of all professors, as we have seen thee in the days of other years!" We enter the class-room, and take, we shall suppose, the most remote seat in the sloping array of benches. We find ourselves surrounded by youths of all varieties of appearance and diversities of standing, waiting, some eagerly, others with an air of perfect indifference, for the entrance of the professor. Yonder two are discussing the question whether Wilson be a real Christian, or a true poet. One is preparing his pencil for making a caricature of his illustrious teacher; and another is mending his pen for the purpose of taking down notes of the lecture. A few are knocking their heels against the ground, because the morning is cold, and, perhaps, in a loud whisper discussing the merits of the leading "star" in the Royal Theatre, where they had been over night. Here and there you see strangers—some enthusiastic youths from England, or some clerical-looking gentlemen from the North of Scotland—whose fidgety air tells you that they are wearying for the appearance of the lion, and who seem regarding his class with feelings of unmixed contempt. At last you hear a certain bustle, and immediately after, there comes rushing along from the left-hand side a tall, yellow-haired man, in a gown, who steps up to the platform, and turns toward you eyes, a brow, a cheek, a chin, a chest, and a port, which instantly stamp him a Titan among the children of men. His hair rolls down his temples like a cataract of gold; his eyes are light-blue, sparkling, and at times so fierce, that they seem two loopholes opening into a brain of fire; his cheek is flushed by exercise and air into a rich manly red; his chin is cut like that of a marble Antinous; his chest is broad and ample, and seems ready either as a bulwark to break, or as a floodgate to let forth strong emotion; his lips are firmly set, yet mild; the aspect of the lower face is that of peach-like bloom, and peach-like peace, the aspect of the upper is that of high, rapt enthusiasm, like that of Apollo, looking up after the path of one of his sunny arrows; the port is erect, yet not haughty—high, yet not overbearing or contemptuous—and, ere he has opened his lips, you say internally, "I have found a man of the old heroic breed, strength, and stature." He begins his lecture. For a little you are disappointed. His voice is deep, but seems monotonous; his utterance is slow; his pronunciation is peculiar; his gesture uncouth; what he says, is a rather confused and embarrassed repetition of a past lecture; and you are resigning yourself to a mere passive and wondering gaze at the *personnel* of the man, expecting nothing from his

mouth, when the progress of his discussion compels him to quote a few lines of poetry, and then his enthusiasm appears, not rapidly bursting, but slowly defiling like a great army into view, his eye kindles, enlarges, and seems to embrace the whole of his audience in one glance, his chest heaves, his arms vibrate, sometimes his clenched hand smites the desk before him, and his tones deepen and deepen down into abysses of pathos and melody, as if searching for the very soul of sound, to bring it into upper air. And, after thus having arrested you, he never for an instant loses his grasp, but, by successive shock after shock of electric power, roll after roll of slow thunder, he does with you what he wills, as with his own, and leaves you in precisely the state in which you feel yourself when awakening from some deep, delightful dream. He had, besides, certain great field-days, as a lecturer, in which, from beginning to end, he spoke with sustained and accelerating power: as when he advocated the immortality of the soul; described the sufferings of Indian prisoners; explained his ideas of the beautiful; or described the character of the miser. The initiated among the students used to watch and weary for these grand occasions, and all who heard him then, felt that genius and eloquence could go no further, and that they were standing beside him on the pinnacle of intellectual power.

His poetry proper has been generally thought inferior to his prose, and beneath the level of his powers. Yet, if we admire it less, we at times love it more. It is not great, or intense, or highly impassioned, but it is true, tender, and pastoral. It has been well called the "poetry of peace;" it is from "towns and toils remote." In it the author seems to be exiled from the bustle and conflict of the world, and to inhabit a country of his own, not an entirely "Happy Valley," for tears there fall, and clouds gather, and hearts break, and death enters, but the tears are quiet, the clouds are windless, the hearts break in silence, and the awful shadow comes in softly, and on tiptoe departs. Sometimes, indeed, the solitude and silence are disturbed by the apparition of a "wild deer," and the poet is surprised into momentary rapture, and a stormy lyric is flung abroad on the winds. But, in general, the region is calm, and the very sounds are all in unison and league with silence. As a poet, however, Wilson was deficient, far more than as a prose writer, in objective interest, as well as in concentration of purpose. His poetry has neither that reflective depth which causes you to recur so frequently to the poetry of Wordsworth,

nor that dazzling lightness and brilliance of movement which fascinates you in Scott. It is far, too, from being a full reflection of his multifarious and powerful nature; it represents only a little quiet nook in his heart, a small sweet vein in his genius, as though a lion were to carry somewhere within his broad breast a little bag of honey, like that of the bee. It does not discover him as he is, but as he would wish to have been. His poetry is the Sabbath of his soul. And there are moods of mind —quiet, peaceful, autumnal moments—in which you enjoy it better than the poetry of any one else, and find a metaphor for its calm and holy charm in the words of Coleridge—

> The moonbeams *steep'd in silentness*,
> The *steady weather-cock*.

The revolving, impatient wheel, the boundless versatility of Wilson's genius, quieted and at rest, as we see it in his poetry, could not be better represented than in these lines. In Coleridge, indeed, as in some true poets, we find all characters and varieties of intellect represented *unconsciously and by anticipation*, even as frost, fire, and rock-work—each contains all architecture and all art, silently anticipated in its varied forms and prophetic imitations.

In his periodical writings alone do we find anything like an adequate display of his varied powers. You saw only the half-man in the professor's chair, and only the quarter-man in his poetry; but in the *Noctes*, and the satirico-serious papers he scattered over *Blackwood*, you saw the whole Wilson—the Cyclops now at play, and now manufacturing thunderbolts for Jove; now cachinnating in his cave, now throwing rocks and mountains at his enemies, and now pouring out awful complaints, and asking strange, yet reverent queries in the ear of the gods.

Wilson's relation to his age has been, like Byron's, somewhat uncertain and vacillating. He has been, on the whole, a "lost leader." He has, properly speaking, belonged neither to the old nor new, neither to the conservative nor to the movement, neither to the infidel nor the evangelical sides. Indeed, our grand quarrel with him is, that he was not sufficiently in earnest; that he did not with his might what his hand found to do; that he hid his *ten* talents in a napkin; that he trifled with his inestimable powers, and had not a sufficiently strong sense of stewardship on his conscience. This has been often said, and we thought it generally agreed on, till our attention was turned to a pamphlet, entitled "Professor Wilson—a

Memorial and Estimate," which, amid tolerably good points and thoughts here and there, is written in a style which, for looseness, inaccuracy, verbosity, and affected obscurity, baffles description, besides abounding in flagrant and, we fear, wilful misstatements, and in efforts at fine writing, which make you blush for Scottish literature. The poor creature who indites this farrago of pretentious nonsense, asserts that the "Life of Wilson seems to have been as truly fruitful as that of any author within the range of English literature," and proves the statement by the following portentous query: "That *wild air* of the unexpressed poet, the inglorious Milton, the Shakspere that might have been, what was it but a *rich spice* of the fantastic humour of the man, a part of that extraordinary character which so delighted in its sport, that, whether he jested on himself, or from behind a mask might be making some play of you, you knew not, nor were sure if it meant mirth, confidence, or a solemn earnest such as *he* only could appreciate?" What this may mean we cannot tell; but the writer becomes a little more intelligible when he speaks, in some later portion of his production, of the great popularity which Wilson's redacted and collected works are to obtain, not appearing to know the fact, that the *Recreations of Christopher North*, published some twelve years ago, have never reached a second edition, and that old William Blackwood, one of the acutest bibliophiles that ever lived, refused to re-publish Wilson's principal articles in *Maga;* nor did the *Recreations* appear till after Blackwood's death. Splendid passages and inestimable thoughts, of course, abound in all that Wilson wrote, but the want of pervasive purpose, of genuine artistic instinct, of condensation, and of finish, has denied true unity, and perhaps permanent power, to his writings. He will probably be best remembered for his *Lights and Shadows*—a book which, although not a full discovery of his powers, lies in portable compass, and embalms that fine nationality which so peculiarly distinguished his genius. Probably a wise selection from his *Noctes*, too, might become a popular book.

Wilson had every inducement to have done more than he did. He was of a strong healthy nature; he had much leisure; he had great, perhaps too great facility of expression. He was the pet of the public for many years. But he did not, alas! live habitually in his "great Taskmaster's eye." We quarrel not with his unhappy uncertainties of mind; they are but too incident to all imaginative and thoughtful spirits. We quarrel not with his "waiting and wondering" on the brink of the un-

seen, but his uncertainty should not have paralysed and emasculated a man of his gigantic proportions. If beset by doubts and demons, he ought to have tried at least to fight his way through them, as many a resolute spirit has done before him. What had he to endure, compared to Cowper, who for many years imagined that a being, mightier than the fallen angels—Ahrimanes himself—held him as his property, and yet who, under the pressure of this fearful delusion, wrote and did his best, and has left some works which, while satisfying the severest critics, are manuals and household words everywhere? Wilson, on the other hand, seldom wrote anything except from the compulsion of necessity. Although not a writer for bread, much of his writing arose to the tune of the knock of the printer's "devil;" and his efforts for the advancement of the race, although we believe really sincere, were to the last degree fluctuating, irregular, and uncertain.

It is a proof, we think, of Wilson's weakness, as well as of his power, that he has been claimed as a possible prize on so many and such diverse sides. He might have been, says one, the greatest preacher of the age. He might have been, says another, the greatest actor of the day. He might have been, says a third, the greatest dramatist, next to Shakspere, that ever lived. He might have been, says a fourth, a powerful parliamentary orator. He might have been, says a fifth, a traveller superior to Bruce or Park. Now, while this proves the estimation in which men hold his vast versatility, it proves also, that there was something wrong and shattered in the structure of a mind which, while presenting so many angles to so many objects, never fully embraced any of them, and while displaying powers so universal, has left results so comparatively slender.

Nevertheless, after all these deductions, where shall we look for his like again? A more generous, a more wide-minded, a more courteous, and a more gifted man, probably never lived. By nature he was Scotland's brightest son, not, perhaps, even excepting Burns; and he, Scott, and Burns, must rank everlastingly together as the first Three of her men of genius. A cheerless feeling of desolation creeps across us, as we remember —that majestic form shall press this earth no more; those eyes of fire shall sound human hearts no more; that voice, mellow as that of the summer ocean breaking on a silver strand, shall swell and sink no more; and that large heart shall no more mirror nature and humanity on its stormy, yet sunlit surface.

Yet long shall Scotland, ay, and the world, continue to cherish his image, and to bless his memory; and whether or not he obtain a splendid mausoleum, he will not require it, for he can (we heard him once quote the words in reference to Scott, as he only could quote them)

A mightier monument command—
The mountains of his native land.

A CLUSTER OF NEW POETS[1]

SYDNEY YENDYS

THIS book[2] we hesitate not to pronounce the richest volume of recent poetry next to *Festus*. It is a "wilderness" of thought—a sea of towering imagery and surging passion. Usually a man's first book is his richest, containing, as it generally does, all the good things which had been accumulating in his portfolio for years before he published. But while *The Roman* was full of beauties, *Balder* is overflowing, and the beauties, we think, are of a rarer and profounder sort. There was much poetry in *The Roman*, but there was more rhetoric. Indeed, many of the author's detractors, while granting him powers of splendid eloquence, denied him the possession of the purely poetic element. *Balder* must, unquestionably, put these to silence, and convince all worth convincing, that Yendys is intensely and transcendently a poet.

In two things only does *Balder* yield to *The Roman*. It has, as a story, little interest, being decidedly subjective rather than objective; and, secondly, its writing is not, as a whole, so clear. In *The Roman*, he was almost always distinctly, dazzlingly clear. The Monk was never in a mist for a moment; but Balder, as he has a Norse name, not unfrequently speaks or bellows from the centre of northern darkness. We speak, we must say, however, after only one reading; perhaps a second may serve to clear up a good deal that seems obscure and chaotic.

The object of the poet is to show that natural goodness, without the divine guidance, is unable to conduct even the loftiest of the race to any issue but misery and despair. This he does in the story of Balder—a man of vast intelligence, and aspiring to universal intellectual power—who, partly through the illness of his wife, represented as the most amiable of women, and partly through his own unsatisfied longings of soul, is reduced to absolute wretchedness, and is left sacrificing her life to his

[1] From *A Third Gallery of Literary Portraits*, 1854.
[2] *Balder*. By the Author of *The Roman*.

disquietude and baffled ambition. The poem has one or two interlocutors besides Balder and Amy, but consists principally of soliloquies uttered and songs sung by these two in alternate scenes, and has very little dramatic interest. It is entitled *Balder, Part First;* a title which pretty broadly hints that a second poem—with a far sublimer argument (the inevitable sequel of the former), showing how, since natural goodness fails in reforming the world, or making any man happy, divine goodness must be expected to perform the work—may be looked for.

We pass from the general argument and bearing of the poem, to speak more in detail of its special merits and defects. The great merit of the book, as we have already hinted, is its Australian wealth of thought and imagery. Bailey must look after his laurels; Tennyson, Smith, and Bigg are all in this one quality eclipsed by Yendys. Nor are the pieces of gold small and of little value; many of them are large nuggets—more precious than they are sparkling. Here, for instance, is a cluster of noble similitudes, reminding you of Jeremy Taylor's thick rushing "So have I seen:"—

> Nature from my birth
> Confess'd me, as one who in a multitude
> Confesseth her beloved, and makes no sign;
> Or as one all unzoned in her deep haunts,
> If her true love come on her unaware,
> Hastes not to hide her breast, nor is afraid;
> Or as a mother, 'mid her sons, displays
> The arms their glorious father wore, and, kind,
> In silence, with discerning love commits
> Some lesser danger to each younger hand,
> But to the conscious eldest of the house
> The naked sword; or as a sage, amid
> His pupils in the peopled portico,
> Where all stand equal, gives no precedence,
> But by intercalated look and word,
> Of equal seeming, wise but to the wise,
> Denotes the favour'd scholar from the crowd;
> Or as the keeper of the palace-gate
> Denies the gorgeous stranger, and his pomp
> Of gold, but at a glance, although he come
> In fashion as a commoner, unstarr'd,
> Lets the prince pass.

By what a strong, rough, daring figure does Balder describe the elements of his power:—

> Thought, Labour, Patience,
> And a strong Will, that, being *set to boil*
> *The broth of Hecate, would shred his flesh*
> *Into the caldron, and stir deep, with arms*

Flay'd to the seething bone, ere there default
One tittle from the spell—these should not strive
In vain!
The repose
Of Beauty—where she lieth bright and still
As some spent angel, dead-asleep in light
On the most heavenward top of all this world,
Wing-weary.

Of what follows death he says—

The *first, last secret all men hear, and none*
Betray.
My hand shakes;
But with the trembling eagerness of him
Who buys an Indian kingdom with a bead.

Fancy, like the image that our boors
Set by their kine, doth milk her of her tears,
And loose the terrible unsolved distress
Of tumid Nature.

Men of drug and scalpel still are men.
I call them the gnomes
Of science, miners who scarce see the light,
Working within the bowels of the world
Of beauty.
Love
Makes us all poets——
From the mount
Of high transfiguration you come down
Into your common lifetime, as the diver
Breathes upper air a moment ere he plunge,
And by mere virtue of that moment, lives
In breathless deeps, and dark. We poets live
Upon the height, saying, as one of old,
"Let us make tabernacles: it is good
To be here."
Dauntless Angelo,
Who drew the Judgment, in some daring hope
That, seeing it, the gods could not depart
From so divine a pattern.

Sad Alighieri, like a waning moon
Setting in storm behind a grove of bays.

The descriptions which follow, in pages 91 and 92—of Milton and Shakspere—are very eloquent, but not, it appears to us, very characteristic. They are splendid evasions of their subjects. Reading Milton is *not* like swimming the Alps, as an ocean sinking and swelling with the billows; it is rather like trying to fly to heaven, side by side with an angel who is at full speed, and does not even see his companion—so eagerly is he straining at the glorious goal which is fixing his eye, and from afar flushing his cheek. Nor do we much admire this:—

Either his muse
Was the recording angel, or that hand

Cherubic which fills up the Book of Life,
Caught what the last relaxing gripe let fall
By a death-bed at Stratford, and henceforth
Holds Shakspere's pen.

No, no, dear Sydney Yendys, Shakspere was no cherub, or seraph either; he was decidedly an "earth spirit," or rather, he was just honest, play-acting, ale-drinking Will of Stratford, with the most marvellous daguerreotypic brow that ever man possessed, and with an immense fancy, imagination, and subtle, untrained intellect besides. He knew well a "Book of Life;" but it was not "the Lamb's!"—it was the book of the wondrous living, loving, hating, maddening, laughing, weeping heart of man. Call him rather a diver than a cherub, or, better still, with Hazlitt and Scott, compare him to that magician in the eastern tale who had the power of *shooting his soul* into all other souls and bodies, and of looking at the universe through *all human* eyes. We are, by this comparison of Shakspere to an angel, irresistibly reminded of Michael Lambourne in *Kenilworth*, who, after in vain trying to enact Arion, at last tears off his vizard, and cries "Cog's bones!" He was none of Arion, or Orion, either, but honest Mike Lambourne, that had been drinking her Majesty's health from morning till midnight. Lambourne was just as like Orion, or his namesake the archangel Michael, as Shakspere like a cherubic recorder.

Now for another cluster of minor, but exquisite, beauties, ere we come to give two or three superb passages:—

Sere leaf, that quiverest through the sad-still air;
Sere leaf, that waverest down the sluggish wind;
Sere leaf, that whirlest on the autumn gust,
Free in the ghastly anarchy of death:
The sudden gust that, *like a headsman wild,*
Uplifteth beauty by her golden hair,
To show the world that she is dead indeed.

The bare hill top
Shines near above us; I feel like a child
Nursed on his grandsire's knee, *that longs to stroke*
The bald bright forehead; shall we climb?

She look'd in her surprise
As when the Evening Star, *ta'en unaware,*
While *fearless she pursues across the Heaven*
Her Lover-Sun, and on a *sudden stands*
Confest in the pursuit, before a world
Upgazing, in her maiden innocence
Disarms us, and so looks, that she becomes
A worship evermore.

The order'd pomp and sacred dance of things.

This is that same hour
That I have seen before me as a star

Seen from a rushing comet through the black
And forward night, which orbs, and orbs, and orbs,
Till that which was a shining spot in space
Flames out between us and the universe,
And burns the heavens with glory.

We quoted his description of Night once before from MS. We give it again, however:—

And lo! the last strange sister, but though last,
Elder and haught, called Night on earth, in heaven
Nameless, for in her far youth she was given,
Pale as she is, to pride, and did bedeck
Her bosom with innumerable gems.
And God He said, " Let no man look on her
For ever; " and, begirt with this strong spell,
The Moon in her wan hand, she wanders forth,
Seeking for some one to behold her beauty;
And wheresoe'er she cometh, eyelids close,
And the world sleeps.

This description has been differently estimated. Some have called it magnificent, and others fantastic; some a matchless gem, and others a colossal conceit. But we think there can be but one opinion about the following picture of Evening. It seems to us as exquisitely beautiful as anything in Spenser, Wordsworth, or Shelley:—

And seest thou her who *kneeleth clad in gold*
And *purple*, with a *flush upon her cheek*,
And upturn'd eyes, *full of the love and sorrow*
Of other worlds? 'Tis said, that when the sons
Of God did walk the earth, she *loved a star*.

Here the description should have stopped, and here we stop it wishing that the author had. But it is curious and characteristic, not so much of the genius as of the temperament (or rather of bodily sufferings influencing that temperament) of this gifted poet, that he often sinks and falls on the very threshold of perfection. Another word, and all were gained, to the very measure and stature of Miltonic excellence; but the word comes not, or the wrong word comes instead; and as Yendys, like the tiger, takes no second spring, the whole effect is often lost. We notice the same in Shelley, Keats, and especially in Leigh Hunt, who has made and spoiled many of the finest poetic pictures in the world. Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Alexander Smith, are signal in this, that all their set descriptions and pet passages are finished to the last trembling articulation; complete even to a comma. Yendys has, perhaps, superior, or equal genius; he has also an equal will and desire to elaborate; but, alas! while the spirit is always willing, the flesh is often weak.

Speaking of the Resurrection to Amy, Balder says:—

> My childhood's dream. Is it a dream? For thou
> Art such a thing as one might think to see
> Upon a footstone, *sitting in the sun,*
> Beside a *broken grave.*
>
> I have been like
> A prophet fallen on his prostrate face
> Upon the hill of fire.

Such is the prophet above. Mark him now, as he comes down to mankind:—

> In the form
> Of manhood I will get me down to man!
> As one goes down from Alpine top with snows
> Upon his head, I, who have stood so long
> On other Alps, will go down to my race,
> *Snow'd on with somewhat out of Divine air ;*
> And *merely walking* through them with a step
> God-like to music, *like the golden sound*
> Of *Phœbus' shoulder'd arrows,* I will shake
> The laden manna round me as I shake
> Dews from this morning tree.

He has, two or three pages after this, a strange effusion, called the "Song of the Sun," which we predict shall divide opinion still more than his "Night." Some will call it worthy of Goethe; others will call it a forced extravaganza, a half-frenzied imitation of Shelley's "Cloud." We incline to a somewhat intermediate notion. At the first reading, it seemed to us to bear a suspicious resemblance, not to Shelley's "Cloud," but to that tissue of noisy nonsense (where, as there was no reason, there ought at least to have been rhyme), Warren's "Lily and the Bee." 'Hear this, for instance. Mark, it is Sol that speaks:—

> Love, love, love, how beautiful, oh love!
> Art thou well-awaken'd, little flower ?
> Are thine eyelids open, little flower?
> Are they cool with dew, oh little flower?
> Ringdove, Ringdove,
> This is my golden finger;
> Between the upper branches of the pine
> Come forth, come forth, and sing unto my day.

Who will encore the sun in such ditties as these? But he has some more vigorous strains, worthy almost of that voice wherewith Goethe, in his "Prologue to Faust," has represented him making "music to the spheres":—

> I will spend day among you like a king!
> Your water shall be wine because I reign!
> Arise, my hand is open, it is day!
> Rise! as men *strike a bell, and make it music,*
> So have I struck the earth, and made it day.

As one blows a trumpet through the valleys,
So from my golden trumpet I blow day.
White-favour'd day is sailing on the sea,
And, like a sudden harvest in the land,
The windy land is waving gold with day !
I have done my task;
Do yours. And what is this that I have given,
And wherefore? Look ye to it! As ye can,
Be wise and foolish to the end. For me,
I under all heavens go forth, praising God.

Well sung, old Baal! Thou hast become a kind of Christian in these latter days. But we have seen a far stronger, less mystic, and clearer song, attributed to thy lips before, although Yendys has not. *His*, as a whole, is not worthy either of thee or himself!

But what beautiful words are these about the sun's darling—summer—immediately below this sun-song?

Alas! that one
Should use the days of summer but to live,
And breathe but as the needful element
The strange, superfluous glory of the air !
Nor rather stand apart in awe beside
Th' untouch'd Time, and saying o'er and o'er,
In love and wonder, " These are summer-days."

We quote but one more of these random and ransomless gems:—

The Sublime and Beautiful,
Eternal twins, one dark, one fair;
She leaning on her grand heroic brother,
As in a picture of some old romaunt.

We promised next to quote one or two longer passages. We wish we had room for all the description of Chamouni, which, like the scene, is unapproachable—the most Miltonic strain since Milton—and this, because it accomplishes its sublime effects merely by sublime thought and image, almost disdaining aught but simple and colloquial words. Yet we must give a few scattered stones from this new Alp in descriptive literature—this, as yet, the masterpiece of its author's genius:—

Chamouni, 'mid sternest Alps,
The gentlest valley; bright meandering track
Of summer, when she winds among the snows
From land to land. Behold its fairest field
Beneath the bolt-scarr'd forehead of the hills
Low lying, like a heart of sweet desires,
Pulsing all day a living beauty deep
Into the sullen secrets of the rocks,
Tender as Love amid the Destinies
And Terrors; whereabout the great heights stand,
Down-gazing, like a solemn company

Of grey heads met together to look back
Upon a far-fond memory of youth.
There being old
All days and years they maunder on their thrones
Mountainous mutterings, or through the vale
Roll the long roar from startled side to side,
When whoso, lifting up his sudden voice
A moment, speaketh of his meditation,
And thinks again. There shalt thou learn to stand
One in that company, and to commune
With them, saying, "Thou, oh Alp, and thou, and thou,
And I." Nathless, proud equal, look thou take
Heed of thy peer, lest he perceive thee not—
Lest the wind blow his garment, and the hem
Crush thee, or lest he stir, and the mere dust
In the eternal folds bury thee quick.

Coleridge, in his "Hymn to Mont Blanc"—a hymn, of which it is the highest praise to say that it is equal to the subject, to Thomson's hymn at the end of *The Seasons*, to Milton's hymn put into the mouth of our first parents, and to this grand effusion of Sydney Yendys—says,

Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty voice,
And straight stood still,
Motionless torrents—silent cataracts!

Balder has thus nobly expanded, if he ever (which we doubt) thought of, the Coleridgean image:—

The ocean of a frozen world;
A marble storm in *monumental rage*;
Passion at nought, and strength still strong in vain—
A wrestling giant, spell-bound, but not dead,
As though the universal deluge pass'd
These confines, and when forty days were o'er,
Knew the set time obedient, and arose
In haste. But Winter *lifted up his hand*,
And stay'd the everlasting sign, which strives
For ever to return. Cold crested tides,
And cataracts more white than wintry foam,
Eternally in act of the great leap
That never may be ta'en—these fill the gorge,
And rear upon the steep uplifted waves
Immovable, that proudly *feign to go*.

There follow a number of verses, striving like ante-natal ghosts for an incarnation worthy of their grandeur, but not so clearly representing the magnificent idea in the author's mind to ordinary readers as we might have wished. Yet all this dim gulf of thought and image is radiant, here and there, with poetry. But how finely this passage sweetens and softens the grandeur before and after:—

Here, in the lowest vale,
Sit we beside the torrent, till the goats
Come tinkling home at eve, with pastoral horn,

Slow down the winding way, plucking sweet grass
Amid the yellow pansies and harebells blue.
The milk is warm,
The cakes are brown;
The flax is spun,
The kine are dry;
The bed is laid,
The children sleep;
Come, husband, come
To home and me.
So sings the mother as she milks within
The chalet near thee, singing so for him
Whom every morn she sendeth forth alone
Into the waste of mountains, to return
At close of day, *like a returning soul*
Out of the Infinite: lost in the whirl
Of clanging systems, and the wilderness
Of all things, but to one remember'd tryste,
One human heart, and unforgotten cell,
True in its ceaseless self, and in its time
Restored.

There follows a fine picture of the "trouble" making cold the Alpine summits as the sun sets:—

For they do watch
The journey of the setting sun, as one
Who, when the weaker inmates of the house
Have sunk about his feet in dews and shades
Of sorrow, watches still, with brows of light
And manly eye, a brother on his way;
But when the lessening face shines no return,
Through distance slowly lengthening, and sinks slow
Behind the hill-top, nor him, looking back,
The straining sense discerns, nor the far sound
Of wheels, *stands fix'd in sudden gloom profound,*
And *thoughts more stern than woe.*

This, too, is very striking—

These fall back aghast in sight
Of everlasting Winter, where, snow-borne
In his white realm, for ever white, he sits
Invisible to men; and in his works
Gives argument of that which seen makes faint
Aspiring Nature, and his *throne a mount*
Not to be touch'd.

As the darkness deepens, the poet, resting his eye upon the vast snow of the upper hills, which alone continues visible, is reminded of a Norland legend; and with a powerful picture of it the noble strain closes:—

There was a legend wild—whisper'd at eve,
Late round the dying watchfires to awed men
In these dead seasons, whence our Danish sires—
Of the Great Arctic Ghost, the efficient power
And apparition of the frozen North,
The mystic Swan of Norna, the dread bird

Of destiny, world-wide, with roaring wings
Flapping the ice-wind, and the avalanche,
And white and terrible as polar snows—
By them unseen, behold it! through the night
Swooping from heaven, its head to earth, its neck
Down-streaming from the cloud; above the cloud,
Its great vans through a rolling dust of stars,
Thundrous descending in the rush of fate.

Our readers will notice, in these and the foregoing extracts, a vast improvement over *The Roman* in the music of the versification. The verse of *The Roman* was constructed too much on the model of Byron, who often closes and begins his lines with expletives and weak words. The verse of Yendys is much more Miltonic. We give, as a specimen of this, and as one of the finest passages in the poem, the following description of Morn:—

Lo, Morn,
When she stood forth at universal prime,
The angels shouted, and the dews of joy
Stood in the eyes of earth. While here she reign'd,
Adam and Eve were full of orisons,
And could not sin; and so she won of God,
That ever when she walketh in the world,
It shall be Eden. And around her come
The happy wonts of early Paradise.
Again the mist ascendeth from the earth,
And watereth the ground; and at the sign,
Nature, that silent saw our woe, breaks forth
Into her olden singing; near and far
The full and voluntary chorus tune
Spontaneous throats.

Once again
The heavens forget their limits, pinions bright
O'er-passing mix th' ethereal bounds with ours,
And winds of morning lead between their wings
Ambrosial odours, and celestial airs,
Warm with the voices of a better world:
Dews to the early grass, Light to the eyes,
Brooks to the murmuring hills, Spring to the earth,
Sweet winds to opening flowers, MORN to the heart.
But more than dew to grass, or light to eyes,
Or brooks to murmuring hills, or spring to earth,
Or winds to opening flowers, MORN to the heart!
Once more to live is to be happy; Life,
With *backward streaming hair, and eyes of haste,*
That look beyond the hills, doth urge no more
Her palpitating feet; her wild hair falls
Soft through the happy light upon her limbs;
She turns her wondering gaze upon herself,
Sweet saying, " It is good."

We are heal'd;
The curse falls from our eyelids; all the thorns
And thistles that do plague us, *clad in gems,*
Stand round.
All fetters break.

We are not dogs
Nail'd to a needful den, but wing'd lions,
And walk the earth from choice—the fair free earth.
The pulse of Being flows; the ills that ran
Along her veins, the hand of Incubus
Upon her throat, are gone like night! All things
Do well, and still his function is to each
Consummate welfare: as the unheeded garb
Upon the rising and the falling breast
Of beauty, that still moveth as she moves,
Breathes with her breath, and quivers with her sighs,
So Nature's varied robe lies light on her.
Morn hath no past.
Primeval, perfect, she, not born to toil,
Steppeth from under the great weight of life,
And stands as at the first.
As love, that hath his cell
In the deep secret heart, doth with his breath
Enrich the precincts of his sanctuary,
And glorify the brow, and tint the cheek;
As in a summer-garden, one beloved,
Whom roses hide, unseen fills all the place
With happy presence; as to the void soul,
Beggar'd with famine and with drought, lo, God!
And there is great abundance; so comes MORN,
Plenishes all things, and completes the world.

Listen to his description of England. It is elaborate, but the elaboration is successful:—

This dear English land!
This happy England, loud with brooks and birds.
Shining with harvests, cool with dewy trees,
And bloom'd from hill to dell; but whose best flowers
Are daughters, and Ophelia still more fair
Than any rose she weaves; whose noblest floods
The pulsing torrent of a nation's heart;
Whose forests stronger than her native oaks
Are living men; and whose unfathom'd lakes,
For ever calm, the unforgotten dead
In quiet grave-yards, willow'd seemly round,
O'er which To-day bends sad, and sees his face;
Whose rocks are rights, consolidate of old,
Through unremember'd years, around whose base
The ever-surging peoples roll and roar
Perpetual, as around her cliffs the seas,
That only wash them whiter; and whose mountains
Souls that from this mere footing of the earth
Lift their great virtues, through all clouds of Fate,
Up to the very heavens, and make them rise,
To keep the gods above us.

At the foot of the page we find something far better:—

Balder.—Is this blossom sweet?
Doctor.—Most fragrant.
Balder.—Yet I pluck'd it on a rock
Where common grass had died.
Learn this, my friend:

> The secret that doth make a flower a flower,
> So frames it, that to bloom is to be sweet,
> And to receive to give. The flower can die,
> But cannot change its nature, though the earth
> Starve it, and the reluctant air defraud;
> No soil so sterile, and no living lot
> So poor, but it hath somewhat still to spare
> In bounteous odours. Charitable they
> Who be their having more or less, *so* have
> That less is more than need, and more is less
> Than the great heart's good will.

We could select a hundred passages of equal merit; but, as faithful critics, are bound now to take notice, and that at some little length, of what we think the defects of this remarkable poem.

We think that the two main objections to *Balder* will be monotony and obscurity. We will not say of the hero, what an admirer of Yendys said of the monk in *The Roman*, that he is a great bore and humbug; but we will say that he talks too much, and does too little. The poem is little else than one long soliloquy—a piece of thinking aloud; and this kind of mental dissection, however masterly, begins, toward the end of 282 pages, to fatigue the reader. *Balder* is in *this* respect a poem of the Manfred and Cain school, but is far longer, and thus palls more on the attention than they. A more fatal objection is the great obscurity of much in this poem. The story does not pervade it, as a clear road passes through a noble landscape, or climbs a lofty hill, distinct even in its windings, and forming a line of light, connecting province with province: it is a foot-path piercing dark forests, and often muffled and lost amid their umbrage. The wailings of Balder toward the close become oppressive, inarticulate, and half-frenzied; and from the lack of interest connected with him as a person, seem unnatural, and produce pain rather than admiration. This obscurity of Yendys has been, as we hinted before, growing on him. We saw few traces of it in *The Roman*. It began first to appear in some smaller poems he contributed to the *Athenæum*, and has, we trust, reached its climax in the latter pages and scenes of *Balder*. It is produced partly by his love of personification and allegory—figures in which he often indeed greatly excels; partly by a diseased subtlety of introspective thought; partly by those fainting-fits to which his demon (like a very different being, Giant Despair in the *Pilgrim*) is subject at certain times, and partly by a pedantry of language, which is altogether unworthy of so masculine a genius.

Take two specimens of this last-mentioned fault:—

> Adjusting every witness of the soul,
> By such external warrants I do reach
> Herself; the centre and untaken core
> Of this enchanted castle, whose far lines
> And strong circumvallations, in and in
> Concentring, I have carried, but found not
> The foe that makes them deadly; and I stand
> Before these most fair walls; and know he lies
> Contain'd, and in the wont of savage war
> Prowl round my scathless enemy, and plot,
> Where, at what time, with what consummate blow,
> To storm his last retreat, and *sack the sense*
> *That dens her fierce decease.*

The second is worse, with the exception of the first four lines:—

> As one should trace
> An angel to the hill wherefrom he rose
> To heaven, and on whose top the vacant steps,
> In march progressive, with no backward print,
> A sudden cease. Sometimes, being swift, I meet
> His fallen mantle, torn off in the wind
> Of great ascent, whereof the *Attalic pomp*
> Between mine eyes and him perchance conceals
> The *bare celestial*. Whose still happier speed
> Shall look up to him, while the *blinding toy*,
> In far perspective, is but as a plume
> Dropp'd from the eagle? Whose *talarian feet*
> Shall stand unshod before him while he spreads
> His pinions?

His description of the heroine, with all its exquisite touches, is considerably spoiled by a similar unwise elaboration and intricacy of language:—

> But when the year was grown,
> And sweet by warmer sweet to nuptial June,
> The *flowery adolescence* slowly fill'd,
> Till, in a *passion of roses*, all the time
> Flush'd, and around the glowing heavens made suit,
> And onward through the *rank and buxom days*, etc.

There is a mixture of fine fancy with the quaintness and odd phraseology of what follows:—

> She came in September,
> And if she were o'erlaid with lily leaves,
> *And substantived by mere content of dews*,
> Or limb'd of flower-stalks and sweet pedicles,
> Or made of golden dust from thigh of bees,
> Or caught of morning mist, or the unseen
> Material of an odour, her *pure text*
> Could seem no more remote from the corrupt
> And seething compound of our common flesh!

A splendid passage near this is utterly spoiled by language

as apparently affected as anything in Hunt's *Foliage* or Keats' *Endymion*:—

> Nature thus—
> The poet Nature singing to herself—
> Did make her in sheer love, having delight
> Of all her work, and doing all for joy,
> And built her like a temple wherein cost
> Is absolute; dark beam and hidden raft
> Shittim; each secret work and covert use
> Fragrant and golden; all the virgin walls
> Pure, and within, without, *prive and apert.*
> From buried plinth to viewless pinnacle,
> Enrich'd to God.

In justice, we must add one of the better passages of this very elaborate, and in many points signally felicitous description:—

> Yet more I loved
> An art, which of all others seem'd the voice
> And argument, rare art, at better close
> A chosen day, worn like a jewel rare
> To beautify the beauteous, and make bright
> The twilight of some sacred festival
> Of love and peace. Her happy memory
> Was many poesies, and when serene
> Beneath the favouring shades, and the first star
> She audibly remember'd, they who heard
> Believed the Muse no fable. As that star
> Unsullied from the skies, out of the shrine
> Of her dear beauty beautifully came
> The beautiful, untinged by any taint
> Of mortal dwelling, neither flush'd nor pale,
> Pure in the naked loveliness of heaven,
> Such and so graced was she.

Smith and Yendys differ very materially in their conception of women. Smith's females are houris in a Mahometan heaven; those of Yendys are angels in the Paradise of our God. Smith's emblem of woman is a rich and luscious rose, bending to every breath of wind, and wooing every eye; that of Yendys is a star looking across gulfs of space and galaxies of splendour, to one chosen earthly lover, whose eyes alone respond to the mystic messages of the celestial bride. Smith's idea of love, though not impure, is passionate; that of Yendys is more Platonic than Plato's own. We think that the true, the human, the poetic, and the Christian idea of love, includes and compounds the sensuous and the spiritual elements into one—a *tertium quid*—diviner, shall we say? because more complete than either; and which Milton and Coleridge (in his "Love") have alone of our poets adequately represented. Shelley, like Yendys, is too spiritual; Keats, like Smith, is too sensuous. Shakspere, we think, makes woman too much the handmaid,

instead of the companion, of man: his yielding, bending shadow, not his sister and friend:—

Stronger Shakspere felt for *man* alone.

Ere closing this critique, we have to mention one or two conclusions in reference to Yendys' genius, which this book has deeply impressed on our minds. First, his *forte* is not the drama or the lyrical poem. The lyrics in this poem are numerous, but none of them equal to Smith's "Garden and Child," or to his own "Winter Night," in *The Roman;* none of them entirely worthy of his genius. Nor is he strikingly dramatic in the management of his scenes and situations. He should give us next, either a great prose work, developing his peculiar theory of things, in the bold, rich, and eloquent style of those articles he contributed to *The Palladium*, *The Sun*, and *The Eclectic;* or he should bind himself up to the task he has already in his eye, that of constructing a great epic poem. We know no writer of the age who, if he will but clarify somewhat his style, and select some stern, high, continuous narrative for his theme, is so sure to succeed in this forsaken walk of the Titans. The poet who has coped with the Coliseum, the most magnificent production of man's art, and with Chamouni, the grandest of God's earthly works, need shrink from no topic, however lofty; nay, the loftier his theme the better.

NOTE

Reception of "Balder"

That has been a very peculiar one. We quote from a clever friend the following description of the various criticisms it has encountered. "One critic rent his garments, and cast dust into the air, and called upon the rocks and mountains to cover the blasphemies of *Balder*, apparently ignorant of the fact that his own exclamation was blasphemous in the extreme. Another, thanking God for the enjoyment of reason, found in the book so many evident marks of insanity, that he immediately concluded the author to be an inmate of Hanwell Asylum, who had murdered his beautiful young wife, when she visited him in his cell, simply for the purpose of enshrining her memory in song! A third, naturally of a timid disposition, was so dismayed by the description of war in the seventh scene, leaping the hills in the shape of a gigantic steed, whose levelled head equalled the clouds, whose eye was a hot and bloody star, and whose snort resembled the clang of ten thousand clarions, that he hastily closed the volume, and imbibed a glass or two of old Madeira to steady his heart. A fourth chuckled like a swallow over his own sagacity, and leaped from his tripod, as the old philosopher sprang from his tub, when he discovered the great secret, that the whole poem was a hoax, a travesty of modern poetry, and a fearful flagellation of the poets. A fifth regarded the author as an amiable and accomplished young man, possessing many fine qualities of head and heart, but who had certainly been misled by some

malicious persons, and tempted by them to clothe in poetry, principles which sapped the foundations of society. A sixth (and here our reference will readily be recognised) remembered that the author had formerly written a revolutionary poem called *The Roman*, and filled as he has long been with aristocratic contempt for the firm of Mazzini, Garibaldi, & Co., he could not resist the opportunity of ridiculing *Balder* to the best of his small ability. He might be able to appreciate the more apparent beauties of the poem, for he is proud to exclaim, 'I also am a poet;' but the *hidden manna* he made no effort to obtain, and he found it more easy and profitable to caricature and invent nicknames, than to attempt an elaborate criticism."

With this clever classification of *Balder's* critics we cordially concur, and think that the gross injustice it has met is very significant of our present lawless, careless, and dishonest state of criticism. Still, we are far from thinking that the critics were alone to blame. *Balder*, with all its power and brilliance, has certainly a degree of disease in it. It is a great organ cracked. Its selection of a subject was an error, and its treatment of it is disfigured with obscurities and affectations, which, but for its vast counterbalancing power, would have entirely sunk it. Anything less happy, and more hideous than those pictures of which "War" is a specimen, does not exist in the language of men. Its very finest passages are marred by diffusion and *diabetes verborum*. In this we speak the sentiments of the wisest and the ablest of Mr. Dobell's friends, who all look upon *Balder* as on the whole a magnificent mistake, and some of whom entertain the hope that Part First will be Part Last. Again we tell him to relinquish lyrics and the drama for ever, and to gird up his loins for some epical achievement.

Our paper was written immediately after reading the poem for the first time. Were we re-writing it now, our language would require considerable alteration, alike in reference to its merits, its faults, and its sum-total effect; our opinion of the author's powers, possibilities, and poetical prospects, remains, however, unchanged. It will be his own fault if he does not become the first of living poets.

ALEXANDER SMITH

THERE is something exceedingly sweet but solemn in the strain of thought suggested by the appearance of a new and true poet. Well is his uprise often compared to that of a new star arising in the midnight. What is he? Whence has he come? Whither is he going? And how long is he to continue to shine? Such are questions which are alike applicable to the planet and to the poet. A new poet, like a new planet, is another proof of the continued existence of the creative energy of the "Father of Spirits." He is a new messenger and mediator between the Infinite and the race of man. Whither rising or falling, retreating or culminating, in aphelion or in perihelion, he is continually an instructor to his kind. There is never a moment when he is not *seen* by some one, and when to be seen is, of course, to shine. And if his mission be thoroughly accomplished, the men of future ages are permitted either to share in the shadow of his

splendour, or to fill their empty urns with the relict radiance of his beams.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever;

so a poet, a *king* of beauty, is for ever a joy or a terror; a gulf of glory opening above, or an abyss of torment and mystery gaping below.

'Tis verily a fearful gift that of poetic genius; and fearful, especially, through the immortality which waits upon all its genuine inspirations, whatever be their moral purpose and tendency. Thus, a Marlowe is as immortal as a Milton—a Congreve as a Goldsmith—a Byron or Burns as a Wordsworth or James Montgomery—an Edgar Poe as a Longfellow or a Lowell. Just look at the dreadful, the unquenchable, the infernal *life* of Poe's *Lyrics and Tales*. No one can read these without shuddering, without pity, and sorrow, and condemnation of the author, without a half-muttered murmur of inquiry at his Maker—"Why this awful anomaly in thy works?" And yet no one can avoid reading them, and reading them again, and hanging over their lurid and lightning-blasted pages, and thinking that this wondrous being wanted only two things to have made him the master of American minds—virtue and happiness. And there steals in another thought, which deepens the melancholy and eternises the interest—what would Poe *now* give to have lived another life than he did, and to have devoted his inestimable powers to other works than the convulsive preparation of such terrible trifles—such *nocturnæ nugæ*—as constitute his remains? And still more emphatically, what would Swift and Byron now exchange for the liberty of suppressing their fouler and more malignant works—works which, nevertheless, a world so long as it lies in wickedness shall never willingly let die?

Alas! it is *too late; ἐίργαστο*, as the Greek play has it. The shaft of genius once ejaculated can be recalled no more, be it aimed at Satan or at God. And hence in our day the peculiar propriety, nay, necessity, of prefacing or winding up our praise of poetic power by such a stern caution to its possessor as this:—"Be thou sure that thy word, whether that of an angel or a fiend, whether openly or secretly blasphemous, whether loyal or rebellious to the existence of a God and of his great laws, whether in favour of the alternative Despair or the alternative Revelation, the only two possible, shall endure with the endurance of earth, and shall remain on thy head either a halo of horror or a crown of glory."

Claiming, as we do, something of a paternal interest in Alexander Smith, we propose, in the remainder of this paper, first characterising his peculiar powers, and, secondly, adding to this estimate our most sincere and friendly counsel as to their future exercise.

It is a labour of love; for ever since the straggling, scratching MS., along with its accompanying letter, reached our still study, we have loved the author of the "Life Drama;" and all the more since we met him in his quiet yet distinct, modest yet manly personality. And perhaps the opportunities of observation which have been thus afforded may qualify us for speaking with greater certainty and satisfaction, both to ourselves and others, than the majority of his critics, about the principal elements of his genius.

We may first, however, glance at some of the charges which even his friendly critics have brought against him. He has been accused of over-sensuousness. The true answer to this is to state his youth. He is only twenty-five years of age, and wrote all those parts of the poem to which objections have been made when he was two or three years younger. Every youth of genius *must* be sensuous; and if he write poetry, ought, in truth to his own nature, to express it there. Of course we distinguish between the sensuous and the sensual. Smith is never sensual; and his most glowing descriptions, no more than those in the "Song of Songs," tend to excite lascivious feelings. Female beauty is a natural object of admiration, and a young poet filled with this passionate feeling, were a mere hypocrite if he did not voice it forth in verse, and, both as an artist and as an honest man, will feel himself compelled to do so. Had Wordsworth himself written poetry at that period of his life to which he afterwards so beautifully refers in the lines—

> O happy time of youthful lovers,
> O balmy time, in which a love-knot on a lady's brow
> Seem'd fairer than the fairest star in heaven—

it had perhaps been scarcely less richly flesh-coloured than the "Life Drama." In general, however, the true poet, as he advances in his life and in his career, will become less and less sensuous in feeling and in song. Woman's form will retreat farther back in the sky of his fancy, and woman's ideal will come more prominently forward; she will "die in the flesh, to be raised in the spirit;" and this inevitable process, through which even Moore passed, and Keats was passing at his death, shall yet be realised in Alexander Smith, if he continue to live,

and his critics consent to wait. If our readers will compare Shelley's conception of woman, in his juvenile novels *Zastrozzi* and the *Rosicrucian*, with Beatrice Cenci, or the graceful imaginary female forms which play like creatures of the elements in the "Prometheus," he will find another striking instance of what we mean. In some cases, perhaps, the process may be reversed, and the young poet who began with the ideal may, in after life, descend to the real, and drown his early dream of spiritual love in sensuous admiration and desire. But these we think are rare, and are accounted for as much from physical as from mental causes.

Smith has been called an imitator, or even a plagiarist. We are not careful to answer in this matter, except by again referring to his age. All young poets are imitators. "Poetry," says Aristotle, "is imitation." It begins with imitation, and it continues in imitation, and with imitation it ends. The difference between the various stages only is, that in boyhood and early youth poets imitate other poets, and that in manhood they pass from the study of models which they may admire to error and extravagance, to that great original, which, without blame, excites an infinite and endless devotion. That Smith has read and admired, and learned of Keats, and Shelley, and Tennyson, and many others, is obvious; but it is obvious also that he has read his own heart still more closely, and has learned still more from the book of nature. Every page contains allusions to his favourite authors; but every page, too, contains evidences of a rich native vein. The man who preserves his idiosyncrasy amid much reading of the poets, is more to be praised than he who, in horror at plagiarism, draws a *cordon sanitaire* around himself, and refuses to cultivate acquaintance with the great classics of his age and country. A true original is often most so when he is imitating or even translating others. So Smith has marvellously improved some of the few figures he has borrowed. The objects shown are sometimes the same as in other authors, but he has cast on them the mellowing, softening, and spiritualising moonlight of his own genius.

A still more common objection is a certain monotony of figure which marks his poetry. He draws, it is said, all his imagery from the stars, the sea, the sun, and the moon. Now we think we can not only defend him in this, but deduce from it an argument in favour of the power and truth of his genius. What bad or mediocre poet could have meddled with these old objects without failure? Nothing in general is so vapid as odes

to the moon, or sonnets on the sea. But Smith has lifted up his daring rod to the heavens, and extracted new and rich imagination from their unfading fires. He has once more laid a poet's hand upon the ocean's mane, and the sea has known his rider, and shaken forth a stormy poetry to his touch. Besides, his circumstances have prevented him from coming in contact habitually with aught but nature's elementary forms, and he has sung only what was most familiar to his mind. What could he have told us about the

> Alps and Apennines,
> The Pyrenean and the river Po,

whose summer excursions never, till of late, extended farther than Inversnaid or Glencoe, and to whom

> The stars were nearer than the fields?

Nothing worth listening to; and therefore he watches the moon circling large and queenly over the smoky tiles of the Gallowgate; or he contemplates the round red sun, shining rayless through the Glasgow morning fogs; or he sees the head of the Great Bear or the foot of Orion glimmering on him at the corner of the streets; or, striking out from the city, he marks the

> Labouring fires come out against the dark,
> Where, with the night, the country seem'd on flame;
> Innumerable furnaces and pits,
> And gloomy holds, in which that bright slave, Fire,
> Doth pant and toil all day and night for man,
> Throw large and angry lustres on the sky,
> And shifting lights across the long black roads.

Or, in his rare holidays, he sails to Loch Lomond, or paces the banks of Loch Lubnaig, and fancies eclipse instead of sunshine bathing the crags of Benledi, and shadowing into terror and inky darkness the placid lake. Thus has he sought to realise and to utter the poetry which he has found around him, and, verily, great has been his reward. Few as are the objects he describes, what a depth of interest he attaches to them. With what lingering gusto does he describe them. In proportion to the smallness of their number, is the strength of his love, the felicity of his descriptions, and the energy and variety of the poetic use he makes of them. It is as if he were apprehensive of immediate blindness coming to hide them from his view, and were anxious previously to daguerreotype them for ever before the eye of his soul.

In this we are reminded of Ossian; and the defence put in

by Blair on behalf of the monotony of the objects of his poetry may be used with fully more force in reference to Smith. His figures, like Ossian's, are chiefly derived from the great primary forms of nature, but their application is still more various, and much less than the Highland bard does he repeat himself, not to speak of the far subtler and intenser spirit of imagination which pervades the later poet. For we fearlessly venture to assert, that no poet that ever lived has excelled Smith in the beauty and exquisite analogical perception displayed in his images from nature. We select a few on this principle, that we have not seen them quoted in any other of the reviews or notices:—

The anguish'd earth shines on the moon—a moon.

Now the fame that scorn'd him while he lived
Waits on him like a menial.

His part is worst that touches this base world;
Although the ocean's inmost heart be pure
Yet the salt fringe that daily licks the shore
Is gross with sand.

The vain young night
Trembles o'er her own beauty in the sea.

The soft star that in the azure east
Trembles in pity o'er bright bleeding day.

The hot Indies, on whose teeming plains
The seasons four, knit in one flowery band,
Are dancing ever.

Oh, could I lift my heart into her sight,
As an old mountain lifts its martyr's cairn
Into the pure sight of the holy heavens.

His cataract of golden curls.

The married colours in the bow of heaven.

The while the thoughts rose in her eyes, like stars
Rising and setting in the blue of night.

The earnest sea
. . . ne'er can shape unto the listening hills
The lore it gather'd in its awful age:
The crime for which 'tis lash'd by cruel winds
To shrieks, mad spoomings to the frighted hills.

A gallant, curl'd like Absalom,
Cheek'd like Apollo, with his luted voice.

'Tis four o'clock already. See, the moon
Has climb'd the blue steep of the eastern sky,
And sits and tarries for the coming night.
So let thy soul be up and ready arm'd,
In waiting till occasion comes like night.

The marigold was burning in the marsh,
Like a thing dipp'd in sunset.

By the way, not one critic, so far as we know, has noticed the exquisite poem from which this last line is quoted—a poem originally entitled "The Garden and the Child," and which alike we and the author consider the best strain in the whole "Life Drama." Our readers will find it on page 91. Its history is curious. Mr. Smith was trudging one day to his work along the Trongate, when he saw a child "beautiful as heaven." There was no more work for him that day. Her face haunted him; her future history rose before his fancy; and in the evening he wrote the poem (or rather it "came upon him") in the space of two hours. Certainly it reads like inspiration. It is one gush of tender or terrible beauty. The author now says of it (p. 101):—

> I almost smile
> At the strange fancies I have girt her with—
> The garden, peacock, and the black eclipse,
> The still grave-yard among the dreary hills,
> Grey mourners round it. I wonder if she's dead.
> She was too fair for earth.

The child is another little Eva. We must say that we love not only little children, but all who love them. Especially we sympathise with all those who have some one dead and sainted image of a child hanging up in the chamber of their heart, as Kate Wordsworth hangs in De Quincey's, as A. V. hangs in our own, and who daily and nightly pay their orisons to the Great God who dwelt in it for a season. We suspect that scarce one who has lived to middle age but can remember some such early sunbeam, which shone as only sunbeams in the morning can shine, and returned with its freshness and glory all untainted to the fountain whence it sprang, bearing with it in its return to heaven a whole, loving, yearning, broken, yet submissive heart. Perhaps, after all, this feeling may have prejudiced us in favour of the "Garden and the Child," but certainly it was the perusal of it which first increased to certainty our previous notion that Mr. Smith was one of our truest poets.

It convinced us, too, that he had a heart. This, we fear, has of late been a vital deficiency in many of our most celebrated bards. The odious examples of Goethe and Byron, the constant inculcation, by critics, of the necessity of reaching artistic merit at every expense and every hazard, and the solitary or divorced life of some of our literary men, not to speak of the withering effects of scepticism and of a modified licentiousness, have all tended to deaden or mislead, or to render morbid, the feelings of our men of genius. Neither Keats nor Moore, nor Tennyson

nor Rogers, nor Henry Taylor, have given, in their poetry, any decided evidence of that warm, impulsive, childlike glow, which all men agree in calling "heart." They have proved abundantly that they are artists, and even poets, but have failed to prove that they are men.

We rejoice, however, to recognise in our younger generation of poets—in Yendys and Smith, and Bigg and Bailey—symptoms that a better order of things is at hand, and that the principle, "the Greatest of these is Love," so long acknowledged in religion, shall by and by be felt to be the law of poetry—understanding, too, by love, not a mere *liking* to all things, not a mere indifferentism, *raised on its elbow* to contemplate objects, but a warm, strong, and enacted preference for all things that are "lovely and true, and of a good report."

The great distinction between the speaker and the singer in this age, as in past ages, is, perhaps, music. Many now, as ever, possessing all other parts of the poet—genius, originality, constructive power—are doomed (sad fate!) all their lives long to the level of prose by their deficiency in ear, their want of music. Apollo's soul may be in them, but Apollo's lute they can by no means tune. Look at Walter Savage Landor! No one can doubt that he is intensely and essentially a poet, and that his prose and verse contain little bursts of glorious poetic music. But they are brief; they are broken; they are not sustained; they are perpetually intermingled with harsh and harrow-like paragraphs, and both his prose and verse conjoin in proving that he never could have elaborated any long, linked, and continuous harmony. Feeling all this, we have watched with considerable interest and care Smith's versifica tion, trying it, however, not by any artificial standard, but solely by the ear; and our decided opinion is, that he has been destined by nature to sing rather than to speak his fine thoughts to the world. His poetry abounds with every variety of natural music.

Take that of the ballad, in this specimen:—

In winter, when the dismal rain
  Comes down in slanting lines,
And Wind, that grand old harper, smote
  His thunder harp of pines.

. . . .

When violets came and woods were green,
  And larks did skyward dart,
A Love alit and white did sit
  Like an angel on his heart.

. . . .

The Lady Blanche was saintly fair,
Nor proud, but meek her look;
In her hazel eyes her thoughts lay clear
As pebbles in a brook.

. . . .

The world is old, oh! very old;
The wild winds weep and rave:
The world is old, and grey, and cold,
Let it drop into its grave.

Or take a specimen of what we may call the Wordsworthian measure, culled from the "Garden and the Child":—

She sat on shaven plot of grass,
With earnest face, and weaving
Lilies white and freak'd pansies
Into quaint delicious fancies;
Then, on a sudden, leaving
Her floral wreath, she would upspring,
With silver shouts and ardent eyes,
To chase the yellow butterflies,
Making the garden ring;
Then gravely pace the scented walk,
Soothing her doll with childish talk.

. . . .

That night the sky was heap'd with clouds;
Through one blue gulf profound,
Begirt with many a cloudy crag,
The moon came rushing like a stag,
And one star like a hound;
Wearily the chase I eyed,
Wearily I saw the Dawn's
Feet sheening o'er the dewy lawns.
Oh God! that I had died.
My heart's red tendrils all were torn,
And bleeding, on that summer morn.

Or take a specimen of rich voluptuous blank verse:—

I will be kind when next he brings me flowers
Pluck'd from the shining forehead of the morn,
Ere they have oped their rich cores to the bee;
His wild heart with a ringlet will I chain,
And o'er him I will lean me like a heaven,
And feed him with sweet looks and dew-soft words,
And beauty that might make a monarch pale,
And thrill him to the heart's core with a touch;
Smile him to Paradise at close of eve,
To hang upon my lips in silver dreams.

Or hear this sterner, loftier, more epical strain:—

A grim old king,
Whose blood leap'd madly when the trumpets bray'd,
To joyous battle 'mid a storm of steeds,
Won a rich kingdom on a battle-day;
But in the sunset he was ebbing fast,
Ring'd by his weeping lords. His left hand held
His white steed, to the belly plash'd with blood,
That seem'd to mourn him with its drooping head;

His right his broken brand; and in his ear
His old victorious banners flap the winds.
He call'd his faithful herald to his side—
"Go! tell the dead I come." With a proud smile,
The warrior with a stab let out his soul,
Which fled, and shriek'd through all the other world—
"Ye dead! my master comes!" And there was pause
Till the great shade should enter.

Does not this description remind you of Homer's style? How rugged yet powerful its melody! We could quote many other passages, all corroborating our statement that Smith is naturally a master of music, and needs only a careful culture to complete the mastery. Since the appearance of the "Life Drama," he published a little chant in a Glasgow newspaper, entitled "Barbara," the copy of which we have mislaid, else we would have quoted it as a final triumphant proof of his musical power, as well as of his lyrical genius. It is one of the most touching little laments in the language. But here a question of greater moment occurs—Has this young poet, in addition to his exquisite imagery, his heart, and his music, a true and deep vein of thought, and does that thought, as all deep veins of reflection should do, run into religion? What is his theory of things? Is he a Christian, or is he a mere philosophic speculator, or poetic visionary? Now here we think is the vital defect of the poem, the one thing which prevents us applying to it the epithet "great." Mr. Smith is, we believe, no infidel; and his poetry breathes, at times, an earnest spirit: but his views on such subjects are extremely vague and unformed. He does not seem sufficiently impressed with the conviction that no poem ever has deserved the name of "great" when not impregnated with religion, and when not rising into worship. His creed seems too much that of Keats—

Beauty is truth—truth beauty.

We repeat that he should look back to the past, and think what are the poems which have come down to us from it most deeply stamped with the approbation of mankind, and which appear most likely to see and glorify the ages of the future. Are they not those which have been penetrated and inspired by moral purpose, and warmed by religious feeling? We speak not of sectarian song, nor of the common generation of hymns and hymn writers, but we point to Dante's "Divina Comedia," to all Milton's Poems, to Spenser's "Faerie Queen," to Herbert's "Temple," to Young's "Night Thoughts," to Thomson's "Seasons," to some of the better strains of Pope and Johnson,

to Cowper, to Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge. These, and not Keats, or Shelley, or Tennyson, or Byron, are our real kings of melody; they are our great, clear, healthy standards of song; they are all alike free from morbid weakness, moral pollution, and doubtful speculation; and the poet who would not merely shine the meteor of a moment, the stare of fools, and the temporary pet of the public, but would aspire to send his name down, in thunder and in music, through the echoing aisles of the future, and become a benevolent and beloved potenate over distant ages, and millions yet unborn, must tread in their footsteps, and seek after the hallowed sources of their inspiration.

This leads us, in the last place, to give our young poet a few sincere and friendly counsels. When he appeared first, he was, we know, and complained that he was, "deluged with advice." That deluge has now subsided, and we would desire, in its subsidence, to try to collect the essence of the moral it has left, and to impress it on his serious attention.

We will not reiterate to him the commonplaces he must have heard, *ad nauseam*, about bearing his honours meekly, and not being dazzled and spoiled with success, etc. That success has, indeed, been unparalleled for at least thirty years. The last case at all in point was Pollok's "Course of Time," but this, if our readers will remember, did not become popular till after its author's premature death had surrounded, as it were, all its pages with a black border, and made it to be read as men read the record of the funeral of a king. But Smith "arose one morning and found himself famous." That this sudden glare of fame on a head so young, were it not as strong as it is young, might have produced injurious effects, was a matter of some probability. But that danger, we think, is now past, and there are other dangers more to be dreaded, which may be on their way.

Mr. Smith should neither, on the one hand, rest under his laurels, nor, on the other, be too eager to snatch at more. Let him deeply ponder on the subject of his second poem, and let him carefully elaborate its execution. Let him mercilessly shear away all those small mannerisms of style of which he has been accused. Let him burn his Tennyson and his Keats; he has read them now long enough, and further perusal were not profitable. He has lately had the opportunity of extending his sphere of survey; he has seen the finest scenery in Scotland and South Britain; he has mingled with much of its most

distinguished literary society, and is now the secretary to an illustrious university, and in the metropolis of his native land. Let him select a topic for his new poem which will permit him to avail himself of these new advantages, and let him pour into it every drop of the new blood and every ray of the new light he has recently acquired. We rejoice to learn that he is no *improvisatore* in composition; that he loves to write slowly; that he enjoys the labour of the file; that almost every line in his "Life Drama" was written several times—rejoice in this, because it assures us that his next work shall be no hasty effusion, hatched by the heat of success, but that it shall be a calm and determined trial of his general and artistic strength. His styles and manners are, as our extracts have proved, manifold, and he might attain mastery in all. But we would earnestly ask him to give us more of that stern Homeric grandeur we find in his picture, quoted above, of the dying king:—

That strain I heard was of a higher mood.

We close this "deluge of advice," if he will call it so, by other three distinct counsels:—First, let him advance to nobler models than those he seems hitherto, almost exclusively, to have studied. We have been told that he has commenced a careful reading of Goethe, which may be of considerable benefit to him in the art of expression, as Goethe's style is generally supposed to be nearly faultless. But let him not rest there, since there are far loftier and far safer ridges on the Parnassian hill. We name, as the models to which he ought to give his days and his nights, Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakspere's sterner tragedies, and, above all, the poetry of the Bible. That he has read all these, we doubt not. What we wish him to do, is to study them; to roll their raptures, and to catch their fire; to make them his song in the house of his pilgrimage; and at their reverend and time-honoured altars, not only to kindle the fire of his own genius, but to consume, as chaff, whatever puerilities may have hitherto contributed to lessen the brightness of the flame.

Secondly, he must become less sensuous. In other words, he must put off the youth, and put on the man. He must think and sing less about "ringlets," and "waists," and "passion-panting breasts," etc., etc. All such things we pardon in him now, but shall be less disposed to forgive after a few years have passed over his head. A boy Anacreon may be borne with, but a middle-aged or old Anacreon is a nuisance, especially when he might have been something far higher. For the sake

of poetry, let him proceed to veil the statue of the Venus, and to uncover those of the Apollo, the Mars, and the Jupiter.

Our last counsel is the most momentous. He has himself painted in glowing colours his ideal of the poet as one who shall "consecrate poetry to God, and to its own high uses." Let him proceed with stern and firm step to fill up his own ideal, and accomplish his own prophecy. Let him be the great sublime he draws. Of this he may be certain, that the poet of the coming time must be a believer in the future as well as a worshipper of the past. He may not be a sectarian, but he must be a Christian. We do not want him to write religious poetry in the style of Watts or Montgomery, or any one else; but we want him to devote his fine powers more than he has hitherto done to the promulgation of high spiritual truth; if not, we foresee that one or two of his competitors in the poetic race, whom he has meantime outstripped, may overtake him, and come into the goal amid a deeper gush of applause and of thankfulness, from that large class who now look upon poetry as a serious thing, and are disposed to consult it as a subordinate oracle of the Most High. But we will not anticipate, far less despair. The vaticination of our hearts tells us that, apart altogether from comparative awards and successes, there are noble fields before Alexander Smith, and that his own words shall not fail of fulfilment.

> I will go forth 'mong men, not mail'd in scorn,
> But in the armour of a pure intent;
> Great duties are before me, and great songs.
> And, whether crown'd or crownless, when I fall,
> It matters not, so as God's work is done.
> I've learn'd to prize the quiet light'ning deed,
> Not the applauding thunder at its heels,
> Which men call Fame.

J. STANYAN BIGG[1]

THERE are, every tyro in criticism knows, three great schools or varieties in poetry—the objective, the subjective, and the combination of the two. The best specimens of the first class are to be found in Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey," in Burns's poems, and in Scott's rhymed romances; of the second, in the poetry of Lucretius, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and some of the Germans; and of the combination of the two,

[1] "Night and the Soul:" a Dramatic Poem.

in Shakspere, Milton, Schiller, and Byron. Of late, almost all our poets of much mark have betaken themselves to the subjective. We propose, ere coming to Mr. Bigg, first, inquiring into the causes of this; and, secondly, urging our young poets, by a few arguments, to intermix a larger amount of the objective with their poetry.

One cause of the propensity of our rising race of poets to the subjective, has undoubtedly been the force of example. The poets who are at present acting with most power on the young mind of the age, are intensely subjective, and some of them to the brink of morbidity. The influence wielded over the lovers of poetry by Homer, Scott, or Burns, is slender, compared to that which Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and the rest of the bardic brotherhood — the sons of Mist by Thunder — are exerting. The writings of the former are devoured like new novels, and then thrown aside. The writings of the latter are tasted slowly, and in drops—are studied—are carried into solitude—are read by the sides of lonely rivers, or on silent mountain tops, and ultimately surround the young aspirants with an atmosphere which goes with them where they go, rests with them where they rest, and hovers over their pens when they write. To the charm of these poets, it adds mightily that they are said to be, and are, more or less heretodox in their creeds. This gives a peculiar gusto to their works, the reading of which becomes a sweet and secret sin, smacking of the taste of the "stolen waters" and the "pleasant bread." Thus are two luxuries—that of the indulgence of daring thought, and something resembling contraband desire—united in the perusal of our later subjective poets.

Secondly, we live in a period of deep thoughtfulness, and great intellectual doubt. Never were there so many thinking. Never was thought so much at sea. Never were there so many "searchings of heart." Our blessed Lord mentions, as one of the most striking signs of his second advent—"perplexity." "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with *perplexity* —the sea and the waves roaring!" This sign is around us, even at the doors. The political and the moral, the intellectual and the religious worlds, are all equally perplexed, and in darkness. It is a midnight, moaning, weltering ocean, on which we are all embarked, and the day-star has not yet risen. Our poetical spirits are sharing, to a very large extent, in this perplexity; and this has led to incessant introspective views

and pensive contemplations. After Byron, there rose a short-lived race of rhymesters, who pretended to scepticism and gloom, but whose real object was to produce a stimulating effect upon the minds of their readers; and who, like quack doctors, distributed drugs to others, of which they themselves never tasted a drop. It is very different now. A real yearning uncertainty and thirst after more light, are now heard crying, if not shrieking, in many of our poets. All recent poems of mark, such as the "Life Drama," "Balder," "Festus," and "Night and the Soul," are more or less filled with those thoughts which wander through eternity; those beatings of strong souls against the bars of their earthly prison-house; those profound questions uplifted to heaven—"Whence evil? What the nature of man, and what his future destiny? What, who, and where is God?" True poets must sympathise with the tendency of their times, and as that, at present, is transitional, uncertain, and uneasy, their poetry must partake, in some measure, of that uncertainty and that unrest.

In connection with this, is the prevalent study of the transcendental philosophy by our poets. It was long imagined that poetry and philosophy were incompatible—that no poet could be a philosopher, and that no philosopher could be a poet. What God had often joined, man put asunder. It has, however, been for some time surmised, that critics were in this wrong. The fact that Milton was thoroughly conversant with the philosophies of his day, and the example set by the German poets, and by the Lakers, who combined ardent poetic enthusiasm with diligent and deep study of metaphysics, have rectified opinion on this point, and sent our young poets to their Kants, their Fichtes, and their Hamiltons, as well as to their Shaksperes and their Goethes. From these and other causes, it has come about, that at an age when the gifted youth of the past were singing of their Helens or their Marys—apostrophising their spaniels and robin-redbreasts, or describing the outward forms of sky and earth around their native village, their successors in the present are singing of the mysterious relations of nature to the human soul; are galloping their Pegasus from galaxy to galaxy; and are now entering the heaven of heavens, and now listening to the sound of the surge of penal fire, breaking on the "murk and haggard rocks" of that "Other Place."

Now, we are far from seeking to deny that this is, *on the whole*, what it should be, as well as what, inevitably, it must have been. It were as vain altogether to condemn, as at all to try to resist,

the stream of an age-tendency. Nay, this state of things has some advantages, and teems with some promise. It proves that the minds of men are becoming more serious and thoughtful, when even our youths of genius are less poets than preachers. It shows that we are living in a more earnest period. It proves progress, since our very youth have passed points where the mature manhood of the past thought it prudent and necessary to halt. It suggests hope, that in a future age there may be still higher, quicker, and more certain and solid advancement. But, looking at the matter on the other side, the exclusively subjective cast of much of our best poetry has produced certain evils. In the first place, it has tended to overcast the renown of our great objective poets, particularly among the young. Homer, Scott, Campbell, and Burns, are still, indeed, popular, but not so much, we think, as they were, and are read rather for their mere interest, than for their artistic and poetic excellence. Relished by many they still are, as sweet morsels; but seldom, if at all, studied as *models*. Secondly, it, on the other hand, excludes our really good poets of the subjective school from many circles of readers, who, seeking for some objective interest in poems, and finding little or none, are tempted to close them in weariness, or fling them away in disgust. Thomson, Cowper, Byron, as well as Shakespere and Milton, addressed themselves to all classes of minds, except the very lowest, and succeeded in fascinating all. Browning, and many besides, speak only to the higher minds, and verily they have their reward; their works are pronounced unintelligible and uninteresting by the majority of readers, and while loudly praised, are little read. How different it had been, if these gifted men had wreathed their marvellous profusion of thought and imagery round some striking story, or made it subservient to some well-constructed plot! The *Paradise Lost* and the *Pilgrim's Progress* are devoured by millions for their fable, who are altogether incapable of understanding their interior meaning, or perceiving their more recondite beauties. "Prometheus Unbound," and "Paracelsus," are read with pleasure by the more enthusiastic, but are *caviare*, not only to the general reader, but to many thousands who love poetry with a passion. Tennyson, on the other hand, with all his subtlety and refinement, seldom forgets to throw in such touches of nature, and little fragments of narrative, as secure a kindly reception for his poems, at once with the severest of critics, and the least astute of schoolboys. Why should poets

be read only by poets, or by philosophical critics? We think that every good poem should be constructed on the same model with a good sermon, in which the preacher, if a sensible man, takes care that there shall be at once milk for babes, and strong meat for them that are of full age; or upon the model of that blessed book, the Bible, which contains often in the same chapter the grandest poetry and the simplest pathos; here, "words unutterable," which seem to have dropped from the very lips of the heavenly oracle, and there, little sentences, which appear made for the mouths of babes and sucklings; here, "deeps where an elephant may swim; and there, shallows where a lamb may wade!"

Thirdly, this systematic subjectivism is almost certain to produce systematic obscurity and methodical mysticism. If an original writer sit down to compose poetry, either without the thought of any audience, or with only that of a few superior minds in view, he almost inevitably falls into peculiarities of thought, and idiosyncrasies of language, which suit only an esoteric class of readers, and will often baffle even them. If a poet only seek to "move himself," leaving it, as beneath him, to the "orator" to "move others," the consequence will be fatal, not only to his popularity, but to his genuine power. He will move nobody but himself. Look again to Browning's poetry: a wonderful thing it is, in many points and parts; but, as a whole, it is a book of puzzles—a vast enigma—a tissue of hopeless obscurity in thought, and of perplexed, barbarous, affected jargon in language. The same is true with much of Emerson's volume of poems. It is easy for these authors to accuse the reader of being dull in comprehension. The reader thinks he has a greater right to retort the charge of dulness upon the author. Where fire is, it shines; where a star is, it beams: the differentia of light is to be seen. But the density of much of our modern poetry is "dark as was Chaos, ere the infant Sun was rolled together, or had tried his beams across the gulf profound." It is amusing to watch the foolish faces put on by the admirers of this kind of rhymed riddles or blank-verse conundrums, when even they are unable to make out the meaning of some portentous passage, through which not a ray of light has been permitted to shine, and from which grammar and sense have been alike divorced; and to hear their mumbled apologies to the effect, "Depend on it, there are sunbeams in this cucumber, provided we were able to extract them!"

Another evil is the increase of a false, pretentious, and pseudo-

philosophic style of criticism, which, by being constantly exercised upon mystic or super-subtle poetry, becomes altogether incapable of appreciating any other, and often finds subjective meanings, where the objective alone was intended by the poet. The great master of this art abroad is Ulrici, whose *Midsummer Night's Dream* of Shakspere passes with many for a piece of profound and unmatched analysis. Specimens of the class are rife at home, and we deplore the increase amongst us of a style of criticism, which seeks to illustrate the *ignotum* by the *ignotius*, as though midnight could add illumination to mist.

What, then, is it asked, do we propose that our poets should do? Should they, as Professor Blackie in his late Stirling speech seems to think, abandon subjective song altogether; and, burning their Wordsworth and Shelley, betake themselves to ballad-poetry, Homer, Scott, and Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome?* By no means. This is not a legitimate conclusion from what we have now said. There remains a more excellent way. The third and best style, combining the direct dealing, the definite plan, and the clear purpose, the interest and the simpler style of objective poetry, with the depth, the thoughtfulness, the catholicity, and the universal references of subjective, should be attempted by our rising bards. They need not be at a loss either for models or subjects. All Shakspere may become their exemplar. Let them look especially to his *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Timon*, and notice how, in these masterpieces of his genius, he has united the subtlest reflection and loftiest imagination, to the liveliest interest and the warmest human feeling. How clear he is, too, amid all his depth; how direct amid all his passion; and how masculine amid all his subtlety, not to speak of the infinite variety produced by his interchange of the gay with the grave—of the comic with the tragic elements. Or let them study not Shelley's "Prometheus," but his "Cenci;" and take not the monstrosity of the story, but the manhood of the style, for their model. Or let them read "Wallenstein," and the other great dramas of Schiller. Or let them consult Byron himself, and see how, in "Manfred," in "Sardanapalus," and in "Cain," he has combined the deepest thought *he* was capable of, and admirable artistic management of style and character, with vividness of individual portraiture, and intensity of interest. As to subjects, they are inexhaustible, as long as there are so many passages and characters in history waiting for treatment; panting, shall we say, for that incarnation which genius only

can give. We point at present to one, a gigantic one—to Danton. Which of our young poets, our Smiths, Masseys, Biggs, and Yendyses, shall win a crown of immortal fame, by writing a rugged historical drama, after the old *Julius Cæsar* or *Richard the Third* fashion, developing the character and casting the proper glare of grandeur on the death of that wild wondrous Titan of the French Revolution? "Danton," said Scott, long ago, "is a subject fit for the treatment of Shakspere or Schiller."

After all the deductions and exceptions implied in the foregoing remarks, we cannot but express our delight at the fine flush of genuine poetry which the last few years have witnessed alike in England, Ireland, and Scotland. In a MS. volume, we find some sentences written by us in the year 1835, when we were newly of age, which we transcribe, because they express anticipations which have been of late signally fulfilled. "It is objected, 'People will not nowadays read poetry.' True, they will not read what is *called* poetry. They will not read tenth-rate imitations of Byron. They will not read nursery themes for which a schoolboy would be flogged. They will not read respectable commonplace. They will not read even the study-sweepings of reputed men, who imagine, in their complacency, that the universe is agape for the rinsings of their genius. But neither will people, if they can help it, eat raw turnips, or drink ditch water, nor have willingly done so, from the flood downwards, to our knowledge. But people would read real poetry, were it given them. Indeed, an outcry about the decline of poetry is sure, sooner or later, to provoke a reaction. It will, indeed, encourage an enterprising spirit. 'The field,' he will say, 'lies clear, or is peopled only by Lilliputians, supplicating to be spit upon rather than neglected. Why should not I enter on it?' The age is now awake. The slightest symptoms of original power are now recognised. And *we often figure to ourselves the rapture with which a great poet, writing in the spirit of his age, would now be welcomed by an age whose manuals are already Wordsworth and Goethe.*"

No mean place among our rising poets must be allowed to J. Stanyan Bigg, who has once more challenged interest for the lake country of Cumberland, on account of the poetic genius it still inspires and fosters. He was born, we believe, at least he now resides, in Ulverston. He has, we understand, published some time ago, a juvenile volume of poems, but this we have not seen. Part of his present work appeared, like Smith's

Life Drama, piecemeal in the *Critic* — that admirable paper which is now, both in character and circulation, at the very top of the literary journals in the metropolis; and the Groombridges have now placed the whole before us, in the shape of this handsome, portable, and well-printed volume.

Mr. Bigg—although classable in strict logic and method with the school of Bailey, and although bearing certain marked resemblances to Alexander Smith—is yet distinctively original; being less mystical than Festus, less sensuous than Smith—more humane and more Christian, we think, than either. He shines not so much in outstanding passages of intense brilliance, or in single thoughts of great depth, as in a certain rich pervasive spirit of poetry, in which (to use the word applied to it by a generous rival-bard) all his verses are "soaked." His poetry has not yet gathered into firm sunlike shape, but rather resembles what Dr. Whewell in his *Plurality of Worlds* supposes many of the stars still to be—fiery matter unconsolidated, and having hitherto cast off no worlds. Yet the light and the fire are genuine, and may be expected, in due time, to bring forth results both useful and splendid. We seem to perceive the following peculiarities, besides, in Mr. Bigg's poetry:—His imagery is remarkable for its boldness and variety. He has exhibited an equal appreciation of the beautiful and the sublime. He has that noble rush of thought and language which is so characteristic of genuine inspiration. He has a keen perception of the analogies subsisting between nature and the mind of man. And his hope in the destiny of humanity is founded on Christian grounds. These are his main merits. We shall, ere we have done, notice what seem his defects.

First, Mr. Bigg's imagery is uncommonly varied and bold. None of his figures are so striking, or so highly wrought, as some in the *Life Drama*, but there is a greater abundance and variety of them. The nature of his theme ("Night") leads him to select many from the scenery of that season—its stars, its wailing winds, the many mysterious sights and sounds which haunt its solitudes. But, besides these, he gathers analogies from a thousand other regions, and skirts his Night with a bright border of Daylight imagery. Here, for instance, are some sweet and soothing figures:—

> Bless them, and bless the world. Oh may it rest
> In peace upon thy bosom, like a ship
> On the unrippled silver of the sea,
> Or like a green tree in the circling blue
> Of the bright joyousness of summer-morns.

Here, again, is a rich Arabian-Night kind of fancy:—

> Thou speakest in soul-pictures, yet I see
> Thy meaning rising through them, free and simple
> As a young princeling from the grand state-bed,
> Where his white limbs have been enswathed all night
> In gold and velvets.

As a proof of his variety, we give a passage containing, in the space of a few lines, three figures, all good, and all so diverse from each other:—

> Oh! 'twere as if a dank dishevell'd night
> Should rush up, madly haunted by the winds,
> All black as Erebus, upon the steps
> Of a great laughing oriental day.
> I should be wretched as a *cold lone house,*
> *Standing a mark upon a northern moor,*
> Eaves-deep in snow, surrounded by black pools,
> *Pelted by winter, ever anger-pale,*
> To lose you; having tasted of such bliss,
> Such sweet companionship, such holy joy,
> 'Twere as if earth should be flung back again,
> All singing as she is, and crown'd with flowers,
> Into the reeking cycles of her past:
> Instead of valleys, sedgy swamps, and fens,
> With grim, unwieldy reptiles trailing through,
> And in the place of singing, bellowings,
> And the wild roar of monsters on the hills.

That "cold lone house," what a picture! It is worthy of Crabbe; only Mr. Bigg gives it a personification more powerflu than was competent to that poet, and you feel for it as if it were a forlorn human being. How often we have regarded houses in the country with similar emotions. One seemed sheltering itself, and consciously cowering, amid the woods which screened it from the northern blast. Another seemed shivering on a bare and bald exposure. A third, of mean aspect, but set on a hill, seemed ashamed of its exalted beggary, and far-seen nakedness, and striving for ever in vain to be hid. A fourth stood up with the majesty of an Atlas, in castellated dignity between earth and heaven, meeting the scene and the sun like an equal. A fifth seemed melancholy amid its eternal moors. And a sixth, a ruin, glared through the dull eyes of its broken windows and dilapidated loopholes, in rage and defiance, to a landscape over which it had once looked abroad in pride, protection, and love.

Secondly, Mr. Biggs seems equally attracted by, although not equally successful in, the beautiful and the sublime. Specimens

of the sublime are found in his poetry; one of the finest, we think, is the following:—

> Were all nature void, one human thought,
> Self-utter'd and evolved in act, left like
> A white bone on the brink of the abyss,
> As the sole relic of what once had been:
> Thou, who perceivest at a glance the all
> In one, who scannest all relationships,
> In whom all issues meet concentrative—
> Couldst from this puny fragment of thy works
> Recall, and re-arrange, and re-construct
> The mighty mammoth-skeleton of things,
> And fold it once more in its spotted skin,
> And bid the Bright Beast live.

Another is this. Speaking of the pre-Adamite earth, he says—

> She lay desolate and dumb as they,
> Save when volcanoes lifted up their voice—
> Olden Isaiahs in the wilderness—
> And told unto the incredulous wastes wild tales
> Of the great after-time—the age of flowers,
> Of songs and blossoms, MAN, and grassy graves.

But it is in the region of the beautiful that our poet is most at home. He has watered his muse at Grasmere Springs, and at the placid Lake of Windermere, rather than at the turbid waves of "grey Loch Skene," the still, slumbering, inky depths of Loch Avon and Loch Lea, or the streams of the Cona, moaning and foaming amid the rocks and gloomy precipices of Glencoe. We give two specimens of the many beautiful and pathetic strains with which this volume abounds. The following occurs at page 33:—

> A fair young girl,
> To whom one keen woe, like the scythe of Death,
> Had sever'd at a stroke the ties of earth—
> The tender trammelage of love and hope—
> And not released the spirit from its clay,
> But left it bleeding out at every pore,
> Clinging with torn hands to its prison-bars,
> And gasping out towards the light, in vain.
> For she had loved and been deserted; and
> All her heart's wealth was now return'd to her
> Base metal, and not current coin. Her love,
> Which went forth from her bright and beautiful,
> Came back a ghastly corpse, to turn her heart
> Into a bier, and chill it with its weight
> Of passive wo for ever. But the shock
> Had turn'd the poles of being, and *henceforth,*
> *In circles ever narrowing, her soul*
> *Went wheeling like a stricken world round heaven.*

EDITH

Eyes she had, in whose dark lustre
Slumber'd wild and mystic beams;
And a brow of polish'd marble—
Pale abode of gorgeous dreams—
Dreams that caught the hues and splendours
Which the radiant future shows,
For the past was nought but anguish,
And a sepulchre of woes;
Therefore from its scenes and sorrows
All her heart and soul were riven,
And her thoughts kept ever wandering
With the angels up to heaven.

When they told her of the pleasures
Which the future had in store,
When her sorrows would have faded,
And her anguish would be o'er;
Told her of her wealth and beauty,
And the triumphs in her train;
Told her of the many others
Who would sigh for her again:
She but caught one-half their meaning,
While the rest afar was driven:
" Yes," she murmur'd, " they are happy—
They, I mean, who dwell in heaven! "

When they wish'd once more to see her
Mingling with the bright and fair;
When they told her of the splendour
And the rank that would be there;
Told her that amid the glitter
Of that brilliant living sea,
There were none so sought and sighed for,
None so beautiful as she;
Still she heeded not the flattery,
Heard but half the utterance given:
" Yes," she answer'd, " there *are* bright ones,
Many too, I know—in heaven! "

When they spoke of sunlit glories,
Summer days, and moonlit hours;
Told her of the spreading woodland,
With its treasury of flowers;
Clustering fruits, and vales, and mountains,
Flower-banks mirror'd in clear springs,
Winds whose music ever mingled
With the hum of glancing wings—
Scenes of earthly bliss and beauty
Far from all her thoughts were driven,
And she fancied that they told her
Of the happiness of heaven.

For one master-pang had broken
The sweet spell of her young life;
And henceforth its calm and sunshine
Were as tasteless as its strife;

Henceforth all its gloom and grandeur,
  All the music of its streams,
All its thousand pealing voices,
  Spoke the language of her dreams;
Dreams that wander'd on, like orphans
  From all earthly solace driven,
Searching for their great Protector,
  And the palace-gates of heaven.

Another (a poem on Childhood) we meet on page 171:—

Always lightest was her laughter,
  There was dream-land in its tone;
Though she mingled with the children,
  Yet she always seem'd alone.
And her prattle—'twas but child's talk—
  Yet it always sparkled o'er
With a strange and shadowy wisdom,
  With a bird-like fairy lore,
Which you could not help but fancy
  You had somewhere heard before,
In some old-world happy version
  By a bright Elysian shore.

All the little children loved her—
  None so joyous in their play;
And yet ever there was something
  Which seem'd—ah! so far away
From the joyance and the laughter,
  And the streamlet's crisping foam—
'Twas as if some little song-bird
  Had dropp'd down from yon blue dome,
Warbling still among the others,
  Wandering with them where they roam,
And yet hallowing remembrance
  With low gushes about home!

Oh, the glory of those child-eyes!
  Oh, the music of her feet!
Oh, those peals of spirit-laughter
  Coming up the village street!
Shall we never hear her knocking
  At the little ivied door?
Will she never run to kiss us,
  Bounding o'er the oaken floor?
Has that music gone for ever?
  Are those tender lispings o'er?
Oh, the terror! oh, the anguish,
  Of that one word—evermore!

Ever was she but a stranger
  Among the sublunary things:
All her life was but the folding
  Of her gorgeous spirit-wings—
Nothing more than a forgetting—
  Still she gave more than she took
From the sunlight or the starlight,
  From the meadow or the brook:—
There was music in her silence,

There was wisdom in her look;
There was raying out of beauty
As from some transcendent book;
She was wonderful as grottoes
With strange gods in every nook!

And at night, amid the silence,
With her little prayer-clasp'd hands,
She look'd holy as the Christ-church
Rising white in Pagan lands:—
Seem'd she but the faltering prelude
To a great tale of God's throne—
As a flower dropp'd out of heaven
Telling whither it has grown.
But she left us—she, our angel—
Without murmur, without moan;
And we woke and found it starlight—
Found that we were all alone,
And as desolate as birds' nests,
When the fledglings have all flown!

But our house has been made sacred—
Sacred every spot she trod;
For she came a starry preacher,
Dedicating all to God.
Render thanks unto the Giver,
Though his gift be out of sight,
For a jubilant to-morrow
Shall come after this to-night!
She hath left a spirit-glory
Blending with the grosser light,
Oh, the earth to us is holy!
Oh, the other world is bright!"

Thirdly, Mr. Bigg exhibits that noble rushing motion of thought and language which testifies so strongly to a genuine inspiration, in which words seem to pursue each other, like wheels in a series of chariots, with irresistible force and impetuous velocity. Nowhere out of "Festus" do we find passages which heave and hurry along with a more genuine afflatus, than in many of Mr. Bigg's pages. Take two long passages, both of which are "instinct with spirit." The first will be found at page 21:—

The night is lovely, and I love her with
A passionate devotion, for she stirs
Feelings too deep for utterance within me.
She thrills me with an influence and a power,
A sadden'd kind of joy I cannot name,
So that I meet her brightest smile with tears.
She seemeth like a prophetess, too wise,
Knowing, ah! all too much for happiness;
As though she had tried all things, and had found
All vain and wanting, and was thenceforth steep'd
Up to the very dark, tear-lidded eyes
In a mysterious gloom, a holy calm!
Doth she not look now just as if she knew

All that hath been, and all that is to come?
With one of her all-prescient glances turn'd
Towards those kindred depths which slept for aye—
The sable robe which God threw round himself,
And where, pavilion'd in glooms, he dwelt
In brooding night for ages, perfecting
The glorious dream of past eternities,
The fabric of creation, running adown
The long time-avenues, and gazing out
Into those blanks which slept before time was;
And with another searching glance, turn'd up
Towards unknown futurities—the book
Of unborn wonders—till she hath perused
The chapter of its doom; and with an eye
Made vague by the dim vastness of its vision,
Watching unmoved the fall of burning worlds,
Rolling along the steep sides of the Infinite,
All ripe, like apples dropping from their stems;
Till the wide fields of space, like orchards stripp'd,
Have yielded up their treasures to the garner,
And the last star hath fallen from the crown
Of the high heavens into utter night,
Like a bright moment swallow'd up and lost
In hours of after-anguish; and all things
Are as they were in the beginning, ere
The mighty pageant trail'd its golden skirts
Along the glittering pathway of its God,
Save that the spacious halls of heaven are fill'd
With countless multitudes of finite souls,
With germ-like infinite capacities,
As if to prove all had not been a dream.
'Tis this that Night seems always thinking of;
Linking the void past to the future void,
And typifying present times in stars,
To show that all is not quite issueless,
But that the blanks have yielded starlike ones
To cluster round the sapphire throne of God
In bliss for ever and for evermore!
O yes! I love the Night, who ever standeth
With her gemm'd finger on her rich ripe lip,
As if in attitude of deep attention,
Catching the mighty echoes of the words
Which God had utter'd ere the earth was form'd,
Or ere yon Infinite blush'd like a bride
With all her jewels; and I love the flowers,
And their soft slumber as they lie around
In the sweet starlight, bathed in love-like dew,
And looking like young sisters, orphans too,
Left to our watchful care and guardianship,
To keep them from the rough-voiced, burly winds,
And see that nought invades their soul-like sleep.
Thou canst not tell me what I do not love,
In all this dark-robed family of peace:
The temporary hush of the low winds,
And their uprising wail;—the shadows there
Cast from the long dark shrubberies, that move
And rest again on the greensward, and nod
Their hearselike plumage to the passing winds;—
The deep, unclouded light, half glow, half gloom,

Dark, and yet lustrous, gleaming with a fire
Whose sources seem unfathomable;—love
Even the very grass beneath our feet,
Whose graceful blades I almost fear to tread on,
Because, when I have pass'd, they raise themselves
Again, half in reproach, so quietly
Turning themselves once more unto the heaven
That cherishes and feeds them, I could weep
That I had crush'd them underneath my foot;—
Even yon tree, standing so lonely there,
As if it dream'd of all the music which
Its branches used to hold when in their prime,
Ere it became a dead and blasted thing
Upon the bosom of the living world,
Which she still weareth, as a maiden wears
The wither'd flowers of the sweet Long-Ago,
Ere love itself and lover both were dead!
And yet I love it too—grim ancient thing.
All, all, oh! yes, I dearly love them all!

The second, still finer, meets us at page 39:—

O thought! What art thou but a fluttering leaf
Shed from the garden of Eternity?
The robe in which the soul invests itself
To join the countless myriads of the skies—
The very air they breathe in heaven—the gleam
That lights it up, and makes it what it is—
The light that glitters on its pinnacles—
The luscious bloom that flushes o'er its fruits—
The odour of its flowers, and very soul
Of all the music of its million harps—
The dancing glory of its angels' eyes—
The brightness of its crowns, and starlike glow
Of its bright thrones—the centre of its bliss,
For ever radiating like a sun—
The spirit thrill that pulses through its halls,
Like sudden music vibrating through air—
The splendour playing on its downy wings—
The lustre of its sceptres, and the breeze
Which shakes its golden harvests into light—
The diamond apex of the Infinite—
A ray of the great halo round God's head—
The consummation and the source of all,
In which all cluster, and all constellate,
Grouping like glories round the purple west
When the great sun is low. For what are stars
But God's thoughts indurate—the burning words
That roll'd forth blazing from his mighty lips
When he spake to the breathless infinite,
And shook the wondrous sleeper from her dream?
Thus God's thoughts ever call unto man's soul
To rouse itself, and let *its* thoughts shake off
The torpor from their wings, and soar and sing
Up in the sunny azure of the heavens:
And when at length one rises from its rest,
Like the mail'd Barbarossa from his trance,
He smiles upon it, in whatever garb
It is array'd:—whether it stretches up
In grand cathedral spires, whose gilded vanes,

Like glorious earth-tongues, lap the light of heaven:
Or rounds itself into the perfect form
Of marble heroes, looking a reproof
On their creators for not gifting them
With one spark of that element divine
Whose words they are; or points itself like light
Upon the retina, in breathing hues
And groups of loveliness on speaking canvas;
Or wreaths itself in fourfold harmony,
Making the soul a sky of rainbows; or
Sweeping vast circuits, ever stretching out
Broad-arm'd, and all-embracing theories;
Or harvesting its brightness focal-wise,
All centring in the poet's gem-like words,
Fresh as the odours of young flowers, and bright
As new stars trembling in the hand of God.
In all its grand disguises he beholds
And blesses his fair child. For thought is one,
As souls are in their essence, and it works
By kindred laws and processes in all;—
Whether it flames within thy mind, oh God,
And publishes itself in spheres of light,
In worlds of spirits—effluences of thee,
And shows its mighty convoluted throes
In embryotic suns and nebulæ;
Or glimmers dimly in the humble mind
Of one of thy earth's children, whose grand wish
And festival ambition is to bow
To thee; and whose most lofty thought is but
As the upturning of an eye in prayer;
Still are they one in nature—the great thought
That ray'd out into constellated worlds,
And the weak thought that went up in a sigh—
The grand and lofty thought that, lover-like,
Hung a new star-string on the neck of heaven,
And the poor, lowly one that, bee-like, brought
The honey of a pious wish to thee;
And this is one drop in that luminous flood;
One note from a light string of the great harp;
One leaf in all the universal wreath;
One point of all the glory of thy throne;
One atom of the substance of all worlds;
One gem upon the costly floor of heaven;
One tiny firstling among all the wealth,
Which, going from thee glances, is return'd
As suns. And to thine eye one human thought
Interprets all the rest; the dynasties
Of mightiest intellect or martial power,
The Pharaohs and the Cæsars, and the times
Of Persian splendour, and of Grecian might—
One human thought, invested in an act,
Lays bare the heart of all humanity,
And holds up, globule-like, in miniature
All that the soul of man hath yet achieved,
Its Paradises Lost, its glorious Iliads,
Its Hamlets and Othellos, and its dreams
Rising in towering Pyramids and Fanes,
To show that earth hath raptures heavenward;
And like the touch'd lips of a hoary saint,

Utters dim prophesies of after-worlds,
Making sweet music to the ear of God,
Like Memnon's statue thrilling at the sun;
And as the New Year opening into life
Is all-related to the ages, so
Are man's works unto thine, Almighty God;
And as the ages to eternity,
So are *all* works to thee, Great Source of all!"

Fourthly, the author of *Night and the Soul* has a quick perception of those real, but mysterious analogies, which bind mind and nature together. The whole poem is indeed an attempt to show the thousand points in which Night, in its brightness and blackness, its terror and its joy, its clouds and its stars, its calm and its storm, comes in contact with human hopes, fears, aspirations, doubts, faults, and destinies. For example, he says—

The solemn Night comes hooded, like a nun
From her dark cell, while all the laughing stars
Mock the black weeds of the fair anchorite.
Sorrow is but the sham and slave of joy;
And this sweet sadness that thou wottest of
Is but the dusky dress in which our bliss,
Like a child sporting with the weeds of wo,
Chooses a moment to enrobe itself.

Two beautiful separate strains will show still better what we mean. One we find at page 113:—

Thou pleadest, love, and all things plead;
For what is life but endless needing?
All worlds have wants beyond themselves,
And live by ceaseless pleading.

The earth yearns towards the sun for light;
The stars all tremble towards each other;
And every moon that shines to-night
Hangs trembling on an elder brother.

Flowers plead for grace to live; and bees
Plead for the tinted domes of flowers;
Streams rush into the big-soul'd seas;
The seas yearn for the golden hours.

The moon pleads for her preacher, Night;
Old ocean pleadeth for the moon;
Noon flies into the shades for rest;
The shades seek out the noon.

Life is an everlasting seeking;
Souls seek, and pant, and plead for truth;
Youth hangeth on the skirts of age;
Age yearneth still towards youth.

And thus all cling unto each other;
For nought from all things else is riven.
Heaven bendeth o'er the prostrate earth;
Earth spreads her arms towards heaven.

So do thou bend above me, love,
And I will bless thee from afar;
Thou shalt be heaven, and I the sea
That bosometh the star.

The other occurs at page 117, and is a powerful collection of gloomy images:—

I stand beside thy lonely grave, my love.
The wet lands stretch below me like a bog;
Darkness comes showering down upon me fast;
The wind is whining like a houseless dog;—
The cold, cold wind is whining round thy grave,
It comes up wet and dripping from the fen;
The *tawny twilight creeps into the dark,*
Like a dun, angry lion to his den.

There is a forlorn moaning in the air—
A sobbing round the spot where thou art sleeping;
There is a dull glare in the wintry sky,
As though the eye of heaven were red with weeping.
Sharp gusts of tears come raining from the clouds,
The ancient church looks desolate and wild;
There is a deep, cold shiver in the earth,
As though the great world hunger'd for her child.

The very trees fling their gaunt arms on high,
Calling for Summer to come back again;
Earth cries that Heaven has quite deserted her;
Heaven answers but in showers of drizzling rain.
The rain comes plashing on my pallid face;
Night, like a witch, is squatting on the ground;
The storm is rising, and its howling wail
Goes baying round her, like a hungry hound.

The clouds, like grim, black faces, come and go.
One tall tree stretches up against the sky;
It lets the rain through, like a trembling hand
Pressing thin fingers on a watery eye.
The moon came, but shrank back, like a young girl
Who has burst in upon funereal sadness;
One star came—Cleopatra-like, the Night
Swallow'd this one pearl in a fit of madness,
And here I stand, the weltering heaven above,
Beside thy lonely grave, my lost, my buried love!

Fifthly, this poet deduces a grand Christian moral from his story and whole poem. Alexis, his hero, after outliving many difficulties, trials, and doubts, comes to a Christian conclusion, in which he expresses the following magnificent passage (page 155):—

The heart is a dumb angel to the soul,
Till Christ pass by, and touch its bud-like lips.
Not unto thee, bold spirit on the wing,
Does the bright form of Truth reveal itself;
Soar as thou wilt, the heavens are still above,
And to thy questionings no answer comes—
Only the mocking of the dumb, sad stars.
Awhile thy search may promise thee success,

And now and then wild lights may play above,
Which, with exultant joy, thou takest for
The gleaming portals of the home of Truth—
'Twas but a mirage where thou saw'st thyself,
And not the image of the passing God!

Oh, with what joy we all set out for truth—
Newer Crusaders for the Holy Land—
Till one by one our guides and comrades fall,
And then some starry night, some cold bleak night,
We find we are alone upon the sands,
Far from all human aids and sympathies,
While the black tide comes roaring up the waste.
The highest truths lie nearest to the heart;
No soarings of the soul can find out God.
I was a bee who woke one summer night,
And taking the white stars for flowers, went up
Buzzing and booming in the hungry blue;
And when its wings were weary with the flight,
And the cold airs of morn were coming up,
Lo! the white flowers were melting out of view,
And it came wheeling back—ah! heavily—
To the great laughing earth that gleam'd below!
God will not show himself to prying eyes:
Could Reason scale the battlements of heaven,
Religion were a vain and futile thing,
And Faith a toy for childhood or the mad;
The humble heart sees farther than the soul.
Love is the key to knowledge—to true power;
And he who loveth all things, knoweth all.
Religion is the true Philosophy!
Faith is the last great link 'twixt God and man.
There is more wisdom in a whisper'd prayer,
Than in the ancient lore of all the schools:
The soul upon its knees holds God by the hand.
Worship is wisdom as it is in heaven!
"I do believe! help Thou my unbelief!"
Is the last, greatest utterance of the soul.
God came to me as Truth—I saw Him not;
He came to me as Love—and my heart broke,
And from its inmost deeps there came a cry,
"My Father! oh! my Father, smile on me;"
And the Great Father smiled.
Ah! 'tis a blessed world—a theatre
Where mighty purposes play out their parts:
We see not half its beauty till we are
That which we see through love. The holy heart
Fulfils the dream of olden alchymists.
Turning all things it touches into gold.
The highest wisdom of the wisest seer
Is that which brings his childhood back to him.
Christ was the babe's Apostle; and his words
Breathe the pure air of childhood, and its faith:
Stoop, stoop, proud man! the gate of heaven is low,
And all who enter in thereat must bend!
Reason has fields to play in, wide as air;
But they have bounds; and if she soar beyond,
Lo! there are lightnings and the curse of God,
And the old thunder'd "Never!" from the jaws

Of the black darkness, and the mocking waste.
Come not to God with questions on thy lips;
He will have love—love and a holy trust,
And the self-abnegation of the child.
'Tis a far higher wisdom to believe,
Than to cry "Question," at the porch of truth.
Think not the Infinite will calmly brook
The plummet of the finite in its deeps.
The humble cottager I saw last night,
Sitting among the shadows at his door,
With his great Bible open on his knee—
His grandchild sporting near him on the grass,
When his day's work was done—and pointing still
With horny finger as he read the lines,
Had, in his child-like trust and confidence,
Far more of wisdom on his furrow'd brow,
Than Kant in proving that there is a God,
Or Plato buried in Atlantis dreams!
I was a pilgrim gone in search of Him;
Reason, my guide, went wheeling through the dark,
And still I follow'd with a faltering joy,
Until at last we reach'd the utmost verge,
Where "Hither and no Farther!" is inscribed,
And my guide vanish'd, leaving me alone—
Alone—and the bright shrine I sought far off!
Alone—and the great waste behind me there,
Shutting me out from love and sympathy;
And there before, a waste yet wider still.
Ah! then it was my sturdy heart was touch'd:
I first felt awe, then love, then confidence;
And when I came once more into the world
From this soul-pilgrimage, behold! it smiled:
And it was morn, and all the birds were up,
And the one heart of all things throbb'd with joy;
And the old hills lay sleeping, sleek in sunlight;
It was a jubilee in praise of God—
An Orphic song—a festal hymn of praise!
I saw all seeming eccentricities
Were but the playing of the wider laws,
While law itself was systematic LOVE.
The passing winds sang vesper hymns to me;
And the old woods seem'd whispering, "Let us pray!"

Still more directly is the moral of the poem stated in the following words, which leave Alexis a "little child":—

The last secret that we learn is this—
That being is a circle after all.
And the last line we draw in after life,
Rejoins the arc of childhood when complete:
That to be more than man is to be less.

We need not dwell on the identity of this statement with the words of Jesus—"Except a man become as a little child, he can in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven;" nor express our joy at finding these words—which are at present a stumbling-block to many, in this proud and sceptical age, when intellect is worshipped as a god, and humility is trampled on as a slave—

taken up, set in the splendid imagery, and sung in the lofty measures of one of our most gifted young poets.

We have not analysed the story, for this reason, that story, properly speaking, there is none. Two couples are the principal interlocutors—Ferdinand and Caroline—Alexis and Flora. The first are all bliss and blue sky together; they seem almost in heaven already. Alexis, again, is a kind of Manfred—without the melancholy end of that hero. Certain spirits form a conspiracy against him, and lead him through wild weltering abysses of struggle—very powerfully described—during which he forgets poor Flora, and a lady named Edith dies in love for him. When he returns to himself, and reaches the solid ground of hope, he returns to Flora too, and they are left in a very happy frame—she blessing the hour of his deliverance, and he resuming his old poetical aspirations. The poem closes with a song, in the "Locksley Hall" style, on the "Poet's Mission," which is not, we think, in the author's best manner; and will be thought, by many, not quite in keeping with the Christian moral of the poem before enunciated.

And now for fault-finding. First, we state the want of objective interest. *Night and the Soul* is just a heap of fine and beautiful things. The story has no hinge. The plot is nothing. You might almost begin to read the book at the end, and close it at the beginning. Secondly, there is no dramatic skill displayed in the management of the dialogue. All the characters talk equally well, and all talk too long. All are poets or poetesses, uttering splendid soliloquies. Hence inevitably arise considerable monotony and tedium. Thirdly, we demur to that Spirit-scene altogether. Either these beings should have been described as doing *more*, or doing *less*. As it is, their introduction is a mere excrescence, although it is redeemed by much striking poetry. Fourthly, there is a good deal of the *hideous* in the poem, imitated, apparently, from the worse passages of *Festus*. We give one specimen—the worst, however, in the volume (page 132):—

> Last night I dream'd the universe was mad,
> And that the sun its Cyclopean eye
> Roll'd glaring like a maniac's in the heavens;
> And moons and comets, link'd together, scream'd
> Like bands of witches at their carnivals,
> And stream'd like wandering hell along the sky;
> And that the awful stars, through the red light,
> Glinted at one another wickedly,
> Throbbing and chilling with intensest hate,
> While through the whole a nameless horror ran;

And worlds dropp'd from their place i' the shuddering,
Like leaves of Autumn, when a mighty wind
Makes the trees shiver through their thickest robes:
Great spheres crack'd in the midst, and belch'd out flame,
And sputtering fires went crackling over heaven;
And space yawn'd blazing stars; and Time shriek'd out,
That hungry fire was eating everything!
And scorch'd fiends, down in the nether hell,
Cried out, "The universe is mad—is mad!"
And the great thing in its convulsions flung
System on system, till the caldron boil'd
(Space was the caldron, and all hell the fire),
And every giant limb o' the universe
Dilated and collapsed, till it grew wan,
And I could see its naked ribs gleam out,
Beating like panting fire—and I awoke.
'Twas not all dream;—such is the world to me.

This will never do. Fifthly, Mr. Bigg appears to us to write too fast, and too diffusely. Many of his passages would be greatly improved by leaving out every third line.

This, however, is an ungracious task, and we must hurry it over. The author of *Night and the Soul* is a genuine poet. He has original genius—prolific fancy—the resources, too, of an ample scholarship—an unbounded command of poetic language—and, above all, a deeply-human, reverent, and pious spirit breathing in his soul. On the future career of such an one, there can rest no shadows of uncertainty. A little pruning, a little more pains in elaborating, and the selection of an interesting story for his future poems, are all he requires to rank him, by and by, with our foremost living poets.

GERALD MASSEY[1]

Gerald Massey has not the voluptuous tone, the felicitous and highly-wrought imagery, or the sustained music of Smith; nor the diffusive splendour and rich general spirit of poetry in which all Bigg's verses are steeped; nor the amazing subtlety, depth, and pervasive purpose of Yendys's song. His poetry is neither sustained as a whole, nor highly finished in almost any of its parts; its power lies in separate sparkles of intense brilliance, shining on what is generally a dark ground—like moonbeams gleaming on a midnight wave. Whether it be from the extreme brightness of those sparkles, or from the gloom which they relieve, certain we are that we have never

[1] *The Ballad of Babe Christabel, and other Lyrical Poems.* With additional Pieces, and a Preface. By Gerald Massey.

made so many *marks* in the same compass in any poem. Indeed, we have seldom followed any such practice; but in Massey's case we felt irresistibly compelled to it—his beauties had such a sudden and startling effect. They rose at our feet like fluttered birds of game; they stood up in our path like rose-bushes amid groves of pine. Before saying anything more of this poet's merits or faults, we shall transcribe some of these markings.

In lonely loveliness she grew
A shape all music, light and love,
With startling looks so eloquent of
The spirit burning into view.

Her brow—fit home for daintiest dreams—
With such a *dawn of light* was crown'd,
And *reeling ringlets rippled round*
Like sunny sheaves of golden beams.

The trees, like burden'd prophets yearn'd,
Rapt in a wind of prophecy.

Hear this exquisite picture of a lover's heart, in the dark, rising to the image of his mistress:—

Heart will plead, "Eyes cannot see her. They are blind with tears of pain,"
And it *climbeth up* and *straineth* for *dear life* to *look* and hark
While I call her once again; but there cometh no refrain,
And it *droppeth down* and *dieth* in the *dark.*

I heard faith's *low sweet singing in the night,*
And *groping through the darkness touch'd God's hand.*

Some bird in sudden sparkles of fine sound
Hurries its startled being into song.

No star goes down, but climbs in other skies.
The rose of sunset folds its glory up,
To burst again from out the heart of dawn;
And love is never lost, though hearts run waste,
And sorrow makes the chasten'd heart a seer;
The deepest dark reveals the starriest hope,
And Faith can trust her heaven behind the veil.

The *sweetest swallow-dip of a tender smile*
Ran round your mouth in thrillings.
A *spirit-feel* is in the solemn air.

Unto dying eyes
The dark of death doth blossom into stars.

Sweet eyes of starry tenderness, through which
The *soul of some immortal* sorrow looks!"

Sorrow hath reveal'd what we ne'er had known,
With *joy's wreath tumbled o'er our blinded eyes.*

Darks of diamonds, grand as nights of stars.

'Tis the old story! ever the blind world
Knows not its angels of deliverance,
Till they stand glorified 'twixt earth and heaven.

Ye sometimes lead my feet to walk the *angel side of life.*

Come, worship beauty in the forest temple, dim and hush,
Where stands magnificence dreaming! and God *burneth in the bush.*

The murkiest midnight that frowns from the skies
Is *at heart* a radiant morrow.

The kingliest kings are crown'd with thorn.

When will the world quicken for liberty's birth,
Which she waiteth, with *eager wings beating the dawn.*

Oh, but 'twill be a merry day, the world shall set apart,
When strife's last brand is broken in the last crown'd tyrant's heart!

The herald of our coming Christ leaps in the womb of time;
The poor's grand army treads the Age's march with step sublime.

Yet she weeteth not I love her;
Never dare I tell the sweet
Tale, but to the stars above her,
And the flowers that kiss her feet.

And the maiden-meek voice of the womanly wife
Still bringeth the heavens nigher,
For it rings like the voice of God o'er my life,
Aye bidding me climb up higher.

Merry as laughter 'mong the hills,
Spring dances at my heart!"

Where life hath climaxt like a wave
That breaks in perfect rest.

We might long persist at this pleasant task of plucking wild-flowers. But we hasten to speak of some of the more prominent merits and defects of this remarkable volume. One main merit of Massey is his intense earnestness, which reminds you almost of Ebenezer Elliott, with his redhot-poker pen. Like him, he has "put his heart"—his big, burning heart—into his poems. Mr. Lewes, of the *Leader*, opines that Massey wants the power of transmuting experience into poetic forms, and that nowhere does the real soul of the man utter itself: two most unfortunate assertions—for the evident effort, and often successful attainment, of this author, more than with most writers, are, to set his own life to music, and to express in verse all the poetry with which it has teemed. He has been a sore struggler—with poverty, with a narrow sphere, with doubts and darkness; and you have this struggle echoed in his rugged and fiery song. He has been a giant under Etna; and his voice is a *suspirium de profundis.* Although still a very young man, he has undergone ages of experience; and, although we had not known all this from his preface and notes, we might have confidently concluded it from his poetry.

In his earlier poems, we find his fire of earnestness burning in fierce, exaggerated, and volcanic forms. The poet appears

an incarnation of the Evil Genius of poverty, and reminds you of Robert Burns in his wilder mood. He sets Chartism to music. He sings, with strange variations, "A man's a man for a' that." But this springs from circumstances, not from the poet himself; and you are certain that progress and change of situation will elicit a finer and healthier frame of spirit—and so it has proved. Although his poems are not arranged in chronological order, internal evidence convinces us that those in which he is at once simplest and most subdued have been written last. A change of the most benignant kind has come o'er the spirit of his dream, and has been, we beg leave to think, greatly owing to female influence. He has found his better angel in that amiable wife, whose virtues he has so often celebrated in his song, and in whom he sees a tenth muse.

The homage done by him to the domestic affections, his ardent worship of his own hearth, is one of the most pleasing characteristics of Gerald Massey's poetry, and has been noticed by more than one of his critics. It comes out, not for the sake of ostentation, or artistic effect, but spontaneously and irresistibly in many parts of his poems. We have great pleasure in transcribing words addressed to him by an eminent writer of the day, in which we cordially concur: "One everlasting subject of people's poetry is love, and you are at the age at which a man is bound to sing it. The devil has had power over love-poems too long, because the tastes of the people were too gross to relish anything but indecency, because the married men left the love-singing to the unmarried ones. Now, love before marriage is the tragedy of *Hamlet* with the part of Hamlet left out! Therefore the bachelor love-poets, being forced to make their subject complete, to go beyond mere sentiment, were driven into illicit love. I say that is a shame. I say that the highest joys of love are married joys, and that the married man ought to be the true love-poet. Now God has given you, as I hear, in his great love and mercy, a charming wife and child. There is your school. There are your treasured ideas. Sing about them, and the people will hear you, because you will be loving, and real, and honest, and practical, speaking from your heart straight to theirs. But write simply what you do feel and see, not what you think you *ought* to feel and see. The very simplest love-poet goes deepest. Get to yourself, I beseech you, all that you can of English and Scotch ballads, and consider them as what they are—models. Read 'Auld Robin Gray' twenty times over. Study it word for word."