

# CHARLES KINGSLEY

LITERARY AND GENERAL  
LECTURES AND ESSAYS

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# Charles Kingsley

## Literary and General Lectures and Essays

### THE STAGE AS IT WAS ONCE <sup>1</sup>

Let us think for a while upon what the Stage was once, in a republic of the past—what it may be again, I sometimes dream, in some republic of the future. In order to do this, let me take you back in fancy some 2314 years—440 years before the Christian era, and try to sketch for you—alas! how clumsily—a great, though tiny people, in one of their greatest moments—in one of the greatest moments, it may be, of the human race. For surely it is a great and a rare moment for humanity, when all that is loftiest in it—when reverence for the Unseen powers, reverence for the heroic dead, reverence for the fatherland, and that reverence, too, for self, which is expressed in stateliness and self-restraint, in grace and courtesy; when all these, I say, can lend themselves, even for a day, to the richest enjoyment of life—to the enjoyment of beauty in form and sound, and of relaxation, not brutalising, but ennobling.

Rare, alas! have such seasons been in the history of poor humanity. But when they have come, they have lifted it up one stage higher thenceforth. Men, having been such once, may become such again; and the work which such times have left behind them becomes immortal.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

Let me take you to the then still unfurnished theatre of Athens, hewn out of the limestone rock on the south-east slope of the Acropolis.

Above are the new marble buildings of the Parthenon, rich with the statues and bas-reliefs of Phidias and his scholars, gleaming white against the blue sky, with the huge bronze statue of Athené Promachos, fifty feet in height, towering up among the temples and colonnades. In front, and far below, gleams the blue sea, and Salamis beyond.

And there are gathered the people of Athens—fifty thousand of them, possibly, when the theatre was complete and full. If it be fine, they all wear garlands on their heads. If the sun be too hot, they wear wide-brimmed straw hats. And if a storm comes on, they will take refuge in the porticoes beneath; not without wine and cakes, for what they have come to see will last for many an hour, and they intend to feast their eyes and ears from sunrise to sunset. On the highest seats are slaves and freedmen, below them the free citizens; and on the lowest seats of all are the dignitaries of the republic—the priests, the magistrates, and the other *καλοὶ καγαθοὶ*—the fair and good men—as the citizens of the highest rank were called, and with them foreign ambassadors and distinguished strangers. What an audience! the rapidest, subtlest, wittiest, down to the very cobblers and tinkers, the world has ever seen. And what noble figures on those front seats; Pericles, with Aspasia beside him, and all his friends—Anaxagoras the sage, Phidias the sculptor, and many another immortal artist; and somewhere among the free citizens, perhaps beside his father Sophroniscus the sculptor, a short, square, pug-nosed boy of ten years old, looking at it all with strange eyes—“who will be one day,” so said the Pythoness at Delphi, “the wisest man in Greece”—sage, metaphysician, humorist, warrior, patriot, martyr—for his name is *Socrates*.

All are in their dresses of office; for this is not merely a day of amusement, but of religious ceremony; sacred to Dionysos—Bacchus, the inspiring god, who raises men above themselves, for good—or for evil.

The evil, or at least the mere animal aspect of that inspiration, was to be seen in forms grotesque and sensuous enough in those very festivals, when the gayer and coarser part of the population, in

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<sup>1</sup> This Lecture was given at Harrow in 1873, and in America in 1874.



town and country, broke out into frantic masquerade—of which the silly carnival of Rome is perhaps the last paltry and unmeaning relic—“when,” as the learned O. Müller says, “the desire of escaping from self into something new and strange, of living in an imaginary world, broke forth in a thousand ways; not merely in revelry and solemn though fantastic songs, but in a hundred disguises, imitating the subordinate beings—satyrs, pans, and nymphs, by whom the god was surrounded, and through whom life seemed to pass from him into vegetation, and branch off into a variety of beautiful or grotesque forms—beings who were ever present to the fancy of the Greeks, as a convenient step by which they could approach more nearly to the presence of the Divinity.” But even out of that seemingly bare chaos, Athenian genius was learning how to construct, under Eupolis, Cratinus, and Aristophanes, that elder school of comedy, which remains not only unsurpassed, but unapproachable, save by Rabelais alone, as the ideal cloudland of masquerading wisdom, in which the whole universe goes mad—but with a subtle method in its madness.

Yes, so it has been, under some form or other, in every race and clime—ever since Eve ate of the magic fruit, that she might be as a god, knowing good and evil, and found, poor thing, as most have since, that it was far easier and more pleasant to know the evil than to know the good. But that theatre was built that men might know therein the good as well as the evil. To learn the evil, indeed, according to their light, and the sure vengeance of Até and the Furies which tracks up the evil-doer. But to learn also the good—lessons of piety, patriotism, heroism, justice, mercy, self-sacrifice, and all that comes out of the hearts of men and women not dragged *below*, but raised *above* themselves; and behind all—at least in the nobler and earlier tragedies of Æschylus and Sophocles, before Euripides had introduced the tragedy of mere human passion; that sensation tragedy, which is the only one the world knows now, and of which the world is growing rapidly tired—behind all, I say, lessons of the awful and unfathomable mystery of human existence—of unseen destiny; of that seemingly capricious distribution of weal and woe, to which we can find no solution on this side the grave, for which the old Greek could find no solution whatsoever.

Therefore there was a central object in the old Greek theatre, most important to it, but which did not exist in the old Roman, and does not exist in our theatres, because our tragedies, like the Roman, are mere plays concerning love, murder, and so forth, while the Greek were concerning the deepest relations of man to the Unseen.

The almost circular orchestra, or pit, between the benches and the stage, was empty of what we call spectators—because it was destined for the true and ideal spectators—the representatives of humanity; in its centre was a round platform, the θυμέλη—originally the altar of Bacchus—from which the leader of these representatives, the leader of the Chorus, could converse with the actors on the stage and take his part in the drama; and round this thymelé the Chorus ranged with measured dance and song, chanting, to the sound of a simple flute, odes such as the world had never heard before or since, save perhaps in the temple-worship at Jerusalem. A chorus now, as you know, merely any number of persons singing in full harmony on any subject. The Chorus was then in tragedy, and indeed in the higher comedy, what Schlegel well calls “the ideal spectator”—a personified reflection on the action going on, the incorporation into the representation itself of the sentiments of the poet, as the spokesman of the whole human race. He goes on to say (and I think truly), “that the Chorus always retained among the Greeks a peculiar national signification, publicity being, according to their republican notions, essential to the completeness of every important transaction.” Thus the Chorus represented idealised public opinion; not, of course, the shifting hasty public opinion of the moment—to that it was a conservative check, and it calmed it to soberness and charity—for it was the matured public opinion of centuries; the experience, and usually the sad experience, of many generations; the very spirit of the Greek race.

The Chorus might be composed of what the poet would. Of ancient citizens, waiting for their sons to come back from the war, as in the “Agamemnon” of Æschylus; of sea-nymphs, as in his “Prometheus Bound;” even of the very Furies who hunt the matricide, as in his “Eumenides;” of

senators, as in the “Antigone” of Sophocles; or of village farmers, as in his “Ædipus at Colonus”—and now I have named five of the greatest poems, as I hold, written by mortal man till Dante rose. Or it may be the Chorus was composed—as in the comedies of Aristophanes, the greatest humorist the world has ever seen—of birds, or of frogs, or even of clouds. It may rise to the level of Don Quixote, or sink to that of Sancho Panza; for it is always the incarnation of such wisdom, heavenly or earthly, as the poet wishes the people to bring to bear on the subject-matter.

But let the poets themselves, rather than me, speak awhile. Allow me to give you a few specimens of these choruses—the first as an example of that practical and yet surely not un-divine wisdom, by which they supplied the place of our modern preacher, or essayist, or didactic poet.

Listen to this of the old men’s chorus in the “Agamemnon,” in the spirited translation of my friend Professor Blackie:

’Twas said of old, and ’tis said to-day,  
That wealth to prosperous stature grown  
Begets a birth of its own:  
That a surfeit of evil by good is prepared,  
And sons must bear what allotment of woe  
Their sires were spared.  
But this I refuse to believe: I know  
That impious deeds conspire  
To beget an offspring of impious deeds  
Too like their ugly sire.  
But whoso is just, though his wealth like a river  
Flow down, shall be scathless: his house shall rejoice  
In an offspring of beauty for ever.

The heart of the haughty delights to beget  
A haughty heart. From time to time  
In children’s children recurrent appears  
The ancestral crime.  
When the dark hour comes that the gods have decreed  
And the Fury burns with wrathful fires,  
A demon unholy, with ire unabated,  
Lies like black night on the halls of the fated;  
And the recreant Son plunges guiltily on  
To perfect the guilt of his Sires.

But Justice shines in a lowly cell;  
In the homes of poverty, smoke-begrimed,  
With the sober-minded she loves to dwell.  
But she turns aside  
From the rich man’s house with averted eye,  
The golden-fretted halls of pride  
Where hands with lucre are foul, and the praise  
Of counterfeit goodness smoothly sways;  
And wisely she guides in the strong man’s despite  
All things to an issue of RIGHT.

Let me now give you another passage from the “Eumenides”—or “Furies”—of Æschylus.

Orestes, Prince of Argos, you must remember, has avenged on his mother Clytemnestra the murder of his father, King Agamemnon, on his return from Troy. Pursued by the Furies, he takes refuge in the temple of Apollo at Delphi, and then, still Fury-haunted, goes to Athens, where Pallas Athené, the warrior-maiden, the tutelary goddess of Athens, bids him refer his cause to the Areopagus, the highest court of Athens, Apollo acting as his advocate, and she sitting as umpire in the midst. The white and black balls are thrown into the urn, and are equal; and Orestes is only delivered by the decision of Athené—as the representative of the nearer race of gods, the Olympians, the friends of man, in whose likeness man is made. The Furies are the representatives of the older and darker creed—which yet has a depth of truth in it—of the irreversible dooms which underlie all nature; and which represent the Law, and not the Gospel, the consequence of the mere act, independent of the spirit which has prompted it.

They break out in fury against the overbearing arrogance of these younger gods. Athené bears their rage with equanimity, addresses them in the language of kindness, even of veneration, till these so indomitable beings are unable to withstand the charm of her mild eloquence. They are to have a sanctuary in the Athenian land, and to be called no more Furies (Erinnys), but Eumenides—the *well-conditioned*—the kindly goddesses. And all ends with a solemn precession round the orchestra, with hymns of blessing, while the terrible Chorus of the Furies, clothed in black, with blood-stained girdles, and serpents in their hair, in masks having perhaps somewhat of the terrific beauty of Medusa-masks, are convoyed to their new sanctuary by a procession of children, women, and old men in purple robes with torches in their hands, after Athené and the Furies have sung, in response to each other, a chorus from which I must beg leave to give you an extract or two:

### **Eldest Fury (Leader of the Chorus)**

Far from thy dwelling, and far from thy border,  
By the grace of my godhead benignant I order  
The blight which may blacken the bloom of the trees.  
Far from thy border, and far from thy dwelling,  
Be the hot blast which shrivels the bud in its swelling,  
The seed-rotting taint, and the creeping disease.  
Thy flocks be still doubled, thy seasons be steady,  
And when Hermes is near thee, thy hand be still ready  
The Heaven-dropt bounty to seize.

### **Athené**

Hear her words, my city's warders—  
Fraught with blessings, she prevaieth  
With Olympians and Infernals,  
Dread Erinnys much revered.  
Mortal faith she guideth plainly  
To what goal she pleaseth, sending  
Songs to some, to others days  
With tearful sorrows dulled.



### **Furies**

Far from thy border  
The lawless disorder  
That sateless of evil shall reign;  
Far from thy dwelling,  
The dear blood welling,  
That taints thine own hearth with the slain.  
When slaughter from slaughter  
Shall flow like the water,  
And rancour from rancour shall grow  
But joy with joy blending,  
Live, each to all lending;  
And hating one-hearted the foe.  
When bliss hath departed;  
From love single-hearted,  
A fountain of healing shall flow.

### **Athené**

Wisely now the tongue of kindness  
Thou hast found, the way of love.  
And these terror-speaking faces  
Now look wealth to me and mine.  
Her so willing, ye more willing,  
Now receive. This land and city,  
On ancient right securely throned,  
Shall shine for evermore.

### **Furies**

Hail, and all hail, mighty people, be greeted,  
On the sons of Athena shines sunshine the clearest.  
Blest people, near Jove the Olympian seated.  
And dear to the maiden his daughter the dearest.  
Timely wise 'neath the wings of the daughter ye gather,  
And mildly looks down on her children the Father.

Those of you here who love your country as well as the old Athenians loved theirs, will feel at once the grand political significance of such a scene, in which patriotism and religion become one—and feel, too, the exquisite dramatic effect of the innocent, the weak, the unwarlike, welcoming

among them, without fear, because without guilt, those ancient snaky-haired sisters, emblems of all that is most terrible and most inscrutable, in the destiny of nations, of families, and of men:

To their hallowed habitations  
'Neath Ogygian earth's foundations  
In that darksome hall  
Sacrifice and supplication  
Shall not fail. In adoration  
Silent worship all.

Listen again, to the gentler patriotism of a gentler poet, Sophocles himself. The village of Colonos, a mile from Athens, was his birthplace; and in his "Ædipus Coloneus," he makes his Chorus of village officials sing thus of their consecrated olive grove:

In good hap, stranger, to these rural seats  
Thou comest, to this region's blest retreats,  
Where white Colonos lifts his head,  
And glories in the bounding steed.  
Where sadly sweet the frequent nightingale  
Impassioned pours his evening song,  
And charms with varied notes each verdant vale,  
The ivy's dark-green boughs among,  
Or sheltered 'neath the clustering vine  
Which, high above him forms a bower,  
Safe from the sun or stormy shower,  
Where frolic Bacchus often roves,  
And visits with his fostering nymphs the groves,  
Bathed in the dew of heaven each morn,  
Fresh is the fair Narcissus born,  
Of those great gods the crown of old;  
The crocus glitters, robed in gold.  
Here restless fountains ever murmuring glide,  
And as their crispèd streamlets play,  
To feed, Cephissus, thine unfailing tide,  
Fresh verdure marks their winding way.  
Here oft to raise the tuneful song  
The virgin band of Muses deigns,  
And car-borne Aphrodite guides her golden reins.

Then they go on, this band of village elders, to praise the gods for their special gifts to that small Athenian land. They praise Pallas Athené, who gave their forefathers the olive; then Poseidon—Neptune, as the Romans call him—who gave their forefathers the horse; and something more—the ship—the horse of the sea, as they, like the old Norse Vikings after them, delighted to call it

Our highest vaunt is this—Thy grace,  
Poseidon, we behold,  
The ruling curb, embossed with gold,  
Controls the courser's managed pace,  
Though loud, oh king, thy billows roar,

Our strong hands grasp the labouring oar,  
And while the Nereids round it play,  
Light cuts our bounding bark its way.

What a combination of fine humanities! Dance and song, patriotism and religion, so often parted among us, have flowed together into one in these stately villagers; each a small farmer; each a trained soldier, and probably a trained seaman also; each a self-governed citizen; and each a cultured gentleman, if ever there were gentlemen on earth.

But what drama, doing, or action—for such is the meaning of the word—is going on upon the stage, to be commented on by the sympathising Chorus?

One drama, at least, was acted in Athens in that year—440 B.C.—which you, I doubt not, know well—“Antigone,” that of Sophocles, which Mendelssohn has resuscitated in our own generation, by setting it to music, divine indeed, though very different from the music to which it was set, probably by Sophocles himself, at its first, and for aught we know, its only representation; for pieces had not then, as now, a run of a hundred nights and more. The Athenian genius was so fertile, and the Athenian audience so eager for novelty, that new pieces were demanded, and were forthcoming, for each of the great festivals, and if a piece was represented a second time it was usually after an interval of some years. They did not, moreover, like the moderns, run every night to some theatre or other, as a part of the day’s amusement. Tragedy, and even comedy, were serious subjects, calling out, not a passing sigh, or passing laugh, but all the higher faculties and emotions. And as serious subjects were to be expressed in verse and music, which gave stateliness, doubtless, even to the richest burlesques of Aristophanes, and lifted them out of mere street-buffoonery into an ideal fairyland of the grotesque, how much more stateliness must verse and music have added to their tragedy! And how much have we lost, toward a true appreciation of their dramatic art, by losing almost utterly not only the laws of their melody and harmony, but even the true metric time of their odes!—music and metre, which must have surely been as noble as their poetry, their sculpture, their architecture, possessed by the same exquisite sense of form and of proportion. One thing we can understand—how this musical form of the drama, which still remains to us in lower shapes, in the oratorio, in the opera, must have helped to raise their tragedies into that ideal sphere in which they all, like the “Antigone,” live and move. So ideal and yet so human; nay rather, truly ideal, because truly human. The gods, the heroes, the kings, the princesses of Greek tragedy were dear to the hearts of Greek republicans, not merely as the founders of their states, not merely as the tutelary deities, many of them, of their country: but as men and women like themselves, only more vast; with mightier wills, mightier virtues, mightier sorrows, and often mightier crimes; their inward free-will battling, as Schlegel has well seen, against outward circumstance and overruling fate, as every man should battle, unless he sink to be a brute.

“In tragedy,” says Schlegel—uttering thus a deep and momentous truth—“the gods themselves either come forward as the servants of destiny and mediate executors of its decrees, or approve themselves godlike only by asserting their liberty of action and entering upon the same struggles with fate which man himself has to encounter.” And I believe this, that this Greek tragedy, with its godlike men and manlike gods, and heroes who had become gods by the very vastness of their humanity, was a preparation, and it may be a necessary preparation, for the true Christian faith in a Son of Man, who is at once utterly human and utterly divine. That man is made in the likeness of God—is the root idea, only half-conscious, only half-expressed, but instinctive, without which neither the Greek Tragedies nor the Homeric Poems, six hundred years before them, could have been composed. Doubtless the idea that man was like a god degenerated too often into the idea that the gods were like men, and as wicked. But that travestie of a great truth is not confined to those old Greeks. Some so-called Christian theories—as I hold—have sinned in that direction as deeply as the Athenians of old.

Meanwhile, I say, that this long acquiescence in the conception of godlike struggle, godlike daring, godlike suffering, godlike martyrdom; the very conception which was so foreign to the

mythologies of any other race—save that of the Jews, and perhaps of our own Teutonic forefathers—did prepare, must have prepared men to receive as most rational and probable, as the satisfaction of their highest instincts, the idea of a Being in whom all those partial rays culminated in clear, pure light; of a Being at once utterly human and utterly divine; who by struggle, suffering, self-sacrifice, without a parallel, achieved a victory over circumstance and all the dark powers which beleaguer man without a parallel likewise.

Take, as an example, the figure which you know best—the figure of Antigone herself—devoting herself to be entombed alive, for the sake of love and duty. Love of a brother, which she can only prove, alas! by burying his corpse. Duty to the dead, an instinct depending on no written law, but springing out of the very depth of those blind and yet sacred monitions which prove that the true man is not an animal, but a spirit; fulfilling her holy purpose, unchecked by fear, unswayed by her sisters' entreaties. Hardening her heart magnificently till her fate is sealed; and then after proving her godlike courage, proving the tenderness of her womanhood by that melodious wail over her own untimely death and the loss of marriage joys, which some of you must know from the music of Mendelssohn, and which the late Dean Milman has put into English thus:

Come, fellow-citizens, and see  
The desolate Antigone.  
On the last path her steps shall tread,  
Set forth, the journey of the dead,  
Watching, with vainly lingering gaze,  
Her last, last sun's expiring rays.

Never to see it, never more,  
For down to Acheron's dread shore,  
A living victim am I led  
To Hades' universal bed.  
To my dark lot no bridal joys  
Belong, nor o'er the jocund noise  
Of hymeneal chant shall sound for me,  
But death, cold death, my only spouse shall be.

Oh tomb! Oh bridal chamber! Oh deep-delved  
And strongly-guarded mansion! I descend  
To meet in your dread chambers all my kindred,  
Who in dark multitudes have crowded down  
Where Proserpine received the dead. But I,  
The last—and oh how few more miserable!—  
Go down, or ere my sands of life are run.

And let me ask you whether the contemplation of such a self-sacrifice should draw you, should have drawn those who heard the tale nearer to, or farther from, a certain cross which stood on Calvary some 1800 years ago? May not the tale of Antigone heard from mother or from nurse have nerved ere now some martyr-maiden to dare and suffer in an even holier cause?

But to return. This set purpose of the Athenian dramatists of the best school to set before men a magnified humanity, explains much in their dramas which seems to us at first not only strange but faulty. The masks which gave one grand but unvarying type of countenance to each well-known historic personage, and thus excluded the play of feature, animated gesture, and almost all which we now consider as "acting" proper; the thick-soled cothurni which gave the actor a more than

human stature; the poverty (according to our notions) of the scenery, which usually represented merely the front of a palace or other public place, and was often though not always unchanged during the whole performance; the total absence, in fact, of anything like that scenic illusion which most managers of theatres seem now to consider as their highest achievement; the small number of the actors, two, or at most three only, being present on the stage at once,—the simplicity of the action, in which intrigue (in the playhouse sense) and any complication of plot are utterly absent; all this must have concentrated not the eye of the spectator on the scene, but his ear upon the voice, and his emotions on the personages who stood out before him without a background, sharp-cut and clear as a group of statuary, which is the same, place it where you will, complete in itself—a world of beauty, independent of all other things and beings save on the ground on which it needs must stand.

It was the personage rather than his surroundings, which was to be impressed by every word on the spectator's heart and intellect; and the very essence of Greek tragedy is expressed in the still famous words of Medea:

Che resta? Io.

Contrast this with the European drama—especially with the highest form of it—our own Elizabethan. It resembles, as has been often said in better words than mine, not statuary but painting.

These dramas affect colour, light, and shadow, background whether of town or country, description of scenery where scenic machinery is inadequate, all, in fact, which can blend the action and the actors with the surrounding circumstances, without letting them altogether melt into the circumstances; which can show them a part of the great whole, by harmony or discord with the whole universe, down to the flowers beneath their feet. This, too, had to be done: how it became possible for even the genius of a Shakespeare to get it done, I may with your leave hint to you hereafter. Why it was not given to the Greeks to do it, I know not.

Let us at least thank them for what they did. One work was given them, and that one they fulfilled as it had never been fulfilled before; as it will never need to be fulfilled again; for the Greeks' work was done not for themselves alone but for all races in all times; and Greek Art is the heirloom of the whole human race; and that work was to assert in drama, lyric, sculpture, music, gymnastic, the dignity of man—the dignity of man which they perceived for the most part with their intense æsthetic sense, through the beautiful in man. Man with them was divine, inasmuch as he could perceive beauty and be beautiful himself. Beauty might be physical, æsthetic, intellectual, moral. But in proportion as a thing was perfect it revealed its own perfection by its beauty. Goodness itself was a form—though the highest form—of beauty. Καλός meant both the physically beautiful and the morally good; αἰσχρος both the ugly and the bad.

Out of this root-idea sprang the whole of that Greek sculpture, which is still, and perhaps ever will be, one of the unrivalled wonders of the world.

Their first statues, remember, were statues of the gods. This is an historic fact. Before B.C. 580 there were probably no statues in Greece save those of deities. But of what form? We all know that the usual tendency of man has been to represent his gods as more or less monstrous. Their monstrosity may have been meant, as it was certainly with the Mexican idols, and probably those of the Semitic races of Syria and Palestine, to symbolise the ferocious passions which they attributed to those objects of their dread, appeasable alone by human sacrifice. Or the monstrosity, as with the hawk-headed or cat-headed Egyptian idols, the winged bulls of Nineveh and Babylon, the many-handed deities of Hindostan—merely symbolised powers which could not, so the priest and the sculptor held, belong to mere humanity. Now, of such monstrous forms of idols, the records in Greece are very few and very ancient—relics of an older worship, and most probably of an older race. From the earliest historic period, the Greek was discerning more and more that the divine could be best represented by the human; the tendency of his statuary was more and more to honour that divine, by embodying it in the highest human beauty.

In lonely mountain shrines there still might linger, feared and honoured, dolls like those black virgins, of unknown antiquity, which still work wonders on the European continent. In the mysterious cavern of Phigalia, for instance, on the Eleatic shore of Peloponnese, there may have been in remote times—so the legend ran—an old black wooden image, a woman with a horse's head and mane, and serpents growing round her head, who held a dolphin in one hand and a dove in the other. And this image may have been connected with old nature-myths about the marriage of Demeter and Poseidon—that is, of encroachments of the sea upon the land; and the other myths of Demeter, the earth-mother, may have clustered round the place, till the Phigalians were glad—for it was profitable as well as honourable—to believe that in their cavern Demeter sat mourning for the loss of Proserpine, whom Pluto had carried down to Hades, and all the earth was barren till Zeus sent the Fates, or Iris, to call her forth, and restore fertility to the world. And it may be true—the legend as Pausanias tells it 600 years after—that the old wooden idol having been burnt, and the worship of Demeter neglected till a famine ensued, the Phigalians, warned by the Oracle of Delphi, hired Onatas, a contemporary of Polygnotus and Phidias, to make them a bronze replica of the old idol, from some old copy and from a drama of his own. The story may be true. When Pausanias went thither, in the second century after Christ, the cave and the fountain, and the sacred grove of oaks, and the altar outside, which was to be polluted with the blood of no victim—the only offerings being fruits and honey, and undressed wool—were still there. The statue was gone. Some said it had been destroyed by the fall of the cliff; some were not sure that it had ever been there at all. And meanwhile Praxiteles had already brought to perfection (Paus. 1, 2, sec. 4) the ideal of Demeter, mother-like, as Heré—whom we still call Juno now—but softer-featured, and her eyes more closed.

And so for mother earth, as for the rest, the best representation of the divine was the human.

Now, conceive such an idea taking hold, however slowly, of a people of rare physical beauty, of acutest eye for proportion and grace, with opportunities of studying the human figure such as exist nowhere now, save among tropic savages, and gifted, moreover, in that as in all other matters, with that inmate diligence, of which Mr. Carlyle has said, “that genius is only an infinite capacity of taking pains,” and we can understand somewhat of the causes which produced those statues, human and divine, which awe and shame the artificiality and degeneracy of our modern so-called civilisation—we can understand somewhat of the reverence for the human form, of the careful study of every line, the storing up for use each scattered fragment of beauty of which the artist caught sight, even in his daily walks, and consecrating it in his memory to the service of him or her whom he was trying to embody in marble or in bronze. And when the fashion came in of making statues of victors in the games, and other distinguished persons, a new element was introduced, which had large social as well as artistic results. The sculptor carried his usual reverence into his careful delineation of the victor's form, while he obtained in him a model, usually of the very highest type, for perfecting his idea of some divinity. The possibility of gaining the right to a statue gave a fresh impulse to all competitors in the public games, and through them to the gymnastic training throughout all the states of Greece, which made the Greeks the most physically able and graceful, as well as the most beautiful people known to the history of the human race,—a people who, reverencing beauty, revered likewise grace or acted beauty, so utterly and honestly, that nothing was too humble for a free man to do, if it were not done awkwardly and ill. As an instance, Sophocles himself—over and above his poetic genius, one of the most cultivated gentlemen, as well as one of the most exquisite musicians, dancers, and gymnasts, and one of the most just, pious, and gentle of all Greece—could not, by reason of the weakness of his voice, act in his own plays, as poets were wont to do, and had to perform only the office of stage-manager. Twice he took part in the action, once as the blind old Thamyras playing on the harp, and once in his own lost tragedy, the “Nausicaa.” There in the scene in which the Princess, as she does in Homer's “Odyssey,” comes down to the sea-shore with her maidens to wash the household clothes, and then to play at ball—Sophocles himself, a man then of middle age, did the one thing he



could do better than any there—and, dressed in women's clothes, among the lads who represented the maidens, played at ball before the Athenian people.

Just sixty years after the representation of the “Antigone,” 10,000 Greeks, far on the plains of Babylon, cut through the whole Persian army, as the railway train cuts through a herd of buffalo, and then losing all their generals by treacherous warfare, fought their way north from Babylon to Trebizond on the Black Sea, under the guidance of a young Athenian, a pupil of Socrates, who had never served in the army before. The retreat of Xenophon and his 10,000 will remain for ever as one of the grandest triumphs of civilisation over brute force: but what made it possible? That these men, and their ancestors before them, had been for at least 100 years in *training*, physical, intellectual, and moral, which made their bodies and their minds able to dare and suffer like those old heroes of whom their tragedy had taught them, and whose spirits they still believed would help the valiant Greek. And yet that feat, which looks to us so splendid, attracted, as far as I am aware, no special admiration at the time. So was the cultivated Greek expected to behave whenever he came in contact with the uncultivated barbarian.

But from what had sprung in that little state, this exuberance of splendid life, physical, æsthetic, intellectual, which made, and will make the name of Athens and of the whole cluster of Greek republics for ever admirable to civilised man? Had it sprung from long years of peaceful prosperity?

From infinite making of money and comfort, according to the laws of so-called political economy, and the dictates of enlightened selfishness? Not so. But rather out of terror and agony, and all but utter ruin—and out of a magnificent want of economy, and the divine daring and folly of self-sacrifice.

In Salamis across the strait a trophy stood, and round that trophy, forty years before, Sophocles, the author of “Antigone,” then sixteen years of age, the loveliest and most cultivated lad in Athens, undraped like a faun, with lyre in hand, was leading the Chorus of Athenian youths, and singing to Athené, the tutelary goddess, a hymn of triumph for a glorious victory—the very symbol of Greece and Athens, springing up into a joyous second youth after invasion and desolation, as the grass springs up after the prairie fire has passed. But the fire had been terrible. It had burnt Athens at least, down to the very roots. True, while Sophocles was dancing, Xerxes, the great king of the East, foiled at Salamis, as his father Darius had been foiled at Marathon ten years before, was fleeing back to Persia, leaving his innumerable hosts of slaves and mercenaries to be destroyed piecemeal, by land at Platea, by sea at Mycalé. The bold hope was over, in which the Persian, ever since the days of Cyrus, had indulged—that he, the despot of the East, should be the despot of the West likewise. It seemed to them as possible, though not as easy, to subdue the Aryan Greek, as it had been to subdue the Semite and the Turanian, the Babylonian and the Syrian; to rattle his temples, to destroy his idols, carry off his women and children as colonists into distant lands, as they had been doing with all the nations of the East. And they had succeeded with isolated colonies, isolated islands of Greeks, and the shores of Asia Minor. But when they dared, at last, to attack the Greek in his own sacred land of Hellas, they found they had bearded a lion in his den. Nay rather—as those old Greeks would have said—they had dared to attack Pallas Athené, the eldest daughter of Zeus—emblem of that serene and pure divine wisdom, of whom Solomon sang of old: “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He appointed the foundation of the earth, then was I by him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him: rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; *and my delight was with the sons of men*”—to attack Athené and her brother Apollo, Lord of light, and beauty, and culture, and grace, and inspiration—to attack them, not in the name of Ormuzd, nor of any other deity, but in the name of mere brute force and lust of conquest. The old Persian spirit was gone out of them.

They were the symbols now of nothing save despotism and self-will, wealth and self-indulgence.

They, once the children of Ormuzd or light, had become the children of Ahriman or darkness; and therefore it was, as I believe, that Xerxes' 1000 ships, and the two million (or, as some have it, five

million) human beings availed naught against the little fleets and little battalions of men who believed with a living belief in Athené and Apollo, and therefore—ponder it well, for it is true—with a living belief, under whatsoever confusions and divisions of personality, in a God who loved, taught, inspired men, a just God who befriended the righteous cause, the cause of freedom and patriotism, a Deity, the echo of whose mind and will to man was the song of Athené on Olympus, when she

Chanted of order and right, and of foresight, and order of peoples; Chanted of labour and craft, wealth in the port and the garner; Chanted of valour and fame, and the man who can fall with the foremost, Fighting for children and wife, and the field which his father bequeathed him. Sweetly and cunningly sang she, and planned new lessons for mortals. Happy who hearing obey her, the wise unsullied Athené.

Ah, that they had always obeyed her, those old Greeks. But meanwhile, as I said, the agony had been extreme. If Athens had sinned, she had been purged as by fire; and the fire—surely of God—had been terrible. Northern Greece had either been laid waste with fire and sword, or had gone over to the Persian, traitors in their despair. Attica, almost the only loyal state, had been overrun; the old men, women, and children had fled to the neighbouring islands, or to the Peloponnese. Athens itself had been destroyed; and while young Sophocles was dancing round the trophy at Salamis, the Acropolis was still a heap of blackened ruins.

But over and above their valour, over and above their loyalty, over and above their exquisite æsthetic faculty, these Athenians had a resilience of self-reliant energy, like that of the French—like that of the American people after the fire of Chicago; and Athens rose from her ashes to be awhile, not only, as she had nobly earned by suffering and endurance, the leading state in Greece, but a mighty fortress, a rich commercial port, a living centre of art, poetry, philosophy, such as this earth has never seen before or since.

On the plateau of that little crag of the Acropolis some eight hundred feet in length, by four hundred in breadth—about the size and shape of the Castle Rock at Edinburgh—was gathered, within forty years of the battle of Salamis, more and more noble beauty than ever stood together on any other spot of like size.

The sudden relief from crushing pressure, and the joyous consciousness of well-earned honours, made the whole spirit-nature of the people blossom out, as it were, into manifold forms of activity, beauty, research, and raised, in raising Greece, the whole human race thenceforth.

What might they not have done—looking at what they actually did—for the whole race of man?

But no—they fell, even more rapidly than they rose, till their grace and their cultivation, for them they could not lose, made them the willing ministers to the luxury, the frivolity, the sentimentality, the vice of the whole old world—the Scapia or Figaro of the old world—infinately able, but with all his ability consecrated to the service of his own base self. The Greekling—as Juvenal has it—in want of a dinner, would climb somehow to heaven itself, at the bidding of his Roman master.

Ah what a fall! And what was the inherent weakness which caused that fall?

I say at once—want of honesty. The Greek was not to be depended on; if it suited him, he would lie, betray, overreach, change sides, and think it no sin. He was the sharpest of men. Sharp practice, in our modern sense of the word, was the very element in which he floated. Any scholar knows it. In the grand times of Marathon and Salamis, down to the disastrous times of the Peloponnesian War and the thirty tyrants, no public man's hands were clean, with the exception, perhaps, of Aristides, who was banished because men were tired of hearing him called the Just. The exciting cause of the Peloponnesian war, and the consequent downfall of Athens, was not merely the tyranny she exercised over the states allied to her, it was the sharp practice of the Athenians, in misappropriating the tribute paid by the allies to the decoration of Athens. And in laying the foundations of the Parthenon was sown, by a just judgment, the seed of ruin for the state which gloried in it. And if the rulers were such, what were the people? If the free were such, what were the slaves?

Hence, weakness at home and abroad, mistrust of generals and admirals, paralysing all bold and clear action, peculations and corruptions at home, internecine wars between factions inside states, and between states or groups of states, revolutions followed by despotism, and final exhaustion and slavery—slavery to a people who were coming across the western sea, hard-headed, hard-hearted, caring nothing for art, or science, whose pleasures were coarse and cruel, but with a certain rough honesty, reverence for country, for law, and for the ties of a family—men of a somewhat old English type, who had over and above, like the English, the inspiring belief that they could conquer the whole world, and who very nearly succeeded in that—as we have, to our great blessing, not succeeded—I mean, of course, the Romans.

## THOUGHTS ON SHELLEY AND BYRON <sup>2</sup>

The poets, who forty years ago proclaimed their intention of working a revolution in English literature, and who have succeeded in their purpose, recommended especially a more simple and truthful view of nature. The established canons of poetry were to be discarded as artificial; as to the matter, the poet was to represent mere nature as he saw her; as to form, he was to be his own law. Freedom and nature were to be his watchwords.

No theory could be more in harmony with the spirit of the age, and the impulse which had been given to it by the burning words of Jean Jacques Rousseau. The school which arose expressed fairly the unrest and unruliness of the time, its weariness of artificial restraint and unmeaning laws, its craving after a nobler and a more earnest life, its sense of a glory and mystery in the physical universe, hidden from the poets of the two preceding centuries, and now revealed by science. So far all was hopeful. But it soon became apparent, that each poet's practical success in carrying out the theory was, paradoxically enough, in inverse proportion to his belief in it; that those who like Wordsworth, Southey, and Keats, talked most about naturalness and freedom, and most openly reprobated the school of Pope, were, after all, least natural and least free; that the balance of those excellences inclined much more to those who, like Campbell, Rogers, Crabbe, and Moore, troubled their heads with no theories, but followed the best old models which they knew; and that the rightful sovereign of the new Parnassus, Lord Byron, protested against the new movement, while he followed it; upheld to the last the models which it was the fashion to decry, confessed to the last, in poetry as in morals, "*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*," and uttered again and again prophecies of the downfall of English poetry and English taste, which seem to be on the eve of realisation.

Now no one will, we presume, be silly enough to say that humanity has gained nothing by all the very beautiful poetry which has been poured out on it during the last thirty years in England.

Nevertheless, when we see poetry dying down among us year by year, although the age is becoming year by year more marvellous and inspiring, we have a right to look for some false principle in a school which has had so little enduring vitality, which seems now to be able to perpetuate nothing of itself but its vices.

The answer so easy twenty years ago, that the new poetry was spoiled by an influx of German bad taste, will hardly hold good now, except with a very few very ignorant people. It is now known, of course, that whatsoever quarrel Lessing, Schiller, and Goethe may have had with Pope, it was not on account of his being too severe an artist, but too loose a one; not for being too classical, but not classical enough; that English poets borrowed from them nothing but their most boyish and immature types of thought, and that these were reproduced, and laughed at here, while the men themselves were writing works of a purity, and loftiness, and completeness, unknown to the world—except in the writings of Milton—for nearly two centuries. This feature, however, of the new German poetry, was exactly the one which no English poet deigned to imitate, save Byron alone; on whom, accordingly, Goethe always looked with admiration and affection. But the rest went their way unheeding; and if they have defects, those defects are their own; for when they did copy the German taste, they, for the most part, deliberately chose the evil, and refused the good; and have their reward in a fame which we believe will prove itself a very short-lived one.

We cannot deny, however, that, in spite of all faults, these men had a strength. They have exercised an influence. And they have done so by virtue of seeing a fact which more complete, and in some cases more manly poets, did not see. Strangely enough, Shelley, the man who was the greatest sinner of them all against the canons of good taste, was the man who saw that new fact, if not most clearly, still most intensely, and who proclaimed it most boldly. His influence, therefore, is outliving

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<sup>2</sup> Fraser's Magazine, November, 1853.

that of his compeers, and growing and spreading, for good and for evil; and will grow and spread for years to come, as long as the present great unrest goes on smouldering in men's hearts, till the hollow settlement of 1815 is burst asunder anew, and men feel that they are no longer in the beginning of the end, but in the end itself, and that this long thirty years' prologue to the reconstruction of rotten Europe is played out at last, and the drama itself begun.

Such is the way of Providence; the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor the prophecy to the wise. The Spirit bloweth where He listeth, and sends on his errands—those who deny Him, rebel against Him—profligates, madmen, and hysterical Rousseaus, hysterical Shelleys, uttering words like the east wind. He uses strange tools in His cosmogony: but He does not use them in vain. By bad men if not by good, by fools if not by wise, God's work is done, and done right well.

There was, then, a strength and a truth in all these men; and it was this—that more or less clearly, they all felt that they were standing between two worlds; and the ruins of an older age; upon the threshold of a new one. To Byron's mind, the decay and rottenness of the old was, perhaps, the most palpable; to Shelley's, the possible glory of the new. Wordsworth declared—a little too noisily, we think, as if he had been the first to discover the truth—the dignity and divineness of the most simple human facts and relationships. Coleridge declares that the new can only assume living form by growing organically out of the old institutions. Keats gives a sad and yet a wholesome answer to them both, as, young and passionate, he goes down with Faust “to the Mothers”—

To the rich warm youth of the nations,  
Childlike in virtue and faith, though childlike in passion and pleasure,  
Childlike still, still near to the gods, while the sunset of Eden  
Lingered in rose-red rays on the peaks of Ionian mountains.

And there, amid the old classic forms, he cries: “These things, too, are eternal—  
A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

These, or things even fairer than they, must have their place in the new world, if it is to be really a home for the human race.” So he sings, as best he can, the half-educated and consumptive stable-keeper's son, from his prison-house of London brick, and in one mighty yearn after that beauty from which he is debarred, breaks his young heart, and dies, leaving a name not “writ in water,” as he dreamed, but on all fair things, all lovers' hearts, for evermore.

Here, then, to return, is the reason why the hearts of the present generation have been influenced so mightily by these men, rather than by those of whom Byron wrote, with perfect sincerity:

Scott, Rogers, Campbell, Moore, and Crabbe will try  
'Gainst you the question with posterity.

These lines, written in 1818, were meant to apply only to Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey.

Whether they be altogether just or unjust is not now the question. It must seem somewhat strange to our young poets that Shelley's name is not among those who are to try the question of immortality against the Lake School; and yet many of his most beautiful poems had been already written. Were, then, “The Revolt of Islam” and “Alastor” not destined, it seems, in Byron's opinion, to live as long as the “Lady of the Lake” and the “Mariners of England?” Perhaps not. At least the omission of Shelley's name is noteworthy. But still more noteworthy are these words of his to Mr. Murray, dated January 23, 1819:

“Read Pope—most of you don't—but do . . . and the inevitable consequence would be, that you would burn all that I have ever written, and all your other wretched Claudians of the day (except Scott and Crabbe) into the bargain.”

And here arises a new question—Is Shelley, then, among the Claudians? It is a hard saying. The present generation will receive it with shouts of laughter. Some future one, which studies and imitates Shakespeare instead of anatomising him, and which gradually awakens to the now forgotten fact, that a certain man named Edmund Spenser once wrote a poem, the like of which the earth never saw before, and perhaps may never see again, may be inclined to acquiesce in the verdict, and believe that Byron had a discrimination in this matter, as in a hundred more, far more acute than any of his compeers, and had not eaten in vain, poor fellow, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the meanwhile, we may perceive in the poetry of the two men deep and radical differences, indicating a spiritual difference between them even more deep, which may explain the little notice which Byron takes of Shelley's poetry, and the fact that the two men had no deep sympathy for each other, and could not in any wise "pull together" during the sojourn in Italy. Doubtless, there were plain outward faults of temper and character on both sides; neither was in a state of mind which could trust itself, or be trusted by those who loved them best. Friendship can only consist with the calm and self-restraint and self-respect of moral and intellectual health; and both were diseased, fevered, ready to take offence, ready, unwittingly, to give it. But the diseases of the two were different, as their natures were; and Shelley's fever was not Byron's.

Now it is worth remarking, that it is Shelley's form of fever, rather than Byron's, which has been of late years the prevailing epidemic. Since Shelley's poems have become known in England, and a timid public, after approaching in fear and trembling the fountain which was understood to be poisoned, has begun first to sip, and then, finding the magic water at all events sweet enough, to quench its thirst with unlimited draughts, Byron's fiercer wine has lost favour. Well—at least the taste of the age is more refined, if that be matter of congratulation. And there is an excuse for preferring champagne to waterside porter, heady with grains of paradise and quassia, salt and cocculus indicus.

Nevertheless, worse ingredients than œnanthic acid may lurk in the delicate draught, and the Devil's Elixir may be made fragrant, and sweet, and transparent enough, as French moralists well know, for the most fastidious palate. The private sipping of eua-de-cologne, say the London physicians, has increased mightily of late; and so has the reading of Shelley. It is not surprising. Byron's Corsairs and Laras have been, on the whole, impossible during the thirty years' peace! and piracy and profligacy are at all times, and especially nowadays, expensive amusements, and often require a good private fortune—rare among poets. They have, therefore, been wisely abandoned as ideals, except among a few young persons, who used to wear turn-down collars, and are now attempting moustaches and Mazzini hats. But even among them, and among their betters—rather their more-respectables—nine-tenths of the bad influence which is laid at Byron's door really is owing to Shelley. Among the many good-going gentlemen and ladies, Byron is generally spoken of with horror—he is "so wicked," forsooth; while poor Shelley, "poor dear Shelley," is "very wrong, of course," but "so refined," "so beautiful," "so tender"—a fallen angel, while Byron is a satyr and a devil. We boldly deny the verdict.

Neither of the two are devils; as for angels, when we have seen one, we shall be better able to give an opinion; at present, Shelley is in our eyes far less like one of those old Hebrew and Miltonic angels, fallen or unfallen, than Byron is. And as for the satyr; the less that is said for Shelley, on that point, the better. If Byron sinned more desperately and flagrantly than he, it was done under the temptations of rank, wealth, disappointed love, and under the impulses of an animal nature, to which Shelley's passions were

As moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.

At all events, Byron never set to work to consecrate his own sin into a religion and proclaim the worship of uncleanness as the last and highest ethical development of "pure" humanity. No—Byron may be brutal; but he never cants. If at moments he finds himself in hell, he never turns round to the world and melodiously informs them that it is heaven, if they could but see it in its true light.

The truth is, that what has put Byron out of favour with the public of late has been not his faults but his excellences. His artistic good taste, his classical polish, his sound shrewd sense,



his hatred of cant, his insight into humbug above all, his shallow, pitiable habit of being always intelligible—these are the sins which condemn him in the eyes of a mesmerising, table-turning, spirit-rapping, spiritualising, Romanising generation, who read Shelley in secret, and delight in his bad taste, mysticism, extravagance, and vague and pompous sentimentalism. The age is an effeminate one, and it can well afford to pardon the lewdness of the gentle and sensitive vegetarian, while it has no mercy for that of the sturdy peer proud of his bull neck and his boxing, who kept bears and bulldogs, drilled Greek ruffians at Missoloughi, and “had no objection to a pot of beer;” and who might, if he had reformed, have made a gallant English gentleman; while Shelley, if once his intense self-opinion had deserted him, would have probably ended in Rome as an Oratorian or a Passionist.

We would that it were only for this count that Byron has had to make way for Shelley. There is, as we said before, a deeper moral difference between the men, which makes the weaker, rather than the stronger, find favour in young men’s eyes. For Byron has the most intense and awful sense of moral law—of law external to himself. Shelley has little or none; less, perhaps, than any known writer who has ever meddled with moral questions. Byron’s cry is, I am miserable because law exists; and I have broken it, broken it so habitually, that now I cannot help breaking it. I have tried to eradicate the sense of it by speculation, by action; but I cannot—

The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life.

There is a moral law independent of us, and yet the very marrow of our life, which punishes and rewards us by no arbitrary external penalties, but by our own consciousness of being what we are:

The mind which is immortal, makes itself  
Requital for its good or evil thoughts;  
Is its own origin of ill, and end—  
And its own place and time—its innate sense  
When stript of this mortality derives  
No colour from the fleeting things about,  
But is absorbed in sufferance or in joy,  
Born from the knowledge of its own desert.

This idea, confused, intermitted, obscured by all forms of evil—for it was not discovered, but only in the process of discovery—is the one which comes out with greater and greater strength, through all Corsairs, Laras, and Parasinas, till it reaches its completion in “Cain” and in “Manfred,” of both of which we do boldly say, that if any sceptical poetry at all be right, which we often question, they are right and not wrong; that in “Cain,” as in “Manfred,” the awful problem which, perhaps, had better not have been put at all, is nevertheless fairly put, and the solution, as far as it is seen, fairly confessed; namely, that there is an absolute and eternal law in the heart of man which sophistries of his own or of other beings may make him forget, deny, blaspheme; but which exists eternally, and will assert itself. If this be not the meaning of “Manfred,” especially of that great scene in the chamois hunter’s cottage, what is?—If this be not the meaning of “Cain,” and his awful awakening after the murder, not to any mere dread of external punishment, but to an overwhelming, instinctive, inarticulate sense of having done wrong, what is?

Yes; that law exists, let it never be forgotten, is the real meaning of Byron, down to that last terrible “Don Juan,” in which he sits himself down, in artificial calm, to trace the gradual rotting and degradation of a man without law, the slave of his own pleasures; a picture happily never finished, because he who painted it was taken away before he had learnt, perhaps when he was beginning to turn back from—the lower depth within the lowest deep.

Now to this whole form of consciousness, poor Shelley's mind is altogether antipodal. His whole life through was a denial of external law, and a substitution in its place of internal sentiment.

Byron's cry is: There is a law, and therefore I am miserable. Why cannot I keep the law? Shelley's is: There is a law, and therefore I am miserable. Why should not the law be abolished?—Away with it, for it interferes with my sentiments—Away with marriage, “custom and faith, the foulest birth of time.”—We do not wish to follow him down into the fearful sins which he defended with the small powers of reasoning—and they were peculiarly small—which he possessed. Let any one who wishes to satisfy himself of the real difference between Byron's mind and Shelley's, compare the writings in which each of them treats the same subject—namely, that frightful question about the relation of the sexes, which forms, evidently, Manfred's crime; and see if the result is not simply this, that Shelley glorifies what Byron damns. “Lawless love” is Shelley's expressed ideal of the relation of the sexes; and his justice, his benevolence, his pity, are all equally lawless. “Follow your instincts,” is his one moral rule, confounding the very lowest animal instincts with those lofty ideas of might, which it was the will of Heaven that he should retain, ay, and love, to the very last, and so reducing them all to the level of sentiments. “Follow your instincts”—But what if our instincts lead us to eat animal food?

“Then you must follow the instincts of me, Percy Bysshe Shelley. I think it horrible, cruel; it offends my taste.” What if our instincts lead us to tyrannise over our fellow-men? “Then you must repress those instincts. I, Shelley, think that, too, horrible and cruel.” Whether it be vegetarianism or liberty, the rule is practically the same—sentiment which, in his case, as in the case of all sentimentalists, turns out to mean at last, not the sentiments of mankind in general, but the private sentiments of the writer. This is Shelley; a sentimentalist pure and simple; incapable of anything like inductive reasoning; unable to take cognisance of any facts but those which please his taste, or to draw any conclusion from them but such as also pleases his taste; as, for example, in that eighth stanza of the “Ode to Liberty,” which, had it been written by any other man but Shelley, possessing the same knowledge as he, one would have called a wicked and deliberate lie—but in his case, is to be simply passed over with a sigh, like a young lady's proofs of table-turning and rapping spirits. She wished to see it so—and therefore so she saw it.

For Shelley's nature is utterly womanish. Not merely his weak points, but his strong ones, are those of a woman. Tender and pitiful as a woman; and yet, when angry, shrieking, railing, hysterical as a woman. The physical distaste for meat and fermented liquors, coupled with the hankering after physical horrors, are especially feminine. The nature of a woman looks out of that wild, beautiful, girlish face—the nature: but not the spirit; not

The reason firm, the temperate will,  
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill.

The lawlessness of the man, with the sensibility of the woman. . . . Alas for him! He, too, might have discovered what Byron did; for were not his errors avenged upon him within, more terribly even than without? His cries are like the wails of a child, inarticulate, peevish, irrational; and yet his pain fills his whole being, blackens the very face of nature to him: but he will not confess himself in the wrong. Once only, if we recollect rightly, the truth flashes across him for a moment, and the clouds of selfish sorrow:

Alas, I have nor hope nor health,  
Nor peace within, nor calm around;  
Nor that content surpassing wealth  
The sage in meditation found,  
And walked with inward glory crowned.

“Nor”—alas for the spiritual bathos, which follows that short gleam of healthy feeling, and coming to himself—

—fame nor power, nor love, nor leisure,  
Others I see whom these surround,  
Smiling they live and call life pleasure,  
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure!

Poor Shelley! As if the peace within, and the calm around, and the content surpassing wealth, were things which were to be put in the same category with fame, and power, and love, and leisure.

As if they were things which could be “dealt” to any man; instead of depending (as Byron, who, amid all his fearful sins, was a man, knew well enough) upon a man’s self, a man’s own will, and that will exerted to do a will exterior to itself, to know and to obey a law. But no, the cloud of sentiment must close over again, and

Yet now despair itself is mild  
Even as the winds and waters are;  
I could lie down like a tired child,  
And weep away this life of care,  
Which I have borne, and still must bear,  
Till death like sleep might seize on me,  
And I might feel in the warm air,  
My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea  
Breathe o’er my dying brain its last monotony!

Too beautiful to laugh at, however empty and sentimental. True: but why beautiful? Because there is a certain sincerity in it, which breeds coherence and melody, which, in short, makes it poetry.

But what if such a tone of mind be consciously encouraged, even insincerely affected as the ideal state for a poet’s mind, as his followers have done?

The mischief which such a man would do is conceivable enough. He stands out, both by his excellences and his defects, as the spokesman and ideal of all the unrest and unhealth of sensitive young men for many a year after. His unfulfilled prophecies only help to increase that unrest. Who shall blame either him for uttering those prophecies, or them for longing for their fulfilment? Must we not thank the man who gives us fresh hope that this earth will not be always as it is now? His notion of what it will be may be, as Shelley’s was, vague, even in some things wrong and undesirable.

Still, we must accept his hope and faith in the spirit, not in the letter. So have thousands of young men felt, who would have shrunk with disgust from some of poor Shelley’s details of the “good time coming.” And shame on him who should wish to rob them of such a hope, even if it interfered with his favourite “scheme of unfulfilled prophecy.” So men have felt Shelley’s spell a wondrous one—perhaps, they think, a life-giving regenerative one. And yet what dream at once more shallow and more impossible? Get rid of kings and priests; marriage may stay, pending discussions on the rights of women. Let the poet speak—what he is to say being, of course, a matter of utterly secondary import, provided only that he be a poet; and then the millennium will appear of itself, and the devil be exorcised with a kiss from all hearts—except, of course, these of “pale priests” and “tyrants with their sneer of cold command” (who, it seems, have not been got rid of after all), and the Cossacks and Croats whom they may choose to call to their rescue. And on the appearance of the said Cossacks and Croats, the poet’s vision stops short, and all is blank beyond. A recipe for the production of millenniums which has this one advantage, that it is small enough to be comprehended by the very

smallest minds, and reproduced thereby, with a difference, in such spasmodic melodies as seem to those small minds to be imitations of Shelley's nightingale notes.

For nightingale notes they truly are. In spite of all his faults—and there are few poetic faults in which he does not indulge, to their very highest power—in spite of his “interfluous” and “innumerable,” and the rest of his bad English—in spite of bombast, horrors, maundering, sheer stuff and nonsense of all kinds, there is a plaintive natural melody about this man, such as no other English poet has ever uttered, except Shakespeare in some few immortal songs. Who that has read Shelley does not recollect scraps worthy to stand by Ariel's song—chaste, simple, unutterably musical? Yes, when he will be himself—Shelley the scholar and the gentleman and the singer—and leave philosophy and politics, which he does not understand, and shriekings and cursings, which are unfit for any civilised and self-respecting man, he is perfect. Like the American mocking-bird, he is harsh only when aping other men's tunes—his true power lies in his own “native wood-notes wild.”

But it is not this faculty of his which has been imitated by his scholars; for it is not this faculty which made him their ideal, however it may have attracted them. All which sensible men deplore in him is that which poetasters have exalted in him. His morbidity and his doubt have become in their eyes his differential energy, because too often, it was all in him with which they had wit to sympathise. They found it easy to curse and complain, instead of helping to mend. So had he. They found it pleasant to confound institutions with the abuses which defaced them. So had he. They found it pleasant to give way to their spleen. So had he. They found it pleasant to believe that the poet was to regenerate the world, without having settled with what he was to regenerate it. So had he. They found it more pleasant to obey sentiment than inductive laws. So had he. They found it more pleasant to hurl about enormous words and startling figures than to examine reverently the awful depths of beauty which lie in the simplest words and the severest figures. So had he.

And thus arose a spasmodic, vague, extravagant, effeminate, school of poetry, which has been too often hastily and unfairly fathered upon Byron. Doubtless Byron has helped to its formation; but only in as far as his poems possess, or rather seem to possess, elements in common with Shelley's. For that conscious struggle against law, by which law is discovered, may easily enough be confounded with the utter repudiation of it. Both forms of mind will discuss the same questions; both will discuss them freely, with a certain plainness and daring, which may range through all grades, from the bluntness of Socrates down to reckless immodesty and profaneness. The world will hardly distinguish between the two; it did not in Socrates' case, mistaking his reverent irreverence for Atheism, and martyred him accordingly, as it has since martyred Luther's memory. Probably, too, if a living struggle is going on in the writer's mind, he will not have distinguished the two elements in himself; he will be profane when he fancies himself only arguing for truth; he will be only arguing for truth, where he seems to the respectable undoubting to be profane. And in the meanwhile, whether the respectable understand him or not, the young and the inquiring, much more the distempered, who would be glad to throw off moral law, will sympathise with him often more than he sympathises with himself. Words thrown off in the heat of passion; shameful self-revealings which he has written with his very heart's blood: ay, even fallacies which he has put into the mouths of dramatic characters for the very purpose of refuting them, or at least of calling on all who read to help him to refute them, and to deliver him from the ugly dream—all these will, by the lazy, the frivolous, the feverish, the discontented, be taken for integral parts and noble traits of the man to whom they are attracted, by finding that he, too, has the same doubts and struggles as themselves, that he has a voice and art to be their spokesman. And hence arises confusion on confusion, misconception on misconception. The man is honoured for his dishonour. Chronic disease is taken for a new type of health; and Byron is admired and imitated for that which Byron is trying to tear out of his own heart, and trample under foot as his curse and bane, something which is not Byron's self, but Byron's house-fiend, and tyrant, and shame. And in the meanwhile that which calls itself respectability and orthodoxy, and is—unless Augustine lied—neither of them, stands by; and instead of echoing the voice of Him who said: “Come to me ye that

are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” mumbles proudly to itself, with the Pharisees of old: “This people, which knoweth not the law, is accursed.”

We do not seek to excuse Byron any more than we do Shelley. They both sinned. They both paid bitter penalty for their sin. How far they were guilty, or which of them was the more guilty, we know not. We can judge no man. It is as poets and teachers, not as men and responsible spirits; not in their inward beings, known only to Him who made them, not even to themselves, but in their outward utterance, that we have a right to compare them. Both have done harm. Neither have, we firmly believe, harmed any human being who had not already the harm within himself. It is not by introducing evil, but by calling into consciousness and more active life evil which was already lurking in the heart, that any writer makes men worse. Thousands doubtless have read Byron and Shelley, and worse books, and have risen from them as pure as when they sat down. In evil as well as in good, the eye only sees that which it brings with it the power of seeing—say rather, the wish to see. But it is because, in spite of all our self-glorifying pæans, our taste has become worse and not better, that Shelley, the man who conceitedly despises and denies law, is taking the place of Byron, the man who only struggles against it, and who shows his honesty and his greatness most by confessing that his struggles are ineffectual; that, Titan as he may look to the world, his strength is misdirected, a mere furious weakness, which proclaims him a slave in fetters, while prurient young gentlemen are fancying him heaping hills on hills, and scaling Olympus itself. They are tired of that notion, however, now. They have begun to suspect that Byron did not scale Olympus after all. How much more pleasant a leader, then, must Shelley be, who unquestionably did scale his little Olympus—having made it himself first to fit his own stature. The man who has built the hay-rick will doubtless climb it again, if need be, as often as desired, and whistle on the top, after the fashion of the rick-building guild, triumphantly enough. For after all Shelley’s range of vision is very narrow, his subjects few, his reflections still fewer, when compared, not only with such a poet as Spenser, but with his own contemporaries; above all with Byron. He has a deep heart, but not a wide one; an intense eye, but not a catholic one. And, therefore, he never wrote a real drama; for in spite of all that has been said to the contrary, *Beatrice Cenci* is really none other than Percy Bysshe Shelley himself in petticoats.

But we will let them both be. Perhaps they know better now.

One very ugly superstition, nevertheless, we must mention, of which these two men have been, in England at least, the great hierophants; namely, the right of “genius” to be “eccentric.” Doubtless there are excuses for such a notion; but it is one against which every wise man must set his face like a flint; and at the risk of being called a “Philister” and a “flunky,” take part boldly with respectability and this wicked world, and declare them to be for once utterly in the right. Still there are excuses for it. A poet, especially one who wishes to be not merely a describer of pretty things, but a “Vates” and seer of new truth, must often say things which other people do not like to say, and do things which others do not like to do. And, moreover, he will be generally gifted, for the very purpose of enabling him to say and do these strange things, with a sensibility more delicate than common, often painful enough to himself. How easy for such a man to think that he has a right not to be as other men are; to despise little conventionalities, courtesies, even decencies; to offend boldly and carelessly, conscious that he has something right and valuable within himself which not only atones for such defects, but allows him to indulge in them, as badges of his own superiority! This has been the notion of artistic genius which has spread among us of late years, just in proportion as the real amount of artistic genius has diminished; till we see men, on the mere ground of being literary men, too refined to keep accounts, or pay their butchers’ bills; affecting the pettiest absurdities in dress, in manner, in food; giving themselves credit for being unable to bear a noise, keep their temper, educate their own children, associate with their fellow-men; and a thousand other paltry weaknesses, morosenesses, self-indulgences, fastidiousnesses, vulgarities—for all this is essentially vulgar, and demands, not honour and sympathy, but a chapter in Mr. Thackeray’s “Book of Snobs.” *Non sic itur ad astra*. Self-indulgence and exclusiveness can only be a proof of weakness. It may accompany

talent, but it proves that talent to be partial and defective. The brain may be large, but the manhood, the “virtus,” is small, where such things are allowed, much more where they are gloried in. A poet such a man may be, but a world poet never. He is sectarian, a poetical Quaker, a Puritan, who, forgetting that the truth which he possesses is equally the right and inheritance of every man he meets, takes up a peculiar dress or phraseology, as symbols of his fancied difference from his human brothers.

All great poets, till Shelley and Byron, as far as we can discern, have been men especially free from eccentricities; careful not merely of the chivalries and the respectabilities, but also of the courtesies and the petty conventionalities, of the age in which they lived; altogether well-bred men of the world.

The answer, that they learnt the ways of courts, does not avail; for if they had had no innate good-breeding, reticence, respect for forms and customs, they would never have come near courts at all.

It is not a question of rank and fashion, but of good feeling, common sense, unselfishness. Goethe, Milton, Spenser, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Ariosto, were none of them high-born men; several of them low-born; who only rose to the society of high-horn men because they were themselves innately high-bred, polished, complete, without exaggerations, affectations, deformities, weaknesses of mind and taste, whatever may have been their weaknesses on certain points of morals. The man of all men most bepraised by the present generation of poets, is perhaps Wolfgang von Goethe. Why is it, then, that of all men he is the one whom they strive to be most unlike?

And if this be good counsel for the man who merely wishes—and no blame to him—to sing about beautiful things in a beautiful way, it applies with tenfold force to the poet who desires honestly to proclaim great truths. If he has to offend the prejudices of the world in important things, that is all the more reason for his bowing to those prejudices in little things, and being content to be like his neighbours in outward matters, in order that he may make them like himself in inward ones. Shall such a man dare to hinder his own message, to drive away the very hearers to whom he believes himself to be sent, for the sake of his own nerves, laziness, antipathies, much more of his own vanity and pride? If he does so, he is unfaithful to that very genius on which he prides himself. He denies its divinity, by treating it as his own possession, to be displayed or hidden as he chooses, for his own enjoyment, his own self-glorification. Well for such a man if a day comes to him in which he will look back with shame and self-reproach, not merely on every scandal which he may have caused by breaking the moral and social laws of humanity, by neglecting to restrain his appetites, pay his bills, and keep his engagements; but also on every conceited word and look, every gaucherie and rudeness, every self-indulgent moroseness and fastidiousness, as sins against the sacred charge which has been committed to him; and determine with that Jew of old, who, to judge from his letter to Philemon, was one of the most perfect gentlemen of God’s making who ever walked this earth, to become “all things to all men, if by any means he may save some.”



## ALEXANDER SMITH AND ALEXANDER POPE

On reading this little book,<sup>3</sup> and considering all the exaggerated praise and exaggerated blame which have been lavished on it, we could not help falling into many thoughts about the history of English poetry for the last forty years, and about its future destiny. Great poets, even true poets, are becoming more and more rare among us. There are those even who say that we have none; an assertion which, as long as Mr. Tennyson lives, we shall take the liberty of denying. But were he, which Heaven forbid, taken from us, whom have we to succeed him? And he, too, is rather a poet of the sunset than of the dawn—of the autumn than of the spring. His gorgeousness is that of the solemn and fading year; not of its youth, full of hope, freshness, gay and unconscious life.

Like some stately hollyhock or dahlia of this month's gardens, he endures while all other flowers are dying; but all around is winter—a mild one, perhaps, wherein a few annuals or pretty field weeds still linger on; but, like all mild winters, especially prolific in fungi, which, too, are not without their gaudiness, even their beauty, although bred only from the decay of higher organisms, the plagiarists of the vegetable world. Such is poetry in England; while in America the case is not much better.

What more enormous scope for new poetic thought than that which the New World gives? Yet the American poets, even the best of them, look lingeringly and longingly back to Europe and her legends; to her models, and not to the best of them—to her criticism, and not to the best of that—and bestow but a very small portion of such genius as they have on America and her new forms of life.

If they be nearer to the spring than we, they are still deep enough in the winter. A few early flowers may be budding among them, but the autumn crop is still in somewhat shabby and rain-bedrabbled bloom. And for us, where are our spring flowers? What sign of a new poetic school? Still more, what sign of the healthy resuscitation of any old one?

“What matter, after all?” one says to oneself in despair, re-echoing Mr. Carlyle. “Man was not sent into the world to write poetry. What we want is truth. Of the former we have enough in all conscience just now. Let the latter need be provided for by honest and righteous history, and as for poets, let the dead bury their dead.” And yet, after all, man will write poetry, in spite of Mr. Carlyle: nay, beings who are not men, but mere forked radishes, will write it. Man is a poetry-writing animal.

Perhaps he was meant to be one. At all events, he can no more be kept from it than from eating. It is better, with Mr. Carlyle's leave, to believe that the existence of poetry indicates some universal human hunger, whether after “the beautiful,” or after “fame,” or after the means of paying butchers' bills; and accepting it as a necessary evil which must be committed, to see that it be committed as well, or at least as little ill, as possible. In excuse of which we may quote Mr. Carlyle against himself, reminding him of a saying of Goethe once bepraised by him in print: “We must take care of the beautiful, for the useful will take care of itself.”

And never, certainly, since Pope wrote his *Dunciad*, did the beautiful require more taking care of, or evince less capacity for taking care of itself; and never, we must add, was less capacity for taking care of it evinced by its accredited guardians of the press than at this present time, if the reception given to Mr. Smith's poems is to be taken as a fair expression of “the public taste.”

Now, let it be fairly understood, Mr. Alexander Smith is not the object of our reproaches: but Mr. Alexander Smith's models and flatterers. Against him we have nothing whatsoever to say; for him, very much indeed.

Very young, as is said, self-educated, drudging for his daily bread in some dreary Glasgow prison-house of brick and mortar, he has seen the sky, the sun and moon—and, moreover, the sea, report says, for one day in his whole life; and this is nearly the whole of his experience in natural objects. And he has felt, too painfully for his peace of mind, the contrast between his environment

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<sup>3</sup> “Poems,” by Alexander Smith. London: Bogue. 1853. *Fraser's Magazine*, October, 1853.

and that of others—his means of culture and that of others—and, still more painfully, the contrast between his environment and culture, and that sense of beauty and power of melody which he does not deny that he has found in himself, and which no one can deny who reads his poems fairly; who reads even merely the opening page and key-note of the whole:

For as a torrid sunset burns with gold  
Up to the zenith, fierce within my soul  
A passion burns from basement unto cope.  
Poesy, poesy, I'd give to thee  
As passionately my rich laden years,  
My bubble pleasures, and my awful joys,  
*As Hero gave her trembling sighs to find  
Delicious death on wet Leander's lip.*  
Bare, bald, and tawdry, as a fingered moth  
Is my poor life; but with one smile thou canst  
Clothe me with kingdoms. Wilt thou smile on me?  
Wilt bid me die for thee? Oh fair and cold!  
As well may some wild maiden waste her love  
Upon the calm front of a marble Jove.

Now this scrap is by no means a fair average specimen of Mr. Smith's verse. But is not the self-educated man who could teach himself, amid Glasgow smoke and noise, to write such a distich as that exquisite one which we have given in italics, to be judged lovingly and hopefully?

What if he has often copied? What if, in this very scrap, chosen almost at random, there should be a touch from Tennyson's "Two Voices?" And what if imitations, nay, caricatures, be found in almost every page? Is not the explanation simple enough, and rather creditable than discreditable to Mr. Smith? He takes as his models Shelley, Keats, and their followers. Who is to blame for that? The Glasgow youth, or the public taste, which has been exalting these authors more and more for the last twenty years as the great poets of the nineteenth century? If they are the proper ideals of the day, who will blame him for following them as closely as possible—for saturating his memory so thoroughly with their words and thoughts that he reproduces them unconsciously to himself? Who will blame him for even consciously copying their images, if they have said better than he the thing which he wants to say, in the only poetical dialect which he knows? He does no more than all schools have done, copy their own masters; as the Greek epicists and Virgil copied Homer; as all succeeding Latin epicists copied Virgil; as Italians copied Ariosto and Tasso; as every one who can copies Shakespeare; as the French school copied, or thought they copied, "The Classics," and as a matter of duty used to justify any bold image in their notes, not by its originality, but by its being already in Claudian, or Lucan, or Virgil, or Ovid; as every poetaster, and a great many who were more than poetasters, twenty years ago, used to copy Scott and Byron, and as all poetasters now are copying the very same models as Mr. Smith, and failing while he succeeds.

We by no means agree in the modern outcry for "originality." Is it absolutely demanded that no poet shall say anything whatsoever that any other poet has said? If so, Mr. Smith may well submit to a blame which he will bear in common with Shakespeare, Chaucer, Pope, and many another great name; and especially with Raphael himself, who made no scruple of adopting not merely points of style, but single motives and incidents, from contemporaries and predecessors. Who can look at any of his earlier pictures, the Crucifixion for instance, at present in Lord Ward's gallery at the Egyptian Hall, without seeing that he has not merely felt the influence of Perugino, but copied him; tried deliberately to be as like his master as he could? Was this plagiarism? If so, all education, it would seem, must be a mere training in plagiarism. For how is the student to learn, except by copying his

master's models? Is the young painter or sculptor a plagiarist because he spends the first, often the best, years of his life in copying Greek statues; or the schoolboy, for toiling at the reproduction of Latin metres and images, in what are honestly and fittingly called "copies" of verses. And what if the young artist shall choose, as Mr. Smith has done, to put a few drawings into the exhibition, or to carve and sell a few statuettes? What if the schoolboy, grown into a gownsman, shall contribute his share to a set of "*Arundines Cami*" or "*Prolusiones Etonienses*?" Will any one who really knows what art or education means complain of them for having imitated their models, however servilely?

Will he not rather hail such an imitation as a fair proof, first of the student's reverence for authority—a more important element of "genius" than most young folks fancy—and next, of his possessing any artistic power whatsoever? For, surely, if the greater contains the less, the power of creating must contain that of imitating. A young author's power of accurate imitation is, after all, the primary and indispensable test of his having even the capability of becoming a poet. He who cannot write in a style which he does know, will certainly not be able to invent a new style for himself. The first and simplest form in which any metrical ear, or fancy, or imagination, can show itself, must needs be in imitating existing models. Innate good taste—that is, true poetic genius—will of course choose the best models in the long run. But not necessarily at first. What shall be the student's earliest ideal must needs be determined for him by circumstance, by the books to which he has access, by the public opinion which he hears expressed. Enough if he chooses, as Raphael did, the best models which he knows, and tries to exhaust them, and learn all he can from them, ready to quit them hereafter when he comes across better ones, yet without throwing away what he has learnt. "Be faithful in a few things, and thou shalt become ruler over many things," is one of those eternal moral laws which, like many others, holds as true of art as it does of virtue.

And on the whole, judging Mr. Alexander Smith by this rule, he has been faithful over a few things, and therefore we have fair hope of him for the future. For Mr. Smith does succeed, not in copying one poet, but in copying all, and very often in improving on his models. Of the many conceits which he has borrowed from Mr. Bailey, there is hardly one which he has not made more true, more pointed and more sweet; nay, in one or two places, he has dared to mend John Keats himself. But his whole merit is by no means confined to the faculty of imitation. Though the "Life Drama" itself is the merest cento of reflections and images, without coherence or organisation, dramatic or logical, yet single scenes, like that with the peasant and that with the fallen outcast, have firm self-consistency and clearness of conception; and these, as a natural consequence, are comparatively free from those tawdry spangles which deface the greater part of the poem. And, moreover, in the episode of "The Indian and the Lady," there is throughout a "keeping in the tone," as painters say, sultry and languid, yet rich and full of life, like a gorgeous Venetian picture, which augurs even better for Mr. Smith's future success than the two scenes just mentioned; for consistency of thought may come with time and training; but clearness of inward vision, the faculty of imagination, can be no more learnt than it can be dispensed with. In this, and this only it is true that *poeta nascitur non fit*; just as no musical learning or practice can make a composer, unless he first possess an innate ear for harmony and melody. And it must be said that it is just in the passages where Mr. Smith is not copying, where he forgets for awhile Shelley, Keats, and the rest, and is content to be simply himself, that he is best; terse, vivid, sound, manly, simple. May he turn round some day, and deliberately pulling out all borrowed feathers, look at himself honestly and boldly in the glass, and we will warrant him, on the strength of the least gaudy, and as yet unpraised passages in his poems, that he will find himself after all more eagle than daw, and quite well plumed enough by nature to fly at a higher, because for him a more natural, pitch than he has yet done.

True, he has written a great deal of nonsense; nonsense in matter as well as in manner. But therein, too, he has only followed the reigning school. As for manner, he does sometimes, in imitating his models, out-Herod Herod. But why not? If Herod be a worthy king, let him be by all means out-Heroded, if any man can do it. One cannot have too much of a good thing. If it be right to

bedizen verses with metaphors and similes which have no reference, either in tone or in subject, to the matter in hand, let there be as many of them as possible. If a saddle is a proper place for jewels, then let the seat be paved with diamonds and emeralds, and Runjeet Singh's harness-maker be considered as a lofty artist, for whose barbaric splendour Mr. Peat and his Melton customers are to forswear pigskin and severe simplicity—not to say utility and comfort. If poetic diction be different in species from plain English, then let us have it as poetical as possible, and as unlike English; as ungrammatical, abrupt, involved, transposed, as the clumsiness, carelessness, or caprice of man can make it. If it be correct to express human thought by writing whole pages of vague and bald abstract metaphysic, and then trying to explain them by concrete conceits, which bear an entirely accidental and mystical likeness to the notion which they are to illustrate, then let the metaphysic be as abstract as possible, the conceits as fanciful and far-fetched as possible. If Marino and Cowley be greater poets than Ariosto and Milton, let young poets imitate the former with might and main, and avoid spoiling their style by any perusal of the too-intelligible common sense of the latter. If Byron's moral (which used to be thought execrable) be really his great excellence, and his style (which used to be thought almost perfect) unworthy of this age of progress, then let us have his moral without his style, his matter without his form; or—that we may be sure of never falling for a moment into his besetting sins of terseness, grace, and completeness—without any form at all. If poetry, in order to be worthy of the nineteenth century, ought to be as unlike as possible to Homer or Sophocles, Virgil or Horace, Shakespeare or Spenser, Dante or Tasso, let those too-idolised names be erased henceforth from the calendar; let the “Ars Poetica” be consigned to flames, and Martinus Scriblerus's “Art of Sinking” placed forthwith on the list of the Committee of Council for Education, that not a working man in England may be ignorant that, whatsoever superstitions about art may have haunted the benighted heathens who built the Parthenon, *nous avons changé tout cela*. In one word, if it be best and most fitting to write poetry in the style in which almost every one has been trying to write it since Pope and plain sense went out, and Shelley and the seventh heaven came in, let it be so written; and let him who most perfectly so “sets the age to music,” be presented by the assembled guild of critics, not with the obsolete and too classic laurel, but with an electro-plated brass medal, bearing the due inscription, “Ars est nescire artem.” And when, in twelve months' time, he finds himself forgotten, perhaps decried, for the sake of the next aspirant, let him reconsider himself, try whether, after all, the common sense of the many will not prove a juster and a firmer standing-ground than the sentimentality and bad taste of the few, and read Alexander Pope.

In Pope's writings, whatsoever he may not find, he will find the very excellences after which our young poets strive in vain, produced by their seeming opposites, which are now despised and discarded; naturalness produced by studious art; sublimity by strict self-restraint; depth by clear simplicity; pathos by easy grace; and a morality infinitely more merciful, as well as more righteous, than the one now in vogue among the poetasters, by honest faith in God. If he be shocked by certain peculiarities of diction, and by the fondness for perpetual antitheses, let him remember, that what seems strange to our day was natural and habitual in Pope's; and that, in the eyes of our grandchildren, Keats's and Shelley's peculiarities will seem as monstrous as Pope's or Johnson's do in ours. But if, misled by the popular contempt for Pope, he should be inclined to answer this advice with a shrug and a smile, we entreat him and all young poets, to consider, line by line, word by word, sound by sound, only those once well-known lines, which many a brave and wise man of fifty years ago would have been unable to read without honourable tears:

In the worst inn's worst room, with mat half-hung,  
The floor of plaster, and the walls of dung,  
On once a flock-bed, but repaired with straw,  
With tape-tied curtains never meant to draw,  
The George and Garter, dangling from that bed,

Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,  
Great Villiers lies. Alas! how changed from him,  
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim!  
Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,  
The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love;  
Or just as gay, at Council, in a ring  
Of mimic statesmen, and their merry king,  
No wit to flatter, left of all his store!  
No fool to laugh at, which he valued more.  
There, victor of his health, of fortune, friends,  
And fame, this lord of useless thousands ends.

Yes; Pope knew, as well as Wordsworth and our "Naturalisti," that no physical fact was so mean or coarse as to be below the dignity of poetry—when in its right place. He could draw a pathos and sublimity out of the dirty inn chamber, such as Wordsworth never elicited from tubs and daffodils—because he could use them according to the rules of art, which are the rules of sound reason and of true taste.

The answer to all this is ready nowadays. We are told that Pope could easily be great in what he attempted, because he never attempted any but small matters; easily self-restraining, because his paces were naturally so slow; above all, easily clear, because he is always shallow; easily full of faith in what he did believe, because he believed so very little. On the two former counts we may have something to say hereafter. On the two latter, we will say at once, that if it be argued, as it often is, that the reason of our modern poetical obscurity and vagueness lies in the greater depth of the questions which are now agitating thoughtful minds, we do utterly deny it. Human nature, human temptations, human problems, are radically the same in every age, by whatsoever outward difference of words they may seem distinguished. Where is deeper philosophic thought, true or false, expressed in verse, than in Dante, or in Spenser's two cantos of "Mutabilities"? Yet if they are difficult to understand, their darkness is that of the deep blue sea. Vague they never are, obscure they never are, because they see clearly what they want to say, and how to say it. There is always a sound and coherent meaning in them, to be found if it be searched for.

The real cause of this modern vagueness is rather to be found in shallow and unsound culture, and in that inability, or carelessness about seeing any object clearly, which besets our poets just now; as the cause of antique clearness lies in the nobler and healthier manhood, in the severer and more methodic habits of thought, the sounder philosophic and critical training, which enabled Spenser and Milton to draw up a state paper, or to discourse deep metaphysics, with the same manful possession of their subject which gives grace and completeness to the "Penseroso" or the "Epithalamion." And if our poets have their doubts, they should remember, that those to whom doubt and inquiry are real and stern, are not inclined to sing about them till they can sing poems of triumph over them. There has no temptation taken our modern poets save that which is common to man—the temptation of wishing to make the laws of the universe and of art fit them, as they do not feel inclined to make themselves fit the laws, or care to find them out.

What! Do you wish, asks some one, a little contemptuously, to measure the great growing nineteenth century by the thumb-rule of Alexander Pope? No. But to measure the men who write in the nineteenth century by a man who wrote in the eighteenth; to compare their advantages with his, their circumstances with his: and then, if possible, to make them ashamed of their unmanliness. Have you young poets of this day, your struggles, your chagrins? Do you think the hump-backed dwarf, every moment conscious at once of his deformity and his genius—conscious, probably, of far worse physical shame than any deformity can bring, "sewed up in buckram every morning, and requiring a nurse like a child"—caricatured, lampooned, slandered, utterly without fault of his own—insulted

and rejected by the fine lady whom he had dared to court in reality, after being allowed and allured to flirt with her in rhyme—do you suppose that this man had nothing to madden him—to convert him into a sneering snarling misanthrope? Yet was there one noble soul who met him who did not love him, or whom he did not love? Have you your doubts? Do you find it difficult to make your own speculations, even your own honest convictions, square with the popular superstitions? What were your doubts, your inward contradictions, to those of a man who, bred a Papist, and yet burning with the most intense scorn and hatred of lies and shams, bigotries and priestcrafts, could write that “Essay on Man”? Read that, young gentlemen of the Job’s-wife school, who fancy it a fine thing to tell your readers to curse God and die, or, at least, to show the world in print how you could curse God by divine right of genius, if you chose, and be ashamed of your cowardly wailings.

Alexander Pope went through doubt, contradiction, confusion, to which yours are simple and light; and conquered. He was a man of like passions with yourselves; infected with the peculiar vices of his day; narrow, for his age was narrow; shallow, for his age was shallow; a bon-vivant, for his age was a gluttonous and drunken one; bitter, furious, and personal, for men round him were such; foul-mouthed often, and indecent, as the rest were. Nay, his very power, when he abuses it for his own ends of selfish spite and injured vanity, makes him, as all great men can be (in words at least, for in life he was far better than the men around him), worse than his age. He can out-rival Dennis in ferocity, and Congreve in filth. So much the worse for him in that account which he has long ago rendered up. But in all times and places, as far as we can judge, the man was heart-whole, more and not less righteous than his fellows. With his whole soul he hates what is evil, as far as he can recognise it. With his whole soul he loves what is good, as far as he can recognise that. With his soul believes that there is a righteous and good God, whose order no human folly or crime can destroy; and he will say so; and does say it, clearly, simply, valiantly, reverently, in his “Essay on Man.” His theodicy is narrow; shallow, as was the philosophy of his age. But as far as it goes, it is sound—faithful to God, and to what he sees and knows. Man is made in God’s image. Man’s justice is God’s justice; man’s mercy is God’s mercy; man’s science, man’s critic taste, are insights into the laws of God himself. He does not pretend to solve the great problem. But he believes that it is solved from all eternity; that God knows, God loves, and God rules; that the righteous and faithful man may know enough of the solution to know his duty, to see his way, to justify God; and as much as he knows he tells. There were in that diseased sensitive cripple no vain repinings, no moon-struck howls, no impious cries against God: “Why hast thou made me thus?” To him God is a righteous God, a God of order. Science, philosophy, politics, criticism, poetry, are parts of His order—they are parts of the appointed onward path for mankind; there are eternal laws for them. There is a beautiful and fit order, in poetry, which is part of God’s order, which men have learnt ages ago, for they, too, had their teaching from above; to offend against which is absolutely wrong, an offence to be put down mildly in those who offend ignorantly; but those who offend from dulness, from the incapacity to see the beautiful, or from carelessness about it, when praise or gain tempts them the other way, have some moral defect in them; they are what Solomon calls fools: they are the enemies of man; and he will “hate them right sore, even as though they were his own enemies”—which indeed they were.

He knows by painful experience that they deserve no quarter; that there is no use giving them any; to spare them is to make them insolent; to fondle the reptile is to be bitten by it. True poetry, as the messenger of heavenly beauty, is decaying; true refinement, true loftiness of thought, even true morality, are at stake. And so he writes his “Dunciad.” And would that he were here, to write it over again, and write it better!

For write it again he surely would. And write it better he would also. With the greater cleanliness of our time, with all the additional experience of history, with the greater classical, æsthetic, and theological knowledge of our day, the sins of our poets are as much less excusable than those of Eusden, Blackmore, Cibber, and the rest, as Pope’s “Dunciad” on them would be more righteously severe. What, for instance, would the author of the “Essay on Man” say to anyone who



now wrote p. 137 (for it really is not to be quoted) of the “Life Drama” as the thoughts of his hero, without any after atonement for the wanton insult it conveys toward him whom he dares in the same breath to call “Father,” simply because he wants to be something very fine and famous and self-glorifying, and Providence keeps him waiting awhile? Has Pope not said it already?

Persist, by all divine in man unawed,  
But learn, ye dunces, not to scorn your God!

And yet no; the gentle goddess would now lay no such restriction on her children, for in Pope’s day no man had discovered the new poetic plan for making the divine in man an excuse for scorning God, and finding in the dignity of “heaven-born genius” free licence to upbraid, on the very slightest grounds, the Being from whom the said genius pretends to derive his dignity. In one of his immortal saws he has cautioned us against “making God in man’s image.” But it never entered into his simple head that man would complain of God for being made in a lower image than even his own. Atheism he could conceive of; the deeper absurdity of Authotheism was left for our more enlightened times and more spiritual muses.

It will be answered that all this blasphemy is not to be attributed to the author, but to the man whose spiritual development he intends to sketch. To which we reply that no man has a right to bring his hero through such a state without showing how he came out of the slough as carefully as how he came into it, especially when the said hero is set forth as a marvellously clever person; and the last scene, though full of beautiful womanly touches, and of a higher morality than the rest of the book, contains no amende honorable, not even an explanation of the abominable stuff which the hero has been talking a few pages back. He leaps from the abyss to the seventh heaven; but, unfortunately for the spectators, he leaps behind the scenes, and they are none the wiser. And next; people have no more right even for dramatic purposes, to put such language into print for any purpose whatsoever, than they have to print the grossest indecencies, or the most disgusting details of torture and cruelty.

No one can accuse this magazine of any fondness for sanctimonious cant or lip-reverence; but if there be a “Father in Heaven,” as Mr. Smith confesses that there is, or even merely a personal Deity at all, some sort of common decency in speaking of Him should surely be preserved. No one would print pages of silly calumny and vulgar insult against his earthly father, or even against a person for whom he had no special dislike, and then excuse it by, “Of course, I don’t think so: but if anyone did think so, this would be a very smart way of saying what he thought.” Old Aristotle would call such an act “banauson”—in plain English, blackguard; and we do not see how it can be called anything else, unless in the case of some utter brute in human form, to whom “there is no cœnum, and therefore no obscœnum; no fanum, and therefore no profanum.” The common sense of mankind in all ages has condemned this sort of shamelessness, even more than it has insults to parental and social ties, and to all which raises man above the brute. Let Mr. Smith take note of this, and let him, if he loves himself, mend speedily; for of all styles wherein to become stereotyped the one which he has chosen is the worst, because in it the greatest amount of insincerity is possible. There is a Tartarus in front of him as well as an Olympus; a hideous possibility very near him of insincere impiety merely for the purpose of startling; of lawless fancy merely for the purpose of glittering; and a still more hideous possibility of a revulsion to insincere cant, combined with the same lawless fancy, for the purpose of keeping well with the public, in which to all appearances one of our most popular novelists, not to mention the poet whose writings are most analogous to Mr. Smith’s, now lies wallowing.

Whether he shall hereafter obey his evil angel, and follow him, or his good angel, and become a great poet, depends upon himself; and above all upon his having courage to be himself, and to forget himself, two virtues which, paradoxical as it may seem, are correlatives. For the “subjective” poet—in plain words, the egotist—is always comparing himself with every man he meets, and therefore momentarily tempted to steal bits of their finery wherewith to patch his own rents; while the man

who is content to be simply what God has made him, goes on from strength to strength developing almost unconsciously under a divine education, by which his real personality and the salient points by which he is distinguished from his fellows, become apparent with more and more distinctness of form, and brilliance of light and shadow, as those well know who have watched human character attain its clearest and grandest as well as its loveliest outlines, not among hankerers after fame and power, but on lonely sickbeds, and during long unknown martyrdoms of humble self-sacrifice and loving drudgery.

But whether or not Mr. Smith shall purify himself—and he can do so, if he will, right nobly—the world must be purified of his style of poetry, if men are ever, as he hopes, to “set his age to music;” much more if they are once more to stir the hearts of the many by Tyrtæan strains, such as may be needed before our hairs are gray. The “poetry of doubt,” however pretty, would stand us in little stead if we were threatened with a second Armada. It will conduce little to the valour, “virtus,” manhood of any Englishman to be informed by any poet, even in the most melodious verse, illustrated by the most startling and pan cosmic metaphors. “See what a highly-organised and peculiar stomach-ache I have had! Does it not prove indisputably that I am not as other men are?” What gospel there can be in such a message to any honest man who has either to till the earth, plan a railroad, colonise Australia, or fight his country’s enemies, is hard to discover. Hard indeed to discover how this most practical, and therefore most poetical, of ages, is to be “set to music,” when all those who talk about so doing persist obstinately in poring, with introverted eyes, over the state of their own digestion—or creed.

What man wants, what art wants, perhaps what the Maker of them both wants, is a poet who shall begin by confessing that he is as other men are, and sing about things which concern all men, in language which all men can understand. This is the only road to that gift of prophecy which most young poets are nowadays in such a hurry to arrogate to themselves. We can only tell what man will be by fair induction, by knowing what he is, what he has been.

And it is most noteworthy that in this age, in which there is more knowledge than there ever was of what man has been, and more knowledge, through innumerable novelists, and those most subtle and finished ones, of what man is, that poetry should so carefully avoid drawing from this fresh stock of information in her so-confident horoscopes of what man will be.

There is just now as wide a divorce between poetry and the common-sense of all time, as there is between poetry and modern knowledge. Our poets are not merely vague and confused, they are altogether fragmentary—*disjecta membra poetarum*; they need some uniting idea. And what idea?

Our answer will probably be greeted with a laugh. Nevertheless we answer simply, What our poets want is faith.

There is little or no faith nowadays. And without faith there can be no real art, for art is the outward expression of firm coherent belief. And a poetry of doubt, even a sceptical poetry, in its true sense, can never possess clear and sound form, even organic form at all. How can you put into form that thought which is by its very nature formless? How can you group words round a central idea when you do not possess a central idea? Shakespeare in his one sceptic tragedy has to desert the pure tragic form, and Hamlet remains the beau-ideal of “the poetry of doubt.” But what would a tragedy be in which the actors were all Hamlets, or rather scraps of Hamlets? A drama of Hamlet is only possible because the one sceptic is surrounded by characters who have some positive faith, who do their work for good or evil undoubtingly while he is speculating about his. And both Ophelia, and Laertes, Fortinbras, the king, yea the very grave-digger, know well enough what they want, whether Hamlet does or not. The whole play is, in fact, Shakespeare’s subtle *reductio ad absurdum* of that very diseased type of mind which has been for the last forty years identified with “genius”—with one difference, namely, that Shakespeare, with his usual clearness of conception, exhibits the said intellectual type pure and simple, while modern poets degrade and confuse it, and all the questions dependent on it, by mixing it up unnecessarily with all manner of moral weaknesses, and very often moral crimes.

But the poet is to have a faith nowadays of course—a “faith in nature.” This article of Wordsworth’s poetical creed is to be assumed as the only necessary one, and we are to ignore altogether the somewhat important fact that he had faith in a great deal besides nature, and to make that faith in nature his sole differentia and source of inspiration. Now we beg leave to express not merely our want of faith in this same “faith in nature,” but even our ignorance of what it means.

Nature is certain phenomena, appearances. Faith in them is simply to believe that a red thing is red, and a square thing square; a *sine qua non* doubtless in poetry, as in carpentry, but which will produce no poetry, but only Dutch painting and gardeners’ catalogues—in a word, that lowest form of art, the merely descriptive; and into this very style the modern naturalist poets, from the times of Southey and Wordsworth, have been continually falling, and falling therefore into baldness and vulgarity. For mere description cannot represent even the outlines of a whole scene at once, as the daguerreotype does; they must describe it piecemeal. Much less can it represent that whole scene at once in all its glories of colour, glow, fragrance, life, motion. In short, it cannot give life and spirit.

All merely descriptive poetry can do is to give a dead catalogue—to kill the butterfly, and then write a monograph on it. And, therefore, there comes a natural revulsion from the baldness and puerility into which Wordsworth too often fell by indulging his false theories on these matters.

But a revulsion to what? To the laws of course which underlie the phenomena. But again—to which laws? Not merely to the physical ones, else Turner’s “Chemistry” and Watson’s “Practice of Medicine” are great poems.

True, we have heard Professor Forbes’s book on Glaciers called an epic poem, and not without reason: but what gives that noble book its epic character is neither the glaciers nor the laws of them, but the discovery of those laws: the methodic, truthful, valiant, patient battle between man and nature, his final victory, his wresting from her the secret which had been locked for ages in the ice-caves of the Alps, guarded by cold and fatigue, danger and superstitious dread. For Nature will be permanently interesting to the poet, and appear to him in a truly poetic aspect, only in as far as she is connected by him with spiritual and personal beings, and becomes in his eyes either a person herself, or the dwelling and organ of persons. The shortest scrap of word-painting, as Thomson’s “Seasons” will sufficiently prove, is wearisome and dead, unless there be a living figure in the landscape, or unless, failing a living figure, the scene is deliberately described with reference to the poet or the reader, not as something in itself, but as something seen by him, and grouped and subordinated exactly as it would strike his eye and mind. But even this is insufficient. The heart of man demands more, and so arises a craving after the old nature-mythology of Greece, the old fairy legends of the Middle Age. The great poets of the Renaissance both in England and in Italy had a similar craving. But the aspect under which these ancient dreams are regarded by them is most significantly different. With Spenser and Ariosto, fairies and elves, gods and demons, are regarded in their fancied connection with man. Even in the age of Pope, when the gods and the Rosicrucian Sylphs have become alike “poetical machinery,” this is their work. But among the moderns it is as connected with Nature, and giving a soul and a personality to her, that they are most valued. The most pure utterance of this feeling is perhaps Schiller’s “Gods of Greece,” where the loss of the Olympians is distinctly deplored, because it has unpeopled, not heaven, but earth. But the same tone runs through Goethe’s classical “Walpurgis Night,” where the old human “twelve gods,” the antitypes and the friends of men, in whom our forefathers delighted, have vanished utterly, and given place to semi-physical Nereides, Tritons, Telchines, Psylli, and Seismos himself.

Keats, in his wonderful “Endymion,” contrived to unite the two aspects of Greek mythology as they never had been united before, except by Spenser in his “Garden of Adonis.” But the pantheistic notion, as he himself says in “Lamia,” was the one which lay nearest his heart; and in his “Hyperion” he begins to deal wholly with the Nature gods, and after magnificent success, leaves the poem unfinished, most probably because he had become, as his readers must, weary of its utter want of human interest.

For that, after all, is what is wanted in a poetical view of Nature; and that is what the poet, in

proportion to his want of dramatic faculty, must draw from himself. He must—he does in these days—colour Nature with the records of his own mind, and bestow a factitious life and interest on her by making her reflect his own joy or sorrow. If he be out of humour, she must frown; if he sigh, she must roar; if he be—what he very seldom is—tolerably comfortable, the birds have liberty to sing, and the sun to shine. But by the time that he has arrived at this stage of his development, or degradation, the poet is hardly to be called a strong man, he who is so much the slave of his own moods that he must needs see no object save through them, is not very likely to be able to resist the awe which nature's grandeur and inscrutability brings with it, and to say firmly, and yet reverently:

Si fractus illibatur orbis,  
Impavidum ferient ruinæ.

He feels, in spite of his conceit, that nature is not going his way, or looking his looks, but going what he calls her own way, what we call God's way. At all events, he feels that he is lying, when he represents the great universe as turned to his small set of Pan's pipes and all the more because he feels that, conceal it as he will, those same Pan's pipes are out of tune with each other. And so arises the habit of impersonating nature, not after the manner of Spenser (whose purity of metaphor and philosophic method, when he deals with nature, is generally even more marvellous than the richness of his fancy), as an organic whole, but in her single and accidental phenomena; and of ascribing not merely animal passions or animal enjoyment, but human discursive intellect and moral sense, to inanimate objects, and talking as if a stick or a stone were more of a man than the poet is—as indeed they very often may be.

These, like everything else, are perfectly right in their own place—where they express passion, either pleasurable or painful, passion, that is, not so intense as to sink into exhaustion, or to be compelled to self-control by the fear of madness. In these two cases, as great dramatists know well enough, the very violence of the emotion produces perfect simplicity, as the hurricane blows the sea smooth. But where fanciful language is employed to express the extreme of passion, it is felt to be absurd, and is accordingly called rant and bombast: and where it is not used to express passion at all, but merely the quiet and normal state of the poet's mind, or of his characters, with regard to external nature; when it is considered, as it is by most of our modern poets, the staple of poetry, indeed poetic diction itself, so that the more numerous and the stranger conceits an author can cram into his verses, the finer poet he is; then, also, it is called rant and bombast, but of the most artificial, insincere, and (in every sense of the word) monstrous kind; the offspring of an effeminate nature-worship, without self-respect, without true manhood, because it exhibits the poet as the puppet of his own momentary sensations, and not as a man superior to nature, claiming his likeness to the Author of nature, by confessing and expressing the permanent laws of Nature, undisturbed by fleeting appearances without, or fleeting tempers within. Hence it is that, as in all insincere and effete times, the poetry of the day deals more and more with conceits, and less and less with true metaphors. In fact, hinc illæ lachrymæ. This is, after all, the primary symptom of disease in the public taste, which has set us on writing this review—that critics all round are crying: “An ill-constructed whole, no doubt; but full of beautiful passages”—the word “passages” turning out to mean, in plain English, conceits. The simplest distinction, perhaps, between an image and a conceit is this—that while both are analogies, the image is founded on an analogy between the essential properties of two things—the conceit on an analogy between its accidents. Images, therefore, whether metaphors or similes, deal with laws; conceits with private judgments. Images belong to the imagination, the power which sees things according to their real essence and inward life, and conceits to the fancy or phantasy, which only see things as they appear.

To give an example or two from the “Life Drama:”

His heart holds a deep hope,  
As holds the wretched West the sunset's corse—  
Spit on, insulted by the brutal rains.

The passion-panting sea  
Watches the unveiled beauty of the stars  
Like a great hungry soul.

Great spirits,  
Who left upon the mountain-tops of Death  
A light that made them lovely.

The moon,  
Arising from dark waves which plucked at her.

And hundreds, nay, thousands more in this book, whereof it must be said, that beautiful or not, in the eyes of the present generation—and many of them are put into very beautiful language, and refer to very beautiful natural objects—they are not beautiful really and in themselves, because they are mere conceits; the analogies in them are fortuitous, depending not on the nature of the things themselves, but on the private fancy of the writer, having no more real and logical coherence than a conundrum or a pun; in plain English, untrue, only allowable to Juliets or Othellos; while their self-possession, almost their reason, is in temporary abeyance under the influence of joy or sorrow.

Every one must feel the exquisite fitness of Juliet's "Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds," etc., for one of her character, in her circumstances: every one, we trust, and Mr. Smith among the number, will some day feel the exquisite unfitness of using such conceits as we have just quoted, or any other, page after page, for all characters and chances. For the West is not wretched; the rains never were brutal yet, and do not insult the sun's corpse, being some millions of miles nearer us than the sun, but only have happened once to seem to do so in the poet's eyes. The sea does not pant with passion, does not hunger after the beauty of the stars; Death has no mountain-tops, or any property which can be compared thereto; and "the dark waves"—in that most beautiful conceit which follows, and which Mr. Smith has borrowed from Mr. Bailey, improving it marvellously nevertheless—do not "pluck at the moon," but only seem to do so. And what constitutes the beauty of this very conceit—far the best of those we have chosen—but that it looks so very like an image, so very like a law, from being so very common and customary an ocular deception to one standing on a low shore at night?

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