferior to the Balaklavan lyric, shows that will cannot supply the heat excited by a thrilling and instant occasion.

A poem in this volume, "The Ancient Sage," consists of speculations on the Nameless,—

and on the universal question which presents itself ever more strenuously as life's shadows lengthen. In this sense, it is of kin to Browning's "Ferishtah" and "Jochannan Hakkadosh." Still more noteworthy is the impetuous elegiac, "Vastness," written in 1885, and as yet not placed in a collection. The persiflage bestowed upon this, and afterward, in various quarters, upon the second "Locksley Hall," proclaimed the rise of a generation not wonted to the poet's habit of speech; more, it revealed one out of patience with its creeds, and consoling itself by avoiding resolute thought upon what confronts and challenges our mortality. Tennyson, smitten by the death of a friend, reflects that not here alone dear faces steadily vanish,—but

"Many a planet by many a sun may roll
with the dust of a vanish'd race."

In the knowledge of this, what are all our politics, turmoil, love, ambition, but "a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million million of suns?" What is it all, forsooth, if at last we end,

"Swallowed in Vastness, lost in Silence, drown'd
in the deeps of a meaningless Past"?

As was natural, the sequel to "Locksley Hall" was received with more than curiosity—with a certain philosophical interest. I do not see that it is out of temper with that fervid chant which, forty-five years before, seized upon all young hearts and caught the ear of the world. Here is the same protest against conditions: in youth, a revolt from convention and class-tyranny; in age, a protest against lawlessness and irreverence. The poet now as then resists the main grievance—but with an old man's increased petulance of speech. His after-song does not wreak itself upon the master passions of love and ambition, and hence fastens less strongly on the thoughts of the young; nor does it come with the unused rhythm, the fresh and novel cadence, that stamped the now hackneyed measure with a lyric's name. Yet, as to its art and imagery, the same effects are there, differing only in a more vigorous method, an intentional roughness, from the individual early verse. The new burthen is termed pessimistic, but, for all its impatient summary of ills, it ends with a cry of faith. And so ends "Vastness":

"Peace, let it be! for I loved him, and love
him forever: The dead are not dead but alive."

If Browning is more intelligibly an optimist, it is because he studies mankind from a scientific point of view, keeping his own temper and spirits withal. He has a more abiding and "saving faith" in the immanence of a beneficent ruling power. Both these poets have deepened and widened their outlook: the one listens to the roll of the ages, and marks the

courses of the stars; the other pierces the soul, to find the secret of a universe in the microcosm, man. Tennyson is the more impressed by that science which observes the astronomic and cosmic whole of nature, while biology and psychology are anticipated by Browning and subjected to his usufruct.

When the laureate was raised to the peerage—a station which he twice declined in middle life—he gained some attention from the satirists, and his acceptance of rank no doubt was honestly bemoaned by many sturdy radicals. It is difficult, nevertheless, to find any violation of principle or taste in the receipt by England's favorite and official poet of such an honor, bestowed at the climax of his years and fame. Republicans should bear in mind that the republic of letters is the only one to which Alfred Tennyson owed allegiance; that he was the "first citizen" of an ancient monarchy which honored letters by gratefully conferring upon him its high traditional award. It would be truckling for an American, loyal to his own form of government, to receive an aristocratic title from some foreign potentate. Longfellow, for example, promptly declined an order tendered him by the King of Italy. But a sense of fitness, and even patriotism, should make it easy for an Englishman, faithful to a constitutional monarchy, to accept any well-earned dignity under that system. In every country it is thought worth while for one to be the founder of his family; and in Great Britain no able man could do more for descendants, to whom he is not sure of bequeathing his talents, than by handing down a class-privilege, even though it confers no additional glory upon the original winner. Extreme British democrats, who openly or covertly wish to change the form of government, and even communists, are aware that Tennyson does not belong to their ranks. He has been, as I long since wrote, a liberal conservative: liberal in humanity and progressive thought, strictly conservative in allegiance to the national system. As for that, touch but the territory, imperil the institutions, of Great Britain, and Swinburne himself—the pupil of Landor, Mazzini, and Hugo—betrays the blood in his veins. Tennyson, a liberal of the Maurice group, has been cleverly styled by Whitman a "poet of feudalism"; he is a celebrator of the past, of sovereignty and knighthood; he is no lost leader, "just for a ribbon" leaving some gallant cause forsown or any song unsung. In all fairness, his acceptance of rank savors less of inconsistency than does the logic of those who rail at the world for neglect of genius, and then upbraid them both for coming to an understanding.

As a final word about Lord Tennyson, a laureate of thirty-seven years' service, it may

be said that no predecessor has filled his office with fewer lapses from the quality of a poet. Southey's patriotic rubbish was no better, and not much worse, than his verse at large. Wordsworth, during the few years of his incumbency, wrote little official verse. Tennyson has freshened the greenness of the laurel; a vivid series of national odes and ballads is the result of his journey as its wearer. That some of his perfunctory salutations and pæans have been failures, notably the Jubilee ode of the current year, is evidence that genius does not always obey orders. The Wellington ode, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," the dedications of "In Memoriam" and the "Idylls," and such noble ballads as those of "Grenville," "The Revenge," "Lucknow"—these are his vouchers for the wreath, and, whether inspired by it or not, are henceforth a secure portion of his country's song.

BROWNING.

OLD lovers of Tennyson feel that he is best understood by those who grew up with his poems, and profited by his advance to the mature art and power of "In Memoriam" and the four chief "Idylls." Browning began and continued in quite another way. A neophyte might as well get hold of his middle-life work, and thence read backward and forward. If one prefers to gain an introduction to the author of "The Inn Album" from a sustained poem, rather than from his lyrics, nothing better could be chosen than that nervous, coherent work, the first in date of his productions during the time we are considering. I recall its effect upon one or two of my younger friends, who ascribe to it their first sense of those profound emotions which set the spirit free. Seldom is there a work more inwrought with characterization, fateful gathering, intense human passion, tragic action to which the realistic scene and manners serve as heightening foils, than this thrilling epic of men and women whose destinies are compressed within a single day. The tragedy ends with the death of two sinners, whose souls are first laid bare. No one of Browning's works is better proportioned, or less sophisticated in diction,—the latter, in truth, being never suffered to divert attention from the movement and interest of this electric novel in verse. It was quickly followed by a various little book, "Pacchiorotto." The poet now turns upon his critics, with countering satire and a defense of his hardy methods; but he welcomes, in title-piece and epilogue, "friends who are sound" to his Thirty-Four Port, promising "nettle-broth" galore to the feeble and maudlin. Of the shorter efforts, "A Forgiveness" displays to the full his dramatic and psychological mastery.

Its verse is modeled with the strong right hand that painted "My Last Duchess," to which it is in all respects a vigorous companion-piece.

A third translation from the Greek drama, the "Agamemnon" of Æschylus, is marked by fidelity to the text, gained through a free disregard of English idiom, but scarcely has the sweetness and grace of "Balaustion" and "Aristophanes' Apology."

The volume entitled "La Saisiaz: The Two Poets of Croisic," like "The Inn Album," commends itself to lay readers, being direct and forcible, with abundant food for thought. The opening poem, in the "Locksley Hall" measure, bravely considers the problem of mortal and immortal life. Its successor reeks with humorous wisdom, irony, knowledge of the world. An ideal lyric supplements them, inscribed to the woman whose aid to the writer's song is symbolized by the cricket's note that helped out a minstrel's tune when his lyre had broken a string. But the finest and richest display of Browning's triune lyrical, narrative, and analytical vigor, which he has given us since the memorable "Dramatic Lyrics" and "Men and Women," is found in the series (1879-80) of "Dramatic Idylls." These silence the critic's complaint of the neglect or dilution of the poet's original genius. The most impressive of the metrical tales are "Martin Ralph," "Clive"—a marvelous evocation—and "Ned Bratts"—a Holbeinish conjecture of the effect on a dull brutish hind of Bunyan's teachings. "Pheidippides," a figure of the Athenian runner with news from Marathon, is superb, and "Doctor ——" quite unapproachable for jest and satire. The story of "Muylykeh" and his Arab steed is already a classic. Always throughout these vivid impersonations, as in "Ivan Ivanovitch" and "Pietro of Albano," the magician's supreme intent is to reveal

"What's under lock and key —
Man's soul!"

"Jocoseria" (1883), made up of brief and sturdy poems, illustrates again the author's habit of exploration through all literatures for his texts and themes. After the grim, pathetic ballad of "Donald" and the grimmer "Christina and Monaldeschi," we have in "Jochannan Hakkadosh" the vital lessons of the book. The Rabbi, and the pupils who find his sayings hard indeed, are no inapt types of our modern poet and his circle. As in "Paracelsus," Browning's favorite theorem continues to be the soul's real victory achieved in the apparent failures of earthly life. His latter years are given more and more to the consideration of eternal rather than temporal questions. Under the guise of a dervish he proffers, in "Ferishtah's Fancies," a sum of hopeful wis-

dom as to the meaning of existence, the goodness of the Creator. The thought, like all great thought, is simple, yet put so subtle-wise as to make it well that our latter-day Solomon has the fame that tempts a world to study the riddling homilies of his old age. To those who balk thereat no comfort is vouchsafed except such as they find in "Pambo" of the preceding volume,—for he still merrily "offends with his tongue," though clearly an interpreter of the purest theistic spirit of our time. My brief references to Browning's plenteous aftermath close with his "Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their Day." His intellect disports itself more than ever in these half-dozen citations of far-away personages whom he raises from the dead at will. The work is capricious enough, but he does not forget, in the most rugged and obscure passages, to give us interludes that prove his voice still unimpaired. "Gerard de Lareise" is smooth and delicate enough for a fastidious ear, with rare bits of song included, and music itself receives expert attention in "Charles Avison." The prologue and epilogue of this book are not its least essential matters. All in all, however, it is not so ultimate and satisfactory as one could desire. At whatever worth he may rate the clubs of quidnuncs associated to study him, he does not disdain to make riddles for them, as in the *Prelude*, and to choose remote, obscure topics for their discussion—somewhat as the wizard Michael Scott, compelled to supply tasks for his familiar, succeeded at last by ordering him to make ropes out of sea-sand. He is right in affording them no special clues, for that which, written in verse, can be conveyed as well by a paraphrase, certainly is not poetry.

Most of the foregoing work, so varied and affluent, is in rhymed verse. Great respect is paid to the observance of the rhyme, even though meaning and measure halt for it. Whitman's Hebraic chant, often vibrating with profound rhythmical harmony, is the outcome of a belief that rhymes are hackneyed and trivial; and as Browning's rhymes are not seldom forced and artificial to a degree reached by no other master, the question is asked why he should rhyme at all, why he does not confine himself to his typical blank-verse and other free-hand measures.

To this it might be replied that he was born a poet, with the English lyrical ear and accentual instinct; that he rhymes by nature, and exquisitely, as we see from all his simpler melodies, and that he is not the man to slight an intuitive note of expression. With all his headlong tyranny over restraints of form, an adherence to rhyme, as in the case of Swinburne, is "a brake upon his speech"; otherwise

his fluency, although the result of endlessly changeable thought, would quite outleap the effective limits of art. That the brakes creak and groan is a proof they are doing their work. But what of his involved and parenthetical style? A rule concerning language is that it has power to formulate not only problems of absolute geometry, but those of imaginative thought; and clearness of style has been a grace of the first poets and thinkers. When Browning's tangled syntax is involuntary, it may denote a struggling process of thought, for the style is the man. But, in defense of such of these "hard readings" as seem voluntary and of aforethought, we call to mind the oriental feeling that truth is most oracular when couched in emblems and deep phrases. Nature arms her sweetest kernels with a prickly and resistful exterior, so that they are procured by toil which gives them worth. This poet surrounds his treasures with labyrinths and thorn-hedges that stimulate the reader's onset. The habit is defensible when the treasures are so genuine. To experts and thinkers, who do not need a lure to make them value the quest, such things are an irritation and open to the disfavor shown by many who yield to none in respect for Browning's creative power.

BROWNING CLUBS.

YET it is plain that both the style and matter of his work, after years of self-respecting adherence to his own ways, have at last given occasion for the most royal warrant of fame and appreciation ever granted to poet or sage while still in the flesh. To be sure there never was a time when such a result could more reasonably be expected. Our period exceeds all others, even the Alexandrian, in literary bustle and research. What organized phalanxes for the study and annotation of our classics,—of course, and as is fitting, with the Shakspeare societies at their head! How rude the capture of Shelley, the avatar of our ideality and lyrical feeling! Old and young, even the "little hordes" of Fourier's socialistic dream, divide the ethereal raiment of the poet's poet, that each may bear away some shred of its gossamer. Shelley's lifelong and reverent lovers, who yield themselves silently to the imponderable, divine beauty of his numbers, and who would as soon make an autopsy of Lycidas himself as to approach his verse with hook and scalpel, look with equal wonder at the tribes which now claim their poet as if by right of discovery and the select few who burden his music with their notes and scholia. To its transformation into a "cult" they apply the stricture of a famous preacher who was concerned at the multiplication of

cheap Bibles. The evangelical bodies, he declared, by placing Holy Writ in every lobby and corridor, have dispelled the sacred awe in which it was held, and in fact have made it "as common as a pack of cards." Feeling, taste, instinct,—all are against making a textbook of Shelley's poetry, almost the last reliquary guarded, with some right of distant kinship, by those who claim a humble inheritance of song. The sudden uprising of many Browning clubs is the latest symptom of the rage for elucidation. The like of it has not been witnessed since the days of the neo-Platonists and grammarians; nor were there a thousand printing-presses at the command of the Alexandrian scholiasts. Not only more than one University quadrangle, but every mercantile town, from London, where the poet dwells, to the farthest outpost of the western continent, has its central Browning Society, from which dependents radiate like the little spiders that spin their tiny strands near the maternal web. Emerson was a seer; Browning is a virile poet and scholar; but it has been the same with the followers of both—a Browning student of the first order can do much for us,—while one of the third or fourth remove, whose degree is expressed algebraically as $B^{\frac{1}{n}}$ or $\sqrt[n]{B}$, may be and often is as prosaic a claimant to special illumination as one is apt to meet. The "study" of Browning takes strong hold upon theorists, analysts, didacticians, who care little for poetry in itself, and who, like Chinese artists, pay more respect to the facial dimensions of his Muse than to her essential beauty and the divine light of her eyes. The master himself may well view with distrust certain phases of a movement originating with his more-favored disciples; nor is poetry that requires annotation in its own time, surer, on that account, of supremacy in the future. Perhaps the best that can be said of this matter is that something out of the common is needed to direct attention to a great original genius, and to secure for a poet, after his long experience of neglect, some practical return for the fruits of his imagination.

A contrast between the objective, or classical, dramatic mode and that of Browning is not derogatory to the resources of either. In the former, the author's thinking is done outside of the work; the work itself, the product of thought, stands as a creation, with the details of its molding unexplained. The other exhibits the play of the constructor's thought. The result, as affecting the imagination, justifies the conventional aim—to make us see, as in real life, the outside of persons and events, concerning ourselves rather with actual speech and movement than with a search for hidden

influences, esoteric laws. To read one of Browning's psychical analyses is like consulting a watch that has a transparent glass, instead of a cap of gold, surmounting the interior. We forget the beauty and proportions of the jeweled time-piece, even its office as a chronicler of time, and are absorbed by the intricate and dexterous, rather than artistic, display of the works within. Here is movement, here is curious and exact machinery—here is the very soul of the thing, no doubt; but a watch of the kind that marks the time as if by some will and guerdon of its own is even more suggestive and often as satisfying to its possessor. All the more, Browning represents the introspective science of the new age. Regard one of his men or women: you detect not only the striking figure, the impassioned human speech and conduct, but as if from some electric coil so intense a light is shot beyond that every organ and integument are revealed. You see the blood in its secretest channels, the convolutions and gyrations of the molecular brain, all the mechanism that obeys the impulse of the resultant personage. Attention is diverted from the entire creation to the functions of its parts. Events become of import chiefly for the currents which promote them, or which they initiate. Browning's genius has made this under-world a tributary of its domain. As a mind-reader, then, he is the most dramatic of poets. The fact that, after scrutinizing his personages, he translates the thoughts of all into his own tongue, may lessen their objective value, but those wonted to the language find nothing better suited to their taste.

His judicial acceptance of things as they are is largely a matter of temperament, and does not imply that he is more devout and theistic, or a sounder optimist, than his chief compeer. The broadening effect of experience as a man of the world also has much to do with it. Both Tennyson and Browning are highly intellectual. The former's instinct for art and beauty is supreme, and mental analytics yield to them in his work. To Browning poetic effects, of which he has proved himself a master, often are nothing but impedimenta, to be discarded when fairly in pursuit of psychological discovery.

A conclusion with respect to Tennyson, in my review of his career from a much earlier point of time, was that he would be regarded long hereafter as, "all in all, the fullest representative" of the "refined and complex Victorian age." To this I added that he had carried his idyllic mode "to such perfection that its cycle seems already near an end" and "a new generation is calling for work of a different order, for more vital passion and dramatic force." After many years, he still seems

to me the exponent of the typical Victorian period—that in which the sentiment poetized in the “*Idylls*” and “*In Memoriam*” was at its height. It is equally true that Browning was in reserve as the leader-elect of the present succeeding time. The Queen is still on her throne, but her reign outlasts the schools to which her name belongs. New movements are initiated, and Browning is their interpreter so far as poetic insight is concerned. To this we only have to add that he is an eminent example of the justice of our exception to Taine’s dogma of the invariable subjection of an artist to his accidental conditions. He has proved that his genius is of the kind that creates its own environment and makes for itself a new atmosphere, whether of heaven or of earth.

SWINBURNE.

SWINBURNE also has been a leader, particularly on the side of form and expression, and through his brilliant command of effects which novices are just as sure to copy as young musicians are to adopt the “*methods*” of a Chopin or a Liszt. Obvious tendencies of the new school reveal the influence of Browning, modified structurally by Swinburne’s lyrical abandonment and feats of diction and rhythm.

As he reaches middle life, the volume of his productions becomes remarkable, putting to confusion those who doubted his vitality and staying-power. His second classical drama, “*Erechtheus*,” is severely antique in mold, with strong text and choruses. But it is relatively frigid, apart from common interest, and lacks something of the fire and melody of *Atalanta*. The author’s compulsive lyrical faculty, however, has not ceased its exercise—the resulting odes, songs, and manifold brief poems having been collected chiefly in the second series of “*Poems and Ballads*,” and in “*Studies in Song*,” “*Songs of the Springtides*,” “*A Century of Roundels*,” and “*A Midsummer Holiday*.” Their variety and splendor sustain the minstrel’s early promise:—any one of the collections would make a reputation. If they have been greeted with less than our old wonder and relish, it is due to the unforgettable novelty of those first impressions, and to the profusion of this poet’s exhaustless outgiving. Masterpieces of their kind among the new songs and ballads are the “*Ave atque Vale*,” of which I wrote in a former essay, and “*A Forsaken Garden*.” The translations from Villon charm the ear with a witching sense possibly unfelt by the vagabond balladist’s contemporaries. Swinburne is still at the head of British elegiac and memorial poets. Witness the twin odes in honor of Landor and Hugo, covering the entire progress of their

achievements, and the second ode to Hugo, the lines to Mazzini, and other compositions in the highest mood of tributary song. A pervasive element of these books is that relating to the sea, of which their author is a familiar and votary. One of them (as also the poem “*By the North Sea*”) is inscribed to his “*best friend, Theodore Watts*,” the poet and critic to whom Mr. Swinburne is indebted for loyal companionship and devotion. The “*Songs of the Springtides*” are surcharged with endless harmony of ocean winds and surges. “*Thalassius*,” “*On the Cliffs*,” “*The Garden of Cymodoce*,” full of alliterative and billowy cadence, are fashioned in a classical and nobly swelling mold. The unique poem of Sappho, “*On the Cliffs*,” was suggested by the fancy that the nightingales still repeat fragments of her Lesbian song. “*A Midsummer Holiday*” takes us again by the sea and through the ‘long-shore lanes of England; its refrain—“*Our father Chaucer, here we praise thy name*”—recalls the enduring freshness of a poet to whom still the avowal can be made that—

“Each year that England clothes herself with May
She takes thy likeness on her.”

Elaborate and refined as all these pieces are, they exhale a purely English atmosphere. “*A Century of Roundels*” is the most simple and distinctive of the lyrical collections. Among the noteworthy roundels are several discoursing with Death, and those on Autumn and Winter; best of all, the clear-cut series on “*A Baby’s Death*.” In the latter, as in the cradle-songs and other notes of infancy and childhood, he is winning and tender—in all his poems on age, reverent and eulogistic. The artistic motive of his political outbursts, at various crises, is quite subordinate to their writer’s impulsive views; their satire and invective possibly act as safety-valves and are of interest to curious students of the poetic temperament in its extremes.

Not a few consider “*Tristram of Lyonesse*” to be his most attractive and ideal narrative poem. The conception of the Arthurian legend is distinct from that of either Tennyson or Arnold, and the verse is rich with desire, foreboding, and pathetic beauty. The opening phrase, *The Sailing of the Swallow*, is enchanting; the description of Iseult of Ireland is a wonder, and the whole coil of burning love and piteous mischance was never before so marvelously woven.

Of Swinburne’s recent dramas, “*Mary Stuart*” completes the most imposing Trilogy in modern literature, and is, while less romantic than “*Chastelard*” and less eloquent than “*Bothwell*,” a fit successor to the two. Its vigor is condensed and joined with a gravity becom-

ing the firm hand of maturer years as it depicts the culmination of this historic tragedy — the taking-off of a picturesque, impassioned, superbly selfish type of royalty and womanhood. The author's consistent ideal of Mary Stuart is formed by intuition and critical study, and is reasonably set forth in his prose essay. The future will accept his conception as justly interpreting the secret of her career. In the *Trilogy* her fate, through the agency of Mary Beaton, is made the predestined outcome of early and heartless misdeeds, and dramatically ends the steady process of the work.

"*Marino Faliero*," post-dating by sixty-five years Byron's drama of that name, following the same chronicle and with the same personages, is a direct challenge to comparison. Both are fairly representative of their authors. Neither is a stage-play: Byron's was tested against his own judgment, and he found no fault with the critics who thought his genius undramatic. There is no talk of love in either play, except the innocent passion which Swinburne creates between Bertuccio and the Duchess. Both poets make the Doge's part o'ertop all others, but Byron lightens Faliero's monologues with stage business, etc., and pays serious attention to the action of the piece. Swinburne uses the higher poetic strain throughout; his language is heroic, the verse and diction are always imposing, but proportion, background, and the question of relative values obtain too little of his attention. All know the slovenly and unstudied character of Byron's blank verse. Swinburne adheres to the type, equally finished and prodigal, to which he has wonted us. In every sense he is a better workman. But the directness and simplicity of Byron's drama are to be considered. The death-speech which he puts in Faliero's mouth, theatrical as it is, will continue memorable as a fine instance of Byronic power. In the modern play the Doge's speech extends to fifteen pages (with the chanting interludes), and this directly after a trial-scene in which he has done most of the talking. Half this rhythmical eloquence would be more impressive than the whole.

In spite of Swinburne's deprecation of Lord Byron, and his own more direct inheritance from Shelley, he has several of the former's traits: the scorn of dullness and commonplace, faith in his own conclusions, and the swift and bold mastery of a forcible theme. Continuing the habit of prose-writing, as is the custom of the times, he has displayed his scholarship and versatility in new critical essays. The value of some of these — such, for example, as the prose dithyrambic on Hugo — lies not so much in their judicial quality as in those felicitous critical epigrams which take the reader by their sudden insight and originality. "A Note

on Charlotte Brontë" is admirable in this way, for all its tendency to extremes. The volume of "*Miscellanies*" (1886) contains, on the whole, his soundest and most varied prose-writing, much of it as well considered as one could desire, and expressing, brilliantly of course, the judgment of a poetic scholar in his dispassionate mood. It is interesting to see how easily and royally Mr. Swinburne keeps up his domination over an active class of writers. His scholarship, indisputable talent, and Napoleonic method of judgment and warfare, render him a kind of autocrat whom few of his craft care to encounter openly, though specialists in matters of research and criticism occasionally venture on rebellion. Whatever ground he loses is lost in consequence of a law already pointed out, which operates in the case of a vein too rich and productive. The torrent of his rhythm, beautiful and imaginative as it is, satiates the public — even animals fed on too nutritious food will turn to bran and husks for a relief. And the workings of his genius, from its very force and individuality, are such as he cannot be expected to vary or suspend.

DEATH has summoned with his impartial touch both young and old alike from the cycle of poets considered in our original review. What more I wish to say concerning Rossetti, Horne, Wells, O'Shaughnessy, Marston, Collins, and others who have joined the silent majority, must be said elsewhere. Nor does the space assigned me here permit an extension of former remarks upon Arnold, W. Morris, Miss Rossetti, Payne, Buchanan, and other old acquaintances, — some of whom, such as Bell Scott, Noel, Patmore, and George Meredith, have materially changed or enriched their respective notes. Many authors not hereinbefore reviewed come properly within our annals of the last twelve years; dramatists like Merivale, Gilbert, Ross Neil; colonial and provincial poets, upon whose list are Gordon, Sladen, Sharp, Anderson, Toru Dutt, Roberts, etc.; song-makers and London lyrists, among whom are Aïdé, Ashby-Sterry, Clement Scott; not to forget a satirist like Courthope, and translators — a class whose service in England is never at an end. But the remainder of the present article must be devoted to remarks on the latter-day poets not embraced in the foregoing classification, and to discussion of tendencies manifest in the spirit of recent British song.

SYMONDS — EDWIN ARNOLD — AUSTIN —
LEWIS MORRIS, ETC.

OF the poets whose books have appeared mainly since the date of our earlier review,

several are conspicuous for the extent of their work, and demand attention in any notice of the time. What are their respective claims to the favor awarded leaders whom they rival in productiveness?

Symonds is fairly typical of the best results of the English university training. He is an exemplar of taste; this, and liberal culture, joined with fine perceptive faculties, endow a writer who has the respect of lovers of the beautiful for his service as a guide to its history and masterpieces. A wealth of language and material sustains his prose explorations in the renaissance, his Grecian and Italian sketches, his charming discourse of the Greek poets and of the Italian and other literatures. He has given us complete and almost ideal translations of the sonnets of Angelo and Campanella. Coming to his original verse, we again see what taste and sympathy can do for a receptive nature; all, in fact, that they can do towards the making of a poet born, not with genius, but with a facile and persistent bent for art. The division between friendship and love is no more absolute, as not of degree but of kind, than that between the connoisseur and the most careless but impassioned poet. Symonds recognizes this in a thoroughbred preface to "Many Moods," a book covering the verses of fifteen years. He proffers attractive work, good handling of the slow meters, and an Italian modification of the antique feeling. There is some lyrical quality in his "Spring Songs." Almost the same remarks apply to a later volume, "New and Old." Its atmosphere, landscape, and notes of sympathy therewith are so un-English that one must possess the author's Latinesque training to feel them adequately. We have sequences of polished sonnets in the "Animi Figura" and its interpreter, "Vagabundi Libellus." These studies of a "beauty-loving and impulsive, but at the same time self-tormenting and conscientious mind" are his most satisfactory efforts in verse; but if their emotions are, as he avows, "imagined," he reasons too curiously for a poet. "Stella" has a right to complain of his hero, and it is no wonder she went mad. His poems are suggestive to careful students only, in spite of their exquisite word-painting, and the merit of sonnets like those on "The Thought of Death." Admiring the finish of them all, we try in vain to recall the one abiding piece or stanza. Here is scholar's work of the first order, the outcome of knowledge and a sense of beauty. Perhaps the author would have succeeded as well as a painter, sculptor, or architect, for in any direction taste would be his mainstay. Nothing can be happier than his rendering, with comments, of the medieval Latin Student's Songs,

neatly entitled "Wine, Woman, and Song"; and in the prose "Italian By-ways" his critical touch is so light and rare that we are thankful for his companionship.

Those who wish to make more than a ripple on the stream may profit by the example of Edwin Arnold. During the latest quarter of a busy life he has gained a respectful hearing in his own country and something like fame in America. He is not a creative poet, yet the success of his Asiatic legends is due to more than an attractive dressing-up of the commonplace. He has zest, learning, industry, and an instinct for color and picturesqueness strengthened through absorption of the Oriental poetry, by turns fanciful and sublime. Above all, he shows the advantage of new ground, or of ground newly surveyed, and an interest in his subject which is contagious. There is a man behind his cantos, and a man clever enough to move in the latest direction of our unsettled taste and thought. A distinct theme and motive, skillfully followed, are the next best things to inventive power. The "Light of Asia" was not an ordinary production. With "The Indian Song of Songs," and "Pearls of the Faith" it formed a triune exposition, on the poetic side, of the Hindoo and Arabian theologies. Probably Arnold's ideals of Buddhism, even of Islamism, insensibly spring from a western conception, but he conveys them with sensuous warmth and much artistic skill. In these books and the translations from the Mahâbhârata, he works an old vein in a new way. Both the accuracy and ethics of his Oriental pieces have been lauded and attacked with equal vehemence. They have received great attention in that part of the United States where discussion is most "advanced" and speculative, and where Buddhism and theosophy are just now indiscriminately a fashion, and likely to pass away as have many fashions that led up to them. Arnold's longer works may soon be laid aside, but such a lyric as "After Death in Arabia," whether original or a paraphrase, will be treasured for its genuine beauty and serene pledges to human faith and hope.

Alfred Austin's essays on "The Poetry of the Period" justly attracted notice. They were epigrammatic, conceived in a logical if disciplinary spirit, and almost the first severe criticism to which our "chief musicians" have been subjected. Here was one who dared to lay his hand on the sacred images. He bore down mercilessly upon "the feminine, narrow, domesticated, timorous" verse of the day, calling Tennyson feminine, Browning studious, Whitman noisy and chaotic, Swinburne and Morris not great because the times are bad, and only less tedious than the rest. While an

iconoclast, his effort was constructive in its demand for the movement and passion that have animated more virile eras. When so lusty a critic himself came out as a poet, it fairly might have been expected that he would at least, whatever his demerits, avoid the tameness thus deplored. But movement and the divine fire are precisely what are lacking in Mr. Austin's respectable and somewhat labored books of verse. "The Human Tragedy," a work by which he doubtless would wish to be judged, includes an early-printed section, "Madonna's Child," which is a key to the poem. The whole requires ten thousand lines, cast in *ottava rima* and other standard forms. The Georgian measures are here, but not their force and glow. The movement is of the slowest, the philosophy prudish, and the story hard to follow: lovers are kept from marriage by religious zeal; they don the Red Cross, travel and talk interminably, and finally are shot, and die in each other's arms to the great comfort of the reader. "Savonarola" is a better work,—a studious tragedy, but not relieved by humor and realism, and with few touches that are imaginative. The title-piece of "At the Gate of the Convent" is artistic and interesting, and is followed by a good deal of contemplative verse, mostly lyrical in form, with the lofty ode not slighted. What we miss is the incense of divine poesy. The author's satirical interludes have point, and I have seen graceful lyrics from his pen, but his ambitious verse, on whatever principle composed, is not of the class that reaches the popular heart, nor likely, on the other hand, to capture a select group of votaries like those so loyal from the outset to Rossetti and Browning.

In every generation there is some maker of books who, without being a great writer, figures as such in his own and other minds. His thorough belief in his function and his hold upon a faithful constituency are things which men of better parts may not envy him, yet find beyond their reach. Lewis Morris with his "Epic of Hades," "Gwen," "Songs of Two Worlds," and other works of many editions, seems to be a writer whose fluent verse satisfies the popular need for rhythmical diet. Certain observances usually are noted in poetry of this kind. Its author handles a pretentious theme, and at much length, thus giving his effort an air of importance. He falls into the manner of popular models, and with great facility. He has a story to tell, or some lesson to teach, in all cases trite enough to an expert but more impressive to the multitude than the expert suspects. Finally, he has zeal and measureless industry, and takes himself more seriously than if he were a sensitive and less robust personage. It would be wrong

to say that Mr. Morris's verse is no better than that of Pollok, Tupper, and Bickersteth. But he bears to this, the most refined of periods, pretty much the same relation which they bore respectively to their own. "The Epic of Hades" is written in diluted Tennysonian verse, its merit lying in simplicity and avoidance of affectations. It is, however, only a metrical restatement of the Greek mythology according to Lempriere, and without that magic transmutation which alone justifies a resmelting of the antique. "Gwen" is a drama in monologue — an English love-story and, as far as "Maud" is dramatic, an attenuated Maud, without novelty of form or incident. In few of Morris's poems is there the radiant spirit which floods a word, a line, a passage, with essential meaning. In "The Ode of Life" he girds himself for a Pindaric effort, and strives with much grandiloquence to display the entire panorama of existence. His truest poetry, though neither he nor his admirers may so regard it, is found among the "Songs of Two Worlds" and "Songs Unsung," and chiefly in simple pieces like "The Organ Boy." A longer poem, "Clytemnestra in Paris," should be mentioned for its originality and interest; it is based on the trial reports of a recent murder, and shows the worth of a vivid subject and a conception due solely to the poet. Morris also is forcible, though prolix, in some of his speculative theses, but leaves an impression of infallibility and that there are few subjects he would hesitate to preëempt.

A survey of these energetic writers leads to the inference that the more ambitious recent efforts do not acquaint us with the new poets who possess the greatest delicacy of hand and vision, and are subject to the most spiritual moods. The successive books of Walter Smith, author of "Orig Grange," "Hilda," "Kildrostan," etc., only strengthen this inference. Their vogue with a class is due to the fact that, like Mrs. ("Violet Fane") Singleton's very feminine poem of "Denzil Place," each is what she honestly calls the latter — a story in verse. They are metrical novelettes, with the excess of interest and liveliness in favor of the lady, who gives zest to her romance by a warmth of realism, upon which the Scotch idyllist would doubtless blush to venture. Dr. Smith's "North Country Folk" contains some good short pieces. Mrs. Singleton's "Queen of the Fairies" is a tender story, purely and simply told. Her drama, "Anthony Babington," is very creditable, above the common range of woman's work, which scarcely can be said of her miscellaneous lyrics. Her love-poetry is of all grades, and not always in the best taste. Mrs. Pfeiffer has been an untiring producer

of verse of a different cast. Her early "Poems" embraced, besides a good ode "To the Teuton Woman," one or two striking ballads which indicated her natural bent, since developed in "The Fight at Rorke's Drift," and other spirited pieces. "Under the Aspens" is perhaps her most enjoyable collection. Her sonnets are thoughtful and intelligible, in this wise differing from the work of many sonnet-mongers, and those on Shelley and George Eliot are well worth preservation. In her more arduous flights she often fails, but there is an air of refinement and sincerity in much that comes from her pen.

Mrs. Hamilton King's long poem, "The Disciples," has been widely read. Four disciples of Mazzini narrate, chiefly in blank verse and rhymed heroics, the story of Garibaldi. The influence of the two Brownings is visible in Mrs. King's style. Her chief poem, the story of Fra Ugo Bassi, though too long, has strong passages and effective pictures of Italian and Sicilian scenery. Her defects are a lack of condensed vigor and imagination.

ARTHUR J. MUNBY — JAMES THOMSON.

THERE are one or two marked exceptions to the inference just now drawn. When Mr. Munby's "Dorothy" appeared, sound-minded readers had a sense of refreshment. It was a novel pleasure to light upon a complete and wholesome poem, faithfully and winningly going at its purpose, that of depicting pastoral English scenes and extolling health and strength as elements of beauty in woman. The heroine of this unique "country story in elegiac verse" is genuine as one of Millet's peasant-girls or Winslow Homer's fisher-maidens. Seldom, nowadays, do we find such pictures of farm-life, bucolic work and sports, outside of Hardy's and Blackmore's novels. The plowing-scene is a subject for a painter, and he could find, indeed, a score of charming themes in this one poem. Dorothy's sweet face and noble bearing require, it is true, the device of an aristocratic fatherhood, and there is possibly an implication of the benefits of cross-breeding. Munby equals Millet in honest candor, but I think he goes beyond nature in the one blemish of his idyll; there is an over-coarseness in giving even a plow-girl hands that would disgust a navy or pitman. As might be expected of the poet who wrote "Doris," that lovely pastoral, he is an artist, and has achieved a difficult feat in popularizing his elegiac distichs.

A second exception is that of a man to whom a long chapter might be devoted, and whose life and writings, I doubt not, will be subjects of recurring interest during years to come.

For it may almost be said of the late James Thomson, author of "The City of Dreadful Night," that he was the English Poe. Not only in his command of measures, his weird imaginings, intellectual power and gloom, but with respect to his errant yet earnest temper, his isolation, and divergence from the ways of society as now constituted,—and very strangely also in the successive chances of his life so poor and proud, in his final decline through unfortunate habits and infirmities, even to the sad coincidence of his death in a hospital,—do the man, his genius, and career afford an almost startling parallel to what we know of our poet of "the grotesque and arabesque." Shelley, Heine, Leopardi, Schopenhauer,—such were the writers whom Thomson valued most, and whose influence is visible in his poetry. Yet the production already mentioned, and many others, have traits which are not found elsewhere in prose or verse. So much might be said of Thomson's work that I scarcely ought to touch upon it here. But "The City of Dreadful Night" may be characterized as a somber, darkly wrought composition, toned to a minor key from which it never varies. It is a mystical allegory, the outgrowth of broodings on hopelessness and spiritual desolation. The legend of Dürer's Melancholia is marvelously transcribed, and the isometric interlude, "As I came through the Desert thus it was," is only surpassed by Browning's "Childe Roland." The cup of pessimism, with all its conjuring bitterness, is drunk to the dregs in this enshrouded, and again lurid, but always remarkable poem. We have Omar Khayyám's bewilderment, without his epicurean compensations. "Vane's Story," the title-piece of an earlier volume, is similarly impressive, and minor lyrics are worth study for their intensesness and frequent strange beauty. "Vane's Story," though melodramatic, and curiously outspoken in its notion of life and death, its opposition to ordinary views, is not easily forgotten. On the side of artistic poetry we have the Arabic love-tale of "Weddah," and "Two Lovers"—a beautiful legend in quatrains. No one can read these, or the passionate "Mater Tenebrarum," or such a rhapsody as "He heard Her Sing," surcharged with melody and fire, without feeling that here was a true and foreordained poet. More profuse than Poe, less careful of his art, often purposely and effectively coarse, he holds a place of his own. He was a natural come-outer, and declared for all sorts and conditions of men, independently of rank or record. At times he proved, by such verses as "Sunday at Hampstead" and "Sunday on the River," that a blither nature underlay his gloom, and that happy experiences would

have made his song less pessimistic. But if ever a poet learned in suffering, it was he, and if the cup had passed from him we should have lost some powerful and distinctive verses. The posthumous volume, "A Voice from the Nile," contains, with a friendly memoir by Bertram Dobell, the fugitive productions of Thomson's early and later years.

VARIOUS RECENT POETS, AND THEIR
TENDENCIES.

THE poetry of many recent and younger writers is still to be considered. They scarcely can be said to initiate a new school, or to divide themselves into groups like those formed by the minor poets of a slightly earlier time. Listening to various masters, and feeling the absence just now of any special tone or drift, more than one new aspirant essays some note of his own. Their very lack of assumption, and failure to claim by bold efforts a share of the attention secured by the novelists, imply a tacit acknowledgment that poetry cannot maintain at the moment its former dominance in the English world of letters. This is an unpromising attitude; but if they do not exhibit the ardent, full-throated confidence that begets leadership, there still are not a few who devote themselves to ideal beauty, and sing, in spite of discouragements, because the song is in them. They bear in one respect a mutual likeness. Though not given to the technical freaks of the recent art-extremists, the work of all displays a finish unknown at the outset of the Victorian period. The art of dexterous verse-making is so established that the neophyte has it at command. As with the technics of modern instrumental music, it is within common reach and not a subject for much remark.

Gosse, whom the public first knew as a poet, and who has become prominent as a literary scholar and critic, has not suffered general authorship to hinder his more ideal efforts for any length of time. That he is an attractive and competent master of English prose the leading journals and magazines bear constant witness, no less than his "Studies in Northern Literature," his "Life of Gray," lectures on poetry, and other essays, biographies, and contributions to works that are richer for his aid. All this prose matter has been refined and bettered by his poetic sensibility. And as a poet, the title of the first book for which he was sole sponsor, "On Viol and Flute," hints of his early quality. Though plainly alive to the renaissance movement, it was full of young blood and tuneful impulse; its contents appertaining to music, art, love, and the Norse legendary so familiar to him. His "New Poems," six years later in date, are simpler, more restrained

and meditative. They are deftly finished, pure and cool, a degree too cool for current taste. His classical sonnets — from the first he has been a good sonneteer — exhibit all these traits. He has a strong and logical sense of form, while his color is keyed to the tranquil and secondary, rather than the sensuous primitive, tones. A grace in which he has few equals is the fidelity to nature of his pastorals and lyrics. There is true and sweet landscape, the very spirit of the English coppices, rivers, and moors, in his quiet pieces. Successful with the French forms which he did much to introduce, he uses them sparingly; in fact, he seldom or never plays the tricks of the extreme decorationists, but trusts to the force of his thoughts and impressions. The contents of the volume, "Firdausi in Exile," may be taken, I suppose, as his most mature and varied work, for the early drama of "King Erik," though creditably done and on a theme quite native to him, does not show his bent to be strongly dramatic. Reviewing his verse, one finds a genuine feeling for nature, and subtle ideality, in "Sunshine before Sunrise," "The Whitethroat," "Lying in the Grass," "The Shepherd of the Thames," "Obermann Yet Again." His "Theocritus" has delicious melody and charm. There is a return in his longer poems, "Firdausi" and "The Island of the Blest," to the Italian method of Hunt and Keats. Gosse is an example of the latter-day poet who does so well and learnedly in prose as scarcely to obtain full credit for his natural poetic gift. His verse, like that of Arnold, with whom its spirit is allied, grows on one by quiet study. It is not often of a swift and lyrical character; yet that he can be both resonant and picturesque is evident from a vigorous ballad, "The Cruise of the Rover," which will bear reading with the sea-ballads of Tennyson and Kingsley, and of itself bestows upon its author the name of poet.

Blunt's "Love Sonnets of Proteus" are interesting as the artistic and sole utterance of their composer — the record, whether personal or not, of a man's successive love-experiences. This series of sonnets comes from one guided by the foremost English master, yet they are idiosyncratic and do not betray a weak or inexpert hand. Their savor of artificiality disappears when the writer ceases to be introspective, as in the fresh and wholesome sonnet on Gibraltar at the close. A claim to regard was at once established by "Michael Field," through her first volume, embracing the dramas of "Callirhoë" and "Fair Rosamond." It seemed a reoccupation of Swinburne's early ground, but this was only true with respect to the choice of themes. "Callirhoë" is classical merely in subject and time,

and is treated in a modern way, the characters being living men and women with a language compact of beauty and imagination. "Fair Rosamond" is brief, strong; the culminating act of a tragic scheme that has beguiled great artists to its handling. The dramas in this writer's second book, "The Father's Tragedy, etc.," reveal the same vigorous touch, but are diffuse and lack contrasting lights and shades; there is no humor,—speech and action are always at concert-pitch. Their diction, however, is more original than that of any other young writer. Often an epithet carries force, and is used in an entirely fresh way. This dramatist lacks proportion; her manner betokens close study of the Elizabethans, but of the minor ones rather than the greatest. Her work is notable for its freedom, even audacity, and contrasts in all respects with that of Tennyson — so correct of style and proportion, yet without natural dramatic fire. Her advance in "Brutus Ultor" is not of the right kind. It seems as if she hunted history for plots and themes. This is a Roman tragedy, compressed and over-virile — even coarse at times, as if the effort to speak as a man were a forced one. "Michael Field" is ambitious, and has warrant for it. Her motto should be "strength and beauty," and not strength alone. The "Nero" of Robert Bridges, an historical tragedy of the emperor's early reign, with narrower extremes of passion, is to my mind a more essentially virile work. There is a nobler severity in dialogue, which merits the name of Roman. The diction and blank verse are restrained, but impressive. The characters of Nero, Poppæa, Seneca, Agrippina, are distinctly drawn. While in a sense conventional, "Nero" shows the mark of a self-poised, confident hand. A few of the lyrics in Bridges' eclectic and privately printed volume of 1884 strengthen my opinion that he is a very ideal and artistic poet. The elegy "I have loved flowers that fade" is matchless in its way, apparently old in feeling yet perfectly original; and some of his songs rival it in their brief melody.

Canon Dixon's early work betrayed the close affinity between the new ecclesiasticism and the methods of Rossetti. His "Odes and Eclogues," on the other hand, are the most extreme type of Anglo-classic verse,—that peculiar grafting of modern thought upon the Grecian stock in which Arnold was a leading expert, and which is so fascinating to a scholar-poet. His latest lyrics have a peculiar wandering beauty. All his work is finished to a notable degree. Dixon and Bridges at this distance appear to be the chief lights of a quaintly esoteric Oxford School.

Miss Robinson's verse is a delicate spray,

engendered by influences which began with Ruskin and the pre-Raphaelites, and in the end supplied the motive of British taste in plastic and decorative art, in letters, and in all the refinements of social life. She shows the effect of culture upon an impressible feminine nature, placed among devotees of the beautiful, and breathing its atmosphere from her childhood. Her classical studies were like those of Mrs. Browning, with an æsthetic training superadded that was not obtainable in Mrs. Browning's time. Her first little book, "A Handful of Honeysuckle," bears the obvious impress of Rossetti,—a shoot from his garden, but with new and fragrant blossoms of its own. The lyrics appended to her next work—a praiseworthy translation of "The Crowned Hippolytus"—were of a maturer cast. Afterward, applying her gift to humane transcripts of real life, she wrote "The New Arcadia," a group of ballads in behalf of suffering womanhood and England's poor. Doubtless this was too grave an experimental task, for in turning at last to Italy, and its *rispetti* and *stornelli*, she seems thoroughly at home. Her book of songs, "An Italian Garden," is the most essentially poetic of her works thus far. It breathes the Anglo-Italian spirit which is in fact her own. The *rispetti* forming her wreath of Tuscan cypress, with their beauty and sadness, are in every way characteristic of this poet, and in her most suggestive vein. Meanwhile her acquirements enable her to take an active part in the critical and biographical industries which the inevitable book-purveyor now opens for every rising author. Of her sister poets not yet mentioned, Mrs. Liddell and Miss Nesbit deserve notice. The former's "Songs in Minor Keys" are suffused with deep religious feeling, always expressed in good taste. Miss Nesbit's "Lays and Legends" suggest immature but promising individuality. She is capable of strong emotion which is most effective in her shorter lays.

Theodore Watts, the scholarly critic of poetry and romantic art, and a frequent contributor of verse to the literary journals, has thus far made no collection of his poems, except for private circulation. My knowledge of them is confined to some very perfect sonnets—a form of verse in which he is a natural and acknowledged master—and to a few lyrics of an elevated type. His ode to a Caged Petrel shows a large and eloquent method and a vivid perception of Nature's grander aspects. He apparently seeks to revive the broad feeling of the Georgian leaders; at all events, his touch is quite independent of any bias derived from the eminent poets with whom his life has been closely associated. Among the many writers of good

sonnets I may mention Hall Caine—Rossetti's young friend and memorialist. Dowden, whose critical work is always of a high order, has published a volume of poems, from which two or three imaginative examples of the same class have met my eye.

William Watson, judging from "The Prince's Quest," is a disciple of Morris and a good one—a poet of slow movement, from whom we have also careful sonnets and Landorian quatrains. Lee-Hamilton's varied "Poems and Transcripts," with the studies in "Apollo and Marsyas," remind one of the sculptor-poet Story by their reflection of Browning's manner; yet where he is Browningsque or Rossettian it is usually because the subject cannot be so well treated in another way. He has a taste for the psychologically dramatic, and usually interests the reader. "The Bride of Porphyryon" and "The Wonder of the World" are far from commonplace, and his sonnets are exceptionally fine. W. J. Dawson is quite possessed by Rossetti, but has resources of fancy, rhythm, decoration. If he contrives to outgrow his pupilage, something of worth may be expected from him. There is much simplicity and grace in the "Poems" of Ernest Myers, largely suggested by study and travel, and they belong to the composite art school.

Many of the young writers devote themselves to cabinet-picturemaking, whether their dainty verse is properly idyllic or dramatic. The scenic tendency increases, just as it has grown, with an Irving to foster it, upon the stage. New poets strive, through affecting the mind's eye, to outdo the painter's appeal to the bodily vision. This invasion of a neighboring domain is a failure to utilize their own, and an undervaluation of the noblest of arts. Very pretty things of their kind, however, are often produced in this way.

A graceful scholar-poet is Lefroy, whose "Echoes" introduce us to old friends in a new guise. His open method is to compress into a single sonnet the tenor of some well-known poem. Gautier's "L'art," already paraphrased by Dobson, thus appears in sonnet-form, and many idylls of Theocritus are treated similarly. But these are supplemented by pleasing sonnets of English cloister and outdoor life. Raffalovich's "Cyril and Lionel" contains well-turned verse of a motive which, although it is not imitative, I find difficult to understand. By his name this writer would seem to be more justified than others in eking out his book with lyrics in other tongues than the English. Since the date of "Chastelard" this practice has been more or less affected by the new men. Swinburne put his French songs into a play where they rightly belong, as an

obligato to the action and discourse. Now every lutanist splits his tongue, like a parrot's, to sing strange words,—but there are capabilities still left in our native English. If such linguistic feats must be essayed, why not compose in the universal Volapük,—or more mellifluously in the late Mr. Pearl Andrews's "Alwato"?

A phase of the æsthetic crusade in defense of poetry as an utterance of the beautiful solely,—a movement having almost perfect development at its start with Keats so long ago,—has appeared in the outgivings of some of Ruskin's disciples, and avowedly in the verse of Oscar Wilde. His "Poems," with all their conceits, are the fruit of no mean talent. The opening group, under the head "Eleutheria," are the strongest. A lyric to England, "Ave Imperatrix," is manly verse,—a poetic and eloquent invocation. "The Garden of Eros," "Burden of Itys," "Charmides," are examples of the sensuous pseudo-classicism. There is a good deal of Keats, and something of Swinburne, in Wilde's pages, but his best master is Milton, whom he has studied, as did Keats, to good effect. His scholarship and cleverness are evident, as well as a native poetic gift. The latter indeed might prove his highest gift, if tended a little more seriously, and possibly he could be on better terms with himself in his heart of hearts, if he would forego his fancies, in behalf of his imagination—as there is still time for him to do. It is fair to accept the statement of his own ground, in his preface to the decorative verse of his friend Rennell Rodd,—though one doubts whether Gautier would not have dubbed the twain *jeunes brodeurs*, rather than *jeunes guerriers, du drapeau romantique*. The apostles of our Lord were filled, like them, with a "passionate ambition to go forth into far and fair lands with some message for the nations and some mission for the world." But not until many centuries had passed were their texts illuminated to the extent displayed by Mr. Rodd and his printer, with their resources of India-paper, apple-green tissue, vellum, and all the rarities desired by those who die of a rose in aromatic pain. Yet the verse of "Rose Leaf and Apple Leaf" is not so effeminate as one would suppose. The minstrel's green-sickness is now well over, judging from his "Feda and other Poems"; and in throwing it off he shows a good deal of the vigor needful for a decisive mark.

Now, as a minor but genuine example of poetic art, not alone for art's sake, but for dear nature's sake,—in the light of whose maternal smile all art must thrive and blossom if at all,—take "A Child's Garden of Verses" by Stevenson. This is a real addition to the

lore for children, and to that for man, to whom the child is father. The flowers of this little garden spring from the surplusage of a genius that creates nothing void of charm and originality. Thanks, then, for the fresh, pure touch, for the revelation of childhood with its vision of the lands of Nod and Counterpane, and of those next-door Foreign Lands spied from cherry-tree top, and beyond the trellised wall.

GARDE-JOYEUSE.

FINALLY we observe what has been, all in all, the most specific phase of British minstrelsy since 1875. This is seen in the profusion of lyrical elegantia, the varied grave and gay ditties, idylls, metrical cameos and intaglios, polished epistles and satires, classed as Society Verse, the Court Verse of older times. Perceiving signs of its revival, I could not foresee that it would flourish as it has, and really constitute the main thing upon which a lyrical interval would plume itself. Its popularity is curious and significant. The pioneer in verse of a movement already evident in society and household art was Austin Dobson. This favorite poet, by turns the Horace, Suckling, Prior, of his day, allying a debonair spirit with the learning and precision of Queen Anne's witty fabulists, has well advanced a career which began with "Vignettes in Rhyme." Enjoying the quality of that book, I felt that its poet, to hold his listeners, must change his song from time to time. Of this he has proved himself fully capable. His second volume, "Proverbs in Porcelain," gave us a series of little "proverbs" in dialogue, exquisite bits of "Louis Quinze," and perfectly unique in English verse. Nothing can excel the beauty and pathos of "Good-Night, Babette," with the Angelus song low-blended in its dying fall. The lines "To a Greek Girl," in the same collection, and the paraphrase of Gautier, "Ars Victrix," superadd a grace even beyond that of Dobson's early lyrics. Who has not read the "Idyll of the Carp," and the racy ballad of "Beau Brocade"? Here, too, are his little marvels in the shape of the rondel, rondeau, villanelle, triolet,—those French forms which he has handled with an ease almost inimitable, yet so wantonly provoking imitation.

Perhaps Dobson has more than others shaped the temper of our youngest poets, both English and American. A first selection from his works appeared in the United States in 1880, its welcome justifying a second in 1885. Meanwhile the choice *éditions de luxe*, "Old World Idylls," and "At the Sign of the Lyre," represent the greater portion of

his verse. Any author might point to such a record with pride; there is scarcely a stanza in these volumes wanting in extreme refinement, and this without marring its freshness and originality. In his place one should never yield—as there are stray omens that he sometimes is yielding—to any popular or journalistic temptation that would add a line to these fortunate pieces, except under the impulse of an artistic and spirited mood.

The influence of Dobson and his associates has been a characteristic—a symptomatic—expression of the interval between the close of the true Victorian period and the beginning of some new and, let us hope, inspiring poetic era. It has created, in fact, a sort of *école intermédiaire*, of which the gay and buoyant minstrelsy is doubtless preferable to those affected heroics that bore every one save the egotist who gives vent to them. For real poetry, though but a careless song, light as thistle-down and floating far from view, will find some lodgment for its seed even on distant shores and after long time. The roundelays of Villon, of Du Bellay and his *Pléiade*, waited centuries for a fit English welcome and interpretation. Lang's "Ballads and Lyrics of old France," in 1872, captured the spirit of early French romantic song. Nine years afterward, his "Ballades in Blue China" chimed in with the temper of our new-fangled minstrel times. Such craftsmanship as the villanelle on Theocritus, the ballade to the same poet, and the ballades "Of Sleep" and "Of the Book-Hunter," came from a sympathetic hand. In the later "Ballades and Verses Vain" are new translations, etc., and a few striking addenda, memorably the resonant sonnet on the Odyssey. A "Ballade of his Choice of a Sepulchre" is Lang's highest mark as a lyricist, and perhaps the freest vein of his "Rhymes à la Mode" is in the long poems that do not fall under that designation, such as "The Fortunate Islands." He has almost preëmpted the "Ballade," but his later specimens of it are scarcely up to his own standard. "Cameos" and "Sonnets from the Antique" are at the head of their class, and naturally, for no other Oxonian is at once so variously equipped a scholar and so much of a poet. The fidelity, diction, and style of his prose translations of Homer and Theocritus are equally distinguished. Thus far his most serious contribution to poetry is "Helen of Troy,"—a poem taking, as one would expect, the minority view of its legend, and depicting the fair cause of Troy's downfall as a victim to the plots of the gods. It is written felicitously in eight-line stanzas of a novel type, and, while not strong in special phrases and epithets, has much tranquil beauty. On his working-day

side, readers never wait long for something bright from this versatile, inventive feuilletonist,—a master of persiflage, whose learned humor and audacity, when he is most insular, are, perhaps, the most entertaining.

CONSIDERATIONS.

If imitation be flattery, Dobson and Lang have breathed sufficient of its incense. Their "forms" have haunted a multitude of young singers, and proved as taking and infectious as the airs of Sullivan's operettas. They have crossed the seas and multiplied in America more rapidly than the English sparrows which preceded them,—so that, as in the case of their feathered compatriots, the question is whether a check can be put to the breed. As I have said, this elegant rhyming, however light and delicate, is in fact a special feature of the latest Victorian literature, and, with its pretty notes tingling on the ear, is a text for some last words in discussion of what has gone before.

First, let me say that it is but shallow reasoning to worry over the outbreak of any fancy or fashion in art. Let a good thing—a much better thing than any form in verse—be overdone, and people will signify their weariness of it so decisively that the quickness of its exit will be as surprising as its temporary vogue.

What conclusions, then, are derivable from our summary of the British poetic movement of the last dozen years? We have paid tribute to the noble chants of a few masters who still teach us that Poetry is the child of the soul and the imagination. But one looks to the general drift of the younger poets, who initiate currents to the future, for an answer to the question,—What next? The direct influences of Keats, Wordsworth, and Shelley are no longer servilely displayed; few echo even Tennyson; Browning, Rossetti, and Swinburne are more widely favored; but ancestral and paternal strains are as much confused and blended in the verse of the newest aspirants as in genealogy. Their work is more composite than ever, judging from the poets selected as fairly representative. Only two of its divisions are sufficiently pronounced for even a fanciful classification. One is the Stained-Glass poetry, if I may so term it, that dates from the Blessed Damozel and cognate models by Rossetti and his group; the other, that Debonair Verse, whose composers apply themselves by turns to imitation of the French minstrelsy and forms, and to the æsthetic embroidery of Kensington-stitch rhyme,—for in each of these pleasant devices the same practitioners excel. Now the class first named, and the first division of the second, are of alien ori-

gin: they are exotics—their renaissance is of the chivalry, romance, mysticism, and balladry of foreign literatures. Only that witty, gallant verse which takes its cue from the courtly British models of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is an exception,—and that, whatever its cleverness and popularity, can hardly be termed inventive.

The next thing to be noted is the finical nicety to which, as we see, the technique of poetry has advanced. Never were there so many capable of polishing measures quite unexceptionable as to form and structure, never fewer whose efforts have lifted them above what is, to be sure, an unprecedented level—but still a level. The cult of beauty and art, delightfully revived so long ago by Hunt and Keats, has brought us at last to this. Concerning inspiration and the creative impulse, we have seen, first: that recent verse-makers who are most ambitious and prolific have not given much proof of exceptional genius. Their productions have the form and dimension of masterpieces, and little more. Secondly: those who appear to be real poets, shrinking from the effort to do great things in an uncongenial time, reveal their quality by lovely minor work—sometimes rising to an heroic and passionate but briefly uttered strain. And it is better to do small things well than to essay bolder ventures without heart or seriousness. Still, I think they must now and then doubt the importance of thus increasing, without specific increase of beauty and novelty, the mass of England's rich anthology. Looking back, years from now, it will be seen that one noble song on a compulsive theme has survived whole volumes of elaborate, soulless artisanship by even the natural poets.

What is it, then, that chills the "heart and seriousness" of those most artistic and ideal? The rise of conditions adverse to the imaginative exercise of their powers has been acknowledged from the first in these essays. It is clear that instinct has become measurably dulled, as concerns the relative value of efforts; so that poets do not magnify their calling as of old. There is less bounce, and, unfortunately, still less aspiration. Nor has the modern spirit, now freed from sentimental illusions, as yet brought its wits to a thorough understanding of what true Realism is—viz., that which is just as faithful to the ideal and to the soul of things as to obvious and external matters of artistic treatment. Here again the law of reaction will in the end prevail. Its operation is already visible in the demand for more inventive and wholesomely romantic works of fiction; and this is but the forerunner of a corresponding impulse by which the poet—the maker—the creative idealist—

whose office it is to perceive and illumine *all* realities, both material and spiritual, will have his place again.

For a time, however, the revival of creative prose-fiction may occupy more than one poetic mind. Novel-writing is more vigorously pursued than ever, by fresh hands. Journalism opens new and broader courts tempting for their influence, sense of power, and the subsistence yielded. Criticism, book-making, book-editing, are flourishing industries. Scholar's work is steadily pursued, and carried even to analysis of living authors. Our poetry itself is too scholarly. Arnold's happy statement concerning Byron, that "he did not know enough," does not apply to the typical latter-day poet. He has too much learning withal, of a technical, linguistic, treasure-hunting sort. The over-intellectuality and scholarship of many lyrists absorb them in curious studies, and deaden their impulse toward original and glowing efforts. They revive and translate, and borrow far too much the hoardings of all time. Even in their judgments they set an undue value upon the learning, reasoning, philosophy, of a master under discussion. Moreover, their literary skill and acquirements make the brightest of them serviceable aids to the publishers. No sooner are their names in public favor than the great houses smooth their way along the lucrative paths of book-making. Great and small houses have multiplied, and printing is easy and universal. To all this we indeed owe attractive series of critico-biographical volumes, anthologies catholic and select, encyclopædias, translations, and texts without end. Good and welcome as much of this work is, my present question must be — does it not chasten and absorb the poet's faculties? Has he not, at last, too good a literary market? The common-sense reply is that, after all, he must live, — and the belief is antiquated that poets, like caged birds, sing better for starving. Yet if you chance of late upon a unique and terribly earnest bard, — a man like Thomson, — you find that he was out of the literary "swim" and usually out of pocket; while his well-to-do brother more often is the man of letters corresponding to Southey and Wilson rather than to their fiery contemporaries. If the poetic drama, for example, were now more frequently calling for elevated work, imagination and subsistence would both be subserved. The stage does make welcome beautiful and witty verse of a light order, but what it regularly supports is the facile playwright; and its operettas and scenic plays are logically adapted to the zest for amusement and the ruling decorative frenzy.

The desire of the critic and the public alike, and first of all, is for something new and ad-

ditional. But that which is new is of higher worth when it contributes to the furtherance of a true national style. What is Spanish, French, German, we at once recognize as such, however different from previous works of like origin; but how seldom the later Victorian minstrelsy is essentially English! A recent article by W. P. P. Longfellow criticises existing tendencies of architecture in Great Britain. He records the progress of a style which advanced to its culmination with the design for the new Law Courts, and until the "Victorian Gothic was everywhere." He writes that —

"Success was due, not so much to the style chosen as to the fact that, having found a style which suited them, the English followed it unitedly and persistently. Here seemed to be a national movement, strong, deep, and promising to endure. . . . Then, suddenly, at the signal of two or three restless and clever young men, whose eyes had caught something else, the English architects with one accord threw the whole thing away; as a boy, after working the morning through at some plaything, with a sudden weariness drops his unfinished toy to run after the first butterfly. . . . They have seemed to show us that their progress was at the impulse of whim rather than conviction, ruled rather by fashion than tradition. It is the mobile Frenchman who in this century has set us an example of steadiness. If his work, like all the rest in our day, lacks some of the higher qualities of older and greater styles, it has, more than any other modern work, the coherency and firmness that are at the bottom of all style."

The point thus made has a bearing upon more arts than one. A style of architecture, it is true, is the outcome of centuries. Literary style has a readier formation and is quickly affected by individual leadership. Yet a national manner distinguished the most subtle and inclusive of literary forms in every important era. This is not sustained by curious devices and imitations, however choice and attractive, but by harmonizing personal quality with the national note of expression. I think there is a lack of recognizable and pervasive style in our English poetry of the period; that, with the exception of the portion which confessedly revives the manners of Queen Anne's time and the Georgian, it is chiefly English in its intense desire to escape from Anglicism.

What does this imply, — style being a visible emblem of spiritual traits, — other than a want, so far as poetry can indicate it, of individual and national purpose? Breadth, passion, and imagination seem to be the elements least conspicuous in much of the recent song. The new men withdraw themselves from the movement of their time and country, forgetting it all in dreamland — in no-man's-land. They compose sonnets and ballads as inexpressive of the resolution of an imperial and stalwart people as are the figures upon certain

modern canvases — the distraught, unearthly youths and maidens that wander along shadowy meads by nameless streams, with their eyes fixed on some hand we “cannot see, which beckons” them away.

It may be that before we can hope for a return of poetic vigor some heroic crisis must be endured, some experience undergone, of more import than the mock-campaigns in weak and barbarous provinces, whereby Great Britain preserves her military and colonizing traditions, and avoids the stagnation of utter repose. The grand old realm bids fair to have her awakening. There are clouds enough to bode sterner issues and nearer conflicts than she has faced since Cromwell’s time. Ireland is filling men’s ears with her threats and appeals. In a season of jubilee socialists crowd St. Paul’s, their banners inscribed with “Jus-

tice and Liberty, or Death”; the Marseillaise is chorused in London thoroughfares, and London poets sing—triolets. The wise are not swift to pronounce this troubadour insouciance a mark of effeminacy and declining genius. A great dramatist makes Combeferre, Jean Prouvaire, and their comrades within the fated barricade, heroes all, while casting bullets and waiting for the struggle at dawn, sing—not battle-odes but love-songs. England’s heroism and imagination are not to be judged by her verse at this moment. Whether the Mother of Nations is to be like Niobe, or long with loyal children to rise up and call her blessed, her poets in fit succession will enrich the noblest imaginative literature of any race or tongue, though, peradventure, “after some time be past.”

Edmund C. Stedman.

THE GOING OUT OF THE TIDE.

THE eastern heaven was all faint amethyst,

Whereon the moon hung dreaming in the mist;
To north yet drifted one long delicate plume
Of roseate cloud; like snow the ocean-spume.

Now when the first foreboding swiftly ran
Through the loud-glorying sea that it began
To lose its late-gained lordship of the land,
Uprose the billow like an angered man,
And flung its prone strength far along the sand;

Almost, almost to the old bound, the dark
And taunting triumph-mark.

But no, no, no! and slow, and slow, and slow,

Like a heart losing hold, this wave must go,—
Must go, must go,—dragged heavily back,
back,

Beneath the next wave plunging on its track,
Charging, with thunderous and defiant shout,
To fore-determined rout.

Again, again the unexhausted main
Renews fierce effort, drawing force unguessed
From awful deeps of its mysterious breast:
Like arms of passionate protest, tossed in
vain,

The spray upflings above the billow’s crest.
Again the appulse, again the backward
strain,—

Till ocean must have rest.

With one abandoned movement, swift and wild,—

As though bowed head and outstretched arms
it laid

On the earth’s lap, soft-sobbing,—hushed and
stayed,

The great sea quiets, like a weaned child.

Ha! what sharp memory clove the calm, and
drove

This last fleet furious wave?

On, on, endures the struggle into night,
Ancient as Time, yet fresh as the fresh hour;
As oft repeated since the birth of light
As the strong agony and mortal fight
Of human souls, blind-reaching, with the
Power

Alloof, unmoved, impossible to cross,
Whose law is seeming loss.

Low-sunken from the longed-for triumph-mark,
The spent sea sighs, as one that grieves in
sleep.

The unveiled moon along the rippling plain
Casts many a keen, cold, shifting silvery spark,
Wild as the pulses of strange joy, that leap
Even in the quick of pain.

And she compelling, she that stands for law,—
As law for Will eternal,—perfect, clear,
And uncompassionate shines: to her appear
Vast sequences close-linked without a flaw.
All past despairs of ocean unforgot,
All raptures past, serene her light she gives,
The moon too high for pity, since she lives
Aware that loss is not.

Helen Gray Cone.