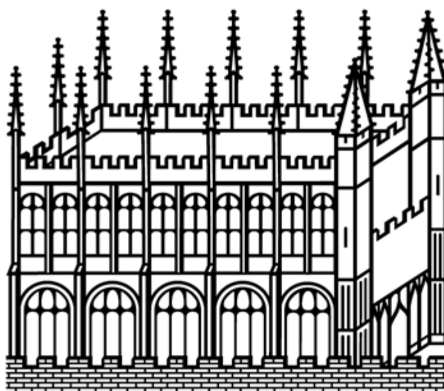

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LETTERS TO MY GRANDSON ON THE GLORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

STEPHEN COLERIDGE

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ON

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LETTERS TO MY GRANDSON

ON

THE GLORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

BY

THE HON. STEPHEN COLERIDGE

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A LETTER FROM ANTONY TO HIS GRANDFATHER

MY DEAR G. P.,

Why have you never written me any letters about poetry? I hope I shall learn, from what you have told me, to know the difference between good prose and bad prose; and I am sure I have learnt many other things which I should never have known if you hadn't written your letters to me. But you must have as much to tell me about English poetry as about all the other subjects; and I know you would like to help me and tell me where to look for the most beautiful poems. You said I was not to answer your letters, because you knew that the obligation to answer would add no pleasure to the receiving of them. But I have loved having them, and the best proof of that is, that I am asking you to take up your pen again and write me some more.

Your loving grandson,

ANTONY.

LETTERS TO MY GRANDSON

I

My dear Antony,

I will very gladly write you a few letters about English poetry. The reason why I have not done so before is that the other subjects seemed to me of greater importance.

To learn how to lead a good and happy life is, I think, the most essential knowledge you can acquire.

To use your own language as a gentleman and a scholar should be the next greatest need for you.

The third qualification for a properly educated man is to understand and appreciate the beauty and wonder of the world about him.

On these three great subjects I have written you my letters hitherto, and have left you, as it were, with your hand upon the plough of life and your face towards God's sunrise.

To use prose with accuracy and good taste is a daily need for you and all of us.

Prose is therefore a necessity of life, while poetry is a decoration—a method of expression vouchsafed not even to everyone to apprehend, and to a still fewer to produce; a vehicle of thought and emotion employed to address a few of the chosen by a still fewer of the inspired.

Much that is to be found in volumes with the legend " Poetry " on their covers is not poetry at all.

I am not going to give you a definition of poetry; it can no more be subjected to the bonds of a definition than can be a fine style in prose.

But there are, nevertheless, certain bonds which cannot be violated by the true poet, and those are the bonds of prosody.

Where the laws of prosody are not obeyed the composition is prose. It may be good prose or bad prose, but it is not poetry, and to describe it as such is an impertinence. On the other hand, merely to observe the rules of prosody does not enable a man to write poetry.

"A Mr Wilkinson a clergyman"

is a blank verse unimpeachable in its prosody, but it is not poetry.

Poetry requires some perfection of phrasing, such as is found in Gray's "Elegy"; or some imaginative vision, as in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"; or some poignant appeal to the heart, as in Wordsworth's "Brothers"; or some splendour of uplifting eloquence, as in Samson's speech on his blindness in Milton's "Samson Agonistes."

Poetry in its highest manifestation is, in fact, the expression of man's deepest emotions rising above prose by the added adornment of the lovely music of metre.

Though I spoke just now of the poets as inspired, there have been many who were never inspired, but yet, by the exercise of exquisite taste and patient, loving care, have given us poems that can never die.

Gray's "Elegy" is such a poem. Its author long pondered over it and perfected it, and finally delivered it to us in a condition so faultless that to change a word in it would inflict upon it a manifest blemish. But its images are all endeared to us by their very familiarity. There is none of the surprise and sudden vision that comes with the gift of inspiration.

For example :—

> " A savage place as holy and enchanted
> As ere beneath the waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon lover."

Here with a single stroke the imagination is endowed with something transcending all experience yet for ever unforgettable.

But after all, Antony, the best way to lead you to love poetry is to show you its glory as revealed in the finest passages.

Such selections as I shall make must depend upon my own taste, and as I can entertain no better method in my choice it must suffice in my letters.

The function of poetry in the life of man is to communicate pleasure by the avenues of emotion, reflection, imagination, and vision.

The reception of it must always refine the mind, widen the sympathies, and purify the heart.

Like all truly beautiful things, it must teach us to look up, and wean us from mean and sordid thoughts. And therefore, Antony, I will do all I can to show you a way through its enchanted gardens.

Your loving old

G. P.

II

My dear Antony,

I shall not invite you to delve deeper into the past in search of fine poetry than the days of Shakespere.

As English prose may be said to start, in its familiar form as we now know it, with the translation of the Bible, so in a general way we may look to Shakespere as the first great example of the glory of English poetry.

In simple loveliness he is supreme, in profundity expressed without confusion he is unsurpassed, in majesty of utterance he has never been excelled.

For loveliness you need look no further than the opening of the fifth act of *The Merchant of Venice*, where Lorenzo and Jessica are discovered reclining in the moonlit avenue leading to Portia's house.

Lorenzo. The moon shines bright :—in such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise ; in such a night,
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Troyan walls,
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night.

Jessica. In such a night
Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew ;
And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,
And ran dismayed away.

Lorenzo. In such a night
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waft her love
To come again to Carthage.

Jessica. In such a night
Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
That did renew old Æson.

Lorenzo. In such a night
Did Jessica steal from the wealthy Jew;
And with an unthrift love did run from Venice,
As far as Belmont.
Jessica. In such a night
Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well;
Stealing her soul with many vows of faith,
And ne'er a true one.
Lorenzo. In such a night
Did pretty Jessica, like a little shrew,
Slander her love, and he forgave it her.
Jessica. I would out-night you, did nobody come:
But, hark, I hear the footing of a man.

Then Stephano, followed by Lancelot, pass across the scene, and after a few words and greetings Lorenzo and Jessica are once more alone, then Lorenzo continues :—

Lorenzo. How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep into our ears; soft stillness, and the night,
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica: look, how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold;
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins:
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

By-and-by Portia and Nerissa are seen entering at a distance, and Portia's first words are :—

That light we see is burning in my hall.
How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.
. . . .
Peace, ho! the moon sleeps with Endymion,
And would not be awaked!

The still enchantment of a summer night consecrated to love and peace is here celebrated for us in verse that none can ever hope to surpass.

The idea that there may be sounds about us so everlasting as not to be heard has been expressed in a passage in Coleridge's "Remorse," where he writes of

> "That innumerable company
> Who, in broad circle, lovelier than the rainbow,
> Girdle this round earth in a dizzy motion,
> With noise too vast and constant to be heard;—
> Fitliest unheard! For, oh, ye numberless
> And rapid travellers! what ear unstunned,
> What sense unmaddened, might bear up against
> The rushing of your congregated wings."

For pregnant expression of didactic thought no one will ever excel Shakespere. The impassable gulf that separates man from all other living creatures is embodied in a single sentence in *Hamlet.*

> "What is a man
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed?—a beast, no more—
> Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and god-like reason
> To fust in us unused."

Then for splendour of vision clothed in noble language there is none like him.

In *The Tempest*, when Prospero has dismissed the spirits he had summoned by his magic art, he turns to Ferdinand and says:—

> "Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air:
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

And as though the utterance of such immortal speech had left his being in a condition of disturbing ecstasy, he dismisses Ferdinand into his cell and says:—

". . . a turn or two I'll take,
To still my beating mind."

This seems to me, Antony, a supreme touch of genius. We must remember, in considering the scenes of magic in *The Tempest*, that the times when it was written were full of marvels and wonders. Tales that lost nothing of the miraculous and amazing in the telling of new continents and unknown worlds were brought constantly home across the uncharted seas, and all men believed in astrology and magic, so that anything might believably happen on unknown shores lighted on in enchanted lands in the immeasurable golden West.[1]

To us the Atlantic ocean has become a commonplace highway to peoples compassed with no less vulgarity than ourselves. There is no magic or romance in the landfall of Sandy Hook, and the jagged skyline of New York's monstrous edifices; but in the days of Elizabeth the sun sank at evening into a Western sea which held unknown continents and unravelled mysteries, filling with visions the imaginations of mankind.

As in all other fields of emotion, Shakespere has touched the utmost height in the expression of human despair. When Macbeth hears the wail of women and, inquiring the cause, is told that Lady Macbeth is dead, he speaks these words:—

[1] *Letters to my Grandson on the Glory of English Prose.* See p. 113.

"She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

And to Macbeth and other men with murder on their souls thus and such must life appear.

The exuberance of Shakespere's powers is displayed by his careless habit of putting in the mouths of quite subordinate characters some of his finest passages.

Other playwrights keep their best lines for their chief players, but not seldom we find the most beautiful speech in a play given by Shakespere to a small part.

To the friar in *Much Ado About Nothing* is entrusted the delivery of the most perfect speech in the play.

Hero, about to be married, has been accused of wantonness at the very altar, and has swooned away in her horror and anguish.

All pass out except her father, Leonato, Benedick, Beatrice, and the friar.

Her father believes the foul accusation, and after much painful discussion exclaims:—

"Hence from her! Let her die!"

Whereupon the friar interposes:—

"Hear me a little: for I have only been
Silent so long and given way unto
This course of fortune,
By noting of the lady; I have marked
A thousand blushing apparitions start

Into her face ; a thousand innocent shames
In angel whiteness beat away those blushes ;
And in her eye there hath appeared a fire,
To burn the errors that these princes hold
Against her maiden truth. Call me a fool ;
Trust not my reading nor my observation,
Which with experimental seal doth warrant
The tenour of my book ; trust not my age,
My reverence, calling, and divinity,
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
Under some biting error. . . .
Pause a while,
And let my counsel sway you in this case.
Your daughter, here, the princes left for dead ;
Let her a while be secretly kept in,
And publish it, that she is dead indeed. . . .

Leonato. What shall become of this ? What will this do ?

Friar. Marry, this, well carried, shall on her behalf
Change slander to remorse ; that is some good :
But not for that dream I on this strange course,
But on this travail look for greater birth.
She dying, as it must be so maintained,
Upon the instant that she was accused
Shall be lamented, pitied, and excused
Of every hearer ; for it so falls out,
That what we have we prize not to the worth
Whiles we enjoy it, but being lacked and lost,
Why, then we rack the value ; then we find
The virtue that possession would not show us
Whiles it was ours. So will it fare with Claudio :
When he shall hear she died upon his words,
The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination,
And every lovely organ of her life
Shall come apparelled in more precious habit,
More moving delicate, and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of his soul,
Than when she lived indeed :—then shall he mourn
And wish he had not so accused her ;
No, though he thought the accusation true.

. . . .

Come, lady, die to live : this wedding day
Perhaps is but prolonged ; have patience and endure."

Of all Shakespere's tragedies, *King Lear* has always seemed to me to be the greatest. The sustained anguish of the old man, culminating at last in his death, is something beyond the reach of all other writers.

The last scene transcends all tragedies in the world.

With his beloved Cordelia dead in his arms he cries :—

"No, no life !
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all ? Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never !
Pray you, undo this button : thank you, Sir,
Do you see this ? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there !"

Edgar. He faints ! My lord, my lord !
Kent. Break, heart : I prithee, break !
Edgar. Look up, my lord.
Kent. Vex not his ghost ; O, let him pass ! he hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer.
Edgar. He is gone indeed."

I hope, Antony, you will see in the simplicity and immensity of this short passage something elemental and unsurpassable. You may be interested to know that Irving, the great actor and my dear friend, agreed with me in placing *King Lear* at the summit of Shakespere's achievement.

I do not myself think that there can ever have lived, or ever will live, an actor who can adequately portray the character of King Lear. Shakespere's Lear is the sublimation of intellectual despair beyond the possibility of bodily representation.

And now lastly, Antony, let me say—for this letter grows too long—that others down the centuries have sung the glory of England and bid its sons rejoice in

their priceless heritage, but that Shakespere has outtopped them all in his inspired apotheosis of

> "This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,"

in the first scene of the second act of *Richard II*.

> "This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise;
> This fortress, built by nature for herself,
> Against infection and the hand of war;
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea,
> Which serves it in the office of a wall,
> Or as a moat defensive to a house
> Against the envy of less happy lands:
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

More than any other writer in Christian Europe, Shakespere has penetrated into all lands, and is acclaimed among educated people of every race and speech. All men of letters do him reverence. Men, not in the first rank of literary achievement, have busied themselves with efforts, entirely abortive, to dim the glory of Shakespere by wasting their ingenuity in suggesting that Bacon or some other learned contemporary wrote the plays, and that a man of Shakespere's origin, education, and acquirements could not have possessed so universal and overpowering a genius.

Do not waste your time over so tiresome a controversy. It leads to nothing that matters.

You and I, Antony, will be wise not to wade through long volumes written to persuade us that Moses never wrote Genesis or that he never existed, or that Shakespere never wrote the plays or that he also never existed.

There is a very clever pamphlet which was written by Archbishop Whateley in 1821, entitled *Historic Doubts Concerning Napoleon Buonaparte*, questioning the proofs that such a person ever existed at all,

and suggesting that he was invented by Pitt to frighten the people and so cajole taxes out of them. It is an excellent piece of wit aimed at those who deny that Christ ever lived in Palestine.

I expect both Shakespere and Napoleon will survive all efforts, serious or jocose, to suppress them.

Your loving old

G. P.

III

MY DEAR ANTONY,

In my last letter I wrote of Shakespere, but only of his plays.

Interspersed throughout them are many beautiful songs, among which there is not a poor one; for in this, as in all else in those incomparable productions, Shakespere transcends.

The most lovely of them seem to me to be these :—

From *Twelfth Night* :—

" Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid;
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O, prepare it;
My part of death no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown;
A thousand thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O, where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there."

From *As You Like It* :—

" 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.

Heigh, ho! sing, heigh, ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then, heigh, ho! the holly!
This life is most jolly.

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp,
As friend remembered not.

Heigh, ho! sing, heigh, ho! unto the green holly:
Most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly:
Then, heigh, ho! the holly!
This life is most jolly."

From *Cymbeline* :—

" Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages;
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o' the great,
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the reed is as the oak;
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning-flash,
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finished joy and moan:
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust."

From *Henry VIII.* :—

" Orpheus with his lute made trees,
And the mountain-tops that freeze,

Bow themselves when he did sing:
To his music, plants and flowers
Ever sprung; as sun and showers
There had made a lasting spring.

Everything that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads, and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall asleep, or hearing, die."

The sonnets of Shakespere have been made the subject of rather tedious dispute as to who may have been the person to whom many of them are addressed.

Let us remember, Antony, that a poet, as often as not, addresses his most sanguine and impassioned verse to a figment of his mind's creation, whom his free fancy can adorn with attributes yet more adorable than were ever possessed by any single human being.

And Shakespere, more than all men who ever wrote, lived in the company of characters that existed only in his "study of imagination."

To me the sonnets seem to be more the manifestations of mental and verbal dexterity than the outpourings of a throbbing heart.

I admire their extreme skill, but they leave me unmoved.

Those that are least artificial are numbers XII, XXX, XCI, CXVI, and CXXIX.

His other poems—"Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece"—have neither the magic of the plays nor the occasional profound thought of the sonnets.

Little is known of this wonderful being. Ben Jonson wrote a fine poem to his memory; but more informing and delightful were the words in which he spoke of him in one of his later works.

"I loved the man," he wrote, "and do honour to his memory on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was

indeed honest, and of an open, free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions."

The man, therefore, was as noble as his plays are superb.

Take him therefore, Antony, for the corner-stone of all English poetry, as I have commended you so to take the Bible in English prose.

Both have conferred an imperishable glory on the English race, and Shakespere is destined to such immortality as this world can confer through the permanence upon it of civilised man.

Your loving old

G. P.

IV

My dear Antony,

In writing these letters to you I am not going to observe a chronological order among the poets of whom I speak.

To do so would be a troublesome impediment to myself, and I do not see that it would be of any particular service to you.

I propose, therefore, from henceforth to cite for your admiration and delight such beautiful poems as have given me the greatest pleasure, as I light upon them in the shelves of my library.

Of all the emotions that have inspired the poets, love is without doubt the most creative.

But there is more than one kind of love that has this power over the hearts of poets. Besides passionate and overwhelming love, there is love not directly founded upon nor connected with the passions.

Also, there is love that is expressed in benevolence to all mankind, sympathy with the joys and sorrows of men and women and of all living creatures ; and there is love of nature, sympathy with the visible universe, moving but inanimate, and the grateful recognition of the Spirit of God in its glorious order and process.

Many years ago there appeared in the *Century Magazine* a little poem which ought to be world-famous.

It was written by a young American, Charles Henry Luders, upon the grave of the girl he had loved, and on inquiry I learnt that it was not long after he had written these beautiful lines that he followed her

to the grave. They seem to me to express the purest form of passionate love, when death has made it impossible to possess the faintest touch of selfishness :—

> "Wind of the North, wind of the Norland snows,
> Wind of the winnowed skies, and sharp clear stars,
> Blow cold and keen across the naked hills,
> And crisp the lowland pools with crystal films,
> And blur the casement squares with glittering ice,
> But go not near my love.
>
> Wind of the West, wind of the few far clouds,
> Wind of the gold and crimson sunset lands,
> Blow fresh and pure across the peaks and plains,
> And broaden the blue spaces of the heavens,
> And sway the grasses and the mountain pines,
> But let my dear one rest.
>
> Wind of the East, wind of the sunrise seas,
> Wind of the clinging mists and gray harsh rains,
> Blow moist and chill across the wastes of brine,
> And shut the sun out and the moon and stars,
> And lash the boughs against the dripping eaves,
> Yet keep thou from my love.
>
> But thou, sweet wind! Wind of the fragrant South,
> Wind from the bowers of jasmine and of rose,
> Over magnolia blooms, and lilied lakes,
> And flowering forests come with dewy wings,
> And stir the petals at her feet, and kiss
> The low mound where she lies."

You may be sure, Antony, that when I came upon this exquisite poem I searched for more from the same source; but no other poem could I find of Luders that seemed to me comparable with this little gem.

I believe good critics would agree that one of the most superb love poems in the world is Keats' "Eve of St Agnes." In it the poet has fulfilled consummately his proper function, which is to sublimate the passions. All the greatest poets in all ages have with one accord

proclaimed the stainless sanctity of passionate love, doing thereby a splendid service to mankind.

Keats pre-eminently possessed vision, and the poem is filled with unforgettable lines :—

> " Beyond a mortal man impassioned far
> At these voluptuous accents, he arose
> Ethereal, flushed, and like a throbbing star
> Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose,
> Into her dream he melted, as the rose
> Blendeth its odour with the violet,—
> Solution sweet ; meanwhile the frost wind blows
> Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
> Against the window-panes ; St Agnes' moon hath set."

Then, as the lovers fly away together :—

> " Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found.
> In all the house was heard no human sound.
> A chain-drooped lamp was flickering by each door ;
> The arras, rich with horseman, hawk and hound,
> Fluttered in the besieging wind's uproar,
> And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor."

And all the anguish of past happiness, and all the regrets for glories that can never return, seem to well from the poet's heart as he cries :—

> " And they are gone ; aye, ages long ago
> These lovers fled away into the storm ! "

There is something of the same sadness in Tennyson's lines in "The Day Dream" :—

> " And on her lover's arm she leant,
> And round her waist she felt it fold,
> And far across the hills they went
> In that new world which is the old :
> Across the hills, and far away
> Beyond their utmost purple rim,
> And deep into the dying day
> The happy princess followed him."

And, Antony, if you have never yet read Tennyson's "Maud," I envy you the first opening upon your sight of all the exquisite visions of loveliness, and all the raptures and pangs of passion that are enshrined in that poem of perfect harmony.

Seldom has any poet so expressed the trembling ecstasy of passion :—

> "Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,
> Come hither, the dances are done,
> In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls,
> Queen lily and rose in one ;
> Shine out, little head, sunning over with curls,
> To the flowers, and be their sun.
>
> She is coming, my own, my sweet ;
> Were it ever so airy a tread,
> My heart would hear her and beat,
> Were it earth in an earthy bed ;
> My dust would hear her and beat,
> Had I lain a century dead ;
> Would start and tremble under her feet,
> And blossom in purple and red."

Poems of passionate love are perhaps the most well known to all kinds of readers.

A very perfect instance of the shorter poem of this class is Shelley's far-famed lines :—

> "One word is too often profaned
> For me to profane it,
> One feeling too falsely disdained
> For thee to disdain it.
> One hope is too like despair
> For prudence to smother,
> And pity from thee more dear
> Than that from another.
>
> I can give not what men call love,
> But wilt thou accept not
> The worship the heart lifts above
> And the Heavens reject not :

The desire of the moth for the star,
  Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
  From the sphere of our sorrow."

Where is the girl, Antony, who would not yield up her heart into such holy keeping as this ?

Another of Shelley's love poems, whose tender thought has been very beautifully set to music by Maude Valerie White, is as follows :—

" Oh ! Mary, dear, that you were here,
With your brown eyes bright and clear,
And your sweet voice, like a bird,
Singing love to its lone mate
In the ivy bower disconsolate !
Voice the sweetest ever heard
In this azure Italy.
Mary, dear, come to me soon,
I am not well when thou art far ;
As sunset to the spheréd moon,
As twilight to the western star,
Thou, beloved, art to me.—
Oh ! Mary, dear, that you were here ;
The castle echo whispers, ' Here ! ' "

It is remarkable that both these poems, and many others almost as beautiful, were found among Shelley's papers after his untimely and tragic death, and were only given to the world when his ashes were deposited in the Roman graveyard close to the remains of Keats.

He was but twenty-nine years old when he was drowned, and Keats died when he was twenty-four. To what heights of glory they would have attained had they but lived into ripe manhood none can now decide.

I here cite for you one more perfect stanza from Shelley's posthumous poems :—

"When the lamp is shattered,
The light in the dust lies dead;
When the cloud is scattered,
The rainbow's glory is shed.
When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remembered not;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot."

Bliss Carman, like Luders, has written a very beautiful little poem to the memory of a lost love, and has expressed what many feel, that the returning of the beauty of spring across the world may sometimes add a poignancy to the grief of an irretrievable loss.

"Out of doors are budding trees, calling birds, and opening flowers,
Purple rainy distances, fragrant winds, and lengthening hours.

Only in the loving heart, with its unforgetting mind,
There is grief for seasons gone, and the friend we cannot find.

For upon this lovely earth mortal sorrow must abide,
And remembrance still must lurk like a pang in beauty's side.

Ah! one wistful heartache now April with her joy must bring,
And the want of you return always with returning Spring."

Bliss Carman, you see from this, Antony, is a living poet, who has remained faithful to the great traditions of his craft, and blends beauty of thought with the harmony of metre and rhyme. He never prints prose in lines that do not uniformly reach the margin of the page, and then put the lying legend "Poetry" on the cover and title-page of his books.

The paraphrase Bliss Carman has given us of the fragments of "Sappho," rendered into English, place him in the first rank of living poets. I cannot but

imagine that the shade of Sappho must rejoice at this presentation of those incomparable stray verses of hers, that have survived the wreck of centuries, in a form that will give them in a new language a fresh immortality.

> " Softly the first step of twilight
> Falls on the darkening dial:
> One by one kindle the lights
> In Mitylene.
>
> Noises are hushed in the courtyard,
> The busy day is departing,
> Children are called from their games,
> Herds from their grazing.
>
> And from the deep shadowed angles
> Comes the soft murmur of lovers,
> Then through the quiet of dusk
> Bright sudden laughter.
>
> From the hushed street, through the portal
> Where soon my lover will enter,
> Comes the pure strain of a flute
> Tender with passion."

The whole of this little volume is so enchanting that I am amazed that it has not found its way into the house of everyone who cares for what is both classical, pure, and lovely. Where all is so refined and exquisite it is difficult to choose :—

> " With your head thrown backward
> In my arm's safe hollow,
> And your face all rosy
> With the mounting fervour;
>
> While the great eyes greaten
> With a wise new wonder,
> Swimming in a love mist
> Like the haze of autumn;

From that throat, the throbbing
Nightingale's for pleading,
Wayward, soft and welling
Inarticulate love-notes,

Come the words that bubble
Up through broken laughter,
Sweeter than spring water,
'Gods, I am so happy!'"

Here is another :—

"O! but my delicate lover,
Is she not fair as the moonlight?
Is she not supple and strong
For hurried passion?

Has not the god of the green world,
In his large tolerant wisdom,
Filled with the ardours of earth
Her twenty summers?

Well did he make her for loving;
Well did he mould her for beauty;
Give her the wish that is brave
With understanding.

O! Pan, avert from this maiden,
Sorrow, misfortune, bereavement,
Harm and unhappy regret,
Prays one fond mortal."

But if selection must be made among these lovely gems, I myself should give the palm to what I now quote :—

"I loved thee, Atthis, in the long ago,
When the great oleanders were in flower
In the broad herded meadows full of sun—
And we would often at the fall of dusk
Wander together by the silver stream,
When the soft grass heads were all wet with dew,
And purple-misted in the fading light.

And joy I knew and sorrow at thy voice,
And the superb magnificence of love—
The loneliness that saddens solitude,
And the sweet speech that makes it durable—
The bitter longing, and the keen desire,
The sweet companionship through quiet days
In the slow ample beauty of the world,
And the unutterable glad release
Within the temple of the holy night.
O Atthis, how I loved thee long ago
In that fair perished summer by the sea!"

If this does not reach your heart, Antony, and make it beat faster, you are no grandson of mine!

But I know it will; and I will add no more to-night to this letter lest I should intrude anything between you and this vision of tenderness and love.

Your loving old

G. P.

V

My dear Antony,

My last letter left you in the enjoyment of Bliss Carman's "Sappho," a set of poems that, I think, places him at the head of poets born in the Dominion of Canada.

I will to-day cross the border into the United States and say a word about their singers.

Edgar Allan Poe stands out as among their foremost poets. He is known the world over as the author of "The Raven," which has a very original and haunting quality. But another of his poems is, I think, more wonderful and amazing. It is called "The Conqueror Worm."

> "Lo! 'tis a gala night
> Within the lonesome latter years.
> An angel throng, bewinged, bedight,
> In veils, and drowned in tears,
> Sit in a theatre to see
> A play of hopes and fears,
> While the orchestra breathes fitfully
> The music of the spheres.
>
> Mimes in the form of God on high
> Mutter and mumble low,
> And hither and thither fly,
> Mere puppets they who come and go
> At bidding of vast formless things
> That shift the scenery to and fro,
> Flapping from out their condor wings
> Invisible woe!

That motley drama—oh, be sure,
  It shall not be forgot,
With its Phantom chased for evermore
  By a crowd that seize it not,
Through a circle that ever returneth in
  To the self-same spot;
And much of madness and more of sin,
  And horror the soul of the plot.

But see amid the mimic rout
  A crawling shape intrude!
A blood-red thing that writhes from out
  The scenic solitude!
It writhes! it writhes! with mortal pangs
  The mimes become its food,
And the angels sob at vermin fangs
  In human gore imbued.

Out!—out are the lights! out all,
  And over each quivering form
The curtain, a funeral pall,
  Comes down with the rush of a storm;
And the angels, all pallid and wan,
  Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy 'MAN,'
  And its hero the 'Conqueror Worm.'"

Here, Antony, is a vision of terror, immensity, and doom, that puts this poem in a place apart by itself. The last verse is terrific. In quite another vein, yet as masterly in their completeness, are the two little verses I now cite:—

"Thou would'st be loved,—then let thy heart
  From its present pathway part not;
Be everything that now thou art,
  Be nothing that thou art not.

So with the world thy gentle ways,
  Thy grace, thy more than beauty,
Shall be an endless theme of praise,
  And love,—a simple duty."

Again :—

> " All that we see or seem
> Is but a dream within a dream.
> I stand amid the roar
> Of a surf tormented shore,
> And I hold within my hand
> Grains of the golden sand
> How few ! Yet how they creep
> Through my fingers to the deep
> While I weep, while I weep !
> O God ! can I not grasp
> Them with a tighter clasp ?
> O God ! can I not save
> One from the pitiless wave ?
> Is all that we see or seem
> But a dream within a dream ? "

Edgar Allan Poe was an unhappy man and led a somewhat disordered life, and died forlornly in a hospital when he was forty. It is a sad reflection that to the true poets is often given that childlike helplessness in the rough and crowded world that leaves them unprotected from its buffets, under which they sink like shipwrecked mariners in the inexorable waves.

No doubt Longfellow has the most popular reputation among all the poets of America. He wrote gently and serenely and tunefully, many benign verses that easily established themselves in the memory.

But there is a sense of tenuity in much of his writing, and, indeed, not seldom a suspicion of the commonplace intrudes itself upon the critical reader.

Everyone has heard of his poem entitled " Excelsior."

> " A banner with a strange device,
> Excelsior."

Very strange indeed, as " Excelsior " means " a taller man " if used thus by itself.

I will quote you one of his poems, which is very typical of his style and measure. You will see that it contains lines that have become familiar quotations to us all, and yet that much of the poem is quite pedestrian :—

" The day is done, and the darkness
   Falls from the wings of night,
As a feather is wafted downward
   From an eagle in his flight.

I see the lights of the village
   Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me
   That my soul cannot resist;

A feeling of sadness and longing
   That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
   As the mist resembles rain.

Come, read to me some poem,
   Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling
   And banish the thoughts of day.

Not from the grand old masters,
   Not from the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
   Through the corridors of Time.

For, like strains of martial music,
   Their mighty thoughts suggest
Life's endless toil and endeavour ;
   And to-night I long for rest.

Read from some humbler poet,
   Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of summer
   Or tears from the eyelids start.

Who, through long days of labour,
  And nights devoid of ease,
Still heard in his soul the music
  Of wonderful melodies.

Such songs have power to quiet
  The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
  That follows after prayer.

Then read from the treasured volume
  The poem of thy choice,
And lend to the rhyme of the poet
  The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music,
  And the cares that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
  And as silently steal away."

Perhaps the very triteness of this kind of verse has led to its wide popularity among those who ask for no more. Longfellow at his best can write such verses as these I now quote :—

"O little feet! that such long years
Must wander on through hopes and fears,
  Must ache and bleed beneath your load;
I nearer to the wayside inn,
Where toil shall cease and rest begin,
  Am weary thinking of your road!

O little hands! that weak or strong
Have still to serve or rule so long,
  Have still so long to give or ask;
I, who so much with book and pen
Have toiled among my fellowmen,
  Am weary thinking of your task.

O little hearts! that throb and beat
With such impatient feverish heat,
  Such limitless and strong desires;
Mine that so long has glowed and burned
With passions into ashes turned,
  Now covers and conceals its fires.

"O little souls! as pure and white
And crystalline as rays of light,
Direct from heaven their source divine
Refracted through the mist of years;
How red my setting sun appears,
How lurid looks this soul of mine."

This is benevolent and sweet verse, though the reader may not feel very convinced about the poet's glowing and burning passions that have burnt themselves to ashes.

The sorrows of childhood have not struck into his heart with real force. Let us turn from this, Antony, to Mrs Browning's "Cry of the Children," and we shall feel immediately the fierce wrath under which she wrote :—

"They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high places,
With eyes turned on Deity—
'How long,' they say, 'how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, or a child's heart
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold heaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath.'"

This was written in those bad old days when little children were set to toil all day in the great mills and factories of England to make gold they were never to share; before the great Lord Shaftesbury arose to strike off the gyves from the little slaves and to make men ashamed of such work. Let us hope and believe that this poem from the pen of a great and good woman, whose heart burnt with righteous rage at such doings, did much to rouse the dormant conscience of mankind.

The love and reverence for little children inspires poets of our own age more than it did in ancient times. I have already, in one of my letters to you *On the Happy Life*, quoted these lovely lines from Coleridge :—

> " A little child, a limber elf,
> Singing, dancing to itself,
> A fairy thing with red round cheeks,
> That always finds and never seeks,
> Makes such a vision to the sight
> As fills a father's eyes with light."

And whether the belief embodied in the lines is accepted by us or not, there is no questioning the beauty of the idea in Wordsworth's verses :—

> " Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,
> The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting
> And cometh from afar.
> Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home.
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy ! "

Coventry Patmore wrote a very moving little poem which must, I think, appeal very poignantly to every father who loves his children :—

> " My little Son who looked from thoughtful eyes,
> And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
> Having my law the seventh time disobeyed,
> I struck him, and dismissed
> With hard words and unkissed ;
> His mother, who was patient, being dead.
> Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
> I visited his bed,
> But found him slumbering deep,
> With darkened eyelids, and their lashes yet
> From his late sobbing wet.

And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters, and a red-veined stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful
art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I prayed
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood,
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'"

There is a world of infinite sadness in that simple line:—

"His mother, who was patient, being dead."

I will leave it in your heart, Antony, as the last word of this letter.

Your loving old

G. P.

VI

MY DEAR ANTONY,

In a sense, all poets are singers, for there should always be an echo of music in the heart of a poem; but the writing of words for the set purpose of their being sung is rather a special craft.

Some songs seem to me so beautiful when they are read aloud, that it is impossible for them not to lose something of their loveliness when sung, though set to most excellent and appropriate music.

Of such I reckon Burns' song :—

> " O wert thou in the cold blast
>   On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
> My plaidie to the angry airt
>   I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee ;
> Or did misfortune's bitter storms
>   Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
> Thy bield should be my bosom
>   To share it a', to share it a'.
>
> Or were I in the wildest waste
>   Sae bleak and bare, sae bleak and bare,
> The desert were a paradise
>   If thou wert there, if thou wert there ;
> Or were I monarch o' the globe
>   Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
> The brightest jewel in my crown
>   Wad be my queen, wad be my queen."

Of course to you and me, Antony, who are ignorant of the Scotch language, Burns' feats in dialect add nothing to his poems. If " would " may be spelt " wad," " could " should, I imagine, be spelt " cad " ;

and the exigencies of rhyme are certainly easily complied with if " blow " can be made to rhyme with " all " by writing one " blaw " and the other " a'."

And it must be observed that this Scotch dialect can be introduced or omitted in the same poem just as it suits Burns, who writes " no " as " nae " when it is convenient to make it rhyme with " play " or " day," and writes it " na' " when he wants it to rhyme with " twa." He does not hesitate to spell " give " " give," if it is to rhyme with " live," but it nimbly slips into gi'e when it is convenient to make it rhyme with " me." He even makes " mouth " rhyme with " dew " by spelling it " mou' "; after which, I can see nothing to prevent a Scotch poet rhyming " face " with " cat "—he has only to spell one " fa' " and the other " ca'."

But in spite of the risible devices to which it seems the Scotch dialect lends itself, Burns' songs remain perhaps the most exquisite of any written in the three kingdoms, with the doubtful exception of those of Herrick :—

" O Mary, at thy window be,
   It is the wished, the trysted hour;
Those smiles and glances let me see,
   That make the miser's treasure poor;
How blithely wad I bide the stoure,
   A weary slave from sun to sun,
Could I the rich reward secure,
   The lovely Mary Morison.

Yestreen when to the trembling string
   The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
   I sat, but neither heard nor saw;
Though this was fair, and that was braw,
   And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sighed, and said, among them a'
   'Ye are na Mary Morison.'

O Mary ! canst thou wreck his peace,
Wha for thy sake would gladly die ?
Or canst thou break that heart of his,
Whose only fault is loving thee ?
If love for love thou wilt na gi'e,
At least be pity to me shown,
A thought ungentle canna be
The thought of Mary Morison."

Again :—

" Ye flowery banks o' bonnie Doon,
How can ye blume sae fair ?
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu' o' care ?

Thou'lt break my heart, thou bonnie bird,
That sings upon the bough ;
Thou minds me o' the happy days
When my fause luve was true.

Thou'lt break my heart, thou bonnie bird,
That sings beside thy mate,
For sae I sat, and sae I sang,
And wist na o' my fate.

Aft hae I roved by bonnie Doon,
To see the woodbine twine ;
And ilka bird sang o' its luve,
And sae did I o' mine.

Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,
Frae off its thorny tree ;
But my fause luver staw my rose,
And left the thorn wi' me."

With one more lovely little song I will leave you, Antony, to forage for yourself in your Burns' poems :—

" O my luve's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June ;
O my luve's like the melodie,
That's sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt with the sun,
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fair thee weel, my only luve,
And fair thee weel awhile,
And I will come again, my luve,
Though it were ten thousand mile."

One of the most successful—that is, popular—song-writers of our own time has been F. E. Weatherly of the Western circuit. I think his "Douglas Gordon" is a very beautiful little gem:—

" 'Row me o'er the strait, Douglas Gordon,
Row me o'er the strait, my love, my love,' said she,
'Where we greeted in the summer, Douglas Gordon,
Beyond the little kirk by the old, old trysting tree!'
Never a word spoke Douglas Gordon,
But he looked into her eyes so tenderly.
And he set her by his side, and away across the tide
They floated to the little kirk and the old, old trysting tree.

'Give me a word of love, Douglas Gordon,
Just a word of pity, O my love,' said she,
'For the bells will ring to-morrow, Douglas Gordon,
My wedding bells, my love, but not for you and me!
They told me you were false, Douglas Gordon,
And you never, never came to comfort me.'
And she saw the great tears rise in her lover's silent eyes,
As they drifted to the little kirk and the old, old trysting tree.

' And it's never, never, never, Douglas Gordon,
Never in this world that you may come to me,
But tell me that you love me, Douglas Gordon,
And kiss me for the love of all that used to be!'
Then he flung away his sails, his oars, and rudder,
And he took her in his arms so tenderly.
And they drifted to the main, and the bells may call in vain,
For she and Douglas Gordon are drownéd in the sea."

Robert Herrick was a very great song-writer, perhaps greater than any who have succeeded him.

Swinburne says of him: "He is and will probably be always the first in rank and station of English song-writers."

" Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying,
And the same flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may go marry,
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry."

To one of his songs, not generally well known, he gave the title of "To Music, to Becalm his Fever":—

" Charm me asleep and melt me so
With thy delicious numbers,
That, being ravished, hence I go
Away in easy slumbers.

Ease my sick head
And make my bed,
  Thou power that can sever
From me this ill;
And quickly still,
Though thou not kill
    My fever.

Thou sweetly canst convert the same
  From a consuming fire
Into a gentle flicking flame
  And make it thus expire.
Then make me weep
My pains asleep;
  And give me such reposes
That I, poor I,
May think thereby
I live and die
    'Mongst roses.

Fall on me like a silent dew,
  Or like those maiden showers
Which, by the peep of day, do strew
  A baptism o'er the flowers.
Melt, melt my pains
With thy soft strains;
  That having ease me given,
With full delight
I leave this light,
And take my flight
    For heaven."

Another very dainty song not often quoted is entitled "To Meadows":—

"Ye have been fresh and green,
  Ye have been filled with flowers,
And ye the walks have been
  Where maids have spent their hours.

You have beheld how they
With wicker arks did come,
To kiss and bear away
The richer cowslips home.

You've heard them sweetly sing,
And seen them in a round :
Each virgin like a spring,
With honeysuckles crowned.

But now we see none here
Whose silvery feet did tread,
And with dishevelled hair
Adorned this smoother mead.

Like unthrifts, having spent
Your stock and needy grown,
You're left here to lament
Your poor estates, alone."

Here is expressed what all sensitive souls feel in any place that has held a happy company which has departed and left it deserted. Tom Moore has this feeling when he writes :—

" When I remember all
The friends so linked together
I've seen around me fall
Like leaves in wintry weather,
I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed."

Another writer has felt this emotion and sung of it thus :—

" Are not all things elusive that are fair ?
And difficult of access that are sweet ?
Lest the unworthy should find entrance there
Where timorously tread the reverent feet.

Therefore you vanish to the land of dreams,
  A phantom of the memory night and day,
And I am left the silent solitude
  That lingers in the chamber where you lay.
Though you have gone, the sense of you remains
  An exquisite thought, an aspiration fair,
A tender vision the soul dwells upon
  With adoration melting into prayer."

Several other songs of Herrick are familiar to everyone. "Bid me to live, and I will live thy protestant to be," is a rapturous love song, and "To Daffodils" is dainty and perfect. His serious and religious poems are not so well known as his songs, but they rise on occasion to a solemn beauty. Here are some stanzas that are memorable:—

"When I lie within my bed,
Sick at heart and sick in head,
And with doubts discomforted,
  Sweet Spirit comfort me!

When the house doth sigh and weep,
And the world is drowned in sleep,
Yet mine eyes the watch do keep,
  Sweet Spirit comfort me!

When the artless doctor sees
No one hope but of his fees,
And his skill runs on the lees,
  Sweet Spirit comfort me!

When the tapers now burn blue,
And the comforters are few,
And that number more than true,
  Sweet Spirit comfort me!

When the priest his last hath prayed,
And I nod to what is said,
'Cause my speech is now decayed,
  Sweet Spirit comfort me!

When the judgement is revealed,
And that opened which was sealed,
When to Thee I have appealed,
Sweet Spirit comfort me ! "

I will now pass from Herrick with one more quotation, which has always seemed to me to deserve a little corner in the memory. It is a child's grace before meals :—

" Here a little child I stand,
Heaving up my either hand :
Cold as paddocks though they be,
Here I lift them up to Thee,
For a benison to fall
On our meat, and on us all. Amen."

I think, Antony, this little grace shows that Herrick loved children, and in these few words one feels that he is himself in his heart blessing the little suppliant.

I will add nothing more to this letter to-day.

Your loving old

G. P.

VII

MY DEAR ANTONY,

I will write to-day to you a little more about English songs. One of the most admired songs in the language is Shelley's " Lines to an Indian Air " :—

" I arise from dreams of thee
  In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
  And the stars are shining bright :
I arise from dreams of thee,
  And a spirit in my feet
Has led me—who knows how ?
  To thy chamber window, sweet !

The wandering airs they faint
  On the dark, the silent stream—
The champak odours fail
  Like sweet thoughts in a dream ;
The nightingale's complaint,
  It dies upon her heart,
As I must die on thine,
  Beloved as thou art !

O lift me from the grass !
  I die, I faint, I fail !
Let thy love in kisses rain
  On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas !
  My heart beats loud and fast,
Oh ! press it close to thine again,
  Where it will break at last."

Long, long ago, Antony, in the winter of 1884 and 1885, I was visiting America, and was welcomed into

the family circle of my friend Mr Sherman Rogers, a citizen of whom the town of Buffalo was justly proud; and there I met his son, Robert Cameron Rogers, who ten years later, in 1894, published his song "The Rosary."

I think it is rather the fashion now to deride that poem, as many good things receive derision if they become so popular as to reach the barrel-organs in the streets, as has this song. But when I first saw the words I thought them beautiful; and often first thoughts are best, in spite of the proverb that gives the preference to second ones.

> "The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,
> Are as a string of pearls to me;
> I count them over every one apart,
> My rosary.
>
> Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer,
> To still a heart in absence wrung;
> I tell each bead unto the end, and there
> A cross is hung.
>
> O memories that bless—and burn!
> O barren gain—and bitter loss!
> I kiss each bead, and strive at last to learn
> To kiss the cross, sweetheart, to kiss the cross."

Eleven years after my friend Robert Cameron Rogers had published these verses, a Mr Winter claimed their authorship, and, like the claimant in the Tichborne case, he found adherents. Audacity of assertion is all that is necessary to deceive ignorant people. I dare say if I were to claim to have written "The Ancient Mariner" I should find people who would believe it. Indeed, twice in my life I have been quite sincerely asked if I were its author, by people in good circumstances in ways other than their knowledge of letters.

I remember Irving once saying to me that "you

cannot overestimate the ignorance of the public,'' and he derived his opinion from his settled custom of sending some of his staff to sit about in the pit and listen to the comments of his patrons on what they saw and heard.

For some reason I cannot understand or explain, the composers of music for songs seem often to prefer twaddly words to real poetry.

Tom Moore's jingling rhymes are exactly suited to the taste of the composer, as thus :—

" This life is all chequered with pleasure and woes,
    That chase one another like waves of the deep ;

One is certain the next line must end with ' it flows,'
    And the fourth line must finish with optics that ' weep.' "

And so they do, sure enough ! Here and there his songs make a rather languid effort to rise out of the bog of the commonplace, as, for instance :—

" At beauty's door of glass,
    Where wealth and wit once stood,
They asked her, ' Which must pass ? '
    She answered, ' He who could.'
With golden key wealth thought
    To pass—but 'twould not do.
While wit a diamond brought,
    Which cut his bright way through.
So here's to her, who long
    Hath waked the poet's sigh,
The girl who gave to song
    What gold could never buy."

The Rev. Charles Kingsley wrote some excellent songs. When I was young, no ballad concert could take place without his three fishers sailing out into the west, their three wives sitting up in light-house towers, and their three corpses lying out on the sand next morning.

His "O that we Two were Maying" is another most popular song, in which we have a similar triple sequence in three verses: first, the two go maying together, then they sit dreaming on a sheep-trimmed down together, and in the last verse they sleep together at rest in the churchyard.

A still better song than these, though not so well known, is the following :—

> " When all the world is young, lad
> And all the trees are green ;
> And every goose a swan, lad,
> And every lass a queen.
> Then hey ! for boot and horse, lad,
> And round the world away,
> Young blood must its course, lad,
> And every dog his day.
>
> When all the world is old, lad,
> And all the trees are brown,
> And all the sport is stale, lad,
> And all the wheels run down.
> Creep home and take your place there
> The spent and maimed among,
> God grant you find one face there
> You loved when all was young."

At the end of his "Ode to the North-East Wind" there is a fine passage :—

> " 'Tis the hard grey winter
> Breeds hard Englishmen.
> What's the soft South-Wester ?
> 'Tis the ladies' breeze
> Bringing home their true loves
> Out of all the seas ;
> But the black North-Easter
> Through the snowstorm hurled,
> Drives out English hearts of oak
> Seaward round the world.

Come, as came our fathers,
Heralded by thee,
Conquering from the Eastward
Lords by land and sea.
Come, and strong within us
Stir the Vikings' blood;
Bracing brain and sinew,
Blow, thou wind of God!"

Kingsley was a hunting clergyman—to some of us a repugnant spectacle, and now, fortunately for the Church of England, a disappearing one. In the earlier part of the above ode he calls upon the "dappled darlings," meaning the hounds, to "see a fox die."

No great poet, as far as I am aware, has ever praised and abetted any form of cruelty, and it is strange that the only respectable minor poet who has done so should be a clergyman.

There is a song, by I know not whom, which was very popular when I was young. It has a couple of excellent verses:—

"Since first I saw your face, I resolved
To honour and renown you;
If now I be disdained, I wish
My heart had never known you.
What! I that loved and you that liked,
Shall we begin to wrangle?
No, no, no! my heart is fixed
And cannot disentangle.

The sun whose beams most glorious are,
Rejecteth no beholder;
And your sweet beauty past compare
Made my poor eyes the bolder;
When beauty moves, and wit delights,
And signs of kindness bind me,
There, O there! where'er I go
I'll leave my heart behind me."

An old cavalier song, by Lovelace, has survived

nearly three centuries, and its last two lines have travelled with the English to the ends of the earth.

"Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,
 That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
 To wars and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase,
 The first foe in the field,
And with a stronger faith embrace
 A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such
 As you too shall adore:
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
 Loved I not honour more."

Old Edmund Waller wrote some excellent songs. His life, which was a long one, synchronised with the seventeenth century; for he was born in 1605, and lived till he was eighty-two. He enjoyed the favour of both sides consecutively in the political upheavals of the times, and praised them both fervently one after the other.

One of his best songs, which I am going to quote, had a verse added to it by Kirke White nearly two hundred years after it was written.

Someone lent Waller's poems to Kirke White, and when the volume was returned the beautiful addition was found written into the book.

"Go, lovely rose.
 Tell her that wastes her time, and me
That now she knows,
 When I resemble her to thee,
 How sweet and fair she seems to be.

Tell her that's young
 And shuns to have her graces spied,
That had'st thou sprung
 In deserts, where no men abide,
 Thou must have uncommended died.

Small is the worth
Of beauty from the light retired;
Bid her come forth,
Suffer herself to be desired,
And not blush so to be admired.

Then die! that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee,
How small a part of time they share,
That are so wondrous sweet and fair."

To this Kirke White added this charming supplement:—

"Yet though thou fade,
From thy dead leaves let fragrance rise
And teach the maid
That goodness Time's rude hand defies,
That virtue lives when beauty dies."

Kirke White's addition was only made in this modest and private manner, and it is not a practice that should be indulged in except by men of genius, and on very rare occasions.

A most impertinent addition was made to Cardinal Newman's splendid poem, "Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom," by Bishop Bickersteth, when he was Bishop of Exeter, and published by him in the Cardinal's lifetime in an Episcopal hymnal. Such intrusions by ineptitude upon genius are insufferable.

There is what one may call a jolly old song, by Sir John Suckling, which deserves to be remembered:—

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prythee, why so pale?
Will, if looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?
Prythee, why so pale?

Why so dull and mute, young sinner ?
Prythee, why so mute ?
Will, when speaking well can't win her,
Saying nothing do't ?
Prythee, why so mute ?

Quit, quit, for shame ! this will not move,
This cannot take her ;
If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her ;
The Devil take her ! "

"Auld Robin Gray" is one of the great songs of the world, but written in the Scotch dialect. Lady Anne Lindsay wrote it more than a hundred years ago.

Jenny Lind once sung it after a dinner-party at my father's house at 1 Sussex Square, in the middle drawing-room, and the passion of woe she threw into her rendering of it was so overwhelming, that when she had finished and stood exhausted with one hand on the piano, no one could speak ; the tears were on her cheek, and in a silence more moving than any applause my father took her hand and led her away.

One more song I will mention, and then an end of this letter. There was a song written by Henry Carey early in the eighteenth century, which may safely be pronounced as so impregnated with the very soil of England, that it is impossible to imagine it as written in any other country. "Sally in our Alley" embodies the very spirit of the English race in its widest dissemination—a spirit that foreigners do not understand and, if they understood, would not appreciate. I will quote some of its most characteristic verses :—

"Of all the girls that are so smart,
There's none like pretty Sally ;
She is the darling of my heart,
And she lives in our alley.

There is no lady in the land
  Is half so sweet as Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
  And she lives in our alley.

Her father he makes cabbage-nets
  And through the streets does cry 'em;
Her mother she sells laces long
  To such as please to buy 'em:
But sure such folk could ne'er beget
  So sweet a girl as Sally!
She is the darling of my heart,
  And she lives in our alley.

When she is by, I leave my work,
  I love her so sincerely;
My master comes like any Turk
  And bangs me most severely;
But let him bang his bellyful,
  I'll bear it all for Sally.
She is the darling of my heart,
  And she lives in our alley.

When Christmas comes about again,
  O, then I shall have money,
I'll hoard it up, and box it all,
  I'll give it to my honey;
I would it were ten thousand pound,
  I'd give it all to Sally.

My master and the neighbours all
  Make game of me and Sally,
And but for her I'd better be
  A slave and row a galley;
But when my seven long years are out,
  O, then I'll marry Sally;
O, then we'll wed, and then we'll bed,
  But not in our alley!"

Addison praised this song, as well he might, and it has always had the same quaint old eighteenth-century melody attached to it, and I hope no one will

ever attempt to displace it with anything less typically English.

For the present then, Antony, I have said enough about songs, and it is fitting that I should finish with this simple and so lovable old ballad.

Your loving old

G. P.

VIII

MY DEAR ANTONY,

The strangest characteristic of poets, affecting nearly all of them alike, is that they can so seldom maintain the high level of their own best utterances. Some of the most beautiful poems have been buried by their authors deep under vast deluges of the commonplace, so that only the persevering and the diligent can ever hope to fish up the treasure so submerged.

Dean Milman wrote a fine poem and then buried it under "The Fall of Jerusalem," "The Martyr of Antioch," and other interminable efforts.

Southey similarly buried some excellent ballads under "The Curse of Kehama," "Roderic, the last of the Goths," "Madoc," first in Wales, and then in Aztlan, wherever that may be, with characters in it with such names as Yuhidthiton, Coanacotzin, and Eaillyab.

And the stoutest heart quails before Wordsworth's "Excursion."

Dean Milman, in his sanguine youth at Oxford, before he became a doctor of divinity, won the Newdigate with a prize poem on the Apollo Belvedere. It is not now to be found in any of the popular collections of English poetry; it even escaped the penetrating vision of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch when he published his Oxford book of English verse.

In 1812, when Milman wrote his poem, the statue was esteemed as one of the finest in the world. I believe the critics of to-day think less of it. In any case, Milman celebrated its fame with some splendid lines,

and I will quote you the best of them. Apollo is represented as having just shot from his bow the arrow that destroyed the python.

" Heard ye the arrow hurtle in the sky ?
Heard ye the dragon monster's deathful cry ?
In settled majesty of calm disdain,
Proud of his might yet scornful of the slain,
The heavenly archer stands—no human birth,
No perishable denizen of earth ;
Youth blooms immortal in his beardless face,
A god in strength, with more than godlike grace ;
All, all divine—no struggling muscle glows,
Through heaving vein no mantling life-blood flows,
But animate with deity alone,
In deathless glory lives the breathing stone.

Bright kindling with a conqueror's stern delight,
His keen eye tracks the arrow's fateful flight ;
Burns his indignant cheek with vengeful fire,
And his lip quivers with insulting ire ;
Firm fixed his tread, yet light, as when on high
He walks the impalpable and pathless sky.

. . . .

Mighty Ephesian ![1] with an eagle's flight
Thy proud soul mounted through the fields of light,
Viewed the bright conclave of Heaven's blest abode,
And the cold marble leapt to life a god ;
Contagious awe through breathless myriads ran,
And nations bowed before the work of man.
For mild he seemed as in Elysian bowers,
Wasting in careless ease the joyous hours ;
Haughty as bards have sung, with princely sway
Curbing the fierce flame-breathing steeds of day ;
Beauteous as vision seen in dreamy sleep
By holy maid on Delphi's haunted steep,
'Mid the dim twilight of the laurel grove,
Too fair to worship, too divine to love ! "

It is interesting to compare the work of other poets

[1] The sculptor was Agasias the Ephesian, who also created the Dying Gladiator.

on the Apollo Belvedere. Byron's fourth canto of "Childe Harold" was published in 1818, and I think he must have known Milman's poem. His verses are as follows :—

> " Or view the Lord of the unerring bow,
> The God of life, and poesy, and light—
> The Sun in human limbs arrayed, and brow
> All radiant from his triumph in the fight ;
> The shaft hath just been shot—the arrow bright
> With an immortal's vengeance ; in his eye
> And nostril beautiful disdain, and might
> And majesty, flash their full lightnings by,
> Developing in that one glance the Deity.
>
> But in his delicate form—a dream of Love,
> Shaped by some solitary nymph, whose breast
> Longed for a deathless lover from above,
> And maddened in that vision—are expressed
> All that ideal beauty ever blessed
> The mind within its most unearthly mood,
> When each conception was a heavenly guest—
> A ray of immortality—and stood,
> Starlike, around, until they gathered to a god ! "

But before either of these poets wrote these passages, James Thomson, in 1736, had published his poem on "Liberty," in the fourth part of which the following lines are to be found :—

> " All conquest-flushed, from prostrate Python, came
> The quivered god. In graceful act he stands,
> His arm extended with the slackened bow :
> Light flows his easy robe, and fair displays
> A manly softened form. The bloom of gods
> Seems youthful o'er the beardless cheek to wave :
> His features yet heroic ardour warms
> And sweet subsiding to a native smile,
> Mixed with the joy elating conquest gives,
> A scattered frown exalts his matchless air."

I think of these three poets Milman has the palm, and Byron cannot be altogether acquitted of writing with his eye on Milman's poem.

Milman wrote some joyous verses to "The Merry Heart," which begin thus :—

> "I would not from the wise require
> The lumber of their learned lore ;
> Nor would I from the rich desire
> A single counter of their store.
> For I have ease, and I have health,
> And I have spirits light as air ;
> And more than wisdom, more than wealth,—
> A merry heart that laughs at care."

In the days of Milman, Greek sculpture and mythology meant more to English people than it does now, for every man of fashion and educated gentleman was familiar with the classics, and the literature of Greece and Rome were the foundations of his culture. But to-day these splendid avenues to intellectual distinction and mental refinement are neglected for other fields of knowledge that are expected to lead more easily to worldly prosperity. This change, which has been gradually turning men's hearts away from the glorious treasures of classical literature towards the mechanical facts of matter, was already working its way into men's lives in Wordsworth's time, and brought from him this noble sonnet :—

> "The world is too much with us ; late and soon
> Getting and spending we lay waste our powers ;
> Little we see in nature that is ours ;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !
> This sea that bares her bosom to the moon ;
> The winds that will be howling at all hours,
> And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers ;
> For this, for everything we are out of tune ;
> It moves us not—Great God, I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathéd horn."

Wordsworth is a poet who, I think, grows in most men's estimation as they get on in years.

He is the poet, Antony, that will appeal to you by-and-by, when you have achieved your ambitions in life, or have not achieved them, and have withdrawn from battle and have time and inclination to go away with him among the hills and lakes and quiet places, and let them lay upon you the hand of peace and consolation; when you can stand with him and gaze into the golden West and see there the Spirit—

> "Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns";

when you can watch with him the old shepherd Michael, whose son laid the first stone of a sheep-fold, the day before he went away to seek his fortune and never returned, having fallen to evil courses, going daily up the glen to continue the humble building:—

> "There is a comfort in the strength of love;
> 'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
> Would overset the brain, or break the heart;
> I have conversed with more than one who well
> Remembered the old man, and what he was
> Years after he had heard this heavy news.
> His bodily frame had been from youth to age
> Of an unusual strength. Among the rocks
> He went, and still looked up to sun and cloud
> And listened to the wind; and as before
> Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
> And for the land, his small inheritance.
> And to the hollow dell from time to time
> Did he repair, to build the fold of which
> His flock had need. 'Tis not forgotten yet
> The pity which was then in every heart
> For the old man,—and 'tis believed by all
> That many and many a day he thither went
> And never lifted up a single stone.
>
> There by the sheepfold sometimes was he seen
> Sitting alone, or with his faithful dog
> Then old, beside him lying at his feet.

> The length of full seven years, from time to time
> He at the building of this sheepfold wrought,
> And left the work unfinished when he died."

If this does not touch your young heart a little now, Antony, I am sure it will do so by-and-by.

It is a strange commentary on the usual readiness of authors to commit their productions to print, that Wordsworth's "Prelude" was finished in the summer of 1805, and never reached the public till 1850.

The poem was addressed, he tells us, "to a dear friend most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the author's intellect is deeply indebted."

Coleridge had been dead sixteen years in 1850, but Wordsworth, it is recorded, had read the poem to Coleridge at Rydal, when the friends and their relatives were gathered round the fireside; and Coleridge was moved to respond that night with his beautiful lines in which he calls "The Prelude"

> "A song divine of high and passionate thoughts to their own
> music chanted"—

and which ended on this fine note:—

> "And when, O Friend! my comforter and guide,
> Strong in thyself and powerful to give strength,
> Thy long-sustained song finally closed,
> And thy deep voice had ceased—yet thou thyself
> Wert still before my eyes and round us both
> That happy vision of belovéd faces—
> Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
> I sate, my being blended in one thought
> (Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?),
> Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound—
> And when I rose I found myself in prayer."

On the 8th of July 1881 I went with my father to Rydal Mount, and we stood together in the room where that memorable recital had taken place, cementing

the lifelong friendship of the two poets. My father had visited Wordsworth when he lived there, and the house to him was full of memories of the poet.

"The Prelude" no doubt is, for modern readers, too long; but it is full of memorable passages. Here is one that describes the poet in youth at a ball, and his confronting of nature on his way home :—

"I had passed
The night in dancing, gaiety, and mirth,
With din of instruments and shuffling feet,
And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,
And unaimed prattle flying up and down;
Spirits upon the stretch, and here and there
Slight shocks of young love-liking interspersed,
Whose transient pleasure mounted to the head
And tingled through the veins. Ere we retired
The cock had crowed, and now the Eastern sky
Was kindling not unseen, from humble copse
And open field, through which the pathway wound
And homeward led my steps. Magnificent
The morning rose, in memorable pomp,
Glorious as e'er I had beheld—in front
The sea lay laughing at a distance; near
The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds
Grain tinctured, drenched in Empyrean light;
And in the meadows and the lower grounds
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And labourers going forth to till the fields."

For one of these images, "The sea lay laughing at a distance," I have no doubt Wordsworth was indebted to a passage in Lucretius: "Tibi rident œquora ponti."

Another poem similar in character to "Michael" is "The Brothers." No doubt it is rather long for modern readers, but a certain deliberation and minuteness of detail are the very means by which he gets his way into our hearts, and convinces us of the truth and poignancy of his story.

By a stupid shallowness of criticism he is commonly rejected by the ordinary person as the silly author of "We are Seven" and "The Pet Lamb," whereas his real character as an author is better shown in such passages as this :—

> "Action is transitory,—a step, a blow,
> The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
> 'Tis done, and in the after vacancy
> We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed;
> Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
> And shares the nature of infirmity."

Or again, where in his second ode to Lycoris he describes the impressions made upon him by the interior of a dark cave in the height of summer :—

> "Long as the heat shall rage let that dim cave
> Protect us, there deciphering as we may
> Diluvian records; or the sighs of Earth
> Interpreting; or counting for old Time
> His minutes, by reiterated drops,
> Audible tears, from some invisible source
> That deepens upon fancy—more and more
> Drawn towards the centre whence those sighs creep forth
> To awe the lightness of humanity."

Much of his great work seems to me to approach nearer to that of Milton than to that of any other English poet, and to make him the lineal literary descendant of him who could describe the Messiah advancing to drive the rebel angels from the plains of heaven in a single couplet thus :—

> "Attended by ten thousand, thousand saints
> He onward came: far off his coming shone."

Some of Milton's greatest passages were composed after he was blind, and must have been dictated; which enhances the wonder of his genius, placing him with Homer, who must have composed his works without seeing them written as he proceeded.

Milton composed a fine sonnet to his blindness, which ends with the well-known line :—

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

But a still finer passage is to be found in "Samson Agonistes," where the blind Samson bewails his loss of sight—a passage which manifestly is a true cry of sorrow from the soul of the poet himself :—

"O loss of sight, of thee I most complain !
Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age !
Light, the prime work of God, to me's extinct,
And all her various objects of delight
Annulled, which might in part my grief have eased.
Inferior to the vilest now become
Of man or worm, the vilest here excel me ;
They creep, yet see. I, dark in light, exposed
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,
Within doors or without, still as a fool
In power of others ; never in my own ;
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.
O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
Without all hope of day !
O first created beam, and thou great Word,
'Let there be light,' and light was over all,
Why am I thus bereaved Thy prime decree ?
The sun to me is dark
And silent as the moon
When she deserts the night
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave !"

The very breaks in the blank verse seem to express his anguish.

Of a very different character is the poet's "L'Allegro," which is familiar to everyone. Bishop Copleston once wrote a most diverting mock criticism of it for the purpose of showing how easily a smart young reviewer can demolish the work of the greatest

writers. It is a perfectly delightful piece of badinage. Here is a bit of it :—

"We will venture to transcribe the passage as a favourable specimen of the author's manner :—

> 'While the cock with lively din
> Scatters the rear of darkness thin,
> And to the stack, or the barn door,
> Stoutly struts his dames before ;
> Oft listening how the hounds and horn
> Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn,
> From the side of some hoar hill,
> Through the high wood echoing shrill.'

Is it not lamentable that, after all, whether it is the cock or the poet that listens should be left entirely to the reader's conjecture ? Perhaps also his embarrassment may be increased by a slight resemblance of character in these two illustrious personages, at least as far as relates to the extent and numbers of their seraglio."

He has already remarked that the poet appeared to claim both Mirth and Liberty as his mistresses, saying that he intended

> "To live with her, and live with thee,
> In unreproved pleasures free."

The funny part of this delightful satire is that all its criticisms are technically unimpeachable.

In Copleston's time—he was born in 1776—bishops were scholars first and ecclesiastics only subordinately, and could afford to be sprightly with their pens.

Bishop Copleston was intimate with my grandfather, though his senior by some fourteen years, they both being Devonshire men and ripe scholars.

> "The old order changeth, yielding place to new ;
> And God fulfils Himself in many ways
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

Yet still, Antony, we may feel a little regret for those old days when almost every gentleman was a scholar and almost every bishop a man of letters.

Your loving old

G. P.

IX

My dear Antony,

I pulled from my shelves this morning a lovely edition of Matthew Arnold's "Scholar Gipsy" and "Thyrsis," given me in July 1911 by a dear friend, A. C. T., who now lies in the cemetery at Cardiff.

He and I shared our deep admiration for these two poems, and he envied me the personal contact that I had enjoyed when young with the poet, whose kindness to me only ended with his death.

The two poems should be read consecutively, "Thyrsis" containing many references to the prior poem.

Clough, the poet, who is commemorated in "Thyrsis," died when I was seven years old, so I never saw him, but many a time I have heard Matthew Arnold speak of him with the utmost affection.

A. C. T. and I both particularly chose the following stanzas from "Thyrsis," as containing a most haunting beauty and deep sadness; and when he last was in this library, shortly before he died so suddenly and lamentedly, he read these stanzas aloud from the very volume he had given me:—

"Yes, thou art gone! and round me too the night
In ever nearing circle weaves her shade.
I see her veil draw soft across the day,
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent with grey:
I feel her finger light
Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train;
The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,
The heart less bounding at emotion new,
And hope, once crushed, less quick to spring again.

And long the way appears, which seemed so short
To the unpractised eye of sanguine youth ;
And high the mountain tops, in cloudy air,
The mountain tops where is the throne of truth,
Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and bare !
    Unbreachable the fort
Of the long battered world uplifts its wall.
And strange and vain the earthly turmoil grows,
And near and real the charm of thy repose,
And night as welcome as a friend would fall.

But hush ! the upland hath a sudden loss
Of quiet :—Look ! adown the dusk hillside,
A troop of Oxford hunters going home
As in old days, jovial and talking ride !
From hunting with the Berkshire hounds they come—
    Quick, let me fly, and cross
Into yon further field !—'Tis done ; and see
Backed by the sunset, which doth glorify
The orange and pale violet evening sky,
Bare on its lonely ridge, the Tree ! the Tree !

I take the omen ! Eve lets down her veil,
The white fog creeps from bush to bush about,
The West unflushes, the high stars grow bright,
And in the scattered farms the lights come out.
I cannot reach the Signal-Tree to-night,
    Yet, happy omen, hail !
Hear it from thy broad lucent Arno vale.
(For these thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep
The morningless and unawakening sleep
Under the flowery oleanders pale.)

Hear it, O Thyrsis, still our Tree is there !—
Ah, vain ! These English fields, this upland dim,
These brambles pale with mist engarlanded,
That lone sky-pointing tree, are not for him.
To a boon southern country he is fled,
    And now in happier air,
Wandering with the great Mother's train divine
Within a folding of the Apennine."

Ah, vain indeed it must ever be to grieve when friends are taken from us and pass before us "behind the veil"; but sorrow is sorrow and loss is loss, and we can still, in the short days that remain to us elder travellers, traverse in our hearts the memory of our friends until harsh grief turns to far music heard sweetly over the slowly receding hills and valleys of time.

"Thyrsis," of course, is not so great and wonderful a production as "In Memoriam." Few long poems are so sustained throughout with profound thought and visionary beauty. Tennyson had as accurate a knowledge of all the significance of nature as had Wordsworth. Time after time a picture is flashed upon the mind's eye in his verse that can never be forgotten :—

> "To-night the winds begin to rise
> And roar from yonder dropping day;
> The last red leaf is whirled away,
> The rooks are blown about the skies."

Again :—

> "Yonder cloud
> That rises upward always higher,
> And onward drags a labouring breast,
> And topples round the dreary west,
> A looming bastion fringed with fire."

Then in another stanza there is something immense in the chronicling of the anniversary of the death of his beloved friend :—

> "Risest thou thus, dim dawn, again,
> And howlest, issuing out of night,
> With blasts that blow the poplar white,
> And lash with storm the streaming pane?
>
> . . . .
>
> Day, marked as with some hideous crime,
> When the dark hand struck down through time,
> And cancelled nature's best: but thou,

Lift as thou may'st thy burthened brows
Through clouds that drench the morning star,
And whirl the ungarner'd sheaf afar,
And sow the sky with flying boughs,

And up thy vault with roaring sound
Climb thy thick noon, disastrous day;
Touch thy dull goal of joyless grey,
And hide thy shame beneath the ground."

One of the numbers, LXV in the first edition, has always been to me one of the most unforgettable :—

"When on my bed the moonlight falls,
I know that in thy place of rest
By that broad water of the west,
There comes a glory on the walls :

Thy marble bright in dark appears,
As slowly steals a silver flame
Along the letters of thy name,
And o'er the number of thy years.

The mystic glory swims away;
From off my bed the moonlight dies;
And closing eaves of wearied eyes
I sleep till dusk is dipped in grey :

And then I know the mist is drawn
A lucid veil from coast to coast,
And in the chancel like a ghost
Thy tablet glimmers to the dawn."[1]

Shelley's "Adonais" was not inspired like "In Memoriam" and "Thyrsis" by the personal loss of a beloved friend; for Shelley was not Keats' personal friend, and wrote of him after his death: "I knew personally but little of Keats." It therefore lacks

[1] Tennyson wrote this before he had visited the church, and in subsequent editions "dark church" is substituted for "chancel," the monument not being in the chancel. I think "dark church" is finer than "chancel."

the note of personal sorrow which so penetrates every part of those other poems.

No doubt others may not agree with me, but I have come to regard Sir William Watson's "Lachrymæ Musarum," which he wrote on the death of Tennyson, as a more beautiful poem than "Adonais." Here are a few lines from it:—

> "Lo, in this season pensive-hued and grave,
> While fades and falls the doomed reluctant leaf
> From withered earth's fantastic coronal,
> With wandering sighs of forest and of wave
> Mingles the murmur of a people's grief
> For him whose leaf shall fade not, neither fall.
> He hath fared forth beyond these suns and showers.
> For us the autumn glow, the autumn flame,
> And soon the winter silence shall be ours;
> Him the eternal spring of fadeless fame
> Crowns with no mortal flowers."

Sir William Watson is a master of prose as well as a distinguished poet. He knows the splendid harmony of language, is never obscure, and is imbued with deep feeling. Here is an example of his verse:—

> "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!
>
> In the night, in the night,
> When thou liest alone,
> Ah, the ghosts that make moan
> From the days that are sped;
> The old dreams, the old deeds,
> The old wound that still bleeds,
> And the face of the dead
> In the night!

In the night, in the night,
When thou liest alone,
With the grass and the stone
O'er thy chamber so deep.
Ah, the silence at last,
Life's dissonance past,
And only pure sleep
    In the night."

To return to Tennyson. You will, I dare say, find that among the young gentlemen of to-day it is rather the fashion to disparage him; though this has, I think, to be done in general terms, because if any of his great poems be taken in hand and discussed, it is really impossible to deny to him a place beside the noblest.

"In Memoriam" alone would be enough to establish his position as great among the greatest.

"Maud" and "Enoch Arden" invade quite other and different fields of beauty, and are each enough to make the reputation of any poet.

Then, also, he is a master of the lyrical art; when once read his shorter gems are never to be forgotten:—

"And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill.
But O for the touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still."

His insight into present life and his vision of the future were sometimes startling, as when he wrote in "Locksley Hall":—

"For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the South-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging through the thunderstorm;

Till the war-drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were furled
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world."

And then, Antony, when the future of the world looks dark and ominous, he bids us look forward not with dread but always with hope :—

"Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward, let us range,
Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.

Through the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day:
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay."

Before I leave this splendid poet I will quote the verses that I myself have always carried treasured in my memory since I first read them. You will find them in "The Princess" :—

"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-awakened 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 remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
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."

I never knew Tennyson in the intimate way in which I enjoyed the gracious friendship of Matthew Arnold, but my hand has been in his, which I treasure as a privilege through my life.

These meetings become interesting in the lapse of years, though sometimes little is thought of them at the time. Browning writes:—

"Ah! did you once see Shelley plain,
And did he stop and speak to you?
And did you speak to him again?
How strange it seems and new!"

My father breakfasted with Rogers the poet, who had in youth called on Dr Johnson in Gough Square.

My grandfather, Mr Seymour, my mother's father, when at Eton, found Shelley the poet up the river with a wound in his leg, which he had given himself by mistake while out duck-spearing, and my grandfather carried Shelley back to the school on his back.

Lapse of time may make any trifling personal incidents interesting and memorable, and some day it may interest you to know, Antony, that I have often helped Gladstone into his coat in my father's hall after dinner, and watched him stride away by himself into the dark.

Your loving old

G. P.

X

My dear Antony,

Gray's "Elegy," as I have said in a former letter, may be regarded as a perfect example of an entirely uninspired poem. It was no doubt the work of years. It was polished and repolished by the poet till no single word could be changed without injury to the work. It also bears about it the signs of Gray's familiarity with other previous poems, of which it contains unmistakable echoes. Collins' "Ode to Evening" may have originally suggested the idea of the "Elegy" to Gray. There are even similar phrases in the two poems.

Gray wrote :—

> "Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight."

And Collins had already written :—

> "Or where the beetle winds
> His small but sullen horn."

But a still more certain imitation is found in this celebrated stanza :—

> "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
> And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
> Await alike the inevitable hour;
> The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

A now forgotten poet, West, had already written this :—

> "Ah me ! what boots it all our boasted power,
> Our golden treasure and our purple state ;
> They cannot ward the inevitable hour,
> Nor stay the fearful violence of fate."

The poetry of the eighteenth century was marked by scholarship and sedate taste, but it never seems to have in it the breath of inspiration.

A poem comparable with Gray's "Elegy," but not now at all as popular, is Goldsmith's "Deserted Village."

If we may judge from the number of its lines that have become familiar as quotations, it must at one time have been very widely known. All the following well-known lines are to be found in it :—

> "And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind."
> "And passing rich with forty pounds a year."
> "Shouldered his crutch and showed how fields were won."
> "And fools who came to scoff, remained to pray."
> "Eternal sunshine settles on its head."
> "And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
> That one small head could carry all he knew."
> "The chest contrived a double debt to pay—
> A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day."

Quotations that become familiar when a poem is popular continue in daily parlance long after the poem is neglected; and those who use the quotations are often innocent of all knowledge of what they are quoting.

This is very much the case with Pope and with Young. Few read Pope in these days, and no one reads Young's "Night Thoughts."

Yet from Pope come these familiar lines :—

> "A little learning is a dangerous thing."
> "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."
> "The proper study of mankind is man."
> "The feast of reason and the flow of soul."
> "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?"
> "To err is human; to forgive divine."

And from Young :—

> "Procrastination is the thief of time."

And many more from both of these writers.

I wonder how many of those who glibly remark,

> "When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war,"

know first, from what they are quoting; and secondly, that they are grossly misquoting the original.

The quotation lies buried deep in a forgotten play called *Alexander the Great*, by a forgotten writer, Nathaniel Lee, who died in the seventeenth century. And what the unfortunately mishandled man wrote was :—

> "When Greeks joined Greeks, then was the tug of war."

The meaning being totally subverted by the current patter.

It is recorded that Byron greatly admired Pope, and though as a critic he was not perspicuous—for he thought Crabbe and Rogers superior to Wordsworth and Coleridge—yet he was right in ranking Pope as supreme as a master of the technical craft of poetry.

The lilt of Pope's couplets is so perfect as almost to tire with monotony. But his heart is never moved, nor is ours, by what he writes.

In elegant numbers he praises virtue and condemns vice, applauds the sprightly and damns the dull.

But he is without tenderness, he has never discovered the loveliness of nature, he has no ascents of rapture, no outbursts of enthusiasm, no conflagrations of glory. He remains upon, and adorns, the level plain of scholarly distinction. Always his mind, and not his heart, directed his pen.

When he transfixes with his glittering rapier the pompous donkeys of his age, he does it with intellectual relish ; not with so much personal spite as was common in his day.

The poem that I think you should prefer to all his other work, Antony, I will now quote. It is not in his usual heroic couplets, and it seems to me to

express more genuine emotion than anything else that he wrote :—

" Father of all ! in every age,
  In every clime, adored
By Saint, by savage, and by sage,
  Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.

Thou Great First Cause, least understood,
  Who all my sense confined,
To know but this, that thou art good,
  And that myself am blind ;

Yet gave me in this dark estate
  To see the good from ill ;
And binding nature fast in fate,
  Let free the human will.

What conscience dictates to be done,
  Or warns me not to do ;
This, teach me more than Hell to shun,
  That, more than Heaven pursue.

What blessings thy free bounty gives
  Let me not cast away ;
For God is paid when man receives,
  T'enjoy is to obey.

Yet not to earth's contracted span
  Thy goodness let me bound,
Or think thee Lord alone of man
  When thousand worlds are round.

Let not this weak unknowing hand
  Presume thy bolts to throw,
And deal damnation round the land
  On each I judge thy foe.

If I am right, thy grace impart,
  Still in the right to stay ;
If I am wrong, O teach my heart
  To find that better way.

Save me alike from foolish pride
 Or impious discontent,
At aught thy wisdom has denied,
 Or aught thy goodness lent.

Teach me to feel another's woe,
 To hide the fault I see;
That mercy I to others show,
 That mercy show to me.

Mean though I am, not wholly so
 Since quickened by thy breath;
O lead me whereso'er I go
 Through this day's life or death!

This day be bread and peace my lot;
 All else beneath the sun
Thou know'st if best bestowed or not,
 And let thy will be done.

To thee, whose temple is all space,
 Whose altar earth, sea, skies;
One chorus let all beings raise,
 All nature's incense rise."

Dryden, who died when Pope was twelve years old, was his predecessor in favouring the heroic couplet in which he wrote an immense amount of poetry which you can well leave unread. But his "Alexander's Feast" is a very fine lyrical ode, and was written in his later years, after the disappearance of James II. had left him under the necessity of writing for his living.

It has in a measure been kept alive by the splendid music of Handel, to which it was set some thirty or forty years after Dryden was dead.

It is, I think, the finest poem ever written on the wonderful influence of music on the mind and heart of man. It particularly celebrates the reputed invention of the organ by St Cecilia. Dr Johnson says of

this ode that it is read "with turbulent delight"; and in another place says of it that it "has been always considered as exhibiting the highest flight of fancy, and the exactest nicety of art. This is allowed to stand without a rival."

And yet, Antony, I invite you to compare it with the wonderful passage on music by Cardinal Newman, which I have cited to you in my letters on English prose; I am not sure that poetry, after all, must not yield the palm in this case to prose.

Among the eighteenth-century poets, James Thomson, who wrote "The Seasons," must always take a distinguished place. He was a man who had travelled much over Europe, and his poem on "Liberty" is full of evidences of his intimate knowledge of Italy and other countries.

His "Seasons" are written with scholarship, taste, and delicacy. His treatment in "Summer" of Musidora bathing in a secluded stream, and unmasking her beauty unawares to her lover Damon, is treated in so chaste and delicate a spirit as to display the power of poetry to refine and purify the passions.

I think Thomson was the first poet to take the loveliness of nature and the world about him into his heart, and make it the chief motive of his verse.

He died in 1748. Collins wrote an ode to his memory, which must have been almost the last product of his pen before he fell into the bodily collapse and mental debility that, after some sad years, ended in his death.

Collins' poetry is often praised by critics, but I do not take much pleasure from it myself. His utterances seem to me rather difficult and obstructed.

He wrote his ode to Thomson on the banks of the Thames, near Richmond, where Thomson was buried, and many years afterwards, in 1798, Wordsworth, floating by the spot in a boat, composed some verses in remembrance of Collins.

Collins' ode contained this stanza :—

> " Remembrance oft shall haunt the shore
> When Thames in summer wreath is dressed,
> And oft suspend the dashing oar,
> To bid his gentle spirit rest."

The last verse of Wordsworth's little poem runs thus :—

> " Now let us as we float along,
> For *him* suspend the dashing oar :
> And pray that never child of song
> May know that Poet's sorrow more.
> How calm ! how still ! the only sound
> The dripping of the oar suspended !
> The evening darkness gathers round,
> By virtue's holiest Powers attended."

Wordsworth italicised the word " him " in the line he thus quoted from Collins, and the casual reader might miss the meaning of that emphasis, unless he were familiar with Collins' ode.

I do not know, Antony, whether these associations of one poet with another will interest you as they do me. I myself find them touching and delightful.

Your loving old

G. P.

XI

My dear Antony,

To-day I will speak of Byron. A man of strange contradictions of character and warring impulses of spirit. A man who could beautifully delineate the blessedness of married life and love, as in the second act of *Marino Faliero*, and in "Don Juan" could flout and fleer at the very feelings he has himself reverenced and exalted. A man who could in many a fine passage pay a glorious tribute to freedom and celebrate his aspirations for the future emancipation of his fellow-men, and even consecrate with his death those very ardours, and yet fill many a page with merciless gibes at everything human and divine that others reverence. A man born in the purple and educated at Harrow and Cambridge, who could nevertheless behave and write on occasion as the veriest "bounder." I use the slang word because there is no other that fits the case. Byron made base imputations in letters to Captain Medwin against John Murray, his publisher, every one of which was entirely refuted subsequently by the production of Byron's own letters to Murray.

Reasonable criticism of contemporaries is permissible to us all, but for Byron to call Coleridge "drunk" and Wordsworth "blockhead" is to behave like a ragamuffin who puts out his tongue at his companions.

Another defect in Byron's work is his interminable and tiresome intrusion of the supposed grievances of his private life. We must conceive of him as unhappily married; but that is a condition not unknown to other poets and men of letters, which they have kept to

themselves with decent reticence in their writings. But Byron wept and roared round Europe, inviting the public into what should be the privacies of his life, attacking publicly people with more personal dignity than himself, who preserved in response a becoming silence. The matter becomes quite absurd as well as vulgar, when it is manifest that the ladies of Europe of every race and clime appear to have been very ready to be complacent to the attentions of the wailing poet, and to be most generous in pouring anodynes upon his lacerated heart, so that the cries of woe need not too poignantly awake our sympathies. But, in spite of all this, Antony, Byron remains a great and wonderful poet.

I think he is beyond all others the poet who has displayed the greatest mastery of rhyme. And this mastery seemed to grow more and more complete with each poem that he wrote, until in "Don Juan" you may read page after page and never find an instance of the rhyme suggesting the sense, or of the faintest effort to find the needful word.

Another characteristic of Byron is, that if you compare him with other poets, he seems pre-eminently to write as a sort of inspired and glorified man of the world.

On occasion, Byron could write most touching and lovely verse, as in the third canto of "Don Juan":—

CII

"Ave Maria! blessed be the hour,
  The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft
Have felt that moment in its fullest power
  Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,
While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,
  Or the faint dying day-hymn stole aloft,
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,
And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer."

CVIII

" Soft hour ! which wakes the wish and melts the heart
Of those who sail the seas, on the first day
When they from their sweet friends are torn apart ;
Or fills with love the pilgrim on his way,
As the far bell of vesper makes him start,
Seeming to weep the dying day's decay ;
Is this a fancy which our reason scorns ?
Ah ! surely nothing dies but something mourns."

Such passages as this one are islands in an ocean of flouts and jeers and ribaldry, all displaying masterly powers of rhyme but giving no pleasure to the reader, who at this time of day cannot take a very lively interest in Byron's everlasting personal acerbities.

I will quote for you now one of Byron's finest passages on the sea, which occurs at the end of " Childe Harold," and opens with the familiar line :—

" Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll."

These are, I think, the two finest stanzas of it :—

" Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee—
Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they ?
Thy waters washed them power while they were free,
And many a tyrant since : their shores obey
The stranger, slave, or savage ; their decay
Has dried up realms to deserts : not so thou,
Unchangeable save to thy wild waves' play—
Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow—
Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now.

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
Glasses itself in tempests ; in all time,
Calm or convulsed—in breeze, or gale, or storm,
Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime
Dark-heaving ;—boundless, endless, and sublime—
The image of Eternity—the throne
Of the Invisible ; even from out thy slime
The monsters of the deep are made ; each zone
Obeys thee ; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless, alone."

This passage recalls a fine invocation to the sea written by Herman Merivale, as the opening lines of an act of his play, *The Bride of Lammermoor* :—

> " Roll on, roll on, ye everlasting sea,
> Unstilled of ages and untouched of time,
> On thy unmeaning mission !
>
> Art thou not weary, Ocean, of thy doom
> Of long imprisonment ? Irks it thee not
> To beat thine heart out on the surly coast,
> And twice a day the eternal siege renew
> Without an answer on the voice of Nature
> To read thee what thou art, and whence, and why ?
> Ah ! yield me up your secrets, sea and stars,
> And tell me what I am and what ye are.
> Are we one deathless substance born of God,
> Or wandering vapours of the nether mist,
> Self-formed, self-nourished, self-annihilate ? "

The tides of the great oceans brought other suggestions to other poets.

Keats in his last sonnet speaks of

> " The moving waters at their priestlike task
> Of pure ablution round earth's human shores " ;

and Tennyson's " Crossing the Bar " is inspired by a very noble vision of the ebbing waters of life.

In these days, Antony, a sea voyage is often deprived of all its romance, for to embark upon one of the enormous liners of to-day differs but little from spending one's time at the Ritz Hotel without going out of doors.

But when I was young, a five or six thousand ton ship was as large a vessel as any traveller was likely to board. It was a real ship, and its speed under steam was not great enough to preclude the hoisting of the sails when the wind was favourable as a help to its progress, and so it was manned by real sailors, not merely by firemen and engineers.

There was a sense of adventure in a sea voyage under those conditions, and "going down to the sea in ships" awoke keen emotions in the hearts of poets.

Henry Lawson, a fine Australian poet, has written some excellent verses on the starting of a ship for that distant commonwealth. Here are three of them :—

"White handkerchiefs wave from the short black pier
  As we glide to the grand old sea.
But the song of my heart is for none to hear
  If one of them waves for me.
A roving, roaming life is mine
  Ever by field and flood.
For not far back in my father's line
  Was a dash of the gipsy blood.

The sailors say 'twill be rough to-night
  As they fasten the hatches down.
The south is black, and the bar is white,
  And the drifting smoke is brown.
The gold has gone from the Western haze,
  The sea-birds circle and swarm,
But we shall have plenty of sunny days
  And little enough of storm.

The hill is hiding the short black pier
  As the last white signal's seen ;
The points run in, and the houses veer,
  And the great bluff stands between.
So darkness swallowed the far white speck
  On many a wharf and quay,
The night comes down on a restless deck,
  Grim cliffs, and—The open sea!"

This fine last verse recalls to me many a setting sail of my own when I was young. I find in it something poignant and moving.

Henry Lawson's verses have in them the atmosphere of Australia. I like "The Ballad of the Drover," which describes the man caught by a storm, and

risking the crossing of a suddenly flooded river to get home with his two horses and dog.

" When flashes the next lightning,
The flood's grey breast is blank,
And a cattle-dog and pack-horse
Are struggling up the bank.
But on the bank to northward
Or on the southern shore,
The stuck horse and his rider
Will struggle out no more.

The faithful dog a moment
Sits panting on the bank,
And then swims through the current
To where his master sank.
And round and round in circles
He fights with failing strength,
Till borne down by the waters,
The old dog sinks at length."

A poem that contained in it something of prophecy was published by Henry Lawson twenty years before the Anzacs forced their great landing at Gallipoli. I think it should be better known in England. Here are some verses from it :—

" There are boys out there by the western creeks who hurry away from school,
To climb the sides of the breezy peaks or dive in the shaded pool,
Who'll stick to their guns when the mountains quake to the tread of a mighty war,
And fight for Right or a Grand Mistake as men never fought before;
When the peaks are scarred and the sea-walls crack till the furthest hills vibrate,
And the world for a while goes rolling back in a storm of love and hate.

There are boys to-day in the city and slum and the home of wealth and pride,
Who'll have one home when the storm is come, and fight for it side by side,

Who'll hold the cliffs 'gainst armoured hells that batter a coastal town,
Or grimly die in a hail of shells when the walls come crashing down.

. . . .

The self-same spirit that drives the man to the depths of drink and crime,
Will do the deeds in the heroes' van that live till the end of time,
The living death in the lonely bush, the greed of the selfish town,
And even the creed of the outlawed push is chivalry—upside down.
'Twill be while ever our blood is hot, while ever the world goes wrong,
The nations rise in a war, to rot in a peace that lasts too long.
The southern nation and southern state, aroused from their dream of ease,
Must sign in the Book of Eternal Fate their stormy histories."

Henry Lawson's verses have a lilt and swing that endear them to me in these days when so much mere prose is printed in lines of no metre, obeying no prosody, and is described as "poetry." He shows in his verse that to obey the principles of prosody and observe the harmony of rhythm is the best form for perfect liberty of expression. In fact, he shows that "service is perfect freedom":—

"The world is narrow and ways are short, and our lives are dull and slow,
For little is new where the crowds resort, and less where the wanderers go;
Greater or smaller, the same old things we see by the dull roadside,
And tired of all is the spirit that sings of the days when the world was wide."

I do not find Henry Lawson in any of the popular collections of poetry that I have seen, though all that

I have now quoted was published before the close of the nineteenth century, and should long ago have reached the shelves of those who direct our taste by making selections for us.

" The Ballad of the Drover " was published in 1889, the lines I first quoted in 1895, and the other verses in the nineties of the last century.

I hope you will agree with me, Antony, that here is a true poet to whom the public in England have not yet done full justice.

Your loving old

G. P.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

XII

MY DEAR ANTONY,

In my last letter I told you something of Henry Lawson, and that leads me to the citation of other Australian poets.

It is a matter of which Australians should be justly proud, that their country has produced singers who have brought the very soul of their great commonwealth into their verse, and have established something in it distinct from other English poetry.

Henry Kendall not only possesses a wonderful gift of spontaneous unforced rhyme, but there is the atmosphere of Australia in every line of his verse :—

"They built his mound in the rough red ground
  By the dip of a desert dell,
Where all things sweet are killed by the heat
  And scattered o'er flat and fell.
In the burning zone they left him alone,
  Past the uttermost Western plain,
And the nightfall dim heard his funeral hymn
  In the voices of wind and rain.

The songs austere of the forest drear,
  And the echoes of cleft and cave,
When the dark is keen where the storm hath been
  Fleet over the far-away grave.
And through the days when the torrid rays
  Strike down in a coppery gloom,
Some spirit grieves in the perished leaves,
  Whose theme is that desolate tomb.

No human foot or paw of brute
  Halts now where the stranger sleeps ;
But cloud and star his fellows are,
  And the rain that sobs and weeps.

The dingo yells by the far iron fells,
  The plover is loud in the range,
But they never come near the slumberer here
  Whose rest is a rest without change.

Ah! in his life had he mother or wife
  To wait for his steps on the floor?
Did beauty wax dim while waiting for him
  Who passed through the threshold no more?
Doth it trouble his head? He is one with the dead;
  He lies by the alien streams;
And sweeter than sleep is death that is deep
  And unvexed by the lordship of dreams."

There are some beautiful verses by Kendall in his "Orara" which describe what so many of us often feel but cannot express, that somewhere up some secret valley there lies a land more lovely than we have ever seen:—

"Ah! brook, above the upper bend
  I often long to stand,
Where you in soft cool shades descend
  From the untrodden land!

Ah! folded woods that hide the grace
  Of moss and torrents strong,
I often wish to know the face
  Of that which sings your song!

But I may linger long and look
  Till night is over all;
My eyes will never see the brook
  Or sweet strange waterfall.

The world is round me with its heat,
  And toil and cares that tire;
I cannot with my feeble feet
  Climb after my desire.

But on the lap of lands unseen,
  Within a secret zone,
There shine diviner gold and green
  Than man has ever known.

And where the silver waters sing
  Down hushed and holy dells,
The flower of a celestial spring—
  A tenfold splendour dwells.

Yea! in my dream of fall and brook
  By far sweet forests furled,
I see the light for which I look
  In vain through all the world.

The glory of a larger sky
  On slopes of hills sublime,
That speak with God and Morning, high
  Above the waves of Time!

Ah! happy in this sphere of change,
  Where shadows spoil the beam,
It would not do to climb that range
  And test my radiant dream.

The slightest glimpse of yonder place
  Untrodden and alone,
Might wholly kill that nameless grace,
  The charm of the unknown.

And therefore though I look and long,
  Perhaps the lot is right,
Which keeps the river of the song
  A beauty out of sight."

Another little poem of Kendall's expresses the same idea in another form, and here are two verses of it:—

"The song that once I dreamed about,
  The tender, touching thing,
As radiant as the rose without—
  The love of wind and wing;
The perfect verses to the tune
  Of woodland music set,
As beautiful as afternoon,
  Remain unwritten yet.

But in the night and when the rain
  The troubled torrent fills,
I often think I see again
  The river in the hills.
And when the day is very near
  And birds are on the wing,
My spirit fancies it can hear
  The song I cannot sing."

Another fine Australian poet, Lindsay Gordon, has written verse full of the great spaces and the virile life of the bush. This is a stanza from his " Sick Stockrider " :—

" I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share of toil,
  And life is short—the longest life a span ;
  I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
  Or for wine that maketh glad the heart of man.
  For good undone and gifts misspent and resolutions vain
  'Tis somewhat late to trouble. This I know,
  I should live the same life over, if I had to live again ;
  And the chances are I go where most men go."

All the Australian poets sing with sorrow in their hearts, born of the vast lonely wastes and the desolate plains of the empty island continent. The early explorers left upon its map their sense of its enduring sadness by naming its mountains Mount Despair, Mount Misery, and Mount Dreadful.

Always their poets seem to consecrate in verse the high hope perished, the young life wasted, and the sanguine heart broken, in the unequal struggle against things insurmountable and inexorable that ever confront them in their melancholy land :—

" I miss the voice of one I've heard
  (The sunlight sinks upon the sea),
He sang as blythe as any bird,
  And shook the rafters with his glee ;

But times have changed with him, I wot,
  By fickle fortune crossed and flung;
Far stouter heart than mine he's got
  If now he sings as thus he sung.
Yet some must swim when others sink,
  And some must sink when others swim;
Make merry, comrades, eat and drink—
    The lights are growing dim.

The fruit is ripe, the wine is red
  (The sunlight fades upon the sea),
To us the absent are the dead,
  The dead to us must absent be.
We too the absent ranks must join;
  And friends will censure and forget.
There's metal base in every coin;
  Men vanish, leaving traces yet
Of evil and of good behind,
  Since false notes taint the skylark's hymn,
And dross still lurks in gold refined—
    The lights are growing dim."

These stanzas are from Lindsay Gordon's "Sunlight on the Sea," and are typical of the pervading sadness of the verse of Australia.

Of all the English-speaking communities scattered over the world, the Australians seem to me to have produced the most indigenous poetry. The poets of America might for the most part have written their poems in London; with the exception of the songs of the negroes, which have a character quite original and characteristic of the plantations of the South.

These ballads have managed to surpass in popularity all the verses of the Americans of white descent, and with their melodies have gone round the world. I will quote for you two that are familiar everywhere, but have not been included in serious collections; for my part, I think they possess all the qualities of fine poetry. They are in a dialect; but so is the greatest work of Burns. They express the pervading sorrow of the life of the slave, and belong to the time,

now passing into distant history, when the negroes had little happiness and no hope.

" The sun shines bright in the old Kentucky home,
'Tis summer, the darkies are gay;
The corn top's ripe, and the meadow's in the bloom,
While the birds make music all the day.
The young folks roll on the little cabin floor,
All merry, all happy, and bright;
By-'n-by hard times comes a-knocking at the door,
Then my old Kentucky home, good night!
Weep no more, my lady,
Oh! weep no more to-day!
We will sing one song for the old Kentucky home,
For the old Kentucky home, far away.

They hunt no more for the 'possum and the coon,
On the meadow, the hill, and the shore;
They sing no more by the glimmer of the moon,
On the bench by the old cabin door.
The day goes by like a shadow o'er the heart,
With sorrow, where all was delight:
The time has come when the darkies have to part,
Then my old Kentucky home, good night!

" The head must bow, and the back will have to bend,
Wherever the darkey may go;
A few more days, and the trouble all will end,
In the field where the sugar-canes grow.
A few more days for to tote the weary load,
No matter, 'twill never be light,
A few more days till we totter on the road,
Then my old Kentucky home, good night!
Weep no more, my lady,
Oh! weep no more to-day!
We will sing one song for the old Kentucky home,
For the old Kentucky home, far away."

This and the next one were both written by Stephen Collins Foster, who died in 1864. I think his verses wonderfully bring to the heart the mournfulness of the poor slaves.

"Way down upon de Swanee Ribber,
Far, far away,
Dere's wha my heart is turning ebber,
Dere's wha de old folks stay.
All up and down de whole creation
Sadly I roam,
Still longing for de old plantation
And for de old folks at home.
All de world am sad and dreary
Eberywhere I roam;
Oh! darkies, how my heart grows weary,
Far from de old folks at home!

All round de little farm I wandered
When I was young,
Den many happy days I squandered,
Many de songs I sung.
When I was playing wid my brudder,
Happy was I,
Oh! take me to my kind old mudder,
Dere let me live and die!

One little hut among de bushes,
One dat I love,
Still sadly to my memory rushes,
No matter where I rove.
When will I see de bees a-humming
All round de comb?
When will I hear de banjo tumming
Down in my good old home?
All de world am sad and dreary
Eberywhere I roam;
Oh! darkies, how my heart grows weary,
Far from de old folks at home!"

These and other negro songs are as characteristic of the Southern States and the institution of slavery as are the Australian poems of their great continent.

Your loving old

G. P.

XIII

My dear Antony,

To-day I will finish what I have to say about the poets of America.

Only one American has yet written anything in what may be called the grand style, and, strangely enough, he wrote this when he was a lad of eighteen, and thereafter never again rose to a like greatness of utterance, although he continued to write verse of altogether less merit for very many years, and died an old man.

William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis" is a wonderful poem for a boy to have written. Its concluding lines rise to an elevation of solemn grandeur :—

> " Yet not to thine eternal resting-place
> Shalt thou retire alone, nor could'st thou wish
> Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
> With patriarchs of the infant world, with kings,
> The powerful of the earth, the wise, the good,
> Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past
> All in one mighty sepulchre. The hills
> Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun ; the vales
> Stretching in pensive quietness between ;
> The venerable woods, rivers that move
> In majesty, and the complaining brooks
> That make the meadows green ; and poured round all
> Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste
> Are but the solemn decorations all
> Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun,
> The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
> Are shining on the sad abodes of death
> Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
> The globe are but a handful to the tribes

That slumber in its bosom. Take the wings
Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound
Save his own dashings—yet the dead are there;
And millions in those solitudes, since first
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.
So shalt thou rest, and what if thou withdraw
In silence from the living, and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
Plod on, and each one as before will chase
His favourite phantom; yet all these shall leave
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come
And make their bed with thee. As the long train
Of ages glides away, the sons of men,
The youths in life's fresh spring, and he who goes
In the full strength of years, matron and maid,
The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man,
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side
By those who in their turn shall follow them.

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not like the quarry slave at night
Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

Thomas Bailey Aldrich is a popular poet in the United States, and he has written some true poetry. Here is a specimen of his verse :—

" I little know or care
If the blackbird on the bough
Is filling all the air
With his soft crescendo now;

For she is gone away,
And when she went she took
The Springtime in her look,
The peach-blow in her cheek,
The laughter from the brook,
The blue from out the May—
And what she calls a week
Is for ever and a day!

It's little that I mind
How the blossoms pink and white
At every touch of wind
Fall a-trembling with delight,
For in the leafy lane,
Beneath the garden boughs,
And through the silent house,
One thing alone I seek.
Until she come again
The May is not the May,
And what she calls a week
Is for ever and a day!"

This is charming and dainty, and I hope, Antony, that the little girl went back to him, and was gracious to him when the week was up!

Another writer of skilful and welcome verse is John Vance Cheney, who was curator of the library at Chicago. Here is a bright little poem from his pen:—

"Who drives the horses of the sun
Shall lord it but a day;
Better the lowly deed were done
And kept the humble way.

The rust will find the sword of fame,
The dust will hide the crown;
Aye! none shall nail so high his name
Time will not tear it down.

The happiest heart that ever beat
Was in some quiet breast,
That found the common daylight sweet
And left to Heaven the rest."

This little poem, Antony, might have appropriately found its way into my letters to you *On the Happy Life.* Even in Chicago quietness and contentment can be found by stepping out of the roaring city into the serene peace of its great library.

There was published in America in 1893 a small volume of verses by Anne Reeve Aldrich. She had died on a night in 1892, at the age of twenty-six, just before dawn, and on her death-bed, when too far gone into the dark valley to hold a pen, she dictated these few lines :—

> " I shall go out when the light comes in—
> There lie my cast-off form and face ;
> I shall pass Dawn on her way to earth
> As I seek for a path through space.
>
> I shall go out when the light comes in ;
> Would I might take one ray with me !
> It is blackest night between the worlds,
> And how is a soul to see ? "

And so she passed from the world as the dawn came up ; but she had written some beautiful verses which at any rate you shall know of, Antony, although, with so many other lovely things, they are like to be lost in the roaring cataract of modern books :—

> " Ah, let my hand lie warm in thine, the hand that held the pen,
> It shall not miss its once loved task, nor long to work again,
> And let me hide my weary eyes against thy sheltering breast ;
> Let others wear the bays I craved ; I know that love is best.
>
> Art's paths were over-sharp for me and cold its mountain air ;
> For I am but a woman, dear, and Love's land is so fair !
> So half-way up Fame's steep incline I pause and yield my place.
> What ! Dare you ask if I regret ? Bend close and read my face ! "

Again :—

"O, take me back to those low-lying lands
I used to love. I want that inlet's tide
That runs out moaning 'twixt the yellow fields
To where the shimmering blue is rippling wide,
And lay my broken body on the sands
Where strong and sparse marsh-grasses wave above
The salty earth that bears them ; let me rest,
For I am very tired of faithless love.

And let me feel upon my pallid mouth
The wind's rough friendly kisses, cold and clean
Against my lips that can but shape a moan,
Where warmer, falser kisses once have been.
I want to lay my cheek on kindly earth,
I want to see the truthful sky above,
I want those old things I have long forgot,
For I am very tired of faithless love."

And yet two more from this little volume :—

"There was a time when I could think of death
As calmly as of life ; 'twas ere I knew
What sacrament of joy beyond all dream
Lies in the life welded from love of two.

Now at its whisper I more closely cling
In deadliest fear to thee. Yet one must die,
And some day one must leave the other here,—
Ay, one must go first, either thou or I.

And then I heavenward turn my anguished face,
And thank God that the way at last is free ;
And none can hold, if through the pass of death
Even as through life, I chose to follow thee !"

"I thought I knew her past as mine
Until she lay there dead,
And I explored that Indian chest
Lacquered in gold and red.

I did not stop to moralise ;
The lesson there was plain,
I hurried home to tear and burn,
And make her loss my gain.

How inconsiderate to die
And leave such things to paint
An unguessed past, when friends bereaved
Prefer to mourn a saint ! "

Such are some of the verses of this young American girl who died untimely. Fruitless is it to wonder to what further excellences of song and poem she might have attained had she lived longer.

" And she is gone, O woe !
Woods cut again do grow,
Bud doth the rose and daisy, winter done ;
But we, once dead, no more do see the sun."

So wrote old Drummond of Hawthornden in the seventeenth century.

Up and down through *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* Oliver Wendell Holmes scatters his verses, and some of them entitle him to be ranked among America's poets. Never was there a man who wrote more verses for public dinners, unveiling of statues, and like dedicatory occasions ; but for the most part these were well enough to decorate a bill of fare or a programme, and to be forgotten on the way home.

Holmes adopted the vile habit of writing " one takes his umbrella " instead of " one takes one's umbrella." One does not, Antony, take his umbrella if one is not a thief. This is one of the two or three detestable mistakes in language I hope you will always avoid.

Here are some others :—

Never say " once " when you mean " when once." " Once the river was crossed, all was well," is a

statement that the river was crossed on one occasion; there is nothing conditional in the statement.

Never say anything happened "prior to" something else. Prior is not an adverb but an adjective; the proper adverb in such a case is "previously."

Never use "phenomenal" as meaning "extraordinary." A phenomenon is something made manifest and displayed; there is no meaning of "unusual" in it.

Never, in speaking, fail to sound the "g" in recognise.

Never, in speaking, say *f*inancial, making the "i" long.

Never use the verb "to aggravate" as meaning "to annoy." It does not mean anything of the kind; it means "to make heavier or more important."

Never use "decimate" as meaning destruction up to any proportion short of total extinction; it means the destruction of one in ten, no more and no less.

If ever you write imaginary conversations, never make anyone say "Humph"; no human being ever says it to any other human being.

Never allude to "stretching a point"; the thing can't be done.

But to return to Oliver Wendell Holmes. After saying, "For that great procession of the unloved, who not only wear the crown of thorns, but must hide it under the locks of brown or grey, there is no depth of tenderness in my nature that pity has not sounded," he writes some verses, some of which I now quote:—

> "A few can touch the magic string,
> And noisy Fame is proud to win them;
> Alas for those that never sing,
> But die with all their music in them!
> Nay, grieve not for the dead alone,
> Whose song has told their heart's sad story,—
> Weep for the voiceless, who have known
> The cross without the crown of glory.

O hearts that break and give no sign
 Save whitening lip and fading tresses,
Till death pours out his cordial wine
 Slow dropped from misery's crushing presses,—
If singing breath or echoing chord
 To every hidden pang were given,
What endless melodies were poured
 As sad as earth, as sweet as heaven!"

A very fine love poem was written by Princess Troubetzkoy, who was born in America, and therefore should properly be classed among American writers:—

"Take all of me—I am thine own, heart, soul,
Brain, body,—all; all that I am or dream
Is thine for ever; yea, though space would teem
With thy conditions, I'd fulfil the whole—
Were to fulfil them to be loved by thee—
Oh! love me! were to love me but a way
To kill me—love me! So to die would be
To live for ever. Let me hear thee say
Once only, 'Dear, I love thee,' then all life
Would be one sweet remembrance, thou its king;
Nay, thou art that already, and the strife
Of twenty worlds could not uncrown thee. Bring,
O Time! my monarch to possess his throne,
Which is my heart, and for himself alone."

Nathaniel Willis wrote one fine poem which I will quote to you. He was a scholar and man of cultivation who was an ornament to American journalism.

"The shadows lay along the Broadway,
 'Twas near the twilight-tide,
And slowly there a lady fair
 Was walking in her pride;
Alone walked she, but viewlessly
 Walked spirits at her side.

Peace charmed the street beneath her feet
 And Honour charmed the air;
And all astir looked kind on her,
 And called her good as fair;
For all God ever gave to her
 She kept with chary care.

She kept with care her beauties rare
 From lovers warm and true,
For her heart was cold to all but gold,
 And the rich came not to woo.—
But honoured well are charms to sell
 If priests the selling do.

Now walking there was one more fair,
 A slight girl lily-pale;
And she had unseen company
 To make the spirit quail,
'Twixt Want and Scorn she walked forlorn,
 And nothing could avail.

No mercy now can clear her brow
 For this world's peace to pray,
For as love's wild prayer dissolved in air
 Her woman's heart gave way.
But the sin forgiven by Christ in Heaven,
 By Man is cursed alway."

I suppose, Antony, I must mention Walt Whitman before I pass from America: though why in the world he is called a poet by anyone I do not know. The bulk of his productions is not even reasonably passable prose. This is the kind of thing he printed as poetry:—

" The axe leaps,
The solid forest gives fluid utterance,
They tumble forth, they rise and form,
Hut, tent, landing, survey,
Flail, plough, pick, crowbar, spade,
Shingle, rail, prop, wainscot, jamb, lath, panel, gable.

Citadel, ceiling, saloon, academy, organ, exhibition house, library,
Cornice, trellis, pilaster, balcony, window, shutter, turret, porch,
Hoe, rake, pitchfork . . ."

and so on, as long as you have the patience to read it. I shall not ask you, Antony, to accept absurd nonsense in no rhyme or metre or rhythm as poetry.

Walt Whitman, besides writing this kind of thing, has displayed himself as a gross carnalist, and similarly minded folk have hailed him as being "virile." I dare say he is virile; and so is a bull in a farmyard!

Your loving old

G. P.

XIV

My dear Antony,

I have something to say to you about what may be generally described as religious poetry. Religious poetry to very many people begins and ends with what they find in hymnals, than which hardly anything in literature is so flat, commonplace, and pedestrian. No taste or scholarship ever seems to be applied to the collection of religious verse or hymns.

And yet, scattered through the poetry of England there are many beautiful verses giving expression to deep religious feeling.

I think most people would agree that Cardinal Newman's verses, that I now quote, touch a supreme note in the region of devotional poetry :—

" Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on ;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet ; I do not ask to see
The distant scene ; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Should'st lead me on ;
I loved to choose and see my path ; but now
Lead Thou me on.
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will : remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone ;
And with the morn those Angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile."

The Cardinal wrote this poem when storm-tossed in a frail packet-boat in the Straits of Bonifacio, between Corsica and Sardinia. I have been in a storm at night there myself, which induced the captain to turn about and abandon the attempt to pass through the Strait, and to pass up and round Corsica instead. And there was the same light across the waters to warn mariners which the Cardinal had seen when he wrote his verses, and the wild and perilous scene inspired him to pen those lines which are now familiar to the ends of the English-speaking world.

Alfred Noyes has written a very beautiful little poem called "The Secret Inn," of which I will quote a few passages:—

"Enough of dreams! no longer mock
The burdened hearts of men!
Not on the cloud, but on the rock
Build thou thy faith again;
O range no more the realms of air,
Stoop to the glen-bound streams;
Thy hope was all too like despair,
Enough, enough of dreams.

An earth-born creed? We may not praise
The Eternal's lowly house;
Yet, through the rude beams may we gaze
And the interwoven boughs,
If on the little Child thou shine,
Whom, though we dream no more,
Here in the heart's hushed Palestine
The magi still adore.

O lowly creed, a wayside inn
For wayfarers! yet come,
Now that the long dark hours begin,
Lead thou the nations home.
Shine on the little roof, fair star,
The thatch in silver steep,
That kings may come to it from afar,
And the shepherds from their sheep."

And here, Antony, I will quote two verses written in deep anguish by one who fell into an abyss of sin and shame, was punished with an awful severity, and repented in the dust :—

"And every human heart that breaks
  In prison cell or yard,
Is as that broken box that gave
  Its treasure to the Lord,
And filled the unclean leper's house
  With scent of costliest nard.

Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
  And peace of pardon win!
How else may man make straight his plan
  And cleanse his soul from sin?
How else but through a broken heart
  May Lord Christ enter in?"

The greatest writer of religious verse in the nineteenth century has always seemed to me to be Christina Rossetti. Her heart seemed full of a half-despairing anguish, which makes her verses appeal very poignantly to anyone who reads her poems :—

"I would have gone; God bade me stay;
  I would have worked; God bade me rest;
He broke my will from day to day,
  He read my yearnings unexpressed,
    And said them nay.

Now I would stay; God bids me go;
  Now I would rest; God bids me work;
He breaks my heart tossed to and fro,
  My soul is wrung with doubts that lurk,
    And vex it so.

I go, Lord, where Thou sendest me;
  Day after day I plod and moil;
But Christ, my God, when will it be
  That I may let alone my toil
    And rest with Thee?"

Again :—

" So tired I am, so weary of to-day,
So unrefreshed from foregone weariness,
So overburdened by foreseen distress,
So lagging and so stumbling on my way
I scarce can rouse myself to watch or pray,
To hope, or aim, or toil for more or less—
Ah ! always less and less, even while I press
Forward and toil and aim as best I may—
Half starved of soul and heartsick utterly.
Yet lift I up my heart and soul and eyes,
Which fail in looking upward, toward the prize ;
Me, Lord, Thou seest, though I see not Thee ;
Me now, as once the thief in Paradise,
Even me, O Lord, my Lord, remember me."

Again :—

" Have mercy, Thou, my God—mercy, my God !
For I can hardly bear life day by day ;
Be I here or there, I fret myself away :
Lo ! for Thy staff, I have but felt Thy rod
Along this tedious desert-path long trod.
When will Thy judgement judge me, yea or nay ?
I pray for grace ; but then my sins unpray
My prayer : on holy ground I, fool, stand shod—
While still Thou haunt'st me, faint upon the cross,
A sorrow beyond sorrow in Thy look,
Unutterable craving for my soul.
All-faithful Thou, Lord ; I, not Thou, forsook
Myself : I, traitor, slunk back from the goal ;
Lord, I repent—help Thou my helpless loss."

The very breaks and syncopations in these lines seem to express the breathless anguish of her prayers. One seems to hear the sobs of despair wrung from the suppliant prone at the foot of the cross.

Her devotional poems all possess this note of almost terrible sincerity of sorrow. And yet here and there she seems to be filled with the sure and certain hope of eternity, and to rejoice :—

"Up the high steep, across the golden sill,
Up out of shadows into very light,
Up out of dwindling life to life aglow,
I watch you, my beloved, out of sight;—
Sight fails me, and my heart is watching still:—
My heart fails, yet I follow on to know."

What was the cause of this heart weariness of Christina Rossetti we should not perhaps too impertinently inquire; but it is permitted to us to see in so spontaneous a writer the possibility of a personal sorrow embalmed in the following moving lines:—

"I took my heart in my hand,
O my love! O my love!
I said:—'Let me fall or stand,
Let me live or die.
But this once hear me speak,
O my love! O my love!
Yet a woman's words are weak;
You should speak—not I.'

You took my heart in your hand
With a friendly smile,
With a critical eye you scanned,
Then set it down,
And said:—'It is still unripe;
Better wait awhile—
Wait till the skylarks pipe,
Till the corn grows brown.'

As you set it down it broke,—
Broke, but I did not wince.
I smiled at the speech you spoke,
At your judgement that I heard;
But I have not often smiled
Since then, nor questioned since,
Nor cared for corn-flowers wild,
Nor sung with the singing bird.

I take my heart in my hand,
O my God! O my God!
My broken heart in my hand
Thou hast seen; judge Thou.
My hope was written on sand,
O my God! O my God!
Now let Thy judgement stand;
Yea, judge me now.

This contemned of a man,
This marred one heedless day,
This heart take Thou to scan
Both within and without;
Refine with fire its gold,
Purge Thou its dross away;
Yea, hold it in Thy hold
Whence none can pluck it out."

I cannot, Antony, define precisely what it is in the writing of this or that poet that convinces one that here we have a cry wrung from the very heart, and there only excellency of verse and composition; but if we turn from these broken sighs and supplications of Christina Rossetti to the perfectly skilful devotional verse of Herrick, who was a true master of his craft, we can perceive the wide separation between them :—

"Make, make me Thine, my gracious God,
Or with Thy staff, or with Thy rod;
And be the blow, too, what it will,
Lord, I will kiss it though it kill;
Beat me, bruise me, rack me, rend me,
Yet, in torments, I'll commend Thee;
Examine me with fire, and prove me
To the full, yet I will love Thee;
Nor shalt Thou give so deep a wound
But I as patient will be found."

Mr G. K. Chesterton has written a little poem called "The Donkey" which, I think, may properly take its

place beside religious poems. These are its last three verses :—

> "With monstrous head and sickening cry,
> And ears like errant wings,
> The devil's walking parody
> On all four-footed things.
>
> The tattered outlaw of the earth,
> Of ancient crooked will;
> Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
> I keep my secret still.
>
> Fools! For I also had my hour;
> One far fierce hour and sweet;
> There was a shout about my ears,
> And palms before my feet."

In my youth I can just remember seeing Keble at Hursley Park when staying myself with Sir William Heathcote there, who was my godfather. Keble and my grandfather were lifelong friends, and Keble's *Life* was written by my grandfather after he was himself eighty years old. *The Christian Year* had an enormous sale, and there were over ninety editions of it before Keble died.

Not many people now turn to it as a depository of fine poetry apart from its ecclesiastical import, but the poem on the "Fourth Sunday in Lent" is, I think, beautiful. It alludes to Joseph entering into his private chamber, there to weep in the tumult of his emotions. Here are some of the verses :—

> "When Nature tries her finest touch,
> Weaving her vernal wreath;
> Mark ye, how close she veils her round,
> Not to be traced by sight or sound,
> Nor soiled by ruder breath?

Who ever saw the earliest rose
  First open her sweet breast ?
Or when the summer sun goes down,
The first soft star in evening's crown
  Light up her gleaming crest ?

God only, and good angels, look
  Behind the blissful screen,
As when, triumphant o'er His woes,
The Son of God by moonlight rose,
  By all but Heaven unseen.

So, truest image of the Christ,
  Old Israel's long-lost son,
What time, with sweet forgiving cheer,
He called His conscious brethren near,
  Would weep with them alone.

He could not trust His melting soul
  But in His Maker's sight,—
Then why should gentle hearts and true,
Bare to the rude world's withering view
  Their treasure of delight !

No—let the dainty rose awhile
  Her bashful fragrance hide,
Rend not her silken veil too soon,
But leave her, in her own soft noon,
  To flourish and abide."

In former letters to you, Antony, I have told you why you should love and reverence the cathedrals of England as glorious evidences of the adoration of our forefathers ; and now I will quote some verses which express very beautifully the peace and loveliness of a cathedral close. They are by Cora Kennedy Aitken :—

" The evening with soft footsteps steals along
The velvet green of the cathedral close ;
Gravely her tender eyelids droop among
The solemn trees that guard God's holy house ;

And her sweet eyes upon the clustering graves
Rest like a benediction, quieter
Than ever in the wild old years they were,
And merciful to-night are the soft hands she waves.

Her thoughts are angels' thoughts : there is no need
To look for blessing to the soaring stone
That, white upon the air, like a soul freed
Upward to God climbs fearlessly alone ;
There is no need to listen for the bell
To overflow with music,—when the heart beats
As fast and full with aspirations sweet,
Doth any sweetest music sweeter story tell ?

This is God's house ; here prayers arise, and praise
And music from its cloistered home below
Flames in victorious symphonies that glow
In golden strength among the windows' rays,
To claim the royal thoughts that shine enthroned,
Magnificent among the lily wings
Of angels, or the purple robes of kings,
Or the sad eyes of saints by a wild world disowned.

All things the windows hold, there is no lack
Of form or colour or divine idea ;
And music from their contact wanders back,
A thing more wondrous and more sweet to hear,
And peals in benediction to and fro,
Largesse on largesse crying as it goes,
Till even the humblest churchyard flower knows
Something of God, and dreams of all that's left to know.

Here, with the dreaming flowers at our feet,
The soul that grieves the most might rest from grief,
Might think because of them that life is sweet,
Perforce believe for their sake in belief !
I would I knew, oh ! thou divinest night,
And thou, white-browed cathedral, if the soul
May grow, as you are, calm and beautiful
By living always as you do with Heaven in sight ! "

I will finish this letter, Antony, with the most splendid national hymn that has ever been written for any race of men. Its peculiar glory is that it could never have arisen in the heart of any foreign poet, and that it expresses what other nations do not feel:—

> "God of our fathers, known of old,
> Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
> Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
> Dominion over palm and pine—
> Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
> Lest we forget—lest we forget!
>
> The tumult and the shouting dies;
> The Captains and the Kings depart:
> Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
> An humble and a contrite heart.
> Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
> Lest we forget—lest we forget!
>
> Far-called, our navies melt away;
> On dune and headland sinks the fire:
> Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
> Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
> Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
> Lest we forget—lest we forget!
>
> If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
> Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe,
> Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
> Or lesser breeds without the Law—
> Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
> Lest we forget—lest we forget!
>
> For heathen heart that puts her trust
> In reeking tube and iron shard,
> All valiant dust that builds on dust,
> And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,
> For frantic boast and foolish word—
> Thy Mercy on Thy People, Lord! Amen."

Rudyard Kipling has here written something for us who live in "this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England," that will last as long as our race survives, adding something imperishable to the glory of English poetry.

Your loving old

G. P.

XV

My dear Antony,

I fear I might never have become acquainted with the poems of Elinor Jenkins had they not been brought to my notice by the late Llewellyn Williams, the leader of the South Wales circuit, whose cousin she was. He showed them to me in MSS. before they were published, and told me that their author was a young girl only eighteen years old.

This was in 1915, when the war had been waged for a little over a year. Her brother had gone out to fight, and the slight volume of poems had not long been published before the brother was killed, and his gifted young sister had followed him broken-hearted to the grave.

One of the poems describes the evening in the home round the dining-table on the night of her brother's departure to the front. They wait for the fatal moment of parting, dissembling their anguish ; then the verses continue thus :—

> " Till the hour struck—then desperately we sought
> And found no further respite—only tears
> We would not shed, and words we might not say.
> We needs must know that now the time was come,
> Yet still against the strangling foe we fought,
> And some of us were brave, and some
> Borrowed a bubble courage nigh to breaking.
> And he that went, perforce went speedily,
> And stayed not for leave-taking :—
> But even in going, as he would dispel
> The bitterness of incomplete good-byes,
> He paused within the circle of dim light
> And turned to us a face, lit seemingly
> Less by the lamp than by his shining eyes.

So in the radiance of his mastered fate
A moment stood our soldier by the gate,
And laughed his long farewell—
Then passed into the silence and the night."

To how many in this stricken England did such a leave-taking come in those awful years, and how often, as in this case, was it an everlasting farewell!

To Elinor Jenkins, such scenes and sorrows first gave her the power to consecrate them in verse, and then crushed her out of life.

She seems to have felt the anguish of those times beating upon her soul day and night :—

" All night, from the quiet street,
Comes the sound, without pause or break,
Of the marching legions' feet
To listeners lying awake.

Their faces none may descry;
Night folds them close like a pall;
But the feet of them passing by
Tramp on the hearts of all.

What comforting makes them strong?
What trust and what fears have they
That march without music or song
To death at the end of the way?

No sleep my soul to befriend;
No voice, neither answering light,
But darkness that knows no end,
And feet going by in the night."

I will quote no more, for you must read these poems in the little volume from beginning to end.

But one tender little epitaph on a little child buried abroad I cannot forbear to cite :—

" Father, forget not, now that we must go,
A little one in alien earth low laid;
Said some kind angel when Thy trumpets blow,
Lest he should wake alone, and be afraid."

You will notice, Antony, that in my letters to you I am rather inclined to quote for your admiration poetry that is not generally familiar with the public; but you must not therefore think that I do not love many of the well-known poems that all the world has long ago taken to its heart.

Now and then I have cited these world-famous gems; but for the most part, I have taken for granted that you do not need me to tell you to read "The Ancient Mariner," or "The Bridge of Sighs," or "The Song of the Shirt," or Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyám," or a score and more of such masterpieces with which everyone is acquainted.

Some of the very simplest of verses are the most haunting and perfect. Nothing can improve such a verse as this:—

> "I remember, I remember,
> The fir trees dark and high,
> I used to think their slender tops
> Were close against the sky;
> It was a childish ignorance,
> But now 'tis little joy,
> To know I'm farther off from Heaven
> Than when I was a boy."

Tom Hood was one of the truly noble poets of the nineteenth century who devoted his great gift to moving the hearts of his countrymen towards loving-kindness and charity; and it was a fine appreciation of this quality in Hood's poetry that led Lord Houghton, when asked to compose an epitaph for his grave, to exclaim without hesitation:—

> "'Here lies Thomas Hood.
> He sang the Song of the Shirt.'"

It is not necessary for me to tell you that Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," and his "Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni," are both of them surpassing

visionary flights of inspired poetry, and that, besides "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," there lie scattered through his works many splendid passages such as this :—

> "For the stricken heart of Love
> This visible nature, and this common world
> Is all too narrow ; yea, a deeper import
> Lurks in the legend told my infant years
> Than lies upon that truth we live to learn.
> For fable is Love's world, his home, his birthplace ;
> Delightedly dwells he 'mong fays and talismans
> And spirits ; and delightedly believes
> Divinities, being himself divine.
> The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
> The fair humanities of old religion,
> The power, the beauty, and the majesty,
> That had their haunts in dale, or piny mountain,
> Or forest by slow stream, or pebbly spring,
> Or chasms and watery depths ; all these have vanished ;
> They live no longer in the faith of reason ;
> But still the heart doth need a language, still
> Doth the old instinct bring back the old names,
> And to yon starry world they now are gone,
> Spirits or gods, that used to share this earth
> With man as with their friend ; and to the lover
> Yonder they move, from yonder visible sky
> Shoot influence down ; and even at this day
> 'Tis Jupiter who brings whate'er is great,
> And Venus who brings everything that's fair !"

I am very fond of the following lines, and they are the more precious to me, because I possess them in Coleridge's own handwriting here among my precious MSS. in my library :—

> "Dewdrops are the gems of morning
> But the tears of mournful eve !
> Where no hope is, life's a warning
> That only serves to make us grieve

When we are old!
That only serves to make us grieve
With oft and tedious taking-leave,
Like some poor nigh related guest
That may not rudely be dismissed,
Yet hath outstayed his welcome while,
And tells the jest without the smile."

Coleridge as a young man had so great an admiration for Bowles' sonnets, that he copied them out several times to give to friends.

One of these sonnets certainly seems to me to possess a pensive beauty and to deserve preservation. It was written on "Dover Cliffs":—

"On these white cliffs, that calm above the flood
Uplift their shadowing heads, and, at their feet,
Scarce hear the surge that has for ages beat,
Sure many a lonely wanderer has stood;
And whilst the lifted murmur met his ear,
And o'er the distant billows the still eve
Sailed slow, has thought of all his heart must leave
To-morrow: of the friends he loved most dear;
Of social scenes, from which he wept to part.
But if, like me, he knew how fruitless all
The thoughts that would full fain the past recall,
Soon would he quell the rising of his heart,
And brave the wild winds and unhearing tide,
The world his country, and his God his guide."

Coleridge and Charles Lamb were lifelong friends. Coleridge was no doubt a man with obvious faults and shortcomings, but he must have been, nevertheless, a very lovable being, for he won and kept through his life the close affection of great and good men.

The brilliantly imperfect are often more attractive than the grimly faultless. Some people are adored abroad and despised at home; but Coleridge was idolised by his daughter and his son-in-law.

Lamb, in the well-known lines I shall now quote,

alludes to Coleridge as the friend from whom he had a passing estrangement—the only one in their lives:—

"I have had playmates, I have had companions
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late with my bosom cronies—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a love once, fairest among women;
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man;
Like an ingrate I left my friend abruptly—
Left him to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like I paced round the haunts of my childhood,
Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse—
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
Why wert not thou born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces—

How some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

Coleridge, besides being a rare and beautiful poet, was a wonderful talker, perhaps the most inspired that ever lived. Wordsworth called him:—

"The wrapt one of the godlike forehead,
The Heaven-eye'd creature."

People of distinction in all walks of life went up to Highgate once a week to hear him pour forth his soaring eloquence. Even grim old Carlyle yields his grudging tribute.

I came lately on a passage in the *Journal* of Anne

Chalmers, daughter of the famous Dr Chalmers, which is as follows :—

"On our way we paid a visit of half an hour to Coleridge, then living with Dr Gillman at Highgate. It appeared to me the most intense half-hour I ever spent in my life, owing to the beauty of his tones and language while he poured forth a monologue on Mr Irving and on the Book of Revelations. . . .

"The effect of his monologue was on me like that of listening to entrancing music. I burst into tears when it stopped, and we found ourselves suddenly in the open air."

It is melancholy to think of all that fountain of wisdom and eloquence perished and forgotten like the leaves of autumn. His son, Hartley Coleridge, was endowed with many gifts, but they were rendered of little avail by an infirmity of purpose and debility of will for which he may not have been wholly to blame.

Such a father was not unlikely to have an abnormal son. Hartley lived most of his life in a little cottage on the shore of Rydal Water, just below Wordsworth's house, to whom he was much beholden in many ways for neighbourly kindnesses.

Conscious of how little he had achieved in spite of many gifts and powers, he wrote these touching lines:—

"Long time a child, and still a child when years
Had painted manhood on my cheek, was I;
For yet I lived like one not born to die;
A thriftless prodigal of smiles and tears;
No hope I needed, and I knew no fears—
But sleep, though sweet, is only sleep, and waking,
I waked to sleep no more, at once o'ertaking
The vanguard of my age with all arrears
Of duty on my back—nor child nor man,
Nor youth nor sage, I find my head is grey,
For I have lost the race I never ran,
A rathe December blights my lagging May.
And still I am a child, though I be old;
Time is my debtor for my years untold."

Another very touching little poem of his is worth preserving from oblivion :—

> " The earliest wish I ever knew
> Was woman's kind regard to win;
> I felt it long ere passion grew,
> Ere such a wish could be a sin,
> And still it lasts ; the yearning ache
> No cure has found, no comfort known ;
> If she did love, 'twas for my sake,
> She could not love me for her own."

Your loving old

G. P.

XVI

MY DEAR ANTONY,

One of the most charming poets of the latter half of the nineteenth century was Austin Dobson. He was a finished student of the eighteenth century, into which he liked to retroject many of his poems. He had a very definite style of his own, which renders any verse of his instantly recognisable; and of himself he justly said that :—

> " . . . He held his pen in trust
> To Art, not serving shame or lust."

All his work is fresh and sweet and tender :—

> " Between the rail of woven brass
> That hides the Strangers' Pew,
> I hear the grey-haired vicar pass
> From section one to two.
>
> And somewhere on my left I see,
> Whene'er I chance to look,
> A soft-eyed girl, St Cecily,
> Who notes them—in a book.
>
> Ah, worthy GOODMAN,—sound divine
> Shall I your wrath incur,
> If I admit these thoughts of mine
> Will sometimes stray—to her ?
>
> I know your theme, and I revere ;
> I hear your precepts tried ;
> Must I confess I also hear
> A sermon at my side ?

Or how explain this need I feel,—
This impulse prompting me
Within my secret self to kneel
To Faith,—to Purity ? "

And here is a very lovable character drawn with a swift and certain touch, which leaves an indelible picture in the memory :—

" Monsieur the Curé down the street
Comes with his kind old face—
With his coat worn bare and his straggling hair,
And his green umbrella case.

You may see him pass by the little *Grande Place*
And the tiny *Hôtel de Ville*;
He smiles as he goes to the *fleuriste* Rose
And the *pompier* Théophile.

He turns, as a rule, through the *Marché* cool,
Where the noisy fishwives call;
And his compliment pays to the *belle Thérèse*,
As she knits in her dusky stall.

There's a letter to drop at the locksmith's shop,
And Toto, the locksmith's niece,
Has jubilant hopes, for the Curé gropes
In his tails for a *pain d'épice*.

There's a little dispute with a merchant of fruit,
Who is said to be heterodox,
Which will ended be with a ' *Ma foi, oui*,'
And a pinch from the Curé's box.

There's also a word that no one heard
To the furrier's daughter, Lou;
And a pale cheek fed with a flickering red,
And a ' *Bon Dieu, garde M'sieur*.'

But a grander way for the *Sous-Préfet*,
And a bow for Ma'am'selle Anne;
And a mock ' off hat ' to the Notary's cat,
And a nod to the Sacristan ;—

For ever through life the Curé goes
  With a smile on his kind old face—
With his coat worn bare and his straggling hair,
  And his green umbrella case."

Now and then Dobson said a word that showed that he felt the loss of moral purpose in the world about him. His lines on "Don Quixote" end on this fine note :—

"Alas! poor Knight! alas! poor soul possessed!
Yet would to-day, when Courtesy grows chill
And life's fine loyalties are turned to jest,
Some fire of thine might burn within us still!
Ah, would but one might lay his lance in rest,
And charge in earnest—were it but a mill!"

In the little poem on "The Ladies of St James's," Dobson catches for us all that is so gallant and picturesque in the eighteenth century, and adds to it a flavour all his own :—

"The ladies of St James's
  Go swinging to the play,
Their footmen run before them
  With a 'Stand by! Clear the way!'
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
  She takes her buckled shoon,
When we go out a-courting
  Beneath the harvest moon.

The ladies of St James's
  Wear satin on their backs;
They sit all night at Ombre
  With candles all of wax;
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
  She dons her russet gown,
And runs to gather May dew
  Before the world is down.

The ladies of St James's!
  They are so fine and fair,
You'd think a box of essences
  Was broken in the air;

But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
  The breath of heath and furze,
When breezes blow at morning,
  Is not so fresh as hers.

The ladies of St James's!
  They're painted to the eyes,
Their white, it stays for ever;
  Their red, it never dies;
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
  Her colour comes and goes;
It trembles to a lily,
  It wavers to a rose.

The ladies of St James's!
  You scarce can understand
The half of all their speeches,
  Their phrases are so grand;
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
  Her shy and simple words
Are clear as, after rain-drops,
  The music of the birds.

The ladies of St James's!
  They have their fits and freaks;
They smile on you—for seconds,
  They frown on you—for weeks;
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
  Come either storm or shine,
From Shrovetide unto Shrovetide
  Is always true—and mine.

My Phyllida! my Phyllida!
  I care not though they heap
The hearts of all St James's,
  And give me all to keep;
I care not whose the beauties
  Of all the world may be,
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
  Is all the world to me."

Austin Dobson, like all poets, had a command of an excellent prose style, and wrote some charming essays

on the eighteenth century. He rather stood aside from the world, and would never have burst upon the public as did Sir William Watson with his "Purple East."

Another poet of the Victorian reign whose work seems to me to have been rather neglected was Robert Buchanan. In my youth he fought a doughty battle against what he called "the fleshly school," and certainly displayed himself as a fine controversial swordsman.

He was also a capable writer of novels; but to me, Antony, he appeals strongly as a true poet.

His "Bookworm" certainly deserves to be included in any collection of English poetry. It blends pathos and humour, which, when happily achieved, is a precious conjunction:—

"With spectacles upon his nose
He shuffles up and down;
Of antique fashion are his clothes,
His napless hat is brown.
A mighty watch of silver wrought
Keeps time in sun and rain
To the dull ticking of the thought
Within his dusty brain.

To see him at the bookstall stand
And bargain for the prize,
With the odd sixpence in his hand
And greed in his grey eyes;
Then conquering, grasp the book, half-blind,
And take the homeward track,
For fear the man should change his mind
And want the bargain back.

The waves of life about him beat,
He scarcely lifts his gaze,
He hears within the crowded street
The wash of ancient days—
If ever his short-sighted eyes
Look forward, he can see
Vistas of dusty libraries
Prolonged eternally.

But think not as he walks along
  His brain is dead and cold;
His soul is thinking in the tongue
  Which Plato spake of old;
And while some grinning cabman sees
  His quaint shape with a jeer,
He smiles—for Aristophanes
  Is joking in his ear.

Around him stretch Athenian walks
  And strange shapes under trees;
He pauses in a dream and talks
  Great speech with Socrates.
Then as the fancy fails—still meshed
  In thoughts that go and come,
Feels in his pouch, and is refreshed
  At touch of some old tome.

The mighty world of human kind
  Is as a shadow dim;
He walks through life like one half-blind,
  And all looks dark to him;
But put his nose to leaves antique,
  And hold before his sight
Some pressed and withered flowers of Greek,
  And all is life and light.

A blessing on his hairs so grey,
  And coat of dingy brown!
May bargains bless him every day
  As he goes up and down.
Long may the bookstall keeper's face
  In dull times smile again,
To see him round with shuffling pace
  The corner of the lane!

A good old ragpicker is he
  Who, following morn and eve
The quick feet of humanity,
  Searches the dust they leave;
He pokes the dust, he sifts with care,
  He searches close and deep,
Proud to discover here and there
  A treasure in the heap!"

I am something of such an old ragpicker myself, Antony, as these letters of mine show, and I know the pleasure of unearthing precious odds and ends that the world has neglected and forgotten.

Buchanan could write with vision on occasion, as in his "Last Song of Apollo." In it he describes

> "the ancient gods divine
> Wan and weary o'er their wine,"

who

> "Wail in their ghastly banquet-hall with large eyes fixed on mine."

And then the advance upon them of the overwhelming and majestic figure of Christ is thus described :—

> "Ah, woe! ah, woe!
> One climbeth from below,
> A mortal shape with pallid smile doth rise,
> Bearing a heavy cross and crowned with thorn,
> His brow is moist with blood, His strange sweet eyes
> Look piteous and forlorn;
> Hark! oh, hark! His cold footfall
> Breaks upon that banquet-hall!
> God and goddess start to hear,
> Earth, air, ocean, moan in fear.
> Shadows of the Cross and Him
> Make the banquet-table dim,
> Silent sit the gods divine,
> Old and haggard o'er their wine,
> And slowly to my song they fade with large eyes fixed on mine!"

Buchanan wrote another excellent poem called "The Starling," which, like "The Bookworm," mingles sighs and smiles in a most affecting union. His work constantly shows a wide and benign charity.

Your loving old

G. P.

XVII

My dear Antony,

I will now say a few words on the very difficult matter of Browning's place among English poets.

To my ear he seems to be without the gift of harmony in language. In one or two short pieces, such as "The Patriot," and to a certain extent in "The Pied Piper" and "The Gallop from Ghent," he makes an approach to the melodious flow of true poetry; but through vast tracts of his immense works there is nothing more than a technical observance of the mechanical rules of prosody, and so perfunctory is this observance that, were the matter printed as prose, I cannot see that it would lose anything in value :—

> "He ended, you wager? Not half! A bet?
> Precedence to males in the alphabet!
> Still disposed of Man's A B C, there's X
> Y Z want assistance,—the Fair Sex!
> How much may be said in excuse of
> Those vanities—males see no use of—
> From silk shoe on heel to laced poll's-hood!
> What's their frailty beside our own falsehood?
> The boldest, most brazen of . . . trumpets,
> How kind they can be to their dumb pets!"

And so on. If this was meant to be funny, as was Tom Hood's comic verse, it might pass, though it has not Hood's lilt and rhythm; but there is no intention to raise a laugh. Even when his thought is fine, as in a passage that begins thus :—

> "Let tongue rest and quiet thy quill be,
> Earth is earth and not Heaven, and ne'er will be"—

we cannot seriously accept such a couplet as poetry any more than :—

> " Tongue I wag, pen I ply, who am Abbott.
> Stick thou, son, to paint-brush and dab-pot !
> But soft ! I scratch hard on the scab hot ?
> Though cured of thy plague there may linger
> A pimple I fray with rough finger ?
> So soon could my homily transmute
> Thy brass into gold ? Why, the man's mute."

To endeavour to read Browning aloud is like trying to walk in step to music over jagged rocks with one's boots off. And even if delivered to us in musical verse, I should not myself regard hot scabs and pimples as appropriate subjects for poetry.

When Byron adopted the grotesque style which he displayed in "Don Juan," it was perhaps a not inappropriate vehicle to express the tumult and rebellion of his soul ; but in Browning's hands it has no such conveyance or excuse ; for Browning's whole attitude to life was perfectly decorous and entirely proper. He attended his place of worship with exemplary regularity, and dined out in Mayfair five days a week. And the artificial grotesqueness of his writings had no connexion at all with his quite conventional habits of thought and manner of life.

It is a tradition coming down to us from Homer to Tennyson, that poetry should fall musically upon the ear and possess rhythm, poise, and balance of sound.

So you and I, Antony, had better accept a tradition that comes to us with such august authority.

Those who reject it, I rather suspect, have been born without an ear for music and rhythm. And I see no reason why they should be listened to on the rules of poetry any more than persons who are colour blind should be deferred to on matters of art.

Then, on the other hand, Antony, verse that fulfils

all the demands of the ear for harmony and lilt may nevertheless disappoint us, owing to the method of expression being put above the thing expressed. And flat tenuity of thought can never find its compensation in mere manner of conveyance, however musical and satisfying it may be to the ear.

> "The weft of the world was untorn
> That is woven of the day and the night,
> The hair of the hours was not white
> Nor the raiment of time overworn
> When a wonder, a world's delight,
> A perilous goddess was born ;
> And the waves of the sea as she came
> Clove, and a foam at her feet,
> Fawning, rejoiced to bring forth
> A fleshly blossom, a flame,
> Filling the heavens with heat
> To the cold white ends of the north."

This is how Swinburne describes the beautiful old story of the rise of Venus from the sea.

The whole of the first four lines contain nothing more than the suggestion that it all happened a long time ago.

People read Swinburne to themselves or hear him read aloud, and imagine they are being presented with beautiful thoughts and images which they do not at the moment precisely define in their minds ; and if they stop to examine the verses intelligently, they will find that there is a very large and copious supply of harmonious verbality hung upon but a slender and tenuous thread of thought.

This is the opposite extreme to the work of Browning, which is full of thought delivered to us without any verbal harmony at all.

Among the poets of my youth "Owen Meredith" has now become almost forgotten. I do not know why Lord Lytton, the first Earl, adopted this assumed name when he adventured into verse.

He wrote many gracious and refined poems which everyone read in the sixties. I have always remembered this tender little poem called "The Chessboard":—

> "Irene, do you yet remember
> Ere we were grown so sadly wise,
> Those evenings in the bleak December,
> Curtained warm from the snowy weather
> When you and I played chess together
> Checkmated by each other's eyes?
> Ah! still I see your soft white hand
> Hovering warm o'er Queen and Knight,
> Brave Pawns in valiant battle stand:
> The double Castles guard the wings:
> The Bishop, bent on distant things,
> Moves sidling through the fight.
> Our fingers touch; our glances meet
> And falter; falls your golden hair
> Against my cheek; your bosom sweet
> Is heaving—Down the field, your Queen
> Rides slow, her soldiery between,
> And checks me unaware.
> Ah me! The little battle's done,
> Dispersed is all its chivalry;
> Full many a move, since then have we
> 'Mid life's perplexing chequers made,
> And many a game with Fortune played.
> What is it we have won?
> This, this at last—if this alone:—
> That never, never, never more
> As in those old still nights of yore,
> Ere we were grown so sadly wise,
> Can you and I shut out the skies,
> Shut out the world and wintry weather,
> And eyes exchanging warmth with eyes
> Play chess as then we played together!"

A very fine poet, whose gift of verse to the world was not requited with enough of a pittance to keep him from despair, was John Davidson. He gave up the

unequal combat with pitiless circumstance, and took his own life when he was in the fulness of his powers.

A man may sell groceries and live, but he may sell visions of Paradise and die of starvation.

In this haunting poem, from which I shall now quote three verses, the man poured out his heart's anguish :—

"I felt the world a spinning on its nave,
I felt it sheering blindly round the sun ;
I felt the time had come to find a grave :
I knew it in my heart my days were done.
I took my staff in hand : I took the road
And wandered out to seek my last abode.
Hearts of gold and hearts of lead,
Sing it yet in sun and rain,
'Heel and toe from dawn to dusk,
Round the world and home again.'

My feet are heavy now, but on I go,
My head erect beneath the tragic years.
The way is steep, but I would have it so ;
And dusty, but I lay the dust with tears,
Though none can see me weep : alone I climb
The rugged path that leads me out of time—
Out of time and out of all,
Singing yet in sun and rain,
'Heel and toe from dawn to dusk,
Round the world and home again.'

Farewell, the hope that mocked, farewell, despair,
That went before me still and made the pace.
The earth is full of graves, and mine was there
Before my life began, my resting-place ;
And I shall find it out and with the dead
Lie down for ever, all my sayings said.
Deeds all done, songs all sung,
While others chant in sun and rain,
'Heel and toe from dawn to dusk,
Round the world and home again.'"

The pity of it, that millions should be given away every year in charity in this England, and no rich man have imagination enough to dole out the little guerdon, to the singer of such verse as this, needed to keep him from suicide!

Are there no noblemen left with great libraries who would do credit to their order and honour to themselves by making such a man as John Davidson the custodian of their books, at a stipend less than that which they give to their motor drivers, and so shelter him from despair and death and confer upon themselves some reflection of the poet's fame?

Perhaps, Antony, you may live to see a return to that more generous sense of the obligations of wealth and nobility to art and letters which once was prevalent in England. The world cannot for ever continue to grow more and more in love with the things that matter nothing.

"Laurence Hope," who wrote some impassioned poems of India and the East, came to the same tragic end as John Davidson, but from a broken heart, after her husband, Colonel Nicolson, had died and left her in a loneliness she could not endure.

Some of her verses, written in England, show how her soul had been captured by the old and weary East:—

"Though I impatient of the heat,
Forth from the window lean
To cool my sight across the street
Amidst your shaded green,
Your leaves, refreshed by summer showers,
Are naught to me who feast
My fancy on those other flowers
That burn about the East.

For I have seen the lotus bloom
On lakes like inland seas,
And white magnolias, through the gloom
Moonlike among the trees.

Have watched the pale tuberose aglow
With phosphorescent light,
And water-lilies lying low
On sacred tanks at night.

By night my fancy spreads his wings
In visions that console,
And all day long, remembered things
Are dragging at my soul.
I want the silver on the sea,
The surf along the shore,
The ruined mosque whose weeds grow free
Where princes prayed of yore.

I want the lonely level sands
Stretched out beneath the sun,
The sadness of the old, old lands
Whose destiny is done,
The glory and the grace that cling
About the mountain crest,
Where tombs of many a faithless king
Guard faithfully their rest."

Certainly, Antony, these beautiful verses make one feel that such haunting visions of "the old, old lands" render the London street where they were written a drab and dreary place of ugliness.

I will finish my letter to-day with two most touching verses from a little poem by Alfred Noyes. It is called "The Skylark Caged":—

"Beat, little breast, against the wires,
Strive, little wings and misted eyes,
Which one wild gleam of memory fires,
Beseeching still the unfettered skies
Whither at dewy dawn you sprang,
Quivering with joy from this dark earth and sang.

Beat, little breast, still beat, still beat,
Strive, misted eyes and tremulous wings,
Swell, little throat, your Sweet! Sweet! Sweet!
Through which such deathless memory rings.
Better to break your heart and die
Than like your gaolers to forget your sky."

The years pass, Antony, and those who fight against all the cruelties of the world and the serried and victorious ranks of the brutalitarians are not listened to.

Little birds are kept in lifelong imprisonment in cages, with one perch in them and not enough space for them to open their wings.

Men and women find pleasure in the long agony of a hunted stag, whose final death-torture is callously described in the papers as the creature being at such a time and place "accounted for."

Professors cut pieces out of dogs, and keep the poor creatures in cages with their wounds for months, and say they do it to benefit mankind; thus adding hypocrisy to sin.

And the world goes on, and we who fight against such things are worsted again and again; but it is better by far to be found in such a combat on the losing side. As Arthur Legge has said :—

"Wisdom of age is vanquished, and generous hopes of youth,
Passion of faith and honour, fire of love and truth,
And the plans that seemed the fairest in the fight have not prevailed,
The keenest blades are broken, and the strongest arms have failed,
But souls that know not the breath of shame
And tongues that have never lied,
And the truest hearts, and the fairest fame,
Are here, on the losing side.

The conqueror's crown of glory is set with many a gem,
But I join not in their triumph—there are plenty to shout for them.
The cause is the most applauded whose warriors gain the day,
And the world's best smiles are given to the victors in the fray.
But dearer to me is the darkened plain
Where the noblest dreams have died,
Where hopes have been shattered and heroes slain
In the ranks of the losing side."

I used to believe, Antony, that humaneness and mercy would ultimately triumph at least in England, but I now know I shall not live to see it. No one can do more than struggle against what he believes to be base, and as far as he himself is concerned, "success and miscarriage are empty sounds," and must be left in the hands of an inscrutable Providence.

Your loving old

G. P.

XVIII

MY DEAR ANTONY,

Before I bring these letters of mine to a close for the present, I must refer again to Keats, of whose "Eve of St Agnes" I have already spoken.

To my taste and heart he appeals as the greatest lyrical poet of our race, and his "Ode to a Nightingale" has always appeared to me to be the most amazing and glorious poem in the English language.

If there exists a single lyrical poem that out-tops it, I do not know it.

It is neither too long nor too short; there is passion and inspired vision in every one of the eight stanzas of which it is composed; there is enchanting music in the words; and the very ecstasy and rapture of a divinely dowered poet's heart unveiled in all its glory to our sight.

I feel, Antony, that to quote part of it only in this letter would be in the nature of an act of irreverence. For once, therefore, contrary to my usual habit with poems of such length, I must cite it all from beginning to end:—

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness,—
That thou, light-wingéd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O for a draught of vintage, that hath been
  Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
  Dance, and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
  Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
    With beaded bubbles winking at the brim
      And purple-stainèd mouth;
  That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
    And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
  What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
  Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey 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.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
  Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
  Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
  And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
    Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
      But here there is no light
  Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
    Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
  Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
  Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
  White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
    Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
      And mid-May's eldest child
  The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
    The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen ; and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a muséd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath ;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy !
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

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 oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn ! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self !
Adieu ! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu ! adieu ! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hillside ; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades :
Was it a vision, or a waking dream ?
Fled is that music :—do I wake or sleep ? "

Keats' " Ode on a Grecian Urn," if he had written nothing else, would place him high among the immortals. But you must read it, Antony, for yourself, for I cannot bring myself to extract anything from what is all-exquisite.

In September 1820, Keats, already far gone in consumption, sailed for Italy, and, after a tempestuous start down the Channel, he and Severn, the artist, landed on the Dorset coast for a few hours, somewhere between Swanage and Lulworth, the tempest having abated.

This was the last time the poet stood on English soil, and in less than six months he was dead. When he returned to the ship, he wrote his last sonnet in the blank page of Severn's *Shakespere*.

This is it :—

> " Bright star ! would I were stedfast as thou art,
> Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
> And watching with eternal lids apart,
> Like nature's patient sleepless Eremite.
> The moving waters at their priestlike task
> Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
> Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
> Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
> No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
> Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,
> To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
> Awake for ever in a sweet unrest.
> Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
> And so live ever—or else swoon to death."

Strange that the last word of the last poem he ever wrote should end with the word "death" !

Severn never left him till he died in his arms.

The poet's last words were :—

" Severn—I—lift me up—I am dying—I shall die easy ; don't be frightened—be firm, and thank God it has come."

Keats was fortunate in the possession of so true and faithful a friend, and Severn's name will remain through the centuries preserved by that friendship from oblivion.

" And they have passed beyond the outer gate
Through death, to knowledge of all things, and so
From out the silence of their unknown fate
They bid us wait
Who only know
That 'twixt their loves and ours the great seas ebb and
flow." [1]

And now, Antony, I will for the present end these letters. I have only mentioned three or four living poets, because I hesitate to embark on criticism, favourable or the reverse, of any living writer whose reputation is not established already; and, indeed, my object has chiefly been to make you love poetry by quoting what seems to me to be beautiful and satisfying.

Poetry I believe to be the highest manifestation of human power yet granted to man, and this my belief seems to have been shared by all the world; for, by universal consent from Homer downwards, the fame of the poets has survived, and will survive, that of all other men of genius. Great actions gradually fade into oblivion, but the written words of the poets can never die till civilisation disappears.

Poetry is the consecrated shrine of absolute beauty as conceived by the mind and heart of man. It teaches us to look away from the squat materialism of life, and up from the sordid achievements of mechanical science; it lifts the mind out of the body; it sanctifies and makes glorious the passions; it gives refinement to pleasure; it brings consolation to sorrow: the great rhythms of the Universe may be said to find their counterpart in it, endowing it with the very music of the spheres.

Therefore it is that he who can bring it down from the heavens and fit it for human ears, will ever be

[1] Sir Rennell Rodd, G.C.B.

acclaimed as one of the celestial choir, bringing glory from above to the upturned faces of mankind.

If I have done anything, Antony, in these letters to bring poetry into your young life, my labour will not have been in vain.

Your loving old

G. P.

FINIS

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I DESIRE to express my grateful appreciation of the generous courtesy of the following authors, publishers, and owners of copyrights, who have permitted me to quote from poems belonging to them, and have not asked for any fee for the privilege they have so graciously extended to me: Messrs George Bell & Sons, Mr Bliss Carman, Mr G. K. Chesterton, Mr A. T. A. Dobson, Mr John Lane, Miss Harriet Jay, Messrs Heinemann, the Earl of Lytton, Sir Frederick Macmillan, Mrs Coventry Patmore, Mr Alfred Noyes, the Viscountess Sandhurst, Messrs Charles Scribner, Messrs Sidgwick & Jackson, Lord Tennyson, Sir William Watson, LL.D., and Mr F. E. Weatherly. Mr Rudyard Kipling has been good enough to allow me to quote his Recessional Hymn in full.

It is my hope that those who read these Letters to my Grandson will be led to make further study for themselves of the poets I have quoted, so that this little book may inflict no injury on the writers or their representatives.

S. C.

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