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Introduction to Poetry

Laurie Magnus

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POETIC EXPRESSION—POETIC TRUTH—THE PROGRESS OF POETRY

BY

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To the Hermit of Piper's End

PREFACE

THIS book is intended to convey the elements of taste and judgment in poetry by the natural or direct method of literature-teaching. In other words, its object is to stimulate a reasonable pleasure in poetry. Elsewhere I have written, "If the new learning is to replace the old in our national system of education, English literature will bear the burden of that discipline in taste and character which has been borne so honourably and so long by the classics of antiquity. . . . It must be left to teachers to discover for themselves the right methods of study. Already it is becoming fairly clear that certain time-honoured modes will have to be discontinued. There is a general agreement—and any point of common meeting is welcome—that the history of English literature and the contents of English letters are two very different studies. The kind of knowledge which is gained by reading up the lives of authors, with lists of

their works and dates, and reproducing the result as accurately as may be, is valueless as culture and discipline. . . . If English literature is really to take its place as a serious mental discipline, we must rid ourselves of the old limitations. . . . One wants to teach children *how* to read, to help them to hear with trained ears the most perfect and melodious speech which the lips of men have ever uttered, and to appreciate at its right value an art which is no mere ornament, but an interpretation of the life of man. . . . In literature-teaching, as at present conducted, no such bridge [between the School and University] has been built, and the need of it has hardly been perceived in this country. At no stage is the learner helped to look for the large conclusion, or to think out for himself the idea underlying the facts." *

I shall, perhaps, be pardoned this long quotation from myself if I add that the present little book is, as far as I know, the first attempt on this side of the Atlantic to supply the need that is pointed out. It has seemed to me more useful to make that attempt, however imperfectly and inadequately, than to continue to reproduce the opinion of teachers as to the

* *National Education: Essays towards a Constructive Policy*, ch. i. (John Murray, 1901.)

existence of the need. Experiments of the kind have been made in America, but the books in question are difficult to recommend, chiefly on account of what may be called the pedagogic bias of their writers, which leads them too frequently to use a deterrent scientific terminology. I may mention two works, however, which may profitably be consulted: *Some Principles of Literary Criticism*, by C. T. Winchester, Professor of English Literature in Wesleyan University (New York, Macmillan, 1899), and *The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages*, by Henry Osborn Taylor (New York, the Columbia University Press, 1901).

Among recent authorities in England, I am chiefly conscious of my debt to Professor Saintsbury's series of volumes, *Periods of European Literature* (William Blackwood & Sons), to the *History of English Poetry*, volumes I. and II., by Professor Courthope, C.B. (Macmillan), and to the Oxford lectures on *Life in Poetry: Law in Taste*, by the same author and publishers. The *Two Lectures Introductory to the Study of Poetry*, by the Rev. H. C. Beeching (Cambridge University Press, 1901), are full of illuminating thought, as is the monograph on *Milton* which Mr Edward Arnold has published for Professor Walter Raleigh, now of Glasgow. But

I hope that there will be found enough of new matter in this book to justify its appearance in a series designed for home and school use.

L. M.

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INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

PART I

POETIC EXPRESSION

§ 1. *Talking and Writing.*—"We are all poets," said Carlyle, "when we read a poem well," and Emerson echoes him in the remark, "'Tis the good reader makes the good book." Plainly, then, our first business is to learn how to read. Even to read an article in a newspaper requires a certain preparation. We must know something of the subject, for example, or we shall not be able to follow the argument, and we must know something of the language, or we shall not be able to form a judgment on the style. A style (Latin, *stylus*) is a pen. When we take a pen in our hand, and begin to write, we have to start choosing our words. In the ordinary talk of everyday life this choice of words is instinctive. In school, or at home, in the playground, or at the dinner-table,

there is not much variety in what we say. We may talk for several hours a day, but we do not use many words. We say the same things many times over. But when a man takes the trouble to write instead of speaking, it is—or it should be—because he has something to say which will be of permanent value. He ought to say something new, useful, and beautiful, which is not to be found in the ordinary talk of everyday life. Accordingly, he will use a different language. One mark of the difference is that literature must always finish its sentences. Most of the sentences in talk are broken and unfinished. The eye, the hand, the inflection of the voice, and, not least, the sympathy of the listener, do half our talking for us. They cannot do half our writing. Literature, again, is never in a hurry. If a writer has something worth saying, he has leisure to find words to say it well. For instance, instead of saying just now "the ordinary talk of everyday life," I might have written "common speech." The one is colloquial, or the language of speaking, the other is literary, or the language of writing. In the phrase "common speech," the same meaning is conveyed by the use of fewer words. In a sense, too, the words are more dignified, more worthy, that is to say, of being written down. For one thing, they contain no redundancy. In the hurry of talk, with its need

of emphasising our meaning, we are apt to repeat ourselves, and the idea of "everyday" is already contained in "ordinary." But literature can afford to exact its full measure from each word, and the words "common speech" form together the most direct complete expression of the thought in my mind. Moreover, they suggest to a well-read man certain other thoughts of a similar kind. The words possess what are called associations. They tune the reader's mind to the key that we wish to strike. Thus "common" suggests two ideas, those of "the community," and of "vulgar," both of which are helpful to the notion here to be conveyed, and "speech" is the simplest technical term for that use of language by mankind which is yet not literature. Together, then, the words convey in a heightened and more definite degree the sense of the longer phrase, "the ordinary talk of everyday life." Thus, to go back to the purpose of the pen, we see that a good style is the selection of the fewest possible words to express a thought worth preserving, and their combination in the most appropriate way.

§ 2. *Literary Language: Purism.*—Literature, then, does not use the same language as speech. By its power and duty of selection, it influences words in various directions. It may preserve

words from decay, and restore dying words to life. It may invent new words and phrases. It may raise colloquial words to literary rank. Let us see what is meant by these important functions. Words, like coins, are liable to get worn-out and rubbed. "Rubbed" itself suggests an example. If I had written that "words grow trite," the sentence would not have been as forcible, though "trite" means, literally, "rubbed" (Latin, *tritum*, past participle of *tero*, I rub). The cause of this is that "trite" has been used too frequently and familiarly. Its own keen edge has been rubbed off by too much circulation, and when we want to express the full force of its meaning we have to find a word less common in that signification. This natural decay of words may be called a loss of vigour or a depreciation of value. The point is that literature, when it comes to choose its words, has to reckon with the loss and to try to repair it. Sometimes it is enough for literature merely to correct speech. Most talkers, for instance, have a habit of exaggeration. They use a strong word to do the work of a weak one, speaking of an "awful" pain when they mean a "severe" pain, or of a "tragedy" when they mean a "grief." And, gradually, the strong word becomes a habit of speech; it becomes, that is to say, a kind of necessity of language in the

place where the weak word was formerly found sufficient. This growth of a habit of exaggeration is like the growth of a habit of drunkenness; a man who increases his dram day by day will grow inured to the use of strong drinks, and at last the strong draught will have no more effect upon him than the weak draught had at first. When the effect of words is weakened in this way, literature, by restoring them to their original strength, does a service to philology, which is the science of language. One often hears, for example, of an "awful hat," or an "awfully good holiday," but when Tennyson wrote—

"God made Himself an awful rose of dawn,"

he succeeded in rescuing "awful" from its degraded place in common talk. He corrected the tendency of speech.

§ 3. *The Excess of Purism.*—The writer who uses this device is frequently called a purist, because he makes it his aim, in his selection of words, to use them in their pure or original significance. But it is a device of style which has a special danger of its own. Speech is alive, and a writer who goes too far in the process of purifying it is liable to become pedantic. He cultivates the scholarly style, but, by neglecting too much

the current signification and living spirit of words, he becomes archaic in his vocabulary. He fails to recognise the limits imposed on his choice of words by the vitality of language. An example will make this clearer. Walter Pater is an instance of the purist in style who frequently succumbed to the danger of which we are speaking. It is the risk, we remember, of paying excessive attention to the proper treatment of words, thus removing the written language too far from the language of speech. Now take Pater's account, in his essay on *Style*, of the devices to be used by "a lover of words for their own sake":—

> "Currently recognising the incident, the colour, the physical elements or particles in words like *absorb*, *consider*, *extract*, to take the first that occur, he will avail himself of them, as further adding to the resources of expression. The elementary particles of language will be realised as colour and light and shade through his scholarly living in the full sense of them. Still opposing the constant degradation of language by those who use it carelessly, he will not treat coloured glass as if it were clear; and while half the world is using figure unconsciously, will be fully aware . . . of all that latent figurative texture in speech, . . . and scrupulously

exact of it, from syllable to syllable, its precise value."

This is not quite easy to understand, but we see that Pater means much the same as we have been saying. Only he would go too far. As a scholar, "living in the full sense of words," and anxious to exact of them "from syllable to syllable" their "precise value," instead of accepting the value which they bear in common talk, his style would take us too far from the language in which he writes. The purist would degenerate into a pedant.

Exactly how far a purist may safely go without becoming pedantic we cannot here attempt to decide. Much depends on the occasion when the purifying experiment is made. Just as a schoolmaster may spoil the effect of a rebuke by introducing it at the wrong time, so the purist in style may spoil the effect of his correction by mistaking the occasion. Mr Stephen Phillips, for instance, is a poet of whom great things are justly expected, but at first especially his choice of words was marked by excessive purism. There is more of Pater's precision than of Tennyson's insight in his phrases,

"Oh *gradual* rose of the dim universe,"

or

"Over him
A *dreadful* freshness *exquisitely* breathes."

"Dreadful," like "awful," requires to be restored to its legitimate use from the degradation it suffers on the lips of careless talkers. But, if the word is to be restored at all, it should be restored at once to its full force, and Mr Phillips has chosen an occasion which is far less exalted—and, therefore, less convincing—than the Tennysonian context in which the misuse of "awful" is corrected. Moreover, he has helped to spoil his effect by doubling his rebuke. The word "exquisitely" in this sense is likewise an instance of purism, and it is asking too much of the reader to expect him to be thankful for two rescued words in a seven-word sentence. Such "syllable to syllable" purism suggests the method of a League for the Promotion of Kindness to Philology. The writer, that is to say, draws too much attention to his style. He wearies us with his well-doing, and, by compelling us to recognise how fine a purist he is, he sins by excess of purity.

§ 4. *Other Kinds of Literary Language.*—Similar dangers attend the enrichment of language by the process of inventing new words, or of combining existing words in a new way, as well as by the process which we described as raising colloquial words to literary rank. These things cannot be classified in rigid departments, for the

obvious reason, which is sometimes overlooked, that great authors do not write to illustrate grammarians' rules. Literature is not a *hortus siccus*, or a collection of botanical specimens, to illustrate the resources of language. It is a garden of living flowers, among which the patient inquirer has to construct his own laws of taste. The point to be remembered is that a fixed habit of using uncommon words, however excellent its motive may be, is apt to betray even the greatest writers into forced effects of style.

Carlyle's *French Revolution* affords us many examples. But first of all let us take this description of the flight of King Louis at daybreak through the slumbering wood of Bondy :—

> "All slumbers save the multiplex rustle of our new Berline. Loose-skirted scarecrow of an Herb-merchant, with his ass and early greens, toilsomely plodding, seems the only creature we meet. But right ahead the great Northeast sends up evermore his gray brindled dawn : from dewy branch, birds here and there, with short deep warble, salute the coming sun. Stars fade out, and Galaxies ; street-lamps of the city of God. The universe, O my brother, is flinging wide its portals for the Levee of the Great High King. Thou, poor King Louis, farest nevertheless, as mortals do,

> towards Orient lands of Hope: and the Tuileries with *its* Levees, and France and the Earth itself, is but a larger kind of doghutch,—occasionally going rabid."

The words, and phrases, and images, are uncommon enough. Carlyle has revived, invented, borrowed, and employed nearly every device by which literature can be invigorated in order to produce his effects. Take the one magnificent sentence, "Stars fade out, and Galaxies; street-lamps of the City of God." The use of galaxies in its original sense of "clusters of stars" is an instance of that vindication of words by restoring them to their proper meaning which we spoke of as the correction of speech. In vulgar talk a "galaxy" is used of any cluster or crowd, the commonest expression of all being a "galaxy of beauty" in the sense of a crowd of beautiful people. Carlyle rescues the word from this vulgar mistake; he lifts it straight up into the heaven from which it fell. The use of "street-lamps" is an instance of the enrichment of literature by combining words in a new way. A new phrase has been invented by the combination of the ideas of "street-lamps" and "God." The device is known as a *metaphor* (Greek μεταφόρα, from μεταφέρω, I carry across), and it means the transference of a word, or of words, from one set of

ideas to another. We shall see later that it must be carefully distinguished from a mere variation of expression, but here we may go on to note that the words are the more appropriate because they bring into play the further devices of contrast and comparison. There is an almost violent contrast between the ideas of the sky and of street-lamps—the one so tranquil and remote, the other so near and throbbing; and yet the splendour of the image is heightened by the comparison implied between the fading lights in the City of God, and the vanishing lights of Paris, from which King Louis is a fugitive. Here, then, in a dozen words, we find more kinds of literary language than we have yet learned to recognise, and we feel that there is an excellent uncommonness in the use that Carlyle makes of the rare word "brindled," and the colloquial "doghutch."

§ 5. *Some of their Dangers.*—With these feelings upon us, let us take another sentence from the same book of the *French Revolution.* There occurs, a few pages further on, the following description of sunset:—

> "Wearied mortals are creeping home from their field-labour; the village-artisan eats with relish his supper of herbs, or has strolled forth to the village-street for a sweet mouth-

> ful of air and human news. Still summer-eventide everywhere! The great Sun hangs flaming on the utmost Northwest; for it is his longest day this year. The hill-tops rejoicing will ere long be at their ruddiest, and blush Good-night. The thrush, in green dells, on long-shadowed leafy spray, pours gushing his glad serenade, to the babble of brooks grown audibler; silence is stealing over the Earth. Your dusty Mill of Valmy, as all other mills and drudgeries, may furl its canvas, and cease swashing and circling. The swenkt grinders in this Treadmill of an Earth have ground out another Day."

When we look for the elements of style in this passage, what is there to delight us? To "blush Good-night" is a pretty combination of two words, neither of which has much weight or dignity. Their combined effect is as much below the force of the "gray brindled dawn," as the "village-artisan" who "eats with relish his supper of herbs" is inferior in vivid presentment to the "Herb-merchant, with his ass and early greens, toilsomely plodding." The artisan, we feel, is an item in a catalogue; the herb-merchant is a finished picture. "Audibler," the next uncommon word, has no charm that serves to recommend it in preference to "more audible"; and then we come to the

sentence, "the swenkt grinders in this Treadmill of an Earth have ground out another Day." We recollect our recent delight at Carlyle's treatment of "galaxies." There was a word restored from misuse and forgetfulness to the service of literature. But "swenkt"—why "swenkt"? Carlyle has gone back two centuries or more to find it: and, when he has found it, why and how is it preferable to "weary" or "tired"? It is like a piece of Wardour-street furniture, set down in a modern drawing-room. And then, again, "this Treadmill of an Earth." We see that it is intended as a metaphor, as a transference of words from one set of ideas to another. But it does not strike us as metaphorical, as the street-lamps of the sky were metaphorical. Indeed, we have an uneasy suspicion that the phrase is very little more than a mere variation of language, on a level, for literary purposes, with "the resurrection of the celestial luminary" as a variant for "sunrise." For let us think what Carlyle wants to say. He has to tell us that the sunset put a close to the *labour* of another day. He has to tell us, we repeat, that the sunset put a close to the *hard labour* of another day. He had to tell us, we repeat once more, that the sunset put a close to the *Hard Labour* of another day. Now, do you see the weakness of the chain—labour, hard

labour, Hard Labour? It is not a transference of words, but merely a variation, to write "penal servitude," or "treadmill," instead of "Hard Labour." The thought is the same; the transference of ideas in "this treadmill of an earth" is of the feeblest description; and the phrase is far less a metaphor than a use of uncommon words employed for the sake of variety—a device which is always weak.

§ 6. *Foundations of Judgment.* — We have reached a point in our inquiry at which we might go forward or go back. For instance, we might begin to attach labels to our results, and to equip ourselves with some of the formulæ of criticism by which to praise or condemn the writers of prose and verse. Thus, the description of the herb-merchant in our first extract from Carlyle might be labelled "literary impressionism," because it selects for reproduction in print those particular features of the things seen, and those only, which are essential to the thought to be conveyed. As vivid a picture is drawn by a few words of the pen as by a few strokes of the pencil of Mr Phil May. And the phrase about the doghutch in the same extract might be labelled "literary realism," because there is no sign that the word has been selected according to any ideal standard. It is

just taken as it comes, without reference at all to the considerations of literary dignity which would have led Macaulay, for example, to leave such a word aside. From that we might go on to discuss the literary merit of the realism which takes its words indiscriminately from the dialect of rustics and the slang of the barrack-room. We might ask if Mr Kipling's heroes, Mulvany, Learoyd, and Ortheris, talk literary English because their words are written in a story-book, and if the Scotch novelists of to-day are to be accounted masters of literature, as the Scottish poems of Burns are masterpieces. Or, again, keeping more strictly to poetry, we might take the two styles of Wordsworth, and lose ourselves in an argument about Wordsworth's realistic child who declared,

> "At Kilve there was no weather-cock;
> And that's the reason why,"

and his idealistic child, "trailing clouds of glory," and

> "Moving about in worlds not realised."*

But, though it is easy to master the cant of criticism, and to ticket our specimens with high-sound-

* See *An Anecdote for Fathers* and *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.* In the first, as is implied in the text, the subject of early childhood is treated realistically, and in the second the treatment is idealistic.

ing names, true judgment should rest on a deeper foundation. We have seen that the choice of words for writing is by no means a simple matter. We have seen enough to know that the gentleman was mistaken who discovered to his surprise that he had been talking prose all his life.* He had talked, but he had not talked prose, for the art of prose requires a style, or pen, and speaking and writing are not the same. It will be wiser, therefore, for us to go back to this original distinction. We started out with the intention of learning to become poets in the sense of reading poetry well. So far, all that we have learned is that the language of literature is different from that of speech, and that the use of uncommon words is not necessarily a sign of good style. We see, then, that a knowledge of words is the beginning of judgment in literature. In order to read well, we have to learn to recognise a simple and an ornate style, to know when uncommon words are effective or merely bombastic, and when the style which uses them is harmonious or merely startling. We cannot expect to learn all this at once. The cleverest critics differ in their judgment on some points. But a little reflection will help us to find our way. Suppose that you were going to write a book, and that a row of words was waiting in

* Molière, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, II., vi.

your ante-room to apply for admission to the work. Take any list of words from a dictionary, and consider how you would deal with their claims. Here are fourteen from "A":—

Amanuensis	Ambassador
Amaranth	Ambidextrous
Amass	Ambient
Amateur	Ambiguous
Amative	Ambition
Amaze	Amble
Amazon	Ambrosia.

§ 7. *Examination of Words.*—(1) *Amanuensis* means a man who writes at the dictation of another, or who copies out what another has written. It is not a very high calling, and it is distinctly an ugly word. Literally, it means a "from-the-hander" (Latin, *a*, from, *manu*, the hand, *ensis*, adjectival termination), and unless you were drafting an advertisement for a clerk, or were writing a book on middle-class professions, you would politely tell that word that you had no use for its services.

(2) *Amaranth* means, literally, "unfading" or "unwithering." It was used by certain Greek writers as the name of a fancied flower which could not decay, and it comes to us laden with all the lovely associations of Wordsworth's "deathless flowers, from Paradise transplanted." But deathless flowers are not seen in an ordinary

country walk, and this word could only be employed appropriately in a passage dealing with the things of the imagination. You would, therefore, mark "amaranth" for selection if you were about to write a poem, or a piece of imaginative prose, in which a reference to the other world could be tastefully introduced. The word is found, for example, in the "choric song" of Tennyson's poem, *The Lotus-Eaters*—

> "But, propt on beds of amaranth and moly." . . .

(3) *Amass* is a verb meaning "to pile up." We may amass wealth, or amass experience, but in the ordinary uses of language a journeyman-builder does not amass bricks, nor a cardplayer counters, nor a child on the sea-shore grains of sand. That is to say, the word moves with a certain dignity; for more colloquial purposes, the verbs "heap" or "pile" would take its place. Such an insight into the rank of words can only be acquired by mixing with them freely, by studying their habits, and learning to feel with them. If a man accustomed to clean steam-engines were to apply for the post of an invalid's nurse, you would probably reject him. His rough hands, their traces of oil, and the general bearing of the applicant, would guide your decision. By much reading we learn to judge words as accurately as men, and we shall mark

"amass" for use if the book to be written requires a well-bred word to express the meaning of "heap together."

(4) *Amateur* is an interesting candidate. The Latin *amator* meant a "lover." At the time of the Renaissance, learned Frenchmen revived the word in the narrower sense of a lover of learning. At the same time they implied that the mere lover of learning was not a learned man. He was only playing, or flirting, with a serious occupation. Learning had come to mean for them the be-all and end-all of life, and when they talked of "love" they meant a tenderness for learning. They established, we may say, a monopoly in love, confining its use to those things which alone could inspire the passion in themselves. Other instances of the perversion of language by the selfishness of monopolists are "deer," originally "a wild animal," but confined at the time of the great deer forests in England to that particular species, "scripture," originally "writing," and "bible," originally "a book," but confined by common consent to the greatest writing of all ages, and the Book of books. Now, when the Renaissance had done its work, the enthusiasm for learning declined, and the love of learning took its proper place as a department only of the great province of love. But it was then too late to restore "amateur" to its old significance.

The waters of the Renaissance had passed over it, and it was impregnated with the intellectual tendencies of that period. To-day, for instance, we may even speak of an "amateur of love," meaning, not *amator amoris*, or a lover of love, but a man inexperienced in loving, who plays at the passion without fully understanding it. For never again will amateur mean, simply, a lover. For our present purpose, let us add, a word with so strange a history must be cautiously employed. We cannot overlook its past, however unfortunate it may have been, and "amateur" must be marked as a word of rather mean character, with no very clear claim to be used in dignified writing.

(5) *Amative* comes from the same Latin root, but it never resided in France, nor indeed has it yet been completely naturalised in England. The English word "loving" having passed into general use, "amative" was left over for the service of scientific men to express a special quality of persons in a loving condition. As an applicant for admission to genuine literature, it can be dismissed at once.

(6) *Amaze* may be passed for use. It is a neutral word so far as its history is concerned. That is to say, it has lived a quite uneventful life, and it will be in place wherever a word is required to express strong astonishment.

(7) *Amazon*, though it stands next to "amaze" in the row of candidates before us, is a word with a very different past. If you are not about to write of the fabled female warriors of the old Greek story, the word may importune you for admission in the general sense of a "masculine woman," or of a woman with manly habits. The reason is that, since the Greek tale is now but seldom told, poor "amazon" has little work to do. It is, therefore, always ready for a job, and is content for the sake of employment to do inferior work. It will be a little hard to reject it if we are going to write about women who behave in an unfeminine manner, but if you aim at purity of style, you will mark "amazon" as a word which is somewhat too eager and officious.

(8) *Ambassador* is a stately word. Except in the technical sense of a Minister of State sent to a foreign Court, it must not be expected to do the work of a "messenger," unless the message is one of peculiar gravity. A clap of thunder may be the "ambassador" of a tempest, sent from the courts of heaven to announce the storm to earth, but a common telegram should not be made the "ambassador" of bad news. This is again a case for respecting the feelings of words.

(9) *Ambidextrous* is something like "amanuensis," in as far as it has an ugly sound, and has

failed altogether to win a place in the front rank, or aristocracy of words. It means "having the power to use both hands with equal ease" (literally right-handed on both sides: Latin, *ambo*, both, *dexter*, right), and you are not likely to require it except to express that meaning. But the word, though uncultivated, may be said to have possibilities. It is on promotion, so to speak, for the very simple reason that the work which it is set to do is not quite definite or rigid. "Using both hands with equal ease" may be literal or figurative. It may mean that the left hand can carry, and strike, and mould, as easily and skilfully as the right, or, by a slight stretch of imagination, the ambidextrous man may mean an adept at double-dealing. Thus, the idea which the word conveys admits a figurative interpretation; the work which it is set to do gives a little scope for originality. The word has an opportunity to escape from the confines of its literal meaning. But "ambidextrous" cannot offer any good testimonials in this respect. Its employers have not hitherto found it very useful in works requiring imagination, and if you reserve it for this purpose you must mark it as a word on its trial.

(10) *Ambient* means, literally, "going around," or surrounding, and, when it asks for employment, it ought to show a good reason why "surrounding"

should not be used. It is a pure-blooded Latin word, with all the pride of the Romans, and for ordinary English writers it would be a piece of affectation to avail themselves of its services. It does not keep the state of "ambassador," nor does it live in the imagination like "amaranth," yet it is as reluctant as either of them to be put to ignoble work. But as it will not be vulgarised, and as it has no special gifts to recommend it, "ambient" is best left alone. It is as useless in the social system of words as the gentlewoman who has known better days in the order of human society. Too proud to beg, and too poor to live, it must languish in penurious retirement. And here, without pausing long at (11) *Ambiguous*, which is a healthy, hard-working bourgeois of the dictionary, let us look for a moment at a word fully as well-born as "ambient," but extremely different in character and experience. "Piety" is likewise a Roman aristocrat. In the days when "*Pius Aeneas*" was the national hero of Rome, and the state which he founded was true to the kindred points of piety and arms,* this word was at once the virtue of kings, and the password of generals. Yet it fell on evil times. It lost its influence and power, and piety sank from the society of kings to the society of pawnbrokers; for the

* See Note 1.

mont de piété in modern French is a pawnbroker's shop. Without waiting to trace in this place the gradual descent of the word, the thing to notice here is the cheerful and ready manner in which piety has accepted its change of fortune. Instead of repining at its hardships, and lamenting the dead better days, it puts its pride in its pocket, turns up its frilled sleeves, and sets contentedly to work to earn the best livelihood it can. "Ambient" is a proud, stilted, white-fingered, mincing word, which will never do an honest day's work, while "piety," though equally well descended, has learned in its chequered career to endure what cannot be cured, and to do as thoroughly and courteously as it can the work that it finds to hand.

(12) *Ambition*, unlike "ambient," though both trace their descent from the same Latin family, comes with excellent references. It means, literally, "a going around," and was used at first of the candidate who goes the round of the electors in order to ask for their support. But the word has served many masters since those far away Roman days, and like certain animals that take the colour of their surroundings, it has varied its meaning to suit the purpose of each master. Some have used it as a term of blame, and others as a term of praise, but in all circumstances it has borne itself with dignity and self-

respect, and its place in genuine literature is quite assured. This change of complexion in words is interesting to notice, and we may profitably pause to examine the use of "ambition" by one or two great writers. Bacon, for instance, was clearly of opinion that men of ambitious natures are of necessity in certain cases:—

> "Good Commanders in the Warres must be taken, be they never so *Ambitious:* For the Use of their service dispenseth with the rest; And to take a Soldier without *Ambition*, is to pull off his Spurres. . . . Of *Ambitions*, it is lesse harmefull the *Ambition* to prevail in great things, than that other, to appeare in everything. . . . He that seeketh to be eminent amongst Able Men, hath a great taske; but that (*i.e.*, a task which) is ever good for the Publique. But he that plots, to be the onely figure amongst ciphars, is the decay of an whole Age. Honour hath three things in it: The Vantage Ground to do good; The Approach to kings, and Principall Persons; And the raising of a Mans owne Fortunes. He that hath the best of these intentions, when he aspireth, is an Honest Man: And that Prince that can discern of these intentions, in Another that aspireth, is a wise Prince."

This is a fine account of ambition in the abstract

as it is called; of ambition, that is to say, considered and discussed without particular reference to any ambitious man. But now, if we turn to Shakespeare, and listen to what he says about ambition as a feature in the character of this man or that, we are led to a different conclusion. Take, for example, the speech of Cardinal Wolsey in *King Henry VIII.*, and compare it carefully with Bacon's reflections on the merit of honest ambition:

> "Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye:
> I feel my heart new open'd. O, how wretched
> Is that poor man that hangs on princes' favours!
> There is, betwixt that smile we would aspire to,
> That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
> More pangs and fears than wars or women have:
> And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
> Never to hope again."

Bacon and Shakespeare, then, are alike in counting "the Approach to Kings" as a part of ambition; but Bacon sees it as it should be, Shakespeare sees it as it is. "When he aspireth," says Bacon, "he is an Honest Man," and his Prince is a "wise Prince"; but Shakespeare declares, through Wolsey's experience, that ambition is not worth its "pangs and fears":—

> "I charge thee, fling away ambition:
> By that sin fell the angels; how can man then,
> The image of his Maker, hope to win by it?"*

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* *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth*, Act iii., Sc. 2. If the student is interested in this

In using "ambition," accordingly, we shall first have to decide what we mean by the word, since obviously it bears one meaning for the moralist and another for the dramatist, one meaning when we think of it as a thing by itself, and another when we think of it as a personal possession.

(13) *Amble* need not detain us. It never varies its signification. It is a word which can only be used to describe a particular kind of motion, and has never shown any desire to go outside of its own province.

(14) *Ambrosia*, to conclude our examination, goes back, like "amaranth," to the Greeks, and, unlike "amazon," it does not push for a place in the common crowd of words. It began as "the food of the immortals," and the flavour of its origin clings about it to-day.

§ 8. *Life in Language.*—Thus, then, in fourteen words, taken at random from the dictionary in

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discussion of "ambition," he should read the speech of Antony in Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* (Act iii., Sc. 2), in which he defends Cæsar from Brutus's charge of ambition. Bishop Jeremy Taylor says, "Ambition teems with stratagems, . . . and is swelled with expectation as with a tympany"; but Satan, in Book I. of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, declares,

> "In my choice,
> To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
> Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" (261-63).

the order of the alphabet, which has no respect for persons, we have found all sorts of suggestive differences to guide us in employing them. The words in the rows of a dictionary are like the soldiers of the line. They are arranged alphabetically or numerically, for the sake of convenience, but the successful general, or the discerning writer, will know them from the inside. We, too, have caught glimpses of the many types of words which acknowledge the sceptre of King Style. He rules over more kinds of subjects than King Edward of the Britains, and he has to be almost more careful not to wound their peculiar susceptibilities. Even among the patricians, the words of long lineage and unsullied traditions, we have seen that distinctions prevail, and in the rank and file of language we have likewise to cultivate a delicate sense of discrimination. Yet we started that inquiry on no more definite a basis than that you were going to write a book. Nothing at all was said as to what class of book it was to be to which these words sought admission, and the utmost we could do was to determine quite generally in advance their literary character. But now, suppose that Tennyson were alive, and were inviting the words to apply for admittance to a new poem. How promptly he would reject the undesirable candidates. "Amanuensis" would never have the

courage to present itself; "amazon" would be shrewd enough to wear all its barbaric splendour, and to hide, if it could, from that searching eye, the tawdry traces of its cultivated life; "amateur" would shrink into the shadow of its own discreditable past; and "ambient" would ask in vain to be saved from the penalty of caste. And how surely Tennyson was able to get the utmost work out of his words. He was a wise and loving master, and they served him willingly and faithfully. We may take, as a striking example of his power of selecting words for a special purpose of style, the following seven lines from his *Morte d'Arthur:*

> "Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
> And barren chasms, and all to left and right
> The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
> His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
> Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels—
> And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
> And the long glories of the winter moon."

"On a sudden"—yes; but he does not merely *tell* us of that sudden change. He reproduces it in our ears, and brings it visibly before our eyes, by the change from the short syllables and narrow vowels (*ă, ĭ, ŭ*) and the repetition of the hard consonants *b, c, g,* to the soft *l,* and the dissyllables, and the broad *ā* and *ō.* We *hear* the noise of the armed man stumbling down the rocky path, and

we *see* the expanse of shining water as he reaches the level of the lake.

§ 9. *Onomatopœia.*—These lines are an example of the effective use of the commonest words. There is not a single word in them (except, perhaps, "harness" in the sense of a soldier's armour) which we might not employ in daily conversation. But they are used here with the special design of bringing out all their powers of sound, and this leads us to a fresh point of importance in the consideration of the use of words in poetry. In the present instance Tennyson was concerned to make the description sound like the thing described, to suggest by the sounds of his verses the sounds or movements that they narrate. This kind of writing, which is rather a trick than an art of literature, is called by the long name of "onomatopœia," which means, literally, "making names" to express sounds. "Mew," "coo," "chirp," are good examples of onomatopœia, or of words made to express the noises of a cat, a dove, and a robin respectively. In these lines from Tennyson, it is to be noted, moreover, that a part of the effect depends on a change of melody. The first five lines in the quotation are jerky and abrupt, like the footsteps of the man they describe, and the last two lines move smoothly and fluently in sight of the lake

and sky. "And on a sudden, lo!" seems to break freely into the open, and he waits to recover breath as he surveys the level lake and the long glories of the moon.

§ 10. *Alliteration.*—But the art of music in language is, at bottom, much more subtle than this trick of sound-reproduction. We have spoken of style as a result of a selection and combination of words, and as far as the selection is concerned, we have seen that, for a master of language, the dictionary is full of romance, and rich in the comedy and tragedy of human nature itself. When we come to words in combination, the first rules to guide us must be based on the requirements of the ear rather than on what we may call the psychology of words, or the laws of their own inner being. First in time, and chief in use, is the device of alliteration. The ear is pleased by hearing the same letter repeated. In early verse the practice was almost entirely confined to the repetition of initial consonants. That practice has prevailed from the "*w*igu *w*intrum geong" of an Old English war song to the "*l*evel *l*ake" in the lines quoted above. Later writers have varied and extended the practice. They have repeated the consonants at the beginning of one word and in the middle of the next, or in the middle of one

word and at the end of another. Again, instead of repeating the same consonant, the alliterative effect is produced by repeating similar consonants, such as *d* and *t*, *p* and *b*, *f* and *v*, and so on, and a more subtle device than all these is found in the alliteration of vowels. Let us keep for the present to Tennyson, the last great master of the art of poetry in England, and take a line and a half from his *Lucretius* in illustration of this :—

> " Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,
> Nor sound of human sorrow mounts."

The words are combined here with the deliberate purpose of using the resources of alliteration ; but the well-worn device of repeating the initial consonant is less important (*m*oans . . . *m*ounts, *s*ound . . . *s*orrow) than the suspended alliteration in *l*owest ro*ll*, and, again, very effectively, in *m*oa*n*s, sou*n*d, hu*m*a*n*, *m*ou*n*ts ; and most important of all is the repetition of the open vowel in l*o*west, r*o*ll, m*o*ans, sorr*o*w, with its variants in s*ou*nd, h*u*man, m*ou*nts.

§ 11. *Rhythm.*—Another source of pleasure is discovered in the regular recurrence of accented syllables. If we have to combine the words, " Terror is a dread foeman," we may either write them in that order, or we may write " Terror is a foeman dread." The ear is struck at once by a

difference in the rhythmic beats. In the first combination we have an accented syllable followed by an unaccented, then another accented, then another unaccented, then two accented syllables closed by one unaccented. But in the second combination, the syllables are disposed as follows—accented, unaccented, accented, unaccented, accented, unaccented, accented—and the final accent is made stronger by the heavy pause. Or, marking the accented, or strong, syllables by the sign ⁻, and the unaccented, or weak, by the sign ∪, we may display the two combinations thus :—

(1) ⁻ ∪ ⁻ ∪ ⁻ ⁻ ∪ stop,
(2) ⁻ ∪ ⁻ ∪ ⁻ ∪ ⁻ stop,

the pause in (1) being on a weak syllable, and in (2) on a strong. The first is a piece of prose-writing, the second has the regular accentuation of verse. We can mark the stresses and divide them into regular parts, calling those parts "feet" or "bars." Thus, in the given example, we may write the line with four stresses :

/ / / /
Terror is a foeman dread,

or we may represent its scansion by the following metrical scheme :—

⁻ ∪ / ⁻ ∪ / ⁻ ∪ / ⁻ / /.

There are many kinds of metre, but the principle

of a beat or stress recurring at fixed intervals is the common foundation of all; and when we talk of the scansion of a line of verse we mean its division into metrical feet.*

§ 12. *Further Repetition of Sounds.*—Now let us go back to Tennyson for a fresh illustration, and try to discover another secret of style in the metrical combination of words. There is a song in *The Princess* which we may quote as a whole :—

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

"Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

"Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

"Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more."

* See Note 2.

Note, first, that the accents in each line are regularly distributed in the following order:—

∪ – / ∪ – / ∪ – / ∪ – / ∪ – / /

so that, calling the short-long (∪ –) foot an iambus, we may call the metre five-foot iambic verse, or *iambic pentameter* (*pente* = five). A slight variation occurs here and there, especially in the first bar, where both syllables are occasionally accented, but the ear is gratified by the change, and English metre, be it said once for all, is a question of ear, not of rule. Note, next, that the poet employs every available kind of alliteration. We have t*e*ars, m*ea*n, *dep*th, *d*ivine, *des*pair, *th*inking, *th*at (read "which" in this place, and mark the difference of sound), *fr*esh, *fir*st, *b*eams, *b*rings, *fr*ien*d*s, u*nd*erworl*d*, sa*d*, re*d*dens, *ov*er, *lov*e, be*l*ow, *v*erge. These are the most obvious specimens of alliteration in the first half of the song. But now let us look a little further. We remark that six words ("the days that are no more") recur at regular intervals to close every fifth line. Looking more closely, we remark that the word "tears" occurs three times in the first two lines, that "rise" at the beginning of the third line is balanced by "eyes" at the end, and that the fourth and fifth lines both open with words of similar sound, containing an "*n*" and a "*k-i-n-g*."

Again, the last line of the second stanza (the stanzas, or groups of lines, are clearly marked by "the days that are no more") picks up the words "fresh" and "sad" from the first and third lines respectively. Similarly, in the third stanza, the words "sad" and "strange" are repeated in the last line from the first, and "sad" takes us back to the preceding stanza, while the middle line is marked by a repetition of the word "dying." We need not pause to point out the obvious alliterations in this stanza and in the fourth, but there again we are struck by the word "death" picked up in the last line from the first, and by the threefold use of "deep as love" in the middle of the stanza.

§ 13. *Rhyme.*—This little poem of twenty lines would repay yet closer study in its word-selection and combination. But what is the total effect of its appeal to the ear? What is the effect of one sound repeated at the end of each stanza, of notes struck and caught up again throughout the course of the poem, of this "rise . . . eyes," "sad, fresh . . . sad, fresh," "dying . . . dying," and so forth? The answer leaps to the lips: the style, in addition to its obvious charms, produces the effect of rhyme, and with rhyme we come to a fresh resource of poets in combining words to please the ear.

Tennyson has shown in this song how an effect of rhyme may be produced without actually using the device. It is technically a poem in blank verse, but so skilfully are the sounds disposed that the ear is deluded into believing that it is listening to rhymed poetry. Tennyson's supreme mastery of language, his loving and intimate insight into the power of words, enabled him to combine them with this effect; and we may note, that this song in its own way is as much a *tour de force* of style as were, in their own way, the onomatopœic lines which we quoted in § 8. It is, in a sense, the insolence of skill which gives the craftsman courage to exhibit such tricks of art. Only the artist of approved perfection would have dared to make the experiment.

§ 14. *Use of Rhyme.* — Rhyme, then, or the repetition of similar sounds at regular pauses, is another device of modern poets for pleasing the ear.* We cannot yet say when rhyme is appropriate, or when it is out of place. The decision depends to some extent on the form of verse that is adopted. In a long poem, for instance, there is room for an effective display of resources of style which cannot be used on a small scale; and,

* Rhyme is unknown in the classical poetry of the Greeks and Romans.

generally speaking, rhyme is more commonly found in short poems than in long. Rhyme, again, would remove dramatic verse, or the actual speeches of personages, one degree further from the reality that is imitated, so that the device is rare in dramatic poetry. But poets in different ages have differed in their views on these usages, and we shall do best to examine a few examples of rhymed verse, in order to discover how the poet uses the device, and what effect it produces, rather than why or when he is likely to employ it. Here, too, let us still keep to Tennyson, as the greatest master in modern times of all the arts and refinements of the poetic style. Take first these three examples :—

(1) "Pink was the shell within,
Silver without ;
Sounds of the great sea
Wander'd about."

(2) "Break, break, break,
At the foot of the crags, O Sea !
But the golden grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

(3) "Sunset and evening-star,
And one clear call for me ;
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea."

In (1) and (2) we notice at once that a sound-repetition occurs at the end of the last line only,

while sounds are repeated in (3) at the end of the third and fourth lines from the first and the second. Among other varieties used by Tennyson within a stanza of four lines are the rhymes of the fourth line with the first, and of the third with the second, which we find throughout his *In Memoriam*:—

(4) "To-day the grave is bright for me,
For them the light of life increas'd
Who stay to share the morning feast,
Who rest to-night beside the sea,"—

and, again, the rhymes of the second and fourth lines with the first, as in the following stanza from a poem called *The Daisy*:—

(5) "It told of England then to me,
And now it tells of Italy,
O love, we too shall go no longer
To lands of summer across the sea."

Now, looking quietly at these five specimens, we may remark a few points. It does not seem to matter much to the ear whether one or two sounds are repeated, or if one sound is repeated twice. Again—and this is important—the sound is repeated more often than not from or to the word "me," which has no particular emphasis. For the purpose of the thought in his mind, it would not signify if the poet had written, "Will never come back to her," or "And one clear call for him," or "To-day the grave is bright for them," or

"It told of England then to us." For the centre of the thought in (2) is the indifference of the sea, in (3) it is the call at sunset, in (4) the consolation of mourning, and in (5) the recollection of the past. The pleasure given to the ear by the repetition of the "e" sound in each instance is wholly, or almost wholly, independent of the true poetical effect, and we find on reflection that our delight in these stanzas is only very slightly due to the presence of the rhymes. They just succeed in adding to the gratification of the ear, and that is the end of their business. We did without them in the song from *The Princess*, and we could do without them again if the other elements of poetic style were to make us forget to miss them. Certainly we cannot declare, in whatever order the rhymes occur, whether as (4) *me, creased, feast, sea,—a-b-b-a*, that is to say,—or as (5) *a-a-b-a*, or as (3) *a-b-a-b*, or as (1) and (2) *a-b-c-b*, that the variation affects the poetry. It is not a case of more rhymes, more pleasure, and less rhymes, less pleasure. Indeed, to a trained ear, the charm of (3) is much greater than the charm of (5), and it is difficult to decide between the relative charms of (2) and (3). Anyway, our decision on this point is not assisted by the presence of two rhymes in (3) and of one only in (2).

§ 15. *Value of Rhyme.*—The conclusion is that the device of rhyme is not essential to poetic style. As far as style is concerned with the choice and combination of words, the proof of style in these quotations from Tennyson is not to be sought in the rhymes that he has introduced. Primarily, at any rate, we find it in the other uses of language which we have been learning to recognise. We find it, first, in the *rhythm*, which is different, as we see, in each piece, and which is always appropriate to the movement of the thought. We find it, next, in the *alliteration*, which is a prominent feature in each extract; and we find it, again, in the *metaphor*, which is the very soul of life in literature.

> "And may there be no moaning of the bar
> When I put out to sea,"—

the beauty of these lines does not lie in their rhymes with "star" and "me": it lies in the wave and sweep of the melody, in which the first line rises and falls, like the tide of the sea itself, and the second takes three tranquil steps (U¯ / U¯ / U¯ / /) from mortal life to immortality; it lies in the subtle appeal to the ear in "*m*ay . . . *b*e . . . *m*oaning . . . *b*ar," and it lies in the figure of speech by which the passage to death is represented as the courageous beginning of a voyage across an unknown sea. All the

qualities of poetry are present in overflowing measure before the device of rhyme is superadded, and we are not surprised to learn that much of the greatest poetry is unrhymed; it makes its appeal to mind and ear without descending to that obvious device.*

It may be noted as a proof of the fact that rhyme is not essential to poetry, that the best effects of comic verse are produced by exaggerating the importance of the rhymes. Just as a caricaturist makes his subject grotesque by bringing the most obvious feature into painful prominence, so the writers of comic verse commonly depend for their effect on the ingenuity of their rhyming powers. They draw marked attention to the feature which is most of all anxious to escape notice. There are not many words, for example, which rhyme with "hope," and Thomas Hood, in an ode to his son, produces a comic effect by going far afield to find one:

> "Thy father's pride and hope!
> (He'll break the mirror with that skipping-rope!)"

Or take Lewis Carroll's triumph of rhyme:

> "Who would not give all else for two p
> ennyworth only of beautiful soup?"

Generally we may say that where a poem

*See Note 2.

suggests that the writer has been using a rhyming-dictionary, it is a fairly correct sign that the true elements of poetry are lacking. The device of rhyme, to be effective, must not be obtrusive.

§ 16. *Metaphor.* — But the greatest resource of poetical language lies in its use of metaphor. We noted the meaning of metaphor in discussing Carlyle's description of the stars in heaven as "street-lamps of the City of God." The value of metaphorical diction is twofold. First, it is pictorial, introducing variety and colour into the material design; and secondly, it is a means of interpretation, an aid to the conveyance of thought from one mind to another. One train of thought suggests another, or one set of ideas is associated with another at a particular point, and that especial aspect is emphasised by employing the terms of the second set in order to express the first. Thus, to take the commonest example, I may want to express the sudden, sharp effect of exposure to a cold wind. To make this clear, I borrow a word from another experience suggested by the action of the wind, and I say that the wind *bites*. From the strict grammarian's point of view, a metaphor must be distinguished from a personification on the one part and from a simile on the other. An effect of style is produced by personify-

ing an inanimate object. Thus, in the opening lines of Tennyson's *Œnone*,

> "The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,
> Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,"

the poet imagines the vapour as a conscious agent, and makes his description accordingly the more vivid and dramatic. A few lines further down, we come to a mixed simile and metaphor:

> "Hear me, for I will speak, and build up all
> My sorrow with my song, as yonder walls
> Rose slowly to a music slowly breathed,
> A cloud that gather'd shape."

Taking this passage word by word, "build" is a metaphor. The comparison with the walls of Troy is a simile, and the "cloud" is either a metaphor or a simile, according as we assume the phrase to signify (*a*) the walls rose like a cloud, or (*b*) the cloudy walls rose. So that for purposes of poetic style a strict differentiation between similes, metaphors, and personifications is of no great importance. The thing to note in this place is the splendid resource of variety, emphasis, and pictorial effect which is put at the disposal of a poet who is alert to the association of ideas. Shakespeare's ripe imagination was always brightening his style by the use of these aids. Take any one familiar scene from his plays, say the fifth of the First

Act of *Hamlet*, and you will find them too many to enumerate:

Simile. "Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Simile. Like quills upon the fretful porcupine."

Simile. ". . . That I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
Metaphor. May sweep to my revenge."

Simile. "Duller should'st thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself at ease on Lethe wharf."

". . . But know, thou noble youth,
Metaphor. The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown."

Simile. "Swift as quicksilver it courses through
Metaphor. The natural gates and alleys of the body."

Metaphor. "Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin."

"Leave her to heaven,
Metaphor. And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her."

Metaphor. "Yea, from the table of my memory. . .
Within the book and volume of my brain."

Metaphor. "The time is out of joint."

The reader will be able to add to these examples, and to discover sometimes even in single words an allusive or figurative meaning which the poet has seized upon to quicken the pleasure of his audience.*

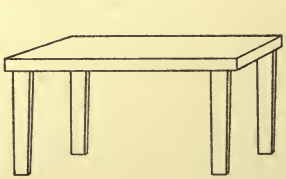
* See Note 3.

PART II

POETIC TRUTH

§ 17. *Words Express Thoughts.*—With this proposition we reach an entirely fresh point of view from which to approach language-study. Hitherto we have dealt with words as we might deal with schoolboys or soldiers, as the units in a community. We have seen them drawn up and drilled in the uniform rows of a dictionary, and between the lines of that book—a book which is no book, as Charles Lamb somewhat hastily called it—we have learnt to look for the history of words, and to distinguish one from another according to the elements of their character and nature. Up and down their serried ranks we have traced the marks of difference. We have seen such a word as "amanuensis" standing shoulder by shoulder with "amaranth," just as the future head of the school might be ranged in alphabetical order with an incurable dunce, or as a future Sir Hector

MacDonald might enlist simultaneously with a coward. Again, we have learnt to know something of the bearing of words in comradeship. As certain boys tend together, or as certain men fall into groups, so certain words in combination are more effective than apart. But throughout this stage of our inquiry, we have been treating words as creatures, as separate living organisms with powers and feelings of their own. We have now to change our point of view. We have now to look at the words, not as independent beings with a future and a past, but as the signs which a superior being uses to indicate his thoughts. If he is thinking of a wooden board erected on four wooden legs, he may express his thought by the following graphic sign,—



But if he wishes to utter that sign aloud, or to reproduce it without a picture, he must have recourse to another set of signs. He must use a verbal sign instead of a graphic one. Accordingly he makes an agreement with those of like mind with himself — or, rather, they obey a common

impulse—to speak and write of that thought as a "table." Why it should be called a "table" instead of a "Helicon" or a "Mesopotamia" is a question that would take us too far. The origin of language is obscure, more obscure perhaps than it seems; but for our present purpose it is enough to note that there are two points of view from which every word may be regarded. We may note that "table" rhymes with "able," that its accent falls on the first syllable, that it is scanned as a trochee, that it alliterates with words in "t" and "bl," and that it means, properly, a flat surface. That is the business of style. In the realm of thought, however, all that we have to note is that "table" is a convenient symbol, wherever English is understood, for the wooden board on four legs.

§ 18. *Matter and Manner.*—One conclusion is obvious. The thing symbolised is more important than the symbol itself; behind the style in poetry we must look for the poetic thought. A man may be a perfect master of all the arts and tricks of style. He may know his words like intimate friends, and the secrets of rhythm and metre, alliteration, rhyme, and so forth, may be as easy to him as walking, but he will not be a poet unless he thinks a poet's thoughts. Accordingly, we have

to ascend from the symbols that poets use to the things that they symbolise. We have to neglect for this purpose the rich resources of language, by which they delight the ear, in order to form a judgment on the merits of their thought, by which they enlarge and enrich the mind:

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n,
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."

We have, then, to examine the material on which the poet's pen sets to work as well as the manner of its working, and we shall find in the course of our inquiry that some poets have more thought than style, and others more style than thought. Some ignore the feelings of their symbols, like men who use their servants as machines, and others cultivate and indulge the symbols without regard to the function they should perform. In the one case the manner is uncouth, in the other the matter is uninspired.

§ 19. *Matter and Manner Uneven.*—Let us look at a few examples. As an instance of uncouth style we may select the following stanza from Browning's poem *Popularity*:—

"Hobbs hints blue—straight he turtle eats :
Nobbs prints blue—claret crowns his cup :
Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats,—
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?"

Here the poet's eye is finely frenzied. He sees the ludicrous disproportion between the reward of the toiling fisherman who risks his life in the sea to net the precious shells that hold the purple dye, and the rewards of the tradesmen and manufacturers who apply the results of his labour, and hence he concludes that popularity is a very poor test of merit. It is a poetical thought, and the comparison of Keats, the poet without honour, to the nameless adventurer in the deep, through whom Hobbs and Nobbs and Nokes and Stokes grow rich, is worthy of poetic treatment. But the poet's pen is inadequate to his vision. He has simply rushed at his meaning without regard to the symbols he employs. The jerky rhythm, the obtrusive rhymes, and the tasteless selection of words, are all unfair to the thought which Browning had to express. He used his symbols contemptuously, and they avenged themselves by degrading his design.

If this is clear, we may take next an example of uninspired matter. Browning, we see, despised his symbols, and his thought suffered in consequence. Mr Coventry Patmore, on the contrary,

had a tendency to symbol-worship. He cultivated his style in excess, till it obscured and eclipsed his thought.

> "I, singularly moved,
> To love the lovely that are not beloved,
> Of all the seasons, most
> Love Winter, and to trace
> The sense of the Trophonian pallor on her face.
> It is not death, but plenitude of peace ;
> And the dim cloud that doth the world enfold
> Hath less the characters of dark and cold
> Than warmth and light asleep,
> And correspondent breathing seems to keep
> With the infant harvest, breathing soft below
> Its eider coverlet of snow."

The sound of these lines is delicious. The many subtle devices by which they appeal to the ear, and which our previous investigations should now enable us to recognise, combine to produce a music at once melodious and captivating. We yield to the *atmosphere* of the poem as we might yield to an hour of idleness under the shadow of an oak tree in a poppy field. But if we resist this temptation to listen, as it were, without our minds, if we turn from the beauty of the symbols to a contemplation of the thought, and retrace the journey of imagination backwards from the pen to the eye, our delight is considerably curtailed. For the failure here is in the matter. The manner is, literally, superfine—fine, that is to say, above and

beyond the requirements of the thought to be expressed. Mr Patmore has cared for his symbols too much. In order to utter his liking for Winter, which is, after all, not so rare, he has refined and polished his language to an unnecessary degree. This "love . . . lovely . . . beloved . . . love," this "Trophonian pallor" (whatever "Trophonian" may mean), this elaboration of the image of summer sleeping under the snow—by no means a "thing unknown"—these are all the faults of a style in excess of the claims of the thought, where the poet's pen has transgressed the horizon of the poet's eye. We might add that there is a suggestion of *pose* (a fatal absence, therefore, of naturalness) in the credit that the poet takes to himself for his liking of Winter. Not even Mr Patmore should patronise a season of nature. Shelley, at least, expressed the same thought in exquisitely proportioned language when he wrote,

> "I love snow, and all the forms
> Of the radiant frost.
> I love winds, and rains, and storms,
> Everything almost
> Which is Nature's."

For the two great questions to be considered are: (1) What does the poet say? and (2) How does he say it?

Now let us ask these questions in two instances

more. Wordsworth cherished a poetical thought when he drew the picture of Peter Bell, ignorantly and cruelly beating the ass which would not leave its master's dead body. But he dealt despitefully with his thought when he selected the symbols to express it:

"'Twas but one mild reproachful look,
A look more tender than severe;
And, straight, in sorrow, not in dread,
He turned the eyeball in his head
Toward the smooth river deep and clear.

"Upon the Beast, the sapling rings;
His lank sides heaved, his limbs they stirr'd;
He gave a groan, and then another,
Of that which went before the brother,
And then he gave a third!"

This crying example of defective manner—of the pen unequal to the eye—reaches its worst stage in the line, "of that which went before the brother," which is an obtrusive concession to the device of rhyme, and stamps the style as unpoetical. And here, without pausing longer to point out the faults of this passage, let us turn to a contrary instance:

"The honeysuckle round the porch has wov'n its wavy bowers,
And by the meadow trenches blow the faint sweet cuckoo-flowers;
And the wild marsh-marigold shines like fire in swamps and hollows gray,
And I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May.

The night-winds come and go, mother, upon the meadow-grass,
And the happy stars above them seem to brighten as they pass." *

Here we may respectfully urge that the symbols selected by Tennyson are too rare and precious for his thought. The poet's pen is more ambitious than his eye. All that he sees is a village girl who is to be crowned by her companions on the morrow; but to express this image he uses elaborate language out of keeping with its character. Read the third line, for instance, and mark the magnificent swing of the metre, rushing through the bars to the sudden pause on "fire," like the sudden revelation of the glory of the wild marsh-marigold itself, and it is clear that no village maiden would ever have spoken in that strain. Nor, again, would she talk of the happy stars that brighten as the night winds pass below them, nor yet—later on in her speech—of the music on the wind coming up the valley. The uneven edges of *Peter Bell* may offend a sensitive ear, but the stately talk of this homely maid is a worse offence to the mind. For the one is a defect of manner, but the other of matter.

§ 20. *Spirit and Form.*—We see, then, that thought and style both go to the making of great

* From the *May Queen*, by Lord Tennyson.

poetry. The eye and the pen must work together. Not all the beauties of style will atone for a paucity of vision; not all the riches of thought will atone for a poverty of style. The symbols of expression must be set to the thought to be expressed, "like perfect music unto noble words." But, seeing this, we still fail to see the whole of the art of poetry unless we know something of the laws that govern the choice of form. The imagination, we are told, bodies forth the forms of things unknown, and the poet's pen, intervening, turns them to shape, and gives them a local habitation and a name. Yes, but what of that journey between the eye and the pen? In what mysterious region, by what processes unguessed-at is the work of the pen accomplished? Is it bound by immutable laws, by rules of judgment and taste, which any man of culture can apply, or does it move in obscurity, attaining the desirable purpose by means which the critic cannot trace? This, after all, is the true problem of expression — to discover *how* the poet's pen does its work, and what hidden poetic instinct helps him to define the shape to which he turns his inspiration. For the shapes, or moulds, of poetry are many and diverse. Lucretius, for instance, wrote a poem *On the Nature of things*, which is complete in 7,413 lines; and Catullus, who lived in the same age—the Ciceronian age of Rome

—is the author of many complete poems of less than a dozen lines each. Contrasts of this kind are repeated in every epoch of history. Virgil and Horace were contemporaries,—Virgil, the author of the *Æneid*, in twelve books and 10,000 lines; Horace, the writer of *Odes*, some of which are only ten lines long. Spencer wrote the *Faerie Queen* in the age in which Thomas Campion was composing his little melodies; Crabbe's *Village* and Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope* were contemporaneous with the early poems of Burns. Nor need we multiply these instances. Examples of different forms of verse are contained, more often than not, in the works of a single poet. Shakespeare is the author of *Hamlet*, and he is likewise the writer of sonnets and songs. Wordsworth wrote the *Excursion*, which is a fragment in 9,000 lines; he also wrote single poems of eight lines or less. Shelley wrote the *Revolt of Islam*, which is about 5,000 lines long; he is yet more famous as the author of poems as short as they are sweet. Nor indeed need we ransack the works of any poet for examples of differences in form. Within the same poem very often two or more moulds, or shapes, are adopted. The Greek playwrights introduced so-called choric songs into their plays, thus varying the choice of a dramatic mould with occasional lyrical forms; and Tennyson, to go no further back, has

shown us in the *Princess* how the blank verse of the main design may be interrupted by lyrical interludes.

The question inevitably arises, What is the relation between the eye and the pen? To what law, or habit, or instinct of the art, are the differences of form to be ascribed? What are the forms of poetry, and to what types of inspiration do they correspond? We have nothing to do in this inquiry with the selection of words or the devices of style. We know that words are mere symbols by which to express an idea, and we are concerned now with the architect's design, not with the builder's materials.

§ 21. *The Need of Expression.*—Poetry begins in thought. The shape that it assumes is determined by the nature of the thought. The choice of form, that is to say, is instinctive or inevitable. There is no question here, as there was with the choice of words, of rejecting one form and selecting another. As the thought is, so the poem will be: it is turned to outward shape as it takes its way downward from the brain to the hand—in the journey between the eye and the pen, thought must travel through the country of expression. We may talk about forms of verse, and draw up a learned list of rules to govern each particular

kind; but the truth is, that, with one possible exception,* no form of poetry is rigid; no poet is governed by any rules which obstruct his freedom of expression. The rules are manufactured by commentators who observe the habits of poets, but the poetry is written by men and women who wish to express an idea in the manner best adapted to convey it clearly to another mind. This fact is important, because it dispels the delusion that poetry is an artificial product. There is a kind of obstinate belief that a man sitting down to write a poem has to put away the natural uses of language, that, instead of saying "I feel cold" when he means it, he has to fit that sentiment into the clamps of a rigid framework of poetic diction; that he undertakes to construct a certain article, and is bound by fixed rules of construction. Nothing is further from the truth. A man writes a poem as a baby utters a cry; each is a natural expression. A baby's cry is a song without words, the expression of a feeling of pain or joy within the capacity of an infant's mind. As the mind grows more capable of feeling, and the powers of expression increase, the song takes a more definite shape. Thought deepens and expands, emotions gather and grow subtle, and the cry of the infant develops into the song of the man. This, at least,

* See Note 4.

is the process of poetry in its simplest and most direct form of lyrical verse. Catullus, the Roman, one of the greatest lyric poets, wrote two lines of verse which contain the whole secret of his art:

> "I hate, I love. You ask the causes of this fact?
> I know not, but I feel it happen, and I'm racked."

Just as a baby, supposing that he could argue about his emotions, might inform his nurse, "I am hurt and I am pleased. You ask me why I am hurt and pleased? I don't know, but I feel it, and I cry out," so Catullus tells the sympathetic world that his songs of love and hate are the natural expression of the emotions that he feels. By no other form of expression could he make his meaning equally clear. He does not choose his form of utterance; above all, he does not pretend to feel: the emotion is genuine, and the utterance direct, *poeta nascitur, non fit.* It is by those who come after the poets that the rules of poetry are made.

§ 22. *Expression must be Imperfect.*—We reach two conclusions: words, we see, are the expression of thoughts, and the form that the words assume depends on the nature of the thought. Language, therefore, is a means of communication, and, though the best means at our disposal, it is often imperfect and inadequate. Sometimes it says too much, and

at other times too little. "People never sufficiently reflect," declared Goethe, "that a language, after all, is nothing but a collection of symbols or pictures, which never directly express the objects, but only imitate them." If I say "lion," for instance, I do not create the beast; I merely avail myself of a sign which you and I have agreed to use when we want to represent it. If you do not possess the key to my symbols—if, that is to say, we do not imitate the same object by this sign—the word will convey nothing to you, or it will convey a different meaning. Thus, the symbol "pain" has a different meaning on either side of the Channel. In a Frenchman's mind it calls up the idea and image of bread; in an Englishman's it represents the feeling contrary to joy. This is an obvious instance of a symbol losing its vitality; the use of a foreign language cuts the lines of communication till the meaning of the new symbols has been acquired. But there is another sense in which language is an imperfect instrument of expression. "What do you read, my lord?" asks Polonius of Hamlet; "Words, words, words," is the Prince's passionate reply, and a great revolt of action against speech is contained in that cry of despair. Language is the instrument of knowledge, as action is the instrument of will; but as the act itself may imper-

fectly express the will, so the poet's expression may be inadequate to his thought. In a sense, it must be inadequate. Heine, the great German poet, tells us in one place, "out of my great sorrows I make my little songs," but during the process of expression, between the sorrow and the song, something, one feels, must be lost. He can but imitate his emotion by signs, he can but hint at what he feels; and another German poet, oppressed by this imperfection of the symbols of expression, declares that

> "The greatest poems are silent,
> Silent as deepest grief,
> Like phantom ghosts, they wander,
> Mute through the broken heart."

Tennyson, again, like Hamlet in his revolt against "words, words, words," was aware that emotion cannot always be adequately expressed in song, that the symbols of feeling do not always imitate the reality:

> "The Wye is hush'd, nor moved along,
> And hush'd my deepest grief of all,
> When, fill'd with tears that cannot fall,
> I brim with sorrow drowning song.
>
> "The tide flows down, the wave again
> Is vocal in its wooded walls;
> My deeper anguish also falls,
> And I can speak a little then."

There are several points to notice here. First,

there is the favourite device of poets, of discovering a likeness between their own emotional mood and a natural phenomenon. Tennyson sees it in the resemblance between the course of the Wye and the movement of his grief. When the river is silent, and its stream hardly seems to move, the poet's tears cannot flow, and his deepest grief is hushed. But when the banks of the river are narrower, and the current becomes more impetuous, his own anguish is likewise released, and he can find words for his feeling. Next, we may note, for the sake of practice, the frequent use of alliteration in these musical lines. There is not only the sound-reproduction, which is identical in the middle verses of both stanzas (*all*, *fall*; *walls*, *falls*), and the word-repetition (hush'd . . . hush'd, deepest . . . deeper), but we have also to allow for *f*ill'd . . . *f*all, *s*orrow . . . *s*ong, *w*ave . . . *v*ocal . . . *w*ooded *w*alls, and for the releasing effect of the free open vowels in t*i*de, fl*o*ws, w*a*ve, v*o*cal, in estimating the skill of the poet's appeal to the ear. But the point particularly to be noticed in our context is Tennyson's confession of the imperfection of words. His deepest grief is silent, and great as *In Memoriam* is as the expression of a poet's sorrow, it is yet not wholly adequate to the feeling that it utters. For there are thoughts in the human mind "that lie too

deep for tears" or language. The baby cries when it is hurt. But man, with his complex emotions and their imperfect symbols, cannot always fit them to speech. The poets come nearest to using language as a complete expression of emotion, but even they, as we have seen, may find it inadequate to their purpose.

§ 23. *The World of the Eye.*—We are drawing nearer to one aspect at least of the relation between the pen and the eye. We have seen that expression depends on inspiration, that as the idea is conceived so the poem is wrought, though a part of its fidelity may be lost in the journey between the mind and the hand. And at the same time we have learnt to recognise the many poetic devices of diction, rhythm, and so forth, as resources at the poet's disposal to heighten and intensify his effect. In this aspect it is plainly a mistake to dwell on differences of form; the determining factor, or the direct cause of such differences, is to be sought in the nature of the message which the poet is charged to deliver.

A man is governed by an overmastering emotion. It may be by love of his mistress, or by hate of a rival in her affection, or by zeal for his country, or by the terror of death, or by the fear of God, or by the temptation of the devil. Yet, when we

come to consider it, the life of ordinary men has no room for such a feeling at its highest. Their love is a prudent marriage, their hate a temporary discomfiture, their patriotism is obedience to the tax-payer, their religion an attendance at church, their temptation a sordid self-indulgence. The life of an ordinary man is filled with business and pleasure; with affairs trivial in themselves, but all-important to him, which keep him occupied and interested. He has no time and no capacity to admit the greater emotions which sweep through the poet's mind, and overwhelm in their current all meaner and minor things. He does not love with the heart of Herrick—

> "Bid me despair, and I'll despair
> Under that cypress tree:
> Or bid me die, and I will dare
> E'en Death to die for thee:"

he is not desperate with the defiance of Macbeth—

> "The mind I sway by and the heart I bear
> Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.
> . . . I have supped full with horrors:
> Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
> Cannot once startle me:"

he does not rejoice with the delirium of Shelley—

> "Teach me half the gladness
> That thy brain must know,
> Such harmonious madness
> From my lips would flow,
> The world should listen then, as I am listening now!"

he is not patient with Milton's resignation—

> "They also serve who only stand and wait."

The sublimities of conduct, the ecstacies of emotion, pass us by. For we, as Matthew Arnold tells us—

> "We have been on many thousand lines,
> And we have shown on each talent and power,
> But hardly have we for one little hour
> Been on our own line, have we been ourselves :
> Hardly had skill to utter one and all
> The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
> But they course on for ever unexpressed,
> And long we try in vain to speak and act
> Our hidden self, and what we say and do
> Is eloquent, is well—but 'tis not true."

And, again, we

> "Pursue
> Our business with unslackening stride, . . .
> And see all sights from pole to pole,
> And glance, and nod, and bustle by,
> And never once possess our soul
> Before we die."

Now, a life of this kind on the surface of things may find satisfactory symbols of expression. But poetry does not spring from such conditions. It is the "things unknown" of Shakespeare's verse, the "nameless feelings" of Matthew Arnold's, to which the poet gives a shape and a name; his capacity of feeling must be deeper

than ours, and it must be joined to skilful expression.

"Ah! Two desires toss about
The poet's feverish blood,
One drives him to the world without,
And one to solitude.

"The glow of thought, the thrill of life—
Where, where do these abound?
Not in the world, not in the strife
Of men shall these be found.

"He who hath watch'd, not shared, the strife
Knows how the day hath gone:
He only lives with the world's life
Who hath renounced his own."

A poet must be moved to utterance. From shrewd old Ennius, who declared that he never could write a line unless he had gout in his toe to rouse him out of his indifference, to this account in Matthew Arnold's *Obermann* of the poet's "feverish blood," poets of all ages have set on record the origin of their utterance in emotion.

§ 24. *Poetic Truth.*—The soul of poetry is feeling. When we have grasped this fact, half the problem of form disappears. For we see that the greater part of poetry lies in the thought, not the form; that, feeling deeply, as a poet feels, his

expression will shape itself, and that all which is mechanical in the art is the polishing and correction of the expression till it approaches as closely as possible to the thought, and combines with clearness of utterance all the available charms of style. The ordinary man cannot know the forces that move a poet. He vaguely believes that a poet is an unpractical man speaking an unnatural language. The further the ordinary man is removed from a share of the poet's insight, the more he tends to regard the "seer" as a dreamer, and to look on his resources of metre, rhyme, and so forth, as artificial aids and appliances. But though the brutish man knoweth it not, the fact is that the poets live the truest and the most real life, and speak the most natural language. It is we who are unpractical and unnatural,—we, with our broken sentences and our half-formed ideas—we who are content to know only the surface of things, who speak and act without once possessing our soul, without once realising the truth that, behind our daily occupation, beyond the business of the market and the pleasure of the circus, there lies an unexplored world of beauty—a world of complete satisfaction for the highest human capacity, a world from which we may derive courage, and hope, and faith, to help us in this world we live in,—

"Here where men sit and hear each other groan ;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs ;
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies ;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs ;
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new love pine at them beyond to-morrow." *

If we turn to the opening pages of the Seventh Book of Plato's *Republic*, we shall find an account of the real and the unreal worlds. The unreal world in which we live is compared to an underground chamber in which men sit like prisoners, watching the shadows of persons and things behind them thrown on the wall in front. "And let us suppose," writes Plato, "that one of these prisoners has been released, and compelled suddenly to walk with open eyes towards the light, . . . what answer would you expect him to make, if some one were to tell him that *then* he was watching foolish phantoms, but that *now* he is nearer to reality, and is turned towards things more real, and sees more correctly?" This upward ascent is the road that the poets travel, and we are the dreamers who affect to believe that the world of the underground chamber is the real and the true. For poetry—let us be clear about this—is no mere ornament of life, no mere mechanical plaything devised for our amusement and distraction. Poetry is life—life

* Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale.*

triumphant, life realised, life at its highest. Poetry that falls short of this standard is like an echo in a dream. Poetry that does not make for human excellence is an idol with feet of clay. The poet, like Jacob at Luz, consecrates the commonplace. He makes a Beth-el of every resting-place in his journey. He takes the stone and sets it up as a pillar, and pours oil on the top of it. And he says, The Lord is in this place, though I knew it not. And he says, This is no other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.

§ 25. *Conditions of Composition.*—A poet, therefore, does not sit down to write a poem in a particular form. His poem *forms*, or *shapes*, itself according to the inspiration of the poet. A poem begins with an idea, and out of that germ the complete result is developed according to various conditions. The age that the poet lives in is one determining factor. There may be a spirit of the age — a *Zeitgeist*, as the Germans have taught us to call it—which encourages one form of verse while it prohibits another. The poet's own powers make another factor of yet more decisive moment. Some forms of composition demand higher gifts of imagination and assiduity than others,—even a higher degree of the common virtue of diligence. A man may have a great idea, but if he does not

take the pains to work it out he will die with his music in him; or his thought may be greater than his capacity of achievement, and he may whittle down the idea for a great poem to the compass of a little poem. The poet's material circumstances, again, are sometimes to be reckoned with in this connection. It is not every poet, like Milton, whose courage and independence are so superb that he can afford to dispense with the reward of skill, and to labour through twelve years of darkness for five pounds.

§ 26. *Evidence of Biography.*—On all these accounts the biographies of poets should be studied. Take Milton first, whom we have mentioned. We, his spiritual heirs, the descendants in his race and language, count as his greatest work the poem called *Paradise Lost.* Its form is the epic, or narrative; but it is at once fair to Milton, and important in a study of forms, to note that the germ-idea in the poet's mind was not at first to write an epic poem. Fair to Milton, because a man of less industry and resolution might have made his blindness or his business an excuse to shun the more arduous task; and important to a study of forms, because it illustrates our contention that a poem shapes itself. Milton himself is more admirable for our knowledge of this fact—the

world, therefore, is richer by a type for admiration, —and our appreciation of poetry is assisted by knowing that Milton did not sit down with the intention of writing an epic poem, as a man might sit down to make a chair, but that *Paradise Lost*, as we possess it, owes something to that force outside ourselves, which, whether we call it genius, or inspiration, or the voice of God in man, is a factor in the creation of works of art. Thus, when we read in Johnson's life of Milton that "the first conception" of his great poem was "a tragedy or mystery, not of a narrative, but of a dramatic work," and that "what he should undertake it was difficult to determine; he was long choosing, and began late," we see how biography may assist criticism and criticism biography.

Let us turn next to the form of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. His son, Hallam, Lord Tennyson, tells us that "before 1840 it is evident that my father wavered between casting the Arthurian legends into the form of an epic or into that of a musical masque. . . . It was not till 1855 that he determined upon the final shape of the poem." Here, then, is the idea determining the form, independently of the poet's intention. He did not sit down to write an Arthurian epic, but the Arthur-idea germinated for fifteen years in his mind and took at last the inevitable shape

suited to all the conditions of the poet and his environment—the times he lived in, their sympathy with his subject, and his own capacity to cope with its demands. In a later passage of this *Memoir* we may remark, by way of contrast, an instance of the idea waiting on the form, and the comparative failure which ensues when the rightful precedence is neglected. Tennyson determined to write dramas, and through the filial lines of his son's account of the matter we may read the record of a mistaken vocation. "He had always taken the liveliest interest in the theatre. . . . He bestowed infinite trouble on his dramas. . . . He felt that he had the power; and even at the age of fourteen he had written plays which were 'extraordinary for a boy.' . . . All his life he enjoyed discovering the causes of historical and social movements. . . . He believed in the future of our English stage. . . . He had been a constant playgoer," and so on,—every excellent excuse being urged why Tennyson should have written plays, except the right cause that he must. Here is no fifteen years' germination of an idea till it takes its inevitable shape, but here is a man sitting down to write a drama, as a cobbler might sit down to mend a shoe. It would be rash to say that no great poem has ever been composed under such conditions, for poetry knows no rules; but Tenny-

son's own experience of the throes of poetic creation might have warned him at the age of sixty-five that one inspired lyric was worth half-a-dozen dramas by design.

A third, and last, example may be taken from the biography of William Collins, who is a type of the man with great ideas but without the pains to work them out. Dr Johnson, who knew him well, and wrote of him with sympathy and kindness, tells us that "he designed many works; but his great fault was irresolution, or the frequent calls of immediate necessity broke his schemes, and suffered him to pursue no settled purpose. . . . He planned several tragedies, but he only planned them," and we gather from Johnson's account that the actual moulds or forms in which the muse of Collins expressed herself are by no means adequate to the inspiration that moved him. Perhaps we may add that the poetical works of Gray are not quite worthy of the scholar who was described in a letter to Boswell as "the most learned man in Europe," and certainly I think we may say, from a study of the lives of poets, that a poet who writes very little is somewhat less than truly great. The plenary inspiration of the muse seems to be copious and profuse. Long years may be wanted for the process of formation, and much fine verse, as Tennyson said, may go in smoke-wreaths up the

chimney; but the great poet, if he lives, will leave a generous inheritance, and even if he die young, like Shelley and Keats, his few years of activity will show by the bulk of their achievement how fertile in ideas was his mind, and how many of them would have come to full expression.

§ 27. *Poetry and Verse-making.*—It is important to realise this dependence of forms on ideas. It helps to correct the opinion that poetry is a mere manual exercise, or a kind of superior skilled labour. A poem manufactured to order is generally a poem uninspired, whether it be the prize exercise of a schoolboy or an undergraduate, or the occasional ode of a poet-laureate. It increases our reverence for poetry to perceive how little can be done by beginning at the wrong end. The forms of verse are ready for the selection of the first comer; the mysteries of prosody can be mastered by an hour's patient study by any elementary arithmetician; rhymes are thrust under his notice by half-a-dozen rival dictionaries; or, if he prefers it, he can write in blank verse, and, for the rest, he has pens, and paper, and a language familiar to him since infancy. But what avail all these aids to composition if the mind of the poet be wanting? For truly, as Sir Philip Sidney wrote, "It is not ryming

and versing that maketh Poesie. One may be a Poet without versing, and a versifier without Poetry." And as Ben Jonson quaintly declared, "There is no Statute Law of the Kingdome bidds you bee a Poet against your will. . . . A Rymer and a Poet are two things. . . . But all this is vaine, without a natural wit, and a Poeticall nature in chiefe." And, lastly, as Shelley, himself a great poet, wrote, "A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. . . . When composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet."

§ 28. *The Poet's Eye.*—The true excellence of poetry, its true point of distinction from other modes of expression, lies in the manner of the poet's approach to nature and human life. To

every man there are two worlds: himself and not-himself, the internal and the external, subjective and objective, *I* and *not-I*. When he speaks, he must speak of one of these two worlds. He asks questions of the external world, he makes statements about his personal experience. And of these two worlds, offered to the exploration of our curiosity, we *know* neither — neither the *I* within, nor the *not-I* without. In discovery and experience alike, revelation stops short of the truth. Poetry, science, philosophy, are paths which the truth-seekers follow, and the poets, as we shall presently see, come nearer than others to the goal. By virtue of the gift that is in them, of a faculty of vision which is their own, they see further, I believe, into the heart of the mystery of two worlds than the pioneers in other ways of speculation.

The problem is—What is true in this world of diverse opinions? Take the simplest statements of fact and examine them with closer attention than you are in the habit of using. Here, for instance, is the simplest:—

This is a table.

At once a whole series of questions arises out of the elementary proposition. How do I know it is a table? By seeing and feeling it. The truth

of the statement depends on two sets of conditions. I must possess the senses of *sight* and *touch;* the table must possess the qualities of *visibility* and *resistance.* To a blind and paralytic man the statement that "This is a table" conveys no meaning whatever—the qualities of the *object* do not appeal to the senses of the *subject.* He cannot feel its resistance; it is not visible to his eyes.

In other words, truth depends on a relation between subject and object. It is impossible to state a proposition which shall be absolutely true under all conditions and in all circumstances of time and space. And relative truth, which is the best that we attain, is a very poor substitute for the absolute truth. In common conversation we hardly ever aim at speaking truth. Our statements about our own health and that of our kinsmen, our statements about the weather, politics, books, and our friends, are all matters of opinion, open to discussion and refutation, but never absolutely true.

Science and art pursue truth. If we wish to learn as truly as possible the condition of our own health, we summon the aid of medical science; if we wish to study the changes of weather, we call in the aid of meteorology; if we wish to understand contemporary politics, we must train our minds in the science of history, and so on, through all the topics on which in ordinary life we

are satisfied with conventional verisimilitude.* Science, in its pursuit of truth, rejects every piece of evidence which cannot be definitely proved, and which is not directly pertinent to the purpose of the inquiry. Art, in its pursuit of truth, starts from a different point of view. The science of weather, for instance, is the subject of meteorological speculation; the artistic view of weather discovers quite another kind of truth. The beauty of the sun and rain are as essential to their complete comprehension as the scientific explanation of these phenomena. The painter or poet who succeeds in revealing that beauty is likewise increasing knowledge; he is interpreting nature to man, and, no less than the meteorologist, he contributes to our knowledge of the truth. "Let us build altars," cried Emerson, "to the Beautiful Necessity." The "Beautiful Necessity" is God, under whatever name He may be designated. Science, seeking sensational truth, reaches God by the road of observation, reaches a point in its

* As a matter of opinion, it may be suggested that we are satisfied with considerably less. When Lord Rosebery, for instance, made a speech at Chesterfield in December 1901, no two newspapers agreed as to the value of his utterance. Yet they must have possessed a *true* worth in politics as well as a multitude of relative and conventional values. Similarly, every new book has its true place in literature as well as the number of false places to which the critics assign it.

inquiry somewhere high up among the hills, where the beaten pathway ceases, but the rocky prospect extends, and the philosopher admits that he has entered the region of the Unknowable. Art, pursuing emotional truth, reaches God by the road of interpretation, and, while science calls His work necessary, art discovers it to be beautiful. But the necessary and the beautiful are *one good*, thus vindicating—in a critical sense transcending the "higher criticism"—the verse of Genesis which states that "God saw everything that he had made, and lo! exceeding good." For

> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." *

§ 29. *Scientific and Poetical Truth: The Sun.*— To make this distinction clearer, we may select a few examples. Take, first, the following paragraphs from the article on Astronomy in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*:—

"The sun is constantly shifting his position among the stars. If we observe the altitude of any star, or group of stars, above the Eastern horizon at sunset, we shall find, on making the same observation a few days afterwards, that its elevation is considerably increased, and that it has approached nearer to the meridian. At the end of three months it will appear at sunset on

* Keats, *Ode to a Grecian Urn.*

the meridian, and from that time continue to advance nearer and nearer to the sun, till it is at last concealed by the splendour of his rays. After remaining for some time invisible, it will again make its appearance in the morning to the westward of the sun, and its distance from him will continue to increase daily, till, at the end of a year, it has made a complete circuit of the sky, and regained the position it occupied at the time of the first observation. . . . The result of constant experience shows that the declination reaches its maximum on the south side of the equator about the 22nd of December. . . . From this time it gradually diminishes till about the 21st of March, when the sun reaches the plane of the equator. . . . His declination or meridianal altitude continues to increase till about the 22nd of June, when he becomes stationary, and then again shapes his course towards the equator."

Now, here are matters of fact, the accumulated evidence of science, laboriously observed, and gathered, and sifted by generations of patient truth-seekers, watching the stars by night, and bringing to bear on their facts of observation minds trained to reason and infer through months, and years, and centuries of investigation. But contrast with this point of view, or, rather, with the mode of presentation selected by this learned

writer, four lines from a poem by Catullus written nineteen hundred years ago:

> "Sed ubi oris aurei Sol radiantibus oculis
> Lustravit æthera album, sola dura, mare ferum
> Pepulitque noctis umbras vegetis sonipedibus,
> Ibi Somnus excitum Attin fugiens citus abiit."

Perhaps you do not understand the Latin, though the sweeping splendour of its language must effect you even as you read it, and I add, therefore, an inadequate attempt at translation, in order to convey the wonderful imagery:

> But when Sun, the golden-visaged, with his radiant-beaming eyes,
> Shone across the white air-spaces, lonely wastes, and savage sea,
> Drave the shades of night before him—hark! the hooves of mettled steeds—
> Then did Sleep, as Attis wakened, sudden turn and swiftly flee.

Add to these two modes of presentation an account of sunset, taken this time from a Christian poet of the middle of the last century. It is from an ode "composed upon an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty" by that prince of interpreters, William Wordsworth:

> "No sound is uttered,—but a deep
> And solemn harmony pervades
> The hollow vale from steep to steep,
> And penetrates the glades.
> Far distant images draw nigh,
> Called forth by wondrous potency

Of beamy radiance, that imbues
Whate'er it strikes, with gem-like hues !
In vision exquisitely clear
Herds range along the mountain side ;
And glistening antlers are descried ;
And gilded flocks appear.
Thine is the tranquil hour, purpureal Eve !
But long as godlike wish, or hope divine,
Informs my Spirit, ne'er can I believe,
That this magnificence is wholly thine !
From worlds not quicken'd by the sun
A portion of the gift is won ;
An intermingling of Heaven's pomp is spread
On ground which British shepherds tread ! "

It is, of course, open to us to say that Catullus and Wordsworth are scientifically inaccurate. Every epithet in their wonderful descriptive lines might be disputed as a *matter of fact*, and the man of science might refer the poets to his article in the *Encyclopædia* in order to dismiss the fanciful accounts of the sun's mettlesome steeds, and the mixture of Heaven's pomp with the clay of an English pasture. And, equally, the poet might complain that the learned account of the sun's meridianal altitude *omits* altogether the true significance of that luminary to us who live by its light. It is not for the sake of its obliquity, nor for love of the angle of its declination, that humanity once worshipped the sun, and still, familiar though it is by its daily rising and setting, treats it as a kind of god, imploring its presence

as the fountain of health, pursuing it when its countenance is turned away, inventing fire to imitate it, gratefully using its light and heat for all kinds of purposes and practices. Yet, in reading both accounts, we are vaguely conscious that there is poetry in the science, and science in the poetry. The matters of fact are the same in each; the difference is in the approach to them.

§ 30. *The Nightingale in Poetry and Science.*— Let us take a fresh example. In another volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* we find the following remarks under the article "Ornithology":—

"*Order II.—Insessores or Perching Birds.* — This is the most numerous order of the class of birds, and, as Cuvier has observed, is distinguished chiefly by negative characters; for it embraces all those various groups which, sometimes possessing but little in common, are yet in themselves neither raptorial, scansorial, grallatorial, natatorial, nor gallinaceous. . . . The first principal division of the passerine birds consists of those genera in which the external toe is united to the internal by not more than one or two of the joints, and contains four great tribes. . . .

"*Tribe 1st.—Dentirostres.*—(Bill with a marginal notch towards the extremity of the upper mandible.) . . . The genus *Curruca*, Bechstein, has the

bill straight, slender throughout, a little compressed anteriorly, the upper mandible slightly curved towards the point. It contains that prince of European songsters, the nightingale (*C. Luscinia*), a bird of shy and unobtrusive disposition, seldom seen in open places, but loving the protection of a close entangled undergrowth of brakes and bushes. . . . We know not that the female sings."

These, then, are the matters of fact about the nightingale. But are they the complete account, the whole truth about the bird? Do we, as men and women, *know* the nightingale till we realise the Philomela of Keats, herself descended through a long line of nightingales in ancient and modern verse, any better than we can be said to *know* the sun by the degree of his meridianal altitude? Is not this also the nightingale—recognisable by a higher law than that of its mandible and toe?—

" Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird :
No hungry generations tread thee down ;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown :
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;
The same that ofttimes hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

§ 31. *Matter of Fact and Poetry.*—These contrasts or comparisons might be indefinitely extended. Take the scientific description of a wind blowing from the west, and compare it with Shelley's burst of poetry:

"Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean,
Angels of rain and lightning; there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Maenad, ev'n from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height—
The locks of the approaching storm,"

where the forces of metaphor and simile combine their imaginative work to express the truth, which scientific language, restricted to matters of fact, would be inadequate to render. Or, as another example in detail, take up the newspaper of this morning. To the poet's eye—and "we are all poets," remember, "when we read a poem well"—it is full of these suggestive contrasts. I read in the *Morning Post* before me that—

> "Harriet H. ——, forty-six, caretaker at a hop warehouse in Southwark Street, was charged with the wilful murder of her two children, Elizabeth, aged twelve years, and Alfred, aged ten years, by cutting their throats with a table knife. The only evidence

given was that of Inspector ——, who said: At twenty-three minutes to ten o'clock this morning I went with Inspector —— and Sergeant —— to the top floor of the warehouse in Southwark Street. In a back bedroom of that floor I saw the girl Elizabeth lying on a small bed on her back with her throat cut. In another bed in the same room I saw the boy Alfred lying on his right side. His throat was cut from ear to ear, and he also had cuts on his hands, as though he had struggled. In the kitchen on the same floor I saw the woman. Her hands were covered with blood. I told her I was a police officer, and asked, "Who did this?" She said, "I did." I conveyed her in a cab to the police station, where she was charged with wilfully murdering her two children. She made no reply to the charge. On that evidence I ask for a remand, and that the prisoner may be taken in a cab to Holloway, as I have reason to believe, from a letter which she has written to her husband, that she is not in her right mind. The letter, which was handed in, was as follows:—'Darling Husband,—I know I am dying, and I cannot leave my darlings behind. I hope they will join my darling Nell in Heaven. Jesus, lover of my soul. God be with you.

> Dicky; forgive me. What with the death of my darling Nell. But I am mad.' The prisoner was asked if she wished to put any questions. She replied: 'No, thank you very much.' She was then remanded."

This sorrow, this tragedy of London, is sordid matter of fact. The middle-aged woman murdered her children, and probably I shall not have the curiosity to follow her trial to the lunatic asylum or the gallows. But transform the surroundings: pursue the story in Euripides of Medea's jealousy of her husband, of her slaughter of her children, and her lament at her own fell deed: read the cry of Constance in Shakespeare's *King John*,—

> "Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
> Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
> Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
> Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
> Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form,
> Then have I reason to be fond of grief.
> Fare you well . . .
> I will not keep this form upon my head,
> When there is such disorder in my wit."

Have we not here something of this sorrow in Southwark? "God be with you, Dicky; forgive me. What with the death of my darling. But I am mad." Or read the second book of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, which contains "The Story of

Margaret," or read Mr Stephen Phillips' tale of "The Woman with the Dead Soul," and we see that the poet's eye can touch the journalist's bald narrative of facts with a light that it did not know.

§ 32. *Differentia of Poetry.*—Why is this? and what is it? What general conclusion can we draw from these particular instances of difference of observation? Which is true? or how are both true?—the astronomer's sun, and the poet's sun; the naturalist's birds, and the poet's birds; the botanist's flowers, and the poet's flowers; the physicist's winds, and the poet's winds; the reporter's narrative, and the poet's tragedy?

Since man's eyes first opened on the wonders of the world, there have been three sorts of vision. I may look without seeing, like "Eyes and No Eyes" in the nursery tale; I may see a thing as it is, reckoning it up as an item of human knowledge, settling its place in the catalogue of known objects, counting its parts, and labelling it with a name. And thirdly, I may see a thing with my mind as well as with my eye, interpreting by contemplation—by loving insight and impassioned contemplation—its meaning in the system of the universe, seeing its intention no less than its contents and its extent, wresting from it the secret of its being, hidden from every sense save the poet's.

This, at least, is poetic vision at its highest, and the examples given above should help to make the difference clear. Take the three types of vision, again, in connection with the example of the primrose. There is, first, Peter Bell, the incurious, who walks about with eyes that are no eyes:

> "He roved among the vales and streams,
> In the green wood and hollow dell;
> They were his dwellings night and day,—
> But Nature ne'er could find the way
> Into the heart of Peter Bell.
>
> "In vain, through every changeful year,
> Did Nature lead him, as before;
> A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more."

Next in order comes the primrose of the botanist, who sees the flower, and observes its habits, and plucks it, and dissects it; and, thirdly, comes the poetic vision, discerning aspects of nature hidden from the botanist's eye, individualising the flower, as in Milton's line,

> "The rathe primrose, that forsaken dies;"

singing, as Tennyson sang:

> "Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies;
> Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower—but if I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is;"

seeing, as Wordsworth saw before, "in the meanest flower that blows . . . . Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears," and trying to express those thoughts, as in his stanzas to "The Primrose of the Rock."

And now, instead of a primrose, consider all nature and man. Surely the poet who takes these for his province, and sees with poetic vision, will have something to say better worthy our attention than the books which pass as literature. This tertiary poetic vision, this third type of vision at least, was what Matthew Arnold had in mind when he described poetry as "a criticism of life, under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." This was what Wordsworth meant when he declared that "poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science;" and again, when he defined poetry as "emotion remembered in tranquillity." This is what Shelley intended by his remark, "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man," and something like this, we may surmise, was at the back of Aristotle's perception that it is the function of tragic poetry to arouse pity and fear, and to effect by their means "the purgation of those passions."* For it is

* See Note 5.

the poet's reconciling power, his solution of the difficulties of life, his free access to what John Stuart Mill, in his praise of Wordsworth, called "the perennial sources of happiness," that is most valuable to us whose eyes are hung with heavy scales.

§ 33. *Poetic Vision.*—At the risk of wearying the reader, a last example may be taken of the different roads followed by seekers after truth, and of the different kinds of truth which are revealed to the poet's eye and to the eye of the man of science. Everyone has heard of Evolution, and of the evolutionist philosophy. Its aim is to explain man by man. It rejects all the superstitions and the "old wives' tales" of the churches. Instead of the Garden of Eden, and the creation of Adam by God,

> "And the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought Death into the World and all our woe,"

it traces the origin of man back to a protoplastic jellyfish, and insists that there is nothing in modern man—not at his highest nor his lowest—which has not been evolved and developed in his gradual descent through the various stages of earthly progress. So he has been adapted to his environment, so he has acquired characteristics, so he has survived in his fittest, so he has preserved

himself. Everything unnecessary to the descent of men is negligible in science. The truth of evolution is complete; it accounts for everything that it requires: all its results have causes—the rest of knowledge is irrational and illusory.

But now consider one aspect of human life, and ask if the truth of science is adequate to the facts of experience. Take love in man. Love, say the evolutionists, is nothing but the common desire for the reproduction of species. The act of reproduction is pleasant, for otherwise the species would die out, and that sense of pleasure is love, through the range of animal existence. Thus Tennyson, in the heyday of evolution, put this theory into song:

"In the Spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast;
In the Spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest;
In the Spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove;
In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

Note the verbs in this quotation—"comes upon," "gets himself," "changes"—they are the verbs of evolution, the verbs of involuntary motion, and even the young man's act, which suggests a touch of deliberateness, is represented as a flash of the fancy, a half-conscious movement in the mind. These lines are scientifically accurate. Through-

out the departments of nature, the season of Spring is astir with the desire for reproduction: the burgeoning trees, the mating birds, and the amorous beasts proclaim it, and man, too, we are glad to believe, is subject to the universal stirring. Nor, indeed, was Tennyson the first poet to observe this fact of science. Catullus, in his 46th song, and Chaucer, at the opening of his *Canterbury Tales*, pay a similar tribute to Spring. It is true, scientifically true, that man's love for woman is a part of the common impulse towards the reproduction of species, as discovered by the observation of the evolutionists. But this truth of science is very far from containing the whole truth of life. It does not cover man's experience of love, and though science may scoff at his experience, and reject its evidence as inadmissible, he *knows*—by a wisdom above logic—that the reproduction of species is not the whole of human love. Men turn from science to art to find the higher law of love—its influence more potent than desire, its beauty lovelier than the iris, its joy more fierce than of possession. For the facts rejected by science are the cornerstone of our spiritual being.

Take the last words of Dido, deserted:

"Vixi, et quem dederat cursum Fortuna peregi,
Et nunc magna mei sub terras ibit imago.
Urbem praeclaram statui, mea mœnia vidi,

Ulta virum pœnas inimico a fratre recepi,
Felix, heu! nimium felix, si litora tantum
Nunquam Dardaniae tetigissent nostra carinae." *

"—Yes, in the sea of life enisled,
We mortal millions live alone,"

sang Matthew Arnold; but is there an island so remote that no Dardan ship ever touches there? is there a happiness so lonely as to found a city and build battlements in which to dwell secure from love?

Take the dying speech of Romeo:

"O my love! my wife!
Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips, and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there . . .
Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous;
And that the lean, abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
And never from this palace of dim night
Depart again: here, here will I remain

---

* The sense of these lines is as follows:—

My life is o'er, my course of fortune run,
And now my vanish'd greatness fares below.
I builded a high city, saw my walls,
Avenged my consort on his brother foe,
Happy, alas! too happy, had the keels
Of Dardan ships but never touch'd my shore.

With worms that are thy chamber-maids ; O, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest ;
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh.—Eyes, look your last !
Arms, take your last embrace ! and, lips, O you
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
A dateless bargain to engrossing death !
Come bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide !
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark !
Here's to my love ! O true apothecary !
Thy drugs are quick.—Thus with a kiss I die."

Is this mood of passion evolved from the carnal instinct of reproduction, or is man greater than mankind, and the truth of poetry higher than that of science? For men must be judged by the best that they achieve, not by the average attainment of their kind.

§ 34. *Truth of Poetry.*—It makes a difference how we answer these questions. Either, as many people still affect to believe, the poets are mere jugglers with language, and write of these things in an emotional style because of the effect that they produce and not because of the vision that is in them, or else there is a truth of poetry as there is a truth of science ; and poetry is the more jealous mistress, exacting more diligent endurance, more devoted labour, and rewarding her few devotees with a yet more precious revelation.

When we draw a distinction between the language of poetry and the language of science, as we have been at pains to do in several instances, do we mean that the poets are triflers, skilful conjurers with words, grooms of the household to the dictionary, and that for the real, the actual, the serious, the men of science must be consulted? Certainly not. As Matthew Arnold wrote, a generation ago, in speaking of the language of the Bible: "If the object be one not fully to be grasped, and one to inspire emotion, the language of figure and feeling will satisfy us better about it, will cover more of what we seek to express, than the language of literal fact and science. The language of science about it will be *below* what we feel to be the truth."* This is the answer, the complete answer, to those "higher" critics of the Bible, who would deny its ethical and spiritual value because it is not "literally" true. This, again, is the key in which to criticise those lines from Tennyson above, in which the robin's crimson and the lapwing's crest, the dove's iris and the young man's thoughts, are all placed on the same level. Literally, no doubt, they are effects of one cause, and science is justified of her disciple; but the lines are false to the ampler revelation of poetical truth, they are "*below* what we feel to

* *Literature and Dogma*, chap. i.

be the truth," they are inadequate to the poet's own perception, expressed a few lines further down, of the mystery of love in human life:

"Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords
with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, passed in music
out of sight."

Who dares say that this is less true, because it is scientifically less demonstrable, than the change on the burnished dove? and who that sets out with Carlyle to learn to read a poem well dares assert that the imagination of the poet is inferior to the definitions of science? All truth, as we have seen, is approximate; no knowledge is full, save of those who, in the figurative language of the Old Testament, see God face to face; but the poets come nearest to that truth and knowledge, and it is in this spirit that they are to be consulted.

PART III

THE PROGRESS OF POETRY

§ 35. *Tradition in Poetry.*—What is an original poem? We have seen that a poet's language comes down to him laden with all the associations of its ancestry and use. Each word has its own colour, liable to harmonise or clash with the colours of other words in the same sentence. His vocabulary is governed by laws which he neglects at his own peril. We have seen, too, that a poet's expression follows certain fixed lines. If he aims at a direct representation of nature, he must mould the action he portrays into the dramatic shape; if he prefers description, he may write an epic poem, or an idyl, or a piece of narrative verse in the form of an epistle or a satire; finally, if he be filled with the desire to give expression to his personal reflection on a single feeling or a situation, the various forms of lyrical poetry are open to his choice, from the rigid framework of the sonnet to the lax

structure of an elegy or of an ode. And within these limits of language and form our poet is bound by the traditions of metre, and rhyme, and alliteration, and the rest of the pleasurable devices which the labours of past poets have bequeathed *pour encourager les autres.*

Again, we have seen that a poet is directed in his range of thought. He is a seer and an interpreter of life, a searcher of the secrets of nature, a seeker after the truth revealed in the light of imagination. He may understand botany, but he must not botanise; astronomy, but he must not count the stars; anatomy, but he must not dissect; chemistry, but he must not analyse. The special sciences may be a part of his equipment, but the art of a great poet is really a science of sciences, leading the soul, in Plato's language, "from a kind of night-like day up to a true day of real existence." The μακροτέρα ὁδός, the longer road to truth, as described in the Sixth Book of the *Republic*, is peculiarly applicable to the way of poetic vision. Eyes cannot see without light. The sun gives light to the eyes, and the problem is what luminary gives the soul its faculty of sight. "This power," says Plato, "which supplies the objects of real knowledge with the truth that is in them, and which renders to him who knows them the faculty of knowing

them, you must consider to be the essential Form of Good, and you must regard it as the origin of science, and of truth, so far as the latter comes within the range of knowledge: and though knowledge and truth are both very beautiful things, you will be right in looking upon good as something distinct from them, and even more beautiful. And just as, in the analogous case, it is right to regard light and vision as resembling the sun, but wrong to identify them with the sun; so, in the case of science and truth, it is right to regard both of them as resembling good, but wrong to identify either of them with good; because, on the contrary, the quality of the good ought to have a still higher value set upon it." *

The poet pursues the "essential Form of Good," by whatever name we may call it. He tries to see with the eyes of his soul, to explain in the light of that vision the objects of common sensibility. Hence are derived the poet's new heaven and new earth—his God, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways His ways,

* ". . . Hence the inseparable connection in Plato and Aristotle between reason and the good. . . Their words for reason and rational cover to a great extent the ground which is covered by words like 'spirit' 'spiritual' and 'ideal' in our philosophy. . . . The good of anything is to be or do what it is meant to be or do."—R. L. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato*, 220 *et seq.*

his men and women, idealised by contemplation, relieved of the dross of circumstance, "how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals." *

Hence, again, the poet's little child,

> "Sweet joy, but two days old,
> Sweet Joy I call thee;" †

hence his birds and his flowers, the skylark of Shelley, the nightingale of Keats, the daffodil of Wordsworth, the daisy of Burns; hence his passions and emotions, his love, his sorrows, his joy. Hence, finally, the poet, in Milton's words, "soaring in the high region of his fancies, with his garland and singing robes about him;" and irradiated, as Wordsworth tells us, by

> "The light that never was, on sea or land,
> The consecration and the Poet's dream."

§ 36. *Force of Tradition.*—Accordingly, we may join with Wordsworth in thanksgiving:

> "Blessings be with them and eternal praise,
> Who gave us nobler loves, and nobler cares,
> The Poets, who on earth have made us heirs
> Of *truth*."

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* Shakespeare. † Blake.

But while we thank and praise, we remember that we are looking for the traces of originality in a poet whose expression and whose truth are handed down in this manner.

Much poetry, it must be owned, is stereotyped, and it is a time-honoured critical exercise to go through the works of a new poet, and to refer it, line by line, and sentiment by sentiment, to the influence of older masters. Virgil's critics were untiring in this respect. They quoted Homer, Ennius, and Lucretius, as the quarry from which Virgil was hewn, till the poet himself turned on his detractors, and told them that adaptation was not plagiarism.* In our own time, too, the same thing is repeated. Mr Stephen Phillips, for instance, has been charged with the metre and rhythm of Marlowe, and with the words and thoughts of who knows how many poets.

Thus, to select but a single example, before Mr Phillips dreamed of his immortality,

> "No longer shall I vex, but live my life
> In solaces, caresses, and in balms,
> Nocturnal soothings and nutritious sighs,
> The unhappy mind an odour shall be breathed,"

---

* The truth was finally expressed by Voltaire: "If Homer is the creator of Virgil, Virgil is certainly the finest of his works."

Wordsworth had already written,

> "Hers shall be the breathing balm,
> And hers the silence and the calm
> Of mute insensate things."

Similarly, sea and wind had found poetic expression before Mr Phillips wrote,

> "Thou meanest what the sea has striven to say
> So long, and yearnèd up the cliffs to tell;
> Thou art what all the winds have uttered not;"

or,

> "And he shall still that old sob of the sea,
> And heal the unhappy fancies of the wind;"

or,

> "Listen! the sea is on the verge of speech,
> The breeze has something private for me;"

or,

> "The melancholy knocking of those waves,
> The deep unhappiness of winds;"

or,

> "It is such souls as mine as go to swell
> The childless cavern cry of the barren sea,
> Or make that human ending to night wind."

Industrious research would discover sentiments not unlike this up and down the pages of the poets; a scholar might trace it back to the pure gem of natural mysticism fashioned by Virgil himself,

> "Sunt lacrimæ rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt;"

and the ordinary reader wonders how much these echoes from the past, with their faithfulness to the traditions of poetic expression and truth, detract from Mr Phillips' originality.*

§ 37. *Types of Originality*: (1) *Walt Whitman.* —Let us look at this question from another point of view. There are poets who have revolted from the bonds of convention and tradition, and who have chosen to deliver their message by original modes of speech. Mr Walt Whitman, for example, among other restraints which he threw over, repudiated the legacy of metre. In his effort to found a democratic art on the other side of the Atlantic, this strong American genius deliberately tried the experiment of inventing new laws of poetic utterance. Take the account of the matter in the lucid essay by the late Addington Symonds. He describes democratic art as "an art free in its choice of style, free in its choice of subject . . . . Classical and feudal art were essentially aristocratic. Modern classicism and romanticism were, in a derivative sense, aristocratic too. . . . Whitman," he adds, "points out that while America advances

* It is superfluous, perhaps, to note in passing the dominion which this idea usurps in Mr Phillips' mind. Herod, Idas, Marpessa, Selene, the Roman in Hades, Lucrezia, and Paolo, all use the sea-and-wind analogy in a total poetic "output" of 363 pages!

rapidly to a dominant position in wealth and strength and all material qualities of national greatness, a literature corresponding to that modern democracy with which she is identified has not yet appeared. . . . From this proposition he advances to the assertion that 'democracy can never prove itself beyond cavil until it founds and luxuriantly grows its own forms of art, poems, schools, theology, displacing all that exists or that has been produced anywhere in the past under opposite influences.'"

Whitman, therefore, revolted from tradition of set design and purpose. With the music of poets in his ears, he elected to displace what exists. He knew the melodies of the Elizabethans, whose language America has inherited. Take this of Thomas Campion, for example:

"Never weather beaten Saile more willing bent to shore,
Never tired Pilgrim's limbs affected slumber more,
Than my weary spright now longs to flye out of my troubled brest.
O come quickly, sweetest Lord, and take my soule to rest."

Or this of Robert Herrick:

"Faire Daffodills, we weep to see
You haste away so soone:
As yet the early-rising Sun
Has not attain'd his Noone.
Stay, stay,
Untill the hasting day
Has run

But to the Even-song ;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

"We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a Spring ;
As quick a growth to meet Decay,
As you, or anything.
We die,
As your hours doe, and drie
Away,
Like to the Summers raine ;
Or as the pearles of Mornings dew,
Ne'r to be found againe."

Or this of Henry Vaughan :

"They are all gone into the world of light !
And I alone sit lingering here ;
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear. . . ."

It would seem impossible to forget or deliberately to forgo a bequest which includes such melodies as these, yet Walt Whitman, straining at novelty, could write the following lines :

"To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every cubic foot of the interior swarms with the same ;
Every spear of grass—the frames, limbs, organs of men and women, and all that concern them,
All these to me are unspeakable miracles."

Mr Symonds discovers in this prosy common-

place a greatness of its own: "Miracles," he expounds, "need not be sought in special occurrences, in phenomena which startle us out of our ordinary way of regarding the universe. . . . At this point science shakes hands with the democratic ideal. We are not forced to gaze upon the starry heavens, or to shudder at islands overwhelmed by volcanic throes, in order to spy out the marvellous. . . . The heroic lies within our reach, if we but stretch a finger forth to touch it." And here he quotes from the innovator again:

> "Lads ahold of fire-engines and hook-and-ladder ropes no less to me than the Gods of the antique wars;
> Minding their voices peal through the crash of destruction,
> Their brawny limbs passing safe over charred laths—their white foreheads whole and unhurt out of the flames."

But looking this democrat fairly in the eyes, we can beat him on his own pretensions. "Whitman," says Symonds, "expels miracles from the region of mysticism, only to find a deeper mysticism in the world of which he forms a part, and miracles in commonplace occurrences. . . . What is near to his side, beneath his feet, . . . bears comparison with things far off and rarities imagined." And here he cites the master's terrible verse:

> "And I could come every afternoon of my life to look at the farmer's girl boiling her iron tea-kettle and baking shortcake."

It is all so pathetically old—all except the ugly diction. Miracles sprang from the soil in the Old Testament narrative—"Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him"—or if this allusion be too childish for the taste of Walt Whitman and his disciple, did not Gray write his *Elegy* a hundred years before? and had not Wordsworth, the author of *Michael*, and the seer of visions in common things "which do often lie too deep for tears," magnificently proclaimed his faith, without the ruin of great music, in the Ninth Book of the *Excursion*, lines 206-254?* Here, surely, was the "true equality" of the democrat made manifest in poetry before the self-appointed apostle of democratic art composed his cacophonous and at times malodorous verses. Mr Symonds himself rightly says, "Language, the instrument of thought, and the vehicle of utterance, remains an uncontrollable witness to the dependence of the present on the past. No one has been so insane as to pretend that odes and epics should be written in Volapuk."

As an innovator, Whitman failed. He had nothing rare enough to offer in exchange and compensation for the beauty which he abandoned. Fine thought, sublime images, and a high purpose are his, among much which is mean or degrad-

* See Note 6.

ing; but he was far too eager to break with tradition, too ostentatiously original, too ready to improve out of existence the indispensable conditions of great poetry.

(2) *Robert Browning.* — We may deal more briefly and more gently with another modern poet whose impatience of convention robbed his works in many places of true poetic expression. In § 19 we found Robert Browning rushing at his sense without due regard to his language. Now take a stanza from a poem which is mocked with the decorative name of "Garden Fancies":

"Splash, went he, as under he ducked,
At the bottom, I knew, rain-drippings stagnate:
Next, a handful of blossoms I plucked
To bury him with, my bookshelf's magnate;
Then I went indoors, brought out a loaf,
Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis;
Lay on the grass, and forgot the oaf
Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais."

It is merely the recreation of a serious man—Browning, the author of *Pippa Passes*, jesting at the punishment he meted out to a book which bored or disgusted him,

"In the white of a matin-prime
Just when the birds sang all together."

But Browning does not command the light touch of the literary jester; nor, it may fairly be urged,

does he add to the joys of life by penning verses of this kind:

> " Gr-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorrence!
> Water your damned flower-pots, do!
> If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
> God's blood, would not mine kill you! . . .
> Blasted lay that rose-acacia
> We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine* . . .
> 'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratia*
> *Ave, Virgo!* Gr-r-r—you swine!"

Can we not fancy the Muse, that mighty Mother of poets, flitting disconsolate from the son who docks her retinue of music to the hardly less savage son who rejects her train of fair words, like King Lear between Goneril and Regan? Browning's sustained vividness, his transcendent powers of presentation, and his occasional bursts of true lyrical melody, condone his impieties against the Muse. Wishing to hear what he says, we accept his manner of saying it: but we do not count his original utterance as a welcome innovation.

(3) *Arno Holz.*—Lastly, to clinch the argument, let us take the example of a poet who has recently repeated in Germany Walt Whitman's American experiment, and has surpassed Robert Browning in the uncouth vigour of his language. Arno Holz belongs to the generation of young German writers which flourished in Berlin between 1880 and 1890.

If Whitman rebelled against metrical inventions, if Browning permitted himself an undue licence of vocabulary, Holz in Germany, leading the "naturalistic" reaction,* deliberately chose to be an outlaw; or—if we may pervert an honourable epigram to bad uses—

> "The force of Nature [or, naturalism] could no further go,
> To make a third, she join'd the other two."

Holz asserted in so many words his independence of dead masters. "Our world," sang its prophet, "is no longer classic, or romantic, but merely modern," and the mere modernity which is his theme involved the complete jettison of every restraining principle in language, metre, and morals. He filled his pages with solecisms, barbarisms, colloquialisms, and foreign words; he transcribed in unblushing detail his sordid adventures in mean streets; and in the fervour of his hate his vulgarity became ferocious. The times were as much to blame as the poet. Berlin in those days was the seat of mob-law in literature. Wild oats were sown on Parnassus. There was a general revolt against tradition and convention, and Holz, in his own esteem, was the apostle-martyr of young Germany.

§ 38. *A Repentant Rebel.*—We have nothing in

* See Note 7.

England quite parallel to this revolt. Wordsworth a hundred years ago protested with all his might against the use of "poetic diction," or, rather, against the theory on which he supposed it to be based, that poetry requires a special language. But there is no difficulty in showing that his practice was better than his principle. Thus, Mr F. W. H. Myers,* "to illustrate the inadequacy of Wordsworth's theory to explain the merits of his own poetry," takes the following stanza from *The Affliction of Margaret*:—

> "Perhaps some dungeon hears thee groan,
> Maimed, mangled, by inhuman men,
> Or thou upon a Desert thrown
> Inheritest a lion's den;
> Or hast been summoned to the Deep,
> Thou, and all thy mates to keep
> An incommunicable sleep."

He points out that there is much more in these lines than mere prose *plus* metre, which was Wordsworth's theory of poetry. There is, first, a simple but magnificent music in slow time, suited to the tone of sorrow, and arranged so as to throw the weight on the accents contained in the words inhuman, desert, lion, summoned, deep, and sleep. There are, next, in the first four lines, the "subtle alliterations of the letters d, h, m, and th." These we learned to recognise in § 10. Then, the words

* Wordsworth, *English Men of Letters*, p. 107.

inheritest and *summoned* would not be the first to occur to the poor widow who is supposed to be speaking. By the sense of call which they imply they connect the missing man, as Mr Myers proceeds to point out, "with (1) the wild beasts who surround him, and (2) the invisible Power which leads; so that something mysterious and awful is added to his fate." And, lastly, there is *incommunicable*, with its "train of literary associations."

Or, we may select for the same purpose a passage from Wordsworth's *Recluse*, in which he expressly states that

> "By words
> Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
> Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
> Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
> To noble raptures. . . .
> Such grateful taunts forgoing, if I oft
> Must turn elsewhere,—to travel near the tribes
> And fellowships of men, and see ill sights
> Of madding passions mutually inflamed;
> Must hear Humanity in fields and groves
> Pipe solitary anguish; or must hang
> Brooding above the fierce confederate storm
> Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore
> Within the walls of cities,—may these sounds
> Have their authentic comment; that even these
> Hearing, I be not downcast or forlorn."

Note in these lines, which "speak of nothing more than what we are," the alliterations with s, v, tr,

m, f; the subtler changes rung on the sounds in "brooding above . . . barricadoed," as well as the masterly use of rare impressive words. Note, again, the rival pictures of the solitary cry of human anguish, lost almost in the vastness of nature, and the crowded horror of cities from which there is no escape, and mark how the imagination is assisted by the rhythm and the language, with "pipe" in the place of emphasis, and "fierce, confederate" rushing through a procession of slow, broad vocables, which fall like minute-guns on the senses. And then read Wordsworth's own rebellious account of what he thinks poetry ought to be—"in works of imagination and sentiment, in proportion as ideas and feelings are valuable, whether the composition be in prose or verse, they require and exact one and the same language. Metre is but adventitious to composition, and the phraseology for which that passport is necessary, even where it may be graceful at all, will be little valued by the judicious."

§ 39. *Liberty and Licence.*—The reader must draw from these examples his own conclusion as to how far a poet is right in rejecting, in the interests of originality, the inheritance of the past, with the obligations and responsibilities that it entails. Here I propose to suggest a different test

of originality, based not on the poet's revolt from the chains that bind him to the dead, but on the texture of his thought, and his mental power to render the spirit of the age in which he lives.

A preliminary word must be said, however, on the subject of order and freedom. We are proud of being orderly citizens, and in the same breath we declare that we live in a free country. If we read English history we learn that the personal liberty of the king's subjects, extending to matters of conscience,* has been wrung from their rulers by a series of struggles. King John at Runnymede, King Charles at Whitehall—to take the most famous examples—were authority's sacrifices to freedom. Yet, with all our liberty, we are bound by a hundred laws. If we offend against any one of them, we are liable to be arrested and locked up, and condemned to a term of imprisonment. Moreover, we hunt down anarchists, whose name signifies no-government,† and whose political creed is a complete freedom from control; we persecute free-love, which means release from the marriage laws; and till quite recently we prohibited free-thought in religious affairs. What, then, is this

* Even vaccination is now a matter of conscience in the eyes of the law.

† Limited anarchy is proclaimed in popular cries such as "No paternal government," "No petticoat government," "No Papal government," etc.

liberty for which fifty years ago Tennyson so finely prayed?—

> "O statesmen, guard us, guard the eye, the soul
> Of Europe, keep our noble England whole,
> And save the one true seed of freedom sown
> Betwixt a people and their ancient throne,
> That sober freedom out of which there springs
> Our loyal passion for our temperate kings."

It is plainly not the abolition of law, not the absence of control. That way madness lies—the madness of mob-rule and the drunkenness of power. True freedom is limited by the consent of the free. It is founded securely on the laws which they who enjoy it have devised. It is the ordered liberty of men united to make the best use of life. Thus only, to quote Tennyson again, has our England become

> "A land of settled government,
> A land of just and old renown,
> Where Freedom slowly broadens down
> From precedent to precedent."

Here, moreover, to quote Wordsworth again, is the secret of personal liberty; in the surrender of the soul to duty true liberty is found,—

> "Me this unchastened freedom tries,
> I feel the weight of chance desires; . . .
> Give unto me, made lowly wise
> The spirit of self-sacrifice;
> The confidence of reason give,
> And in the light of Truth thy bondman let me live."

§ 40. *Law in Poetry.*—Now transfer this reflection to the domain of art. The original artist is not he who breaks through the laws of his profession and impresses the senses by violating tradition. Mr Courthope insists on this point. In a lecture from the Oxford Chair of Poetry, he said:

> "The most marked characteristic in the contemporary art and literature of every country in Europe is the pursuit of novelty; by which word I mean not the freshness, character, and individuality, which are essential to every work of genius, but the determination to discover absolutely new *matter* for artistic treatment, and the deliberate rejection of those first principles of taste which the greatest artists have traditionally obeyed. Corresponding with this revolution in the sphere of poetical conception, there has been a complete departure from traditional development in the modes of poetical expression. . . . The question is whether these strongly outlined features are the signs of Life or Decadence in Poetry;"

and the professor concludes that—though regeneration may be near—exaggerated self-consciousness is a proof of the decay of art, and that "the impassioned followers of novelty would do well to

pause and consider in what direction they are hurrying with so much enthusiasm." *

The poet is liable to two dangers; or poetry, we should rather say, is equally poised between two poles, and the magnetism of either may prove too attractive to the poet. I have already quoted Matthew Arnold's lines:

> "Ah, two desires toss about
> The poet's feverish blood;
> One drives him to the world without,
> And one to solitude,"

which bear directly on this context. For if the poet lives too keenly in the life of the outside world, he becomes a mere impressionist in ideas, a man of the hour, an ephemeral creature, a journalist—not a poet for all time; and if he lives too remotely in the fastness of his own thoughts, he misses the sympathy of his kind, which gives art its interpretative power. The one errs by vulgarity and the other by refinement; the one is an anarchist, impatient of law and control, the other is a slave to the mechanism of his own art. Novelty in poetry, like liberty in politics, must be governed by law. Accordingly, in trying to discover what is an original poem, we have first to discover the law of progress in poetry. The

* *Life in Poetry: Law in Taste*, Pt. II., Lect. iv. By W. J. Courthope, C.B. (Macmillan & Co.)

original poet will then be he who obeys that law without transgressing the essential conditions of structure and form.

§ 41. *The "Sea-and-Wind" Conceit.*—Let us take one or two examples. We stumbled on this problem of originality in connection with Mr Phillips' idea, repeated a dozen times in his works, about the dumb, human, unhappiness of the winds and the sea:

> "Thou meanest what the sea has striven to say
> So long, and yearnèd up the cliffs to tell;
> Thou art what all the winds have uttered not."

Now, in one sense, of course, this view of the longing of the sea is nothing but the poetical expression of the scientific fact of tidal motion due to the attraction of the moon. Mr Phillips recognises this in a passage I have not yet quoted in his drama *Paolo and Francesca*, where Paolo exclaims,—

> "O God, Thou seest us Thy creatures bound
> Together by that law which holds the stars
> In palpitating cosmic passion bright;
> By which the very sun enthrals the earth,
> And all the waves of the world faint to the moon."

It is the triumph of poetical truth to have brought these scientific facts of gravitation into direct relation with human experience, and to have

exalted the love of a man for a woman by making it an inseparable part of the Divine law which governs the stars and the tides. The old myth of Selene was merely a graphic personification of natural forces. What is novel in the matter is the fusion of all created things in a single law of attraction—a poetical truth transcending, but not contradicting, the facts of proven knowledge. And we note that the idea can hardly be better expressed than in the last line of this extract with its cumulative phrase, "all the waves of the world," culminating musically at the monosyllable "faint."

We may go a step further in this analysis. Mr Phillips is possessed by this idea perhaps a little too persistently, but if its frequent repetition points to a poverty in the poet, it need not blind us to its significance as poetry. He sees, as we have all seen, the waves climbing the shore, and everlastingly repulsed. He hears, as we have all heard, the moan of the sea, and the weird voices of the winds. In these sights and sounds he perceives, not merely an analogy—a likeness—to thwarted human desires and the vain cries of the children of men, but an absolute identity. He tells us in so many words that the desires and the cries of unsatisfied love and longing *are* what the sea tries to say and what the winds utter not. Lucrezia tells us that her disappointment—her sense of the

life she has not lived, her love for the children she has not borne—*increases* the cry of the sea and *adds* the human ending to night-wind. And Herod tells us of the king to be, who shall not merely bring the Golden Age to Jerusalem, but who

> "Shall still that old sob of the sea,
> And heal the unhappy fancies of the wind,
> And turn the moon from all that hopeless quest,"

thus by a daring poetical innovation identifying the interests of nature and man.

§ 42. *The Wind in Poetry.* — Now, let us go straight back to Virgil's idea of the winds, as expressed in the first century before Christ.

Taking Homer's *Odyssey*, X., as his starting-point,

> "Then we came to the isle Æolian, where dwelt Æolus, son of Hippotas, dear to the deathless gods, in a floating island, and all about it is a wall of bronze unbroken, and the cliff runs up sheer from the sea. . . . Him the son of Cronos made keeper of the winds, either to lull or to rouse what blasts he will," *

Virgil drew the following picture of the Æolian isle, with its splendid facilities for overhearing what the winds utter not:

* Butcher and Lang.

"The goddess . . . repairs to Æolia, the native land of storms, regions pregnant with boisterous winds. Here, in a vast cave, Æolus controls with imperial sway the reluctant winds and sounding tempests, and confines them with chains in prison. They roar indignant round their barriers, filling the mountain with loud murmurs. Æolus is seated on a lofty throne, wielding a sceptre, and assuages their fury, and moderates their rage. For, unless he did so, they, in their rapid career, would bear away sea and earth, and the deep heaven, and sweep them through the air. But the almighty Sire, guarding against this, hath pent them in gloomy caves, and thrown over them the ponderous weight of mountains, and appointed them a king, who, by fixed laws, and at command, knows how to curb them, and when to relax their reins. . . . Whirling the point of his spear, he struck the hollow mountain's side: and the winds, as in a formed battalion, rush forth at every vent, and sweep over the lands in a hurricane." *

From another Roman poet, Valerius Flaccus, as the late James Henry pointed out in his monumental "Æneidea," we can "fix the time

* Davidson (Bohn). It is a wretched, and not always an accurate, translation. The passage should be read in Virgil, *Æneid*, I., 50 *et seq.*

at which Jupiter placed the winds, the old inhabitants of this island, under the dominion of King Æolus, viz., when they had gone so far, made such ill use of their uncontrolled liberty, as to force the waves in between Sicily and Italy, and to separate Africa from Europe at Gibraltar." And plainly, in this conception of an island of imprisoned winds, the slaves of the gaoler-king Æolus, we have a totally different idea from that of Mr Phillips, an idea totally inadequate to the requirements of poetical truth in the twentieth century A.D. The Æolus-idea dominated literature for hundreds of years, and produced much beautiful poetry. We meet it in Shakespeare again and again:

> "Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
> Thou art not so unkind
> As man's ingratitude;
> Thy tooth is not so keen,
> Because thou art not seen,
> Although thy breath be rude."

Ariel says:

> "I and my fellows
> Are ministers of Fate: the elements,
> Of whom your swords are temper'd, may as well
> Wound the loud winds, or with bemock'd-at stabs
> Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish
> One dowle * that's in my plume."

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* Fibre of down.

We meet it in Milton, in *Lycidas* directly:

"He ask'd the waves, and ask'd the felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?
And question'd every gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beakèd promontory:
They knew not of his story;
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd;"

indirectly, in *Il Penseroso:*

"Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career,
Till civil-suited Morn appear,
Not trick'd and frounced as she was wont
With the Attic Boy to hunt,
But kercheft in a comely cloud
While rocking winds are piping loud,
When the gust hath blown his fill."

We meet it in Walter Scott:

"Till fell the evening damp with dew
And the sharp sea-breeze coldly blew."

In all these examples, the image of the wind is employed descriptively, but they contain no trace of the human affinity on which Mr Phillips insists.

§ 43. *Nature and Man.*—But now take the following examples of the wind-image and others from nineteenth century verse. Take this of Burns:

"Of a' the airts the wind can blaw
I dearly like the West,
For there the bonnie lassie lives,
The lassie I lo'e best:

There wild woods grow, and rivers row,
And mony a hill between ;
But day and night my fancy's flight
Is ever wi' my Jean.

"*I see her in the dewy flowers*,
I see her sweet and fair :
I hear her in the tunefu' birds,
I hear her charm the air :
There's not a bonnie flower that springs
By fountain, shaw, or green,
There's not a bonnie bird that sings
But minds me o' my Jean.

"O blaw, ye westlin' winds, blaw saft
Amang the leafy trees ;
Wi' balmy gale, frae hill and dale
Bring hame the laden bees ;
And bring the lassie back to me
That's aye sae neat and clean ;
Ae smile o' her wad banish care,
Sae charming is my Jean."

Here are likeness, identity, and intervention, as between nature and man. Take these of Shelley :

"Make me thy lyre, ev'n as the forest is :
What if my leaves are falling like its own ! *
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep autumnal love,
Sweet though in sadness, be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit ! *be thou me*, impetuous one !"
Ode to the West Wind.

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* Contrast *Macbeth*, in Shakespeare,

"My way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,"

a metaphor from autumn ; not, as here in Shelley, the poet's participation in nature's autumnal process.

"His last sight
Was the great moon, which o'er the western line
Of the wide world her mighty horn suspended,
With whose dun beams inwoven darkness seemed
To mingle. Now upon the jagged hills
It rests, and still as the divided frame
Of the vast meteor sunk, *the Poet's blood*,
That ever beat in mystic sympathy
With nature's ebb and flow, grew feebler still:
. . . till the minutest ray
Was quenched, the pulse yet lingered in his heart.
It paused—it fluttered. But when heaven remained
Utterly black, the murky shades involved
An image, silent, cold, and motionless,
As their own voiceless earth and vacant air."
Alastor.

Take these of Keats:

"The *solitary breeze*
Bluster'd, and slept, *and its wild self did teaze*
With wayward melancholy; and I thought,
Mark me, Peona! that *sometimes it brought*
Faint fare-thee-wells and sigh-shrillèd adieus!"
Endymion.

"In the mid days of autumn, on their eves,
The breath of Winter comes from far away,
And the sick west continually bereaves
Of some gold tinge, and plays a roundelay
Of death among the bushes and the leaves,
To make all bare before he dares to stray
From his north cavern," *Isabella.*

where we have the Æolus-idea joined with the personal pathos of the "solitary" breeze in the foregoing example.

Take this of Matthew Arnold:

"Plainness and clearness without shadow of stain,
Clearness divine!
Ye Heavens, whose pure dark regions have no sign
Of languor, though so calm and though so great
Are yet untroubled and unpassionate:
Who, though so noble, share in the world's toil,
And though task'd, keep free from dust and soil:
I will not say that your mild deeps retain
A tinge, it may be, of their silent pain
Who have long'd deeply once, and long'd in vain;
But I will rather say that you remain
A world above man's head, to let him see
How boundless might his soul's horizon be,
How vast, yet of what clear transparency.
How it were good to sink there, and breathe free.
How high a lot to fill
Is left to each man still." *A Summer Night.*

Take this from Mr William Watson:

"In the night, in the night,
When thou liest alone,
Ah, the sounds that are blown
In the freaks of the breeze,
By the spirit that sends
The voice of far friends
With the sigh of the seas
In the night!"

and this from Mrs Meynell:

"And if thy thoughts unfold from me,
Know that I too have hints of thee,
Dim hopes that come across my mind
In the rare days of warmer wind,
And tones of summer in the sea;"

and have we not text and verse for the note Mr Phillips has struck in his wind-and-sea *vox humana?*

§ 44. *Progress of Poetry.*—Where does this tend to? To one conclusion, at least, that poetic ideas follow a law of progress, and that—to use technical terms—the perfect poem will be composed of a harmonious combination of the universal and the individual elements. The universal element is supplied by the thought of the age—the disposition of the age towards the whole problem of existence, its religious conceptions, its political convictions, the state of its scientific knowledge, its social conditions, and so forth. The individual element is supplied by the poet's personality; he reflects the complex features of his times, and reproduces them, clarified and unified, thus interpreting the age to itself. Thus, to revert for the last time to this wind-and-sea figure of speech, which has served as a peg for the present argument, the original movement of thought, of which it forms the ultimate expression, can be traced right back to the times of the French Revolution, and—except in hints—no further. At the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, aristocratic art was becoming democratic. Or, to put the fact more simply, the ideal of liberty

which was exalted by the revolutionaries in Paris infected the poets of England. Wordsworth, for instance, threw his sympathies into the Girondist cause, by the contagion of the example of that peerless knight, Michel Beaupuy, and he would have backed his sympathies with his life if his relatives, to the eternal gain of British poetry, had not recalled him to England. The effect of these experiences may be traced in his autobiographical work, *The Prelude*, which he carefully entitled, *The Growth of a Poet's Mind*, and the kind of poetic mind which was developed by that training was the mind of an enthusiast for freedom, whose belief in the liberty of the subject extended through the human and animal creation to the very flowers and inanimate things. "'Tis my faith," he declared, "that every flower enjoys the air it breathes;" and in another place he writes of this community of interest between all creatures and things as

> "A sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,"

—a thought which contains the conclusion which Mr Phillips applies so frequently of the identity of nature and man. Byron, too, and Shelley expressed in their lives the devotion to liberty which formed

the inspiration of their poetry, and, following British poetry down the changes of the nineteenth century, we can watch it suiting itself to the spirit of the age, till to-day it has reached the last limit of original expression, and has acquired a tinge of convention in the polished verses of minor poets who feel, or affect to feel, the passion of liberty without having lived in (or near) the experience of liberation. It is an impossible task to determine the movement of contemporary thought. In one aspect, it seems to be reactionary, away from the "brotherhood of man, the federation of the world," which appealed to Tennyson in the middle of last century, and which fell so flat in the Czar's Peace Message a few years ago, towards an imperial race sentiment, slowly purging itself of ignobleness, and imposing its own high responsibilities. And if this movement, backward in a sense to aristocracy, proves to be permanent and uplifting, it will be reflected in the poetry of the new age, not by experiments in Imperial verse of any jingo or vulgar type, but through a new "individual" attuned to a new "universal"—the old wine poured into new bottles; poetry, as its heirs inherit it, interpreting the spirit of the new age. This may be the work of the future, or we may have fallen on a barren time, or changes yet unseen may be in store for voices yet unborn to sing: but one

thing at least we can state with confidence, that the French Revolution ideal has now been worn thin in verse. Its fires are well-nigh extinguished, and our poets of the hour, however carefully they tend and cherish its embers, are nursing a dying flame.

§ 45. *The Example of Elegy.*—Before we attempt very briefly to mark the stages of poetic inheritance along the line of the progress of poetry, let us take one more example in the concrete. Read the following passages :—

(i) The Lament of Moschus for Bion (about B.C. 250):

"Begin, and in the tenderest notes complain !
Sicilian Muse, begin the mournful strain !
Though fade crisp anise, and the parsley's green,
And vivid mallows from the garden-scene ;
The balmy breath of spring their life renews,
And bids them flourish in their former hues !
But we, the great, the valiant, and the wise,
When once the seal of death hath closed our eyes,
Lost in the hollow tomb obscure and deep,
Slumber, to wake no more, one long unbroken sleep !
Thou too, while many a scrannel reed I hear
Grating eternal harshness on my ear—
Thou too, thy charm of melting music o'er,
Shut in the silent earth shalt rise no more."*

(ii) The Lament for Sir Philip Sidney, by his

* Translated by the Rev. Richard Polwhele.

sister Mary, Countess of Pembroke (by E. Spenser?):

"Ah no! It is not dead, ne can it die;
But lives for aye in blissful Paradise:
Where, like a new-born babe, it soft doth lie
In bed of lillies, wrapped in tender wise:
And compassed all about with roses sweet,
And daintie violets from head to feet.

"There thousand birds, all of celestial brood,
To him do sweetly caroll day and night;
And with strange notes, of him well understood,
Lull him asleep in angelick delight:
Whilst in sweet dream, to him presented be
Immortal beauties, which no eye may see.

"But he them sees and takes exceeding pleasure
Of their divine aspects, appearing plaine
And kindling love in him above all measure,
Sweet love still joyous, never feeling paine.
For what so goodly forme he there doth see
He may enjoy from jealous rancor free.

"There liveth he in everlasting bliss,
Sweet Spirit never fearing more to die;
Ne dreading harme from any foes of his,
Ne fearing savage beasts' more crueltie.
Whilst we hear, wretches, waile his private lack,
And with vaine vowes do often call him back."

(iii) The Lament for Edward King ("Lycidas"), by John Milton:

"Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead.
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor.
So sinks the day-star in the ocean-bed,
And yet anon repairs his drooping head
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore

Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high
Through the dear might of Him that walk'd the waves;
Where, other groves and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the saints above
In solemn troops, and sweet societies,
That sing, and singing, in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;
Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
To all that wander in that perilous flood."

(iv) The Lament for Keats ("Adonais"), by Shelley:

"He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;
Mourn not for Adonais.—Thou young Dawn
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;
Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
Cease ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air
Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown
O'er the abandoned earth, now leave it bare
Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!

"He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

"He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely."

(v) The Lament for Arthur Hallam, by Tennyson:

"I care not in these fading days
To raise a cry that lasts not long,
And round thee with the breeze of song
To stir a little dust of praise.

"Thy leaf has perish'd in the green,
And, while we breathe beneath the sun,
The world which credits what is done
Is cold to all that might have been.

"So here shall silence guard thy fame;
But somewhere, out of human view,
Whate'er thy hands are set to do
Is wrought with tumult of acclaim,"

—a thought which the poet repeats in his *Ode* on the death of the Duke of Wellington:

"We doubt not that for one so true
There must be other nobler work to do
Than when he fought at Waterloo."

(vi) The Lament for Arthur Hugh Clough ("Thyrsis"), by Matthew Arnold:

"Thou too, O Thyrsis, on like quest wast bound!
Thou wanderedst with me for a little hour!
Men gave thee nothing; but this happy quest,
If men esteem'd thee feeble, gave thee power,
If men procured thee trouble, gave thee rest.
And this rude Cumnor ground,
Its fir-topped Hurst, its farms, its quiet fields,
Here cam'st thou in thy jocund youthful time,
Here was thy height of strength, thy golden prime!
And still the haunt beloved a virtue yields."

(vii) The Lament for Tennyson, by Mr William Watson ("Lachrymæ Musarum," p. 4):

> "He hath returned to regions whence he came.
> Him doth the spirit divine
> Of universal loveliness reclaim.
> All nature is his shrine.
> Seek him henceforward in the wind and sea,
> In earth's and air's emotion or repose,
> In every star's august serenity,
> And in the rapture of the flaming rose.
> There seek him if ye would not seek in vain,
> There, in the rhythm and music of the whole;
> Yes, and for ever in the human soul,
> Made stronger and more beauteous by his strain."

The extracts speak for themselves. The pagan resignation of Moschus at the loss absolute of his friend, with its elaborate pretence in the earlier part of the elegy that all nature has gone into mourning;* the dogmatic theology of Spenser and Milton, with the consolation they derive from the scriptural view of immortality; the natural religion of Shelley at the century's dawn, repeated almost verbally at its close by Mr William Watson—the identity of thought and language is remarkable—who find comfort in the belief, new a hundred years ago, but familiar and less sustaining to-day, that death is not absolute, nor heaven literal, but that immortality implies an unconscious continuation of faculties. And between the two

* See Note 8.

the reserved creed of Matthew Arnold and Tennyson, on the century's noon, that we cannot dogmatise, but must believe. Is there not in this visible movement of poetry an epitome of the history of religion, culminating in the spiritual tenuities of to-day, hardly discernible from chill despair? For, according to the mellifluous language of our latter-day poets, the hope of immortality has been reduced by a rationalising process to the less comfortable prospect of impersonal survival in the colour of a rose or in the sound of a wind.

§ 46. *National Poetic History.*—The history of poetry in every country has a certain similarity and likeness. Beginning with ballads of the heroes, it works up through heroic epos and the drama to narrative and lyrical verse. Roughly, these divisions correspond to the stages of national growth. The ballads belong to nomadic habits of life, when the minstrels fared from camp to camp, and from rude hall to hall. The foundations of national epos are laid while the nation is thus in the making; they are built round the fame of the career of a national hero whose unifying work stands out conspicuously in the annals.* Drama emerges at the time when the nation's prosperity

* See Note 9.

is at its height. The mere possession of a national theatre implies a centre of attraction, a capital city, in other words, to which the political units converge without danger or jealousy. The mere attendance at theatrical performances implies a state of leisure and culture, which commonly supervenes on the top of successful warfare, or at least in a period of conscious vigour. So that from purely material causes the appearance of drama in the history of poetry is a sign of national greatness, and its inherent qualities demand the greatest capacity from the poets. These appeal directly to their audience, without the aid of description or reflection. The persons they create walk boldly on the stage, without biographical notes or character delineation. By their acts they have to declare themselves; the tragedy or comedy of life has to be compressed within a short span of time. The ripe perfection of lyric poetry and of reflective and narrative verse, as distinct from the heroic epos, is commonly subsequent to the drama. The nation becomes self-conscious, and poet after poet attempts to turn his individual experience to the service of mankind, and through his personal reflections on life, death, love, and so forth, to reconcile his fellows with their lot.

Some nations move more slowly than others. Ancient Greece flourished and perished within

the space of a few centuries. The history of England, we trust, is still centuries from completion. Thus, this development of poetry, which in all instances must be stated in general terms, can be traced more readily in Greece than in the nations of Christendom. We can see the epic of Homer growing out of the ballads of the heroes and the myths and legends of the Greek race. We can watch the rise of the Attic theatre, when Athens had become the centre of the Greek hegemony, and we can see the passing of poetry through Euripides, the reflective playwright, into the hands that held the lyre, and evoked the melodies of Alexandria.

§ 47. *General Poetic History.* — There are national stages of development, which it is instructive, but not very important, to follow in England through the Arthurian legend, corresponding to the tales of the Trojan War, to the rise of Elizabethan drama in the days of the great awakening, through the reflective and didactic poetry of the Commonwealth and the eighteenth century to the lyrical outburst in the nineteenth, declining down to our own day.

It is more important, however, and more relevant to what has been said, to consider the progress of poetry, not nation by nation, but in

the light of the development of human thought. At any particular time in a nation's history, we can almost unerringly determine the kind of poetry that will be flourishing; but kinds of poetry, as we know, count infinitely less in æsthetics than the ideas which the poems express. We may learn the history of English poetry, and acquire a nodding acquaintance with all the names that its index contains; but we shall still fail to read the poetry well unless we realise to ourselves that the history of English poetry is a study independent of that of the progress of poetry, and that it is only at particular moments that the two studies meet. They bear to each other somewhat the same relation as biography bears to history. The student of Wellington's biography is interested in his childhood and in his old age, in the letters he wrote, the friendships he formed, the houses he lived in, and so forth. But to the student of English history the significant thing is Wellington's military and political career. The rest is the biographer's, not the historian's, business. Precisely the same is true of the study of English history as a whole. Unless we view it in connection with the general history of western civilisation, we shall see it in false proportions; for the biography of England

touches only at certain points the historical progress of nations and events. So, too, the history of English poetry is, more strictly, a private biography, interesting to us, as Englishmen, but only of occasional importance to the history of poetry itself.

Our business, then, is to discover the stages in the progress of poetry, to mark the heirs of the ages, and the inheritance of one age from another. By the success of a poet in using his accumulated legacy with due respect to the past, and in developing its powers to suit the new needs of his own times, his degree of originality and his value as an artist are to be measured. In this sense Matthew Arnold composed his famous definition of poetry, in which, "as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true."

§ 48. *The Inheritance.*—This is not an historical

treatise, nor does it propose to relate at length and in detail the story of the muse. But if her wanderings were to be tràced on a map of the world, we should distinguish Athens as her earliest resting-place in the West. There, on the seaboard of the Mediterranean, the girlhood of the muse was spent. Driven at last from Athens by the indifference and degeneracy of the Attic Greeks, she found her way through Alexandria to Italy, where after a few provincial visits she settled for a while in Rome. Among the Romans, she lived as a Roman. At first she tried to make them Greeks. She taught them Greek fashions of speech, Greek modes of expression, even Greek habits of thought. But presently the solid worth of the nation that entertained her impressed the wilful maid. With a pretty air of tyranny, she submitted to her hosts. She learned to admire, and finally to reproduce, essentially Roman qualities, moral rather than intellectual, and while the muse became a Roman she lavished on her conquerors the resources of ideal beauty which she had brought from Greece. Thus doubly dowered, serious and beautiful, the western muse was ripe for marriage. Rome, the second home of her girlhood, took a new incarnation. The Rome of the Cæsars changed to the Rome of the Popes, and the Roman

Empire of the muse was invaded and dismembered.

At this period the muse met her mate. Two streams of civilisation, as we say, the Hellenic and the Hebraic, mingled their waters in the early Middle Ages. The muse of the East wooed the muse of the West under the blue skies of Italy, and with the Mediterranean odours around them. It was a romantic wooing, in the times when the example of Christ and the suffering of the Madonna were teaching the novel virtues of pity, humility, chivalry, endurance, to a world which had been trained to practice the ancient virtues of Greece and Rome, temperance and piety. We can read, as it were, the love-letters of this romance in the works of early Greek and Latin Christian poets. The passage from Pagan to Christian art was disguised or assisted by the free use of symbolism, mysticism, and allegory,* and the marriage of Hebraism and Hellenism was consummated in Dante, who placed in the city of Rome the common seat of spiritual and temporal power.

From the medieval Italian city-states, Florence,

* A striking concrete illustration is the use made by early Christian poets and other artists of the Phœnix of classical mythology. See H. O. Taylor, *The Classical Heritage of the Middle Ages*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 279.

Genoa, Venice, Pisa,—"downwards through that bright dream of Commonwealths, each city a starlike seat of rival glory,"—the muse paid visits to other parts of Europe. Spain, France, England, and Germany were distinguished in this way, as the stream of poetry flowed onward with full flood. Wherever a stage was marked in the development of modern life, there poetry came to sojourn—in the wake of religious fervour freed from ecclesiastical control, of political liberty released from the bonds of feudalism, of human love ennobled by the contemplation of high objects. Think for a moment what a wealth of energy was poured into the stream by the translation of the Bible into European languages; and how, having crossed the bridges that were built between Paganism and Christianity, Hellenism and Hebraism, modern thought was enriched by the inheritance of all the ages. It accepted and transmuted the splendid material of the Pagan mythologies, the Trojan War with the legends it included, and the story of Alexander with its magical accretions. To these were added the cycles of myth that grew up round the names of Charlemagne and King Arthur, and over them all was shed the influence of the new point of view, with its permanent effects on men's thought, men's language, and poetic metres. And this

rich stream, continually fed by tributary rivulets from all directions, poured its fertilising waters through all kinds of political changes, in times of geographical adventure, in times of popular awakening, in times of national self-consciousness, in times of spiritual emotion.

The muse took the colour of her surroundings. In Italy in the sixteenth century she reflected what Professor Courthope calls the "one unvarying cycle of change," through which every free city of Italy ran, "from elective monarchy to patrician oligarchy, and thence to democratic faction, which, ending in anarchy, prepared the way for despotism." Monarchical loyalty, the patronage of nobles, municipal liberty, inspired the poets in turn, till the disorder in politics produced stagnation in art. In England in the seventeenth century she reflected the adventurous spirit at the Court in the spacious times of Queen Elizabeth. Speaking through the mouth of Shakespeare she inspired the larger reading of nature and human life by which the playwright increased the patrimony of his race. In Germany, in the eighteenth century, she reflected the religious idealism, the national union, the reaction from a degenerate kingship to a benevolent absolutism on the one part, and popular emancipation on the other, which characterise the age of Frederick the Great. Speak-

ing through the mouths of men like Herder, Kant, Goethe, and Schiller, she inspired the great German Revolution, which was fought out, as Professor Francke writes, "not on the political battlefield, but in the realm of letters," and which "resulted, not in a violent uprooting of the old, hereditary aristocracy, but in the peaceful triumph of the new, intellectual aristocracy, which during the hundred years just preceding, recruiting itself largely from the middle classes, had gradually united in itself the best minds of the whole nation." * And in France in the nineteenth century, she reflected the Revolutionary ideals, which, crossing the channel into England, inspired the British school of revolt and reconstruction in Burns, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Tennyson, till its fires have died down to-day.

§ 49. *Conclusion.*—Such is the course of the progress of poetry, and though volumes have been written on each period, the thing to remember is the fact of the descent of western poetry along two lines of derivation, the Hellenic and the Hebraic. Attic perfection was attained in the Periclean age of Greece, when Sophocles expressed in his tragedies the μηδὲν ἄγαν idea, and Hebraic

* *Social Forces in German Literature*, p. 318.

perfection was attained at the time of the second Temple of Jerusalem, when the authors or anthologists of the Psalter expressed through their hymns and praises the enlightened idea of righteousness. And when the two streams met, and Christian writers took up both ideals with fine courage, and turned them to new uses in politics, literature, and art, fresh impetus was lent at every stage to the interpretative genius of poetry. For us, then, the heirs of all the ages, originality in poetry is discovered by marking the development in poetic technique, and the receptivity of the poet's mind to the general ideas underlying the particular facts of his own generation, without violence to the tradition of poetic beauty and truth. The muse, wrote George Wither, three hundred years ago:

> "Doth tell me where to borrow
> Comfort in the midst of sorrow:
> Makes the desolatest place
> To her presence be a grace:
> And the blackest discontents
> To be pleasing ornaments.
> In my former days of bliss
> Her divine skill taught me this,
> That from everything I saw,
> I could some invention draw:
> And raise pleasure to her height,
> Through the meanest object's sight,
> By the murmur of a spring,
> Or the least bough's rustleing;

> By a daisy, whose leaves spread
> Shut when Titan goes to bed ;
> Or a shady bush or tree,
> She could more infuse in me,
> Than all Nature's beauties can
> In some other wiser man."

Add to this Ruskin's warning to the aspirants at the Elysian gates, and the preparation for poetry is complete: "Do you ask to be the companions of nobles? Make yourself noble, and you shall be. Do you long for the conversation of the wise? Learn to understand it, and you shall hear it. But on the other terms?—No. If you will not rise to us, we cannot stoop to you. . . . You must rise to the level of our thoughts, if you would be gladdened by it, and share our feelings, if you would recognise our presence."

NOTES

Note 1, § 7, page 23.

The history of "piety" is interesting, because when Virgil was commissioned by the Emperor Augustus in the first century before Christ to write a national poem, commemorating the virtues of Rome, he took as his hero "pious Æneas," the reputed founder of the city, and exalted this quality of "pietas" to the rank of the national virtue of the Romans. The nature of this piety in Virgil's conception, as exemplified in the character of Æneas, has suffered somewhat from misapprehension, and from the confusion of ideals of conduct, due to the later meanings of piety and pity. The old Roman piety was the twin source of national greatness. "Tantum ferro quantum pietate potentes stamus," wrote Propertius under the Empire: "Our power is founded half on arms, half on piety;" and it is fair to a word which has lost so much of its former stateliness to dwell for a moment on its past significance.

Piety, in the Augustan age, was a wide virtue, giving laws to every relation of the patriarchal life. It expressed the obligation of man to God, of subject to state, of child to father. And it was further a reciprocal virtue, defining the relation of God to man, of state to subject, of father to child. There might be a conflict of pieties, a lesser contending with a greater, with perhaps a bias of love, or pity, or desire, weighing the scale of the slighter duty. So the man of exact piety would have to balance and discriminate, to

recognise, in fact, a rigid etiquette and right of precedence determining his action. The perfect man of Rome's ideal was heroic before he was human, grand before he was gracious. Piety was a quality of sterling gold, without small change, and "pious Æneas" has, to modern eyes, the defects of his quality. He is chill, where love might have fired him; statuesque, where tenderness might have bent him; deaf, where he might have yielded to desire. This is the first point at which Piety clashes with later laws of conduct. We give our respect, but we withhold our admiration; we withhold even our consent to that conception of duty incarnate which confronts us in the Æneid. It is magnificent, but it is not life: and herein lay its failure to convince in its own day. The star-like aloofness from human passion, the devoted pursuit of a far-off ideal, these may have been the qualities of the remote and consecrated pilgrim who brought the Latin gods from Ilium to Rome, but they were as impossible and mythological to the civilised Roman of the first centuries, before and after Christ, as were those vagrant gods themselves.

How false, for instance, is our appreciation of the fourth book of the Æneid, if we misinterpret the gravity of this virtue and under-estimate its scope. It has been said that here Virgil misses true greatness by failing to reconcile us to the conduct of Æneas. More discreetly seen, it is here that Virgil surpasses himself, and carries us with him beyond the limits of the drama of individual passion, to a personal sympathy with a State moving across the stage, and a transcendent enthusiasm for a national idea. Rome herself moves in procession as the weighty lines of his narrative wind along. Let us consider this in more detail. The path of the perfect man, even on paper, was not always smooth. Piety was a religion, but the religion might be a yoke. Obedience and loyalty to a statuesque ideal could not proceed without some sacrifices by the way, as when Æneas, after the ghost of Hector had committed to him Troy and her gods, had to save his son, the future repository of that

trust, and his aged father, before his wife. The romantic tale of suffering Dido, the loveliest widow whom any age has seen, is too well known to be repeated here; but one point is too often missed for us not to emphasise it. Romance and pathos and sentiment take the part of the deserted bride in the horror of her "waking dream" of endless journeying through an empty land, and in her desolate cry from the margin of the unkind sea which was bearing her lover away. "Go," she cried; "follow thine Italy before the wind, and seek thy kingdom through the waters. I only pray, if the perfect [pious] gods have power in aught, mayst thou drain thy punishment on some mid-ocean rock, calling again and again upon the name of Dido." But romance, pathos, sentiment were necessarily postponed in the sterner code of ancient Roman morality to the single call of duty. For what is the answer to this appeal? Do the perfect gods exact the retribution due from broken vows and unhallowed pledges, or, if not, does the poet apologise in any way for the triumph of unrighteousness, and the oppression of the weaker side? Or, to re-write this according to a view of *pietas* which has been coloured by its derivative pity, do the gentle gods exercise their prerogative of mercy, and rebuke the cruelty of the fugitive lover? This is the reply:

> "At pius Æneas, quamquam lenire dolentem
> Solando cupit et dictis avertere curas,
> Multa gemens, magnoque animum labefactus amore,
> Iussa tamen divum exsequitur"—

which may thus be Englished:

> "Perfect Æneas, though he sore doth long,
> With consolation trembling on his tongue,
> To soothe her grief and charm away her cares,
> Groaning, and faint for the great love he bears,
> Yet wreaks the gods' command."

Love, and pity, and desire, and all the weaker impulses are conquered, and Æneas is perfect still, and the perfect gods approve. *Impius*, Dido may hail him, but he is *pius*

throughout, illustrating to the letter Tennyson's stately lines,

> "His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
> And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true."

Truth prevails. He is a nobler Antony, preferring Rome to Cleopatra; an earlier Lovelace, preferring duty to love. A quality great as this, lying dormant in the excessive activity of the sword, Virgil, Mæcenas, and Augustus did wisely to endeavour to restore.

So far we have considered Piety in its loftiest bearing, as the serene religion of the gods' missionary to Rome. But inasmuch as Rome's message was a message to every Roman, it was in its daily operation on the minds of ordinary men that it seemed so valuable to the imperial patriots. When every man does what is right, without question of convenience or complication of desire, the world, though it may be duller, will at any rate be better. But further, the Romans, who were essentially a nation of affairs, apt to exact what we still call a *quid pro quo*, were perhaps less reverent than business-like in their piety. The quality of perfection was binding in heaven no less than on earth, and men who rendered due service to the gods could command due recompense in return. By the recognition of this simple equation in the arithmetic of Piety, several passages in the Æneid are rescued from misinterpretation. In the terrible lines of the second book which precede the death of Priam an excellent instance is obtained. Troy has been taken, and the palace is thrown open to promiscuous fugitives from the slaughter without. The old king has just yielded to the representations of Hecuba, his wife,

> "Non tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis
> Tempus eget"—

and has consented to stay with her for life or death, when Polites, one of his sons, comes rushing through the corridor, flying before Pyrrhus, mortally wounded. Just as he reaches

his father's sight, he stumbles, falls, and breathes his last. Then Priam turns to Pyrrhus, and exclaims: "For this outrage, that thou hast made the father look upon the death of the son,

> 'Di, si qua est cœlo pietas, quæ talia curet,
> Persolvant grates dignas et præmia reddant
> Debita'—

may the gods, if there yet be righteousness [piety] in heaven to take count of this, return thee thanks deserved, and render the payment due." What was this *pietas* of the gods to which he appeals? Note the language which expands its operation: *return*, *deserved*, *render*, *due*. The words all express the attributes of a right which has been earned; it is no suppliant's cry, but a claimant's. For the demand of Priam is no old man's prayer for pity, but the appeal from duty outraged to duty retributive. Priam is in the gods' debt, and his vindication is secure, provided only that the gods are pious indeed, have indeed the sense of justice.

And here is a fitting place whence to descry the path of Piety's degeneration. In the confusion of caste which overtook so many words at the imposition of Christianity upon Paganism, Piety was one that fared badly. The introduction of a more spiritual element, of a remoteness and an aloofness into the conception of Deity, which was so alien to Greek or Roman, disturbed the relations of God and man. Gods could no longer be regarded as human beings raised to a higher power, a little wayward, a little untractable, but quite transparent. Hebraism, which taught the inscrutability of the divine ways, and the profoundness of the divine wisdom, proportionally belittled man in his own estimation. With this view there could be no question of merit and desert, of debt and payment between God and man. The bewildered cry of conscious mortality, "Lord, what is man that Thou takest knowledge of him, the son of man that Thou makest account of him!" was a point of view precisely antithetical to that reciprocity of obligation which *Pietas*

denoted. Equal justice is the last right men would now demand from God, for the divine standard has become incommensurate with the human. Therefore the expression of God's perfection to man is in deeds of mercy, of pardon, and of pity. We may still exclaim in moments of doubt, "*Di si qua est cœlo Pietas!* God, if Thou art perfect indeed;" but by piety we mean pity. Knowing, even in our darkest distress, that our wrongs can but be a degree worse than our wrong-doing, we hesitate to challenge that omniscient justice. Our appeal is rather to His universal tenderness. And side by side with its new rendering of the relations of the human and divine, ecclesiasticism gave birth to the age of chivalry and its repaired ideal. Respect for women and pity for weakness became virtues more knightly, because more Christ-like, than the undeviating duty of the patriarchal code. The grandest Pagan was never more than a man; he lacked the touch which makes it man's chief glory to be gentle. So on twin lines arose, and widened as time went on, the distinction (which it is a too common anachronism to read into the Æneid) between these two forms of the same word; and pity and piety, God's boon to man and man's homage to God, though once reciprocal and synonymous, have long ago parted ways.*

NOTE 2, 11, page 34.

There are two ways of scanning a line of verse, (1) by the rhythmic beats or stresses, and (2) by the metrical feet; or (1) by accent, and (2) by quantity.

In the Greek and Latin languages, it should be noted, the quantity (or time-value) and the accent (or musical pitch) of words do not necessarily correspond. The position of a word in a metrical system is there strictly determined by

* The bulk of this note is reprinted from *Macmillan's Magazine*, May 1895, by kind permission.

the natural quantity (length or shortness) of its vowels. We do not know how *pater* (the Latin for father) was pronounced in ancient Rome, though we place the accent on the first syllable; but we do know that it had a short or weak *ă*, and could not be scanned – ∪. *Mater*, mother, however, which we pronounce in exactly the same way, had a long or strong *ā*, so that the quantity and the accent corresponded. The metrical sign for *păter* is ∪ ∪, and for *māter* –∪. But note, again, for the purposes of the scansion of Latin verse, that the second syllable of either of these words can only be scanned as short if the next succeeding word begins with a vowel. For a vowel followed by two consonants became long by position, though it may have been short by natural time value. Thus, *Ō păter ōmnĭpŏtēns* is – ∪∪ / –∪∪ / – //, but *Māgnĕ păter mĭsĕrērĕ* (Great father, pity!) is scanned – ∪∪ / – ∪∪ / – ∪ //, the natural short quantity of the *er* of *pater*, that is to say, is changed by the succeeding consonant.

The following names have been given to the various metrical feet composed of long and short syllables:—

A *trochee* is a foot containing one long followed by one short syllable, – ∪.

A *spondee* contains two long syllables, – –.

A *dactyl*, one long followed by two short, – ∪ ∪.

An *anapæst*, two short followed by one long, ∪ ∪ –.

An *iamb* (or *iambus*), one short followed by one long, ∪ –.

The Homeric and Virgilian epic poems (Iliad, Odyssey, and Æneid) are written in dactylic hexameters, or six-foot dactylic verses. This metre permits certain equivalent variations, and insists upon others. Thus, the last foot of such a verse must be, not a dactyl, but a spondee, or—by special license—a trochee, the spondee being due to the convention that one long syllable is equivalent to two short (– = ∪ ∪), and the trochee at the end of a line being a concession to variety. Accordingly, the dactylic hexameter is never a monotonous succession of six dactylic feet,

– ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ / – ∪ ∪ //;

but within the limits of that scheme several variations are

permissible, by the combination in diverse ways of the following equivalents. The first foot is :

$$— \overset{\cup\cup}{—} \;/\; \overset{\cup\cup}{—}\,\overset{—}{\cup\cup} \;/\; \overset{\cup\cup}{—}\,\overset{—}{\cup\cup} \;/\; \overset{\cup\cup}{—}\,\overset{—}{\cup\cup} \;/\; - \cup\cup \;/\; -\,\overset{\cup}{-} \;//$$

The first syllable is invariably long ; the fifth foot is almost invariably a dactyl, and the last foot is always dissyllabic. Another source of musical variety in ancient verse is the *cæsura*, or the law of the division of feet. The ends of the words and of the metrical feet must not correspond throughout the line ; each foot, that is to say, must not close with the end of a word, but the last syllable or syllables of a word must overrun into the next foot. Thus the scansion by sense and sound may be totally different from the strict scansion by the quantitative value of the syllables.

The second great metre of the ancients is the iambic pentameter, or five-foot iambic measure, in which the tragedies and comedies of the Greeks were composed. Without discussing the prosody of this metre in detail, it may be stated that variety was likewise introduced by the law of the cæsura and by the theory of equal time-values.

Modern verse is always accentual. We may speak, as in § 12 of the text, of a line of Tennyson as an iambic pentameter, marking, for instance,

" That sinks with all we love below the verge "

as ∪ – / ∪ – / ∪ – / ∪ – / ∪ – , but such a correspondence of quantity and accent is merely accidental, and not necessary. The true basis of the music in that song is in the four rhythmic beats or stresses, which occur at various places in the verses. Thus, Tennyson gives us, in the song quoted on page 34,

Te'ars, idle te'ars, I kno'w not what they me'an ;
Ri'se in the he'art, and ga'ther to the ey'es ;
In lo'oking on the ha'ppy Au'tumn fie'lds ;
That si'nks with all we lo've belo'w the ve'rge ;

to take four only of the variants.

Each and all of the verses in this song can be fitted into the clamps of the metrical scheme of an iambic pentameter (neglecting, of course, the Greek and Roman rules for the quantity of vowels by position), but scansion by the ear has superseded in modern poetry the old scansion by measure.

This applies especially to blank verse, or poetry without rhyme, which is always correctly said to be the most difficult form of poetic composition. When fixed sounds are expected in fixed places, as in rhymed verse, the rhythm has a natural tendency to fall into uniform measures. Thus, in the so-called heroic couplet, or rhymed pair of iambic pentameters, we find long passages in Pope, Dryden, and others, where the necessity of repeating the sound at the end of every second line from its predecessor led the poet to cast his thoughts in a kind of double-line mould; the metre became, accordingly, in the eighteenth century especially, when the tone of social life was highly polished, an admirable vehicle for epigrams and gems of diction. A single example from Pope's *Essay on Man* will illustrate this tendency:

"The bliss of Man (could pride that blessing find)
Is not to act or think beyond mankind;
No powers of body or of soul to share,
But what his nature and his state can bear.
Why has not man a microscopic eye?
For this plain reason, Man is not a fly.
Say what the use, were finer optics given,
To inspect a mite, not comprehend the heaven?
Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er,
To smart and agonise at every pore?
Or quick effluvia darting through the brain,
Die of a rose in aromatic pain?
If nature thunder'd in his opening ears,
And stunn'd him with the music of the spheres,
How would he wish that Heaven had left him still
The whispering zephyr, and the purling rill?
Who finds not Providence all good and wise,
Alike in what it gives, and what denies?"

Note how the thoughts tend to close at the rhymes; how

each couplet grows self-contained; how (in line 6, for instance) the impending rhyme is responsible for the circumlocution, "for this plain reason," to fill up the line; how, in lines 12 and 17-18, for instance, the phrases fall into pointed epigrams; and how, finally, though not quite relevantly to the context, words like "optics" for eyes, "zephyr" for breeze, and "purling" as a kind of conventional epithet for the water noise, are typical of the language against which the reformers of the early nineteenth century protested so strongly, condemning it as "poetic diction."

And now note how Keats, when he took over the heroic couplet, succeeded in disguising the influence of the rhyme, and in melting the barriers. The metre had touched the height of its powers in epigram, antithesis, and terseness; its limitations were now to be washed down in a flood of melody. Take a single example from the *Endymion* of Keats:

"Full in the middle of this pleasantness
There stood a marble altar, with a tress
Of flowers budded newly; and the dew
Had taken fairy phantasies to strew
Daisies upon the sacred sward last eve,
And so the dawned light in pomp receive.
For 'twas the morn: Apollo's upward fire
Made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre
Of brightness so unsullied, that therein
A melancholy spirit well might win
Oblivion, and melt out his essence fine
Into the winds: rain-scented eglantine
Gave temperate sweets to that well-wooing sun;
The lark was lost in him; cold springs had run
To warm their chilliest bubbles in the grass;
Man's voice was on the mountains; and the mass
Of nature's lives and wonders puls'd tenfold,
To feel this sunrise and its glories old."

Contrast these nine couplets with the nine above from Pope, and mark how differently the metre is treated. There we had a succession of compact couplets, carefully dovetailed and polished, and fitting like compartments in a box. Here is a stretch of musical curves, winding in irregular lengths

down the page, and hardly interrupted by the recurrence of fixed sounds at fixed places in the metrical scheme. In the Keats passage, in other words, rhyme has nearly ceased to influence the style. For the purposes of style the device is practically neglected; the rhymes tend to fall on unimportant words or syllables, and at no pauses in the thought or music, whereas they were used by Pope to point the emphasis of his argument; and *Endymion*, we may fairly say, is as near blank verse as a narrative poem in heroic couplets can be. Indeed, for the last hundred years it has been the general tendency of English poets to reduce the effect of rhyme to a minimum.

Accordingly, in the scansion of poetry, if we are to use the quantity-test at all, it is obviously fairer to apply it to rhymed verse than to unrhymed. The rhyme constrains the metre automatically, and helps it more readily to be measured off into feet.

But the greatest (and the great bulk of) English poetry—nearly all Shakespeare and Milton, for example, and much of Wordsworth and Tennyson—is written without rhymes, and here we should be very shy of testing the prosody by counting the long and short syllables. The ear is the only safe guide to the prosody of blank verse, the very life of which is a varied music, subtly adapted to the meaning which it intends to express, and wholly independent of the regular sound-reproduction which tends to metrical uniformity in composing rhymed verse.

Keats, we saw, wrote *Endymion*, a long narrative poem, in heroic couplets which effectually disguised the recurrence of the sounds in fixed places. Spenser's *Faerie Queen* is written in cantos of stanzas, in which the rhymes are so disposed as to admit of a winding melody, hardly at all constraining the freedom and fluency of the narrative. Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, again, likewise a descriptive poem, though containing two rhymes in each of its four-lined stanzas, succeeds in minimising the influence of rhyme, first by the arrangement of the design in short poems

of varying length, and, secondly, as remarked in §§ 14 and 15 above, by using the other devices of style to disguise the cadence of the rhymes.

The prosody of blank verse is too vast a subject to occupy us here. Much reading alone can help us to understand it, and the aid of music and elocution must be called in to assist. But a part of its mystery may be gathered by a careful study of the difference between the passages from Pope and Keats which were quoted just now, and the reader may be referred to Mr Robert Bridges' essay on the *Prosody of Milton*, to the acute remarks of Professor Walter Raleigh in his monograph on *Milton*, pp. 188-198, to Hallam, Lord Tennyson's *Memoir* of his father, vol. ii., pp. 11-16, and a few other passages, to the prefaces in T. H. Ward's *English Poets*, and to the conclusion of chapter iii. in the second volume of Professor Courthope's *History of English Poetry*.

NOTE 3, § 16, page 46.

Homer's use of the simile—the earliest in an artistic sense known to Western poetry—is remarkable for the wealth of pictorial imagery with which he commonly enriched it. There are, of course, brief Homeric similes; for instance, "he descended *like night*," or "she rose from the sea, *like a mist*," but more usually, as Sir R. Jebb tells us (*Introduction to Homer*, page 27), "When Homer compares *A* to *B*, he will often add details concerning *B* which have no bearing on the comparison." . . . If *A* is to be made clearer by means of *B*, *B* itself must be clearly seen; and therefore Homer takes care that *B* shall never remain abstract or shadowy; he invests it with enough of detail to place a concrete image before the mind."

In a passage in the second book of the *Iliad*, Homer

gives a succession of similes, so striking as to be worthy quotation in this contest:

"Even as ravaging fire kindleth a boundless forest on a mountain's peaks, and the blaze is seen from afar, even so as they marched went the dazzling gleam from the innumerable bronze through the sky even unto the heavens. And as the many tribes of feathered birds, wild geese or cranes or long-necked swans, on the Asian mead by Kaystros' stream, fly hither and thither joying in their plumage, and with loud cries settle ever onwards, and the mead resounds, so poured forth the many tribes of warriors from ships and huts into the Skamandrian plain. And the Earth echoed terribly beneath the tread of men and horses. So stood they in the flowery Skamandrian plain, unnumbered as are the leaves and flowers in their season. Even as the many tribes of thick flies that hover about a herdsman's steading in the spring season, when milk drencheth the pails, even in like number stood the flowing-haired Achaians upon the plain in face of the Trojans, eager to rend them asunder. And even as the goatherds easily divide the ranging flocks of goats when they mingle in the pasture, so did their captains marshal them on this side and on that, to enter into the fray, and in their midst Lord Agamemnon, his head and eyes like unto Zeus whose joy is in the thunder, and his waist like unto Ares, and his breast unto Poseidon. Even as a bull standeth out far foremost amid the herd, for he is pre-eminent amid the pasturing kine, even such did Zeus make Atreides on that day, pre-eminent among many and chief amid heroes." (Trans. by W. Leaf.)

It would be an interesting exercise in style to translate this beautiful description, with its clear representation of the movements of the host, into the language of impressionism as used by modern war correspondents, putting the 'red-necked Englishmen' for the flowing-haired Achaians and the Boers for the Trojans. Something of this sort might be produced:

"A plain of gleaming steel. Just a confusion of Rooineks,

hurrying, flocking, buzzing, eager to open fire on the Boers. They are herded into order, and Lord ——, the war-god incarnate, gives the word of command."

Allowing for differences in the conditions of warfare, we may be sure that the three separate pictures—the fire, the birds, the flies—would be summarised by epithets, containing the ideas of the gleam, the flight, and the clusters. Metaphors, that is to say, would be used in the place of similes, and the picture of the herdsman and the goats would be conveyed by a single verb of herding. The general, again, Lord Kitchener or another, would not expressly be compared to Zeus in the eyes, Ares at the waist, and a bull among kine, but the impression would be given by a brief, effective phrase.

The point is that modern literature, whether in poetry or in history, is not much addicted to similes. The student should read Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*, composed in the spirit of Homer, in order to convince himself how far that spirit is removed from modern methods of style. These follow more closely the Biblical precedent in their use, if not in their range, of similes; for the influence of the translation of the Bible on European letters is incalculable.

"How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain;"

"Keep me as the apple of the eye;"

"Then did I beat them small as the dust before the wind;"

"I am poured out like water, . . . my heart is like wax,"—

this is the kind of writing which has influenced modern literature much more strongly than the inset pictures of the Homeric poems; and the metaphors of the Psalter are likewise extremely modern in the manner of their employment.

"Hide me under the shadow of thy wings;"

"They are inclosed in their own fat;"

"The Lord is the portion of my cup;"

"I will wash mine hands in innocency;"

"Their throat is an open sepulchre,"—

Very rightly is the advice given to those who wish to cultivate a good style to train themselves on the Bible. There, too, we frequently meet the mixed metaphor and simile so common in the works of great authors, where *A* is compared to *B*, and *A* is subsequently described in terms appropriate to *B*.

"Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces,"

may be taken as a simple example. More elaborate instances are the following:

"The Lord is my shepherd; . . . he maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters;"

"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither."

A fine example of this style in modern poetry is Shelley's image of life:

"Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity,"

where the metaphor in the second line is defended by the simile in the first. But English poetry is so full of metaphor, even single words are frequently so rich in figurative meaning, that only the barest reference can be made to the subject in this place.

NOTE 4, § 21, page 59.

The exception is the sonnet. The sonnet is a lyrical poem of fourteen decasyllabic lines, arranged according to a definite metrical scheme. The poem is divided into two parts, consisting of the first eight lines and the latter six, and called respectively the octave and the sextet. In the first part there should not be more than two rhyme-endings, disposed commonly as follows,—*a*, *b*, *b*, *a*, *a*, *b*, *b*, *a*; though

the sequence, *a*, *b*, *a*, *b*, *a*, *b*, *a*, *b*, is by no means uncommon, and other variations occur. In the second part a little more variety is permitted. We get the rhyme-endings in the order *c*, *d*, *e*, *c*, *d*, *e*, or *c*, *d*, *e*, *e*, *d*, *c*, or *c*, *d*, *c*, *d*, *e*, *e*, or *c*, *d*, *d*, *c*, *e*, *e*, or *c*, *d*, *c*, *d*, *d*, *c*. Thus, the sonnet may fairly be regarded as an artificial form of composition, which nothing but the genius of a poet can render natural and spontaneous. At the same time, it must not be supposed that the making of a sonnet requires only a hundred and forty syllables arranged grammatically and sensibly with the rhymes distributed by rule. Inspiration is a necessary ingredient, but it may be admitted that in certain ages of poetry, the sixteenth century, for example, the sonnet was used as a vehicle of poetical conceits, of simulated emotion, that is to say, and of forms of expression employed for the sake of their own beauty, and not corresponding to any feeling in the poet's mind. Hence has arisen in these days one of the many theories to explain the classical problem of sonnetteering—the identity of "Mr W. H." to whom Shakespeare inscribed the book of his collected sonnets. Mr Sidney Lee (*Life of William Shakespeare*, p. 427) speaks of "the sonnetteering vogue," which "reached its full height between 1591 and 1597," and adds that "an enumeration of volumes containing sonnet-sequences or detached sonnets that were in circulation during the period best illustrates the overwhelming force of the sonnetteering rage of these years." His evidence proves that the sonnet flourished as an artificial product, and the formal conventions doubtless assisted Shakespeare in preserving the secret of "W. H." But that Shakespeare's were merely formal experiments, and nothing more, executed in deference to the prevailing fashion, is a theory of their origin which the critics have not accepted.

In English literature since Elizabeth, the sonnet has been freely used as a lyrical mould to convey a single deep and genuine emotion. Wordsworth, who revived the sonnet-sequence in his *River Duddon* and his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*,

defends that form of verse, and supplies a kind of bibliography, in a sonnet, itself of great merit:

"Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours; with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound;
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound;
With it Camöens soothed an exile's grief;
The sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned

His visionary brow; a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land
To struggle through dark ways; and when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few!"

Note that the rhymes in this example occur as *a*, *b*, *b*, *a*, *a*, *c*, *c*, *a*; *d*, *e*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *f*; note, too, that the octave and the sextet are not, as more strictly required, divided by a demarcation of thought, though the ending is conventionally in the nature of a climax. The reader should study for himself the allusions to Petrarch, Tasso, Camöens, and the rest. He may further be referred to a paper by the Rev. Thomas Hutchinson on *The Structure of the Wordsworthian Sonnet*, in Vol. II. of the "Transactions" of the Wordsworth Society; also to Archbishop Trench's edition of *The Sonnets of Wordsworth*, with an essay on the History of the English Sonnet. Generally, it may be said that the frugality of rhymes, the strict division of sense between the octave and the sextet, and the summary conclusion of Italian and Elizabethan tradition were relaxed by later sonnetteers, who have tended to treat this form of verse as a stately lyrical mould rather than as the vehicle for a conceit of love.

NOTE 5, § 32, page 91.

Aristotle's words are—

> "The historian and the poet do not differ in using or not using metre . . . but the difference lies in this fact, that the one tells what has happened and the other what could happen. *And therefore poetry has a wider truth and a higher aim than history.* . . . Tragedy . . . is an imitation of a serious and complete action which has magnitude. The imitation is effected by embellished language, each kind of embellishment varying in the constituent parts. It is acted, not narrated; and it uses the agency of pity and fear to effect a purging of these and the like emotions (δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν)."

I use the translation given by Mr W. Basil Worsfold in his little treatise on *Judgment in Literature* (Dent & Co., p. 25), but it is almost needless to add, as Professor Saintsbury writes (*History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, vol. i., p. 38; Blackwood & Sons), that "volumes have been written on these few words, the chief *crux* being, of course, the word *Katharsis*." The best book to consult, after Lessing's *Dramaturgie*, is Professor Butcher's work on *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. Here it may briefly be said that the κάθαρσις is a metaphor from medicine. Pity and fear are fevers of the emotion induced by witnessing a tragedy, and the playwright's duty is to purge such fevers before he dismisses his audience. Otherwise, his "imitation" of life will not differ from the reality of life. Experience is full of facts with the appearance of tragedy, but differing from the "facts" of tragic art in failing to reconcile the minds of the spectators to the justice, or the inevitableness, of the tragedy. Pity and fear are aroused, but they are not resolved and purged. In the ancient tragedy of the Greeks (Æschylus and Sophocles especially) the "purgation"

was most commonly effected by an act of divine interposition, or at least by superhuman means. In Euripides we see this 'deus ex machina' as a mechanical device, which soothes, if it does not completely satisfy, the audience. Dr J. P. Mahaffy (*History of Classical Greek Literature*, vol. i., p. 307: Longmans) writes correctly on this point, "This momentary introduction of gods at the opening and close of tragedies shows plainly the process of humanization, which was completed by Euripides, and which made the gods a mere piece of stage machinery, tolerated by tradition, but only to be called in when the web of human passion required prompt and clear explication. But in old Greek plays they furthermore performed the important tragic service of justifying the cruel side, the iron destiny, of the drama. They were the main agents in purifying the terror of the spectator, which had else been akin to despair at the miseries entailed by necessity upon the human race."

This seems to me to be the right explanation of Aristotle's definition. Professor Saintsbury (*op. cit.*), it may be added, evades the problem of κάθαρσις as irrelevant to "such a treatise" as the *History of Criticism* which he is writing, but he states of the "pity and fear" clause that "its ethical drift is unmistakable." Ethical is, perhaps, the wrong word for a function of tragic drama which by Aristotle's time had become highly artificial. Nor is a ready assent to be yielded to Mr Worsfold's opinion (*op. cit.*, p. 26) that "we shall be able to find something in our own everyday experience which is in accordance with the words of the great Greek thinker. If we recall the feelings with which we have left the theatre after witnessing a tragedy, or even the less definite sensation with which we have closed a powerful and well-written novel, we shall probably remember that there was a distinct sense of relief present in our minds. For a few hours we had forgotten our own difficulties and troubles in the sympathy which was aroused in us for the imagined characters of the dramatist or the novelist. If we had given expression in words to this feeling we should have said to ourselves, 'Well,

after all, my troubles are not so bad as these.' And this feeling—based on a comparison of the circumstances of our own life with those of others—made us more reconciled with our own lot in life, and perhaps taught us to understand better the meaning of human life as a whole." The conclusion here is more reasonable than the argument. Our feeling on leaving a Greek theatre would not have been, "Well, after all, my troubles are not so bad as these," but rather, "Well, after all, these troubles are not as bad as they seemed," and hence are derived the purgative power and the reconciling influence of Greek drama. But Mr Worsfold's view is at least more convincing than Mr W. L. Courtney's (*The Idea of Tragedy: Three Lectures*, p. 38; Constable & Co.), who declares that "Aristotle thought it just as well that spectators should go to a theatre, and see what fools the tragic characters made of themselves by indulging in such emotions;" in other words, that the κάθαρσις is a violent emetic, and that you would have left the Attic theatre saying, "Well, what fools they all are!"

Greek drama effected its reconciliation in the minds of the audience by showing, artistically or mechanically, the gods governing the world, by treating human destiny, that is to say, on a wider basis than the individual. The Elizabethan drama effected it by the inner necessities of character. As a man is, so he acts; the inevitableness of circumstances is not in obedience to outer law, but to the nature of the person. The tragedy of Hamlet is in his own irresolution. Our pity and fear are equally purged, for we see through the playwright's eyes that things could not have happened differently; but the cathartic agent, to speak in technical terms, is objective in Æschylus and subjective in Shakespeare. The artistic crime of the modern stage of Scandinavia and her disciples lies in its neglect of the κάθαρσις. They imitate life without interpreting it, giving therefore the limited truth of human experience instead of the "wider truth and higher aim" of poetry.

NOTE 6, § 37, page 109.

Wordsworth, *Excursion*, ix., 206-254.

"Alas! what differs more than man from man?
And whence that difference? Whence but from himself?
For see the universal Race endowed
With the same upright form!—The sun is fixed,
And the infinite magnificence of heaven
Fixed, within reach of every human eye;
The sleepless ocean murmurs for all ears;
The vernal field infuses fresh delight
Into all hearts. Throughout the world of sense,
Even as an object is sublime or fair,
That object is laid open to the view
Without reserve or veil; and as a power
Is salutary, or an influence sweet,
Are each and all enabled to perceive
That power, that influence, by impartial law.
Gifts nobler are vouchsafed alike to all;
Reason, and, with that reason, smiles and tears;
Imagination, freedom in the will;
Conscience to guide and check; and death to be
Foretasted, immortality conceived
By all,—a blissful immortality,
To them whose holiness on earth shall make
The Spirit capable of Heaven, assured.
Strange, then, nor less than monstrous, might be deemed
The failure, if the Almighty, to this point
Liberal and undistinguishing, should hide
The excellence of moral qualities
From common understanding; leaving truth
And virtue, difficult, abstruse, and dark;
Hard to be won, and only by a few;
Strange, should He deal herein with nice respects,
And frustrate all the rest! Believe it not:
The primal duties shine aloft—like stars;
The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
Are scattered at the feet of Man—like flowers.
The generous inclination, the just rule,
Kind wishes, and good actions, and pure thoughts—
No mystery is here! Here is no boon
For high—yet not for low; for proudly graced—

Yet not for meek of heart. The smoke ascends
To Heaven as lightly from the cottage-hearth
As from the haughtiest palace. He, whose soul
Ponders this true equality, may walk
The fields of earth with gratitude and hope;
Yet, in that meditation, will he find
Motive to sadder grief, as we have found;
Lamenting ancient virtues overthrown,
And for the injustice grieving, that hath made
So wide a difference between man and man."

NOTE 7, § 37, page 112.

It is no part of the purpose of this book to discuss naturalism, idealism, and the rest of the isms. It may be noted, however, that the so-called modern realists, who profess to represent the unvarnished truth of life, are inverted idealists after all.. Idealists, because they select the particular aspects of life which suit their artistic aim; inverted, because those aspects are almost uniformly ugly. This false naturalism, which flourished chiefly in France and Scandinavia, is now on the decline. It wrought a certain amount of good in correcting some ancient prejudices, mainly, perhaps, on the stage, but its worst features were more pernicious than the most stilted compositions of strictly conventional poets.

NOTE 8, § 45, page 136.

"The mountains are voiceless: and the heifers that wander by the hills lament and refuse their pasture. . . . And echo in the rocks laments that thou art silent, and no more she mimics thy voice. And in sorrow for thy fall the trees cast down their fruit,

and all the flowers have faded. From the ewes hath flowed no fair milk, nor honey from the hives. . . ." (Trans. by A. Lang, "Golden Treasury" Series).

Contrast with this another passage from *Lycidas*, where Milton indeed makes nature a mourner, but in a more restrained and more analogical fashion than the dogmatic directness of Moschus :

"But, O the heavy change now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return !
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'er-grown,
And all their echoes, mourn :
The willows and the hazel copses green
Shall now no more be seen
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays :—
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear.
When first the white-thorn blows ;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear."

NOTE 9, § 46, page 137.

As a matter of fact, the generalisations of critics on national epos are based mainly on the single example of Homer. The *Iliad* is a complete national epic, poetically more perfect than the *Nibelungenlied.* The material for another existed in the Arthurian tales of our own country.

An epic poem is always long. The epic poet is like a painter who has to fill a large stretch of canvas, or he is like a sculptor who has to mould a colossal statue, or he is like a musician who has to fill a wide space with his sounds. In other words, he works on a big scale. His art gives little opportunity for delicate study of character, for intricate development of events, or for subtleties of poetic effect.

Breadth, boldness, and clarity are essential to his success, and it follows with a moment's reflection that he must select a subject, the main outline of which is already familiar to his readers. He does not, and cannot, expect them to maintain an interest in something new and strange by a narrative which winds its discursive way through many thousands of like lines. The readers of an epic poet are his collective fellow-countrymen, and his most obvious subject is the origin of his country. Homer's epos, which was founded on the songs and ballads of the Greeks, set the fashion in this respect:

> "Sing, goddess," he began, "the wrath of Achilles, Peleus' son, the ruinous wrath that brought on the Achaians woes innumerable, and hurled down into Hades many strong souls of heroes; . . . and so the counsel of Zeus wrought out its accomplishment from the day when first strife parted Atreides, king of men, and noble Achilles." (*Il.*, I., 1-6; trans. by Lang, Leaf, and Myers).

Two sides, therefore, and the counsel of Zeus—the national epos of the Greeks sang of the leisurely war waged by the heroes of their race against Troy and the Trojans; and Virgil, in a late age of Rome, when he was commissioned to compose the national epos of the Romans, and to recall his fellow-countrymen to their primitive ideals (*see* Note 1), selected a like subject:

> "Arms I sing, and the hero, who first, exiled by fate, came from the coast of Troy to Italy, and the Lavinian shore: much was he tossed, both on sea and land, by the power of those above, on account of the unrelenting rage of cruel Juno: much, too, he suffered in war till he founded a city, and brought his gods into Latium; from whence the Latin progeny, the Alban fathers, and the walls of lofty Rome." (*Æn.*, I., 1-7; trans. by Davidson).

And when John Milton, in the seventeenth century after Christ, composed the great English epos, he too went back to an early war and to the early gods, choosing a subject

familiar to all his readers, and wider than their national beginnings:

> "Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the World, and all our woe,
> With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
> Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
> Sing, Heavenly Muse." (*P. L.*, I., 1-6).

Lastly, when Tennyson, in the last century, came to write his *Idylls of the King*, stories and scenes from an unwritten epos of King Arthur, he too, it is important to note, described his work in the epilogue as an

> "old imperfect tale,
> New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,"

—in other words, as idylls, or pictures, of the war between the right side and the wrong, thus linking his work to the chain of epic poetry which dates back in our western world to the early age of Greece. For, at the root of every great epic poem, whether or not it be disguised in the allegory of Tennyson, whether it be substance or shadow, is the war between right and wrong. "So the counsel of Zeus wrought out its accomplishment" in the national destiny of Hellas; "much too he suffered in war till he founded a city," strong in piety and arms; "with loss of Eden, till one greater Man restore us;" "new-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,"—in the narrative of these great adventures, in which destiny dominated character, is the source of epic poetry.

A word must be said about the influence of Homer on Virgil. The *Æneid*, as we see from its opening lines, went back to Troy for the origin of the Romans. Thus Virgil linked the *Æneid* with the *Iliad*, and even in some of the details of composition the Roman epicist accepted the formal traditions of the Greek. His deference was in places too literal. The detached pictorial similes (*see* Note 3) and the perpetual epithets which Virgil took over from Homer detract from the spontaneity of his poem, and more than these must be accounted Virgil's courageous attempt to

revive in a luxurious age the virtues extolled by Homer. He consciously failed in that attempt, but the endeavour is striking. The conditions of form—epic form—as he conceived them, proved tyrannous at times. We see Form rear its head in places, and demand of Virgil, "Here stop and epicise! Here remember you are writing epic poetry!" Did the *Iliad* have a supernatural background? The *Æneid* must have it too; and Virgil, a few years before the Sermon on the Mount, tried to galvanise the dying gods of Paganism into a semblance of vitality and vigour. Did the *Iliad* exhibit a cheerful joy in combat and bloodshed? The *Æneid*, too, must be bloody; and Virgil, the "Maid of Naples," most sensitive of civilised men, conscientiously dragged his readers through long pages of gore, in deference to the Homeric tradition. Virgil's greatness, happily, is quite independent of these mistakes of form. It rests on claims of poetic truth and expression which no counter-advocacy can gainsay; but the following passage may fairly be quoted from Dr Mackail's *Latin Literature* (John Murray, pp. 101-2): "The funeral games at the tomb of Anchises, no longer described, as they had been in early Greek poetry, from a real pleasure in dwelling upon their details, begin to become tedious before they are over. In the battle-pieces of the last three books we sometimes cannot help being reminded that Virgil is rather wearily following an obsolescent literary tradition." Now, to keep faith with obsolete traditions, whether in literature or aught else, is a sign of formal observance after the spirit is dead. In poetry, when the spirit droops, it is merciful to kill the form.

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