ARTICLE VI.

SPENSER AND LATER SONNET-WRITERS.

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VERY naturally Shakespeare does not stand alone as a sonneteer in the Elizabethan Era.

In common with all forms of literature in prose and verse, the sonnet partook of the general literary awakening which marked the opening of the sixteenth century. Saintsbury, in his recent discussion of Elizabethan literature, speaks of "the extraordinary outburst of sonnet writing" at the time, so notable that, before the close of Elizabeth's reign, in 1603, more than "a dozen collections, chiefly or wholly of sonnets," appeared, represented by such authors as Lodge, Fletcher, Daniel, Constable, Watson, Drayton, and, especially, Sidney, quite apart from the more distinctive product of Shakespeare and Spenser. To these minor authors of the era, this special poetic form seemed particularly to appeal, partly because of its structural brevity, and, also, by reason of its pronounced idyllic quality, admitting of the expression of emotion throughout the wide range of human feeling and fancy. That the "fashion changed" as the century closed is suggestively attributed to the overshadowing excellence of Shakespeare and Spenser.

SPENSER.

The great epic poet of the time, Edmund Spenser, contributed either originally or as a translator what might be

called several collections or series of sonnets. One of these series is "The Ruines of Rome," the product of Bellay, one of the seven compeers under Henry the Second. In the first stanza, which is an invocation, the poet asks the aid of those spirits who of old peopled Rome and added to its fame. As the poem develops, he pictures the city in ruins, repeats the lamentation of her great names over her downfall and the boasts of her conquerors. Though in ruins, he depicts her as still beautiful, recalls her greatness, feared even by the gods, proclaims her to be without a rival, and calls on the spirits of the Thracian bards and of Vergil himself to aid him in his praise. He dwells with sadness on the causes of her downfall, in ambition, pride, wealth and luxury, civil and foreign wars, and social corruption. Each of the thirty-two stanzas is a poem in itself, as rich in æsthetic beauty as it is in ethical teaching, Spenser adding an envoy to the original, as a formal tribute to Bellay. It is a kind of an abridged poetic study of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, as Gibbon viewed it, and marked by suggestive comments on political philosophy, and life. The structure of the stanzas is that of three regular quatrains and a couplet. Another Spenserian series of the sonnet order is that entitled "The Visions of Bellay," made up of fifteen stanzas, in which the Italian poet is back again among Roman ruins and by a succession of visions depicts the instability of all things human. "The Visions of Petrarch," made up of seven stanzas, and "The Visions of the World's Vanitie," with twelve stanzas, complete a cycle or a trilogy of Visions, in the sonnet structure, all included in a larger series of nine poems under the caption of "Complaints." It is interesting to note that an early version of Bellay's "Visions" is found in "The Theatre for Worldlings," a book by John

Vander Noodt, a refugee from Brabant to England, to escape Romish persecution.

The Sonnets proper, however, from the pen of Spenser are the eighty-eight entitled "Amoretti," written as a tribute to Elizabeth Boyer, whom he married in 1594. As the Italian title indicates, they are little Love-Lyrics, and follow the prevailing Spenserian structure, as seen in the "Visions," and are marked by that peculiar poetic quality that characterizes all the work of Spenser in verse. Some of these — such as the fifteenth, eighteenth, twenty-second, thirty-fourth, and sixty-eighth — are exceptionally excellent. This last one well exhibits the author at his best:—

> "Most glorious Lord of life, that on this day
> Didst make thy triumph over death and sin,
> And, having harrowed hell, didst bring away
> Captivity thence captive, us to win:
> This joyous day, dear Lord, with joy begin,
> And grant that we, for whom thou diddest die,
> Being with thy dear blood clean washt from sin,
> May live forever in felicity!
> And that thy love, we weighing worthily,
> May likewise love thee for the same again;
> And for thy sake, that all like dear did'st buy,
> With love may one another entertain!
> So let us love, dear Lord, like as we ought:
> Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught."

In fact, the Sonnets of Spenser sustain somewhat the same relation to "The Faerie Queene" and his other poems which the Sonnets of Shakespeare sustain to his Plays; so that, though inferior to his Epic as Shakespeare's to his Dramas, they cannot be said to be unworthy of their author or in any substantive way to impair his poetic repute. As the two greatest poets of the Elizabethan Age they thus fittingly represent the three great divisions of poetry, the epic, dra-

matic, and lyric, and auspiciously open the record of Modern English verse.

MILTON.

In the collection of Milton's poems, we find eighteen Sonnets, the authorship of no one of them being in doubt, sustaining somewhat the same relation to his Epics as the Shorter Poems, so-called, sustain to them; especially, such as the poems "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," "Upon the Circumcision," "The Passion," and "Arcadia." What are called his "Songs," such as "Song on May Morning," are such in substance though not in form, as are the poems "On Time" and "At a Solemn Music." The famous "Epitaph on Shakespeare," though not exactly corresponding to the laws of sonnet structure, is the nearest approximation to it and has the force of such a lyric. It is in reality a sixteen-line stanza, made up of eight regular couplets. His poem "On the University Carrier," Hobson, is made up of nine such couplets. His first Sonnet was written in 1631, and is entitled "On his being arrived to the Age of Twenty-three," as it opens:—

> "How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
> Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!"

ending with the oft-quoted couplet:—

> "All is, if I have grace to use it so,
> As ever in my great Task-Master's eye."

Other Sonnets follow of varying value, those pertaining to political struggles, such as the third, sixth, seventh, twelfth, and thirteenth, and those referring to his blindness, the fifteenth and seventeenth, being especially significant. From these eighteen Sonnets, few though they are, we may cull

some of the most current passages that Milton has penned. Thus in the sixth we note the line:—

> "That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp."

In the seventh, we read:—

> "License they mean when they cry liberty."

So, in the twelfth, are the familiar lines:—

> "Till truth and right from violence be freed,
> And public faith cleared from the shameful brand
> Of public fraud."

So, in the thirteenth:—

> "Peace hath her victories
> No less renowned than War."

In the fifteenth:—

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

In the seventeenth, writing of his blindness, he says:—

> "Yet I argue not
> Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate one jot
> Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer
> Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?
> The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied
> In liberty's defence, my noble task,
> Of which all Europe rings from side to side."

In an exceptional stanza of twenty lines, published among the Sonnets as if a part of them, entitled "New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament," is the well-known line

> "New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large."

Of the eighteen Sonnets, the fourth, fifth, eleventh, fourteenth, and fifteenth are somewhat iregular as to structure. As to the poetic merit of the Sonnets, there has been but one opinion, and that fully sustaining the author's general reputation as a writer of verse.

"The effectiveness of Milton's sonnets," writes Pattison, "is chiefly due to the real nature of the character, person, or incident of which each is the delineation. Each person, thing, or fact is a moment in Milton's life in which he was stirred." The short and condensed form of this verse seemed admirably suited to the expression of Milton's terse and vigorous sentiments on matters affecting the commonwealth, and in such personal tributes as those to Skinner, Cromwell, Fairfax, and Sir Henry Vane. Few contrasts in English literature are more marked than that which is presented in the Milton of "Paradise Lost" and "Samson Agonistes," on the one hand, and the Milton of "L'Allegro" and "Comus" and the Sonnets, on the other. The most suggestive example of such a contrast is furnished by Milton himself as a writer of verse and a writer of prose.

WORDSWORTH.

In the troublous times between the early poems of Milton and the birth of Wordsworth (1770), opening the era of naturalistic verse in England, we find but little lyric product of exceptional merit, and the sonnet "was long out of favor." A gross materialism, on the one hand, or a conventional formalism, on the other, sufficiently explains this lyric dearth. Gay's "Shepherd's Week" and Ramsey's "Gentle Shepherd"; Shenstone's "Pastoral Ballad" and the Odes and Elegy of Gray; Thomson's "Seasons" and the Odes of Collins; Beattie's "Minstrel" and Goldsmith's "Deserted Village"; and Cowper's "Hymns" represented but scattered specimens of idyllic excellence. Sir Walter Scott was born the following year; Burns was but a boy of twelve summers; while Byron, remembered as a sonneteer only by his famous lines on "Chillon," was still in his minority. In-

deed, it was this famous trio that widened and enriched the romantic movement that was so signally to change the current and character of English verse in the direction of emotive sympathy, of a catholic spirit, and a deep devotion to the interests of the people as a whole; and yet Wordsworth was the only one of the three who in any substantive sense represents that form of the lyric included in the sonnet as a form whose "thoughtfulness suited his bent and whose limits frustrated his prolixity."

It is true that in Scott's "Lady of the Lake," "Marmion," "Lay of the Last Minstrel," and other poems, we have some stanzas of fourteen lines, but not of the traditional sonnet type nor in any consecutive order; while in the poetry of Burns, though in what he thus writes he conforms to one of the standard sonnet structures, the examples are so rare as to scarcely admit of citation. It is not a little difficult to account for the fact that such genuine bards as Scott and Burns, so in sympathy, as they were, with all human interests and all the varied phenomena of the natural world, should not have given us extended specimens of this particular lyric order. As to Burns, especially, such a sonnet as he gives us in the one entitled "On hearing a Thrush Sing in a Morning Walk," elicits increasing surprise that he did not give us more. Possibly, his free and easy manner and his lack of all restraint as a man or poet made it impossible for him to confine himself to any such prearranged poetic order as that furnished us in the historic sonnets of Milton and Wordsworth and the later poets. His songs seemed to need an atmosphere and area of their own to give them their fullest poetic effect.

In one of his informal conversations Wordsworth speaks of the "five and six hundred sonnets" that he had written,

an estimate that can be justified only by supposing that all that he wrote are not extant, or that he used the term "sonnet" somewhat loosely as including any short lyric and not necessarily only those of the conventional structure. In his poetry, as we have it, there are somewhat over three hundred examples of the sonnet proper, divisible into classes or series as follows:—

First, "The Ecclesiastical Sketches," including one hundred and fifteen selections. "For the convenience of passing from one point of the subject to another without shocks of abruptness," the author states, "this work has taken the shape of a series of Sonnets." In what he calls the "Advertisement" he gives us the occasion that elicited the poem. In a walk, one beautiful morning in December, 1820, with a special friend, who was selecting a site for a church on his estate, their thoughts naturally reverted to the ecclesiastical history of England, and especially to the Catholic Question, then agitating Parliament; "and it struck me," he says, "that certain points" in the history "might advantageously be presented to view in verse." He thus divides the "Sketches" into three parts: The first treats of the history, "From the Introduction of Christianity into Britain, to the Consummation of the Papal Dominion"; the second, "To the Close of the Troubles in the Reign of Charles I.," and the third, "From the Restoration to the Present Time,"—"a series of sonnets," writes Myers, "which though they possess, in only a few instances, force or charm enough to rank them high as poetry, yet, assume a certain value when we consider . . . . the greater inadequacy of all rival attempts in the same direction." Some of the selections are of special historical interest alike to the student of church and state, such as the "Monastery of

Old Bangor"; "Paulinus," of Northumbria; "Primitive Saxon Clergy," beginning—

> "How beautiful your presence, how benign,
> Servants of God! who not a thought will share
> With the vain world";

"Reproof," a tribute to the historian Bede; "Saxon Monasteries"; "Alfred" as it opens:—

> "Behold a pupil of the monkish gown,
> The pious Alfred, King to Justice dear;
> Lord of the harp and liberating spear;
> Mirror of Princes";

"The Norman Conquest"; "Wicklif," as the forerunner of the English Reformation; "Corruptions of the Higher Clergy," in which he stoutly rebukes their worldliness and love of ease, as he writes:—

> "Woe to you Prelates! rioting in ease
> And cumbrous wealth, . . .
> . . . .
> Pastors who neither take nor point the way
> To Heaven";

"The Translation of the Bible" so that—

> "He who guides the plough, or wields the crook,
> With understanding spirit now may look
> Upon her records";

"Walton's Book of Lives"; "Places of Worship," of which he beautifully sings:—

> "Where a few villagers on bended knees
> Find solace which a busy world disdains";

"Pastoral Character"; and "Inside of King's College Chapel, Cambridge." These are some of the varied topics of which this old Lakeside sonneteer treats, and in the elaboration of which some of the choicest elements of his personality and poetic art appear, — "not brilliant, indeed, as models of lyric

verse, and yet truly Wordsworthian, and as such interesting and impressive."

A second series of Sonnets, numbering thirty-three, with what is called an "After-Thought," or supplementary stanza, is entitled "To the River Duddon," a collection, the author tells us, "which was the growth of many years." To Wordsworth, as a poet of the woods and streams, this historic river "on the confines of Westmoreland, Cumberland and Lancashire," seemed to appeal with special interest, as he writes in the closing couplet of the first stanza:—

"Pure flow the verse, pure, vigorous, free, and bright,
For Duddon, long-loved Duddon, is my theme!"

Of the entire collection, the "After-Thought" is the best:—

"I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away,—vain sympathies!
For, backward, Duddon! as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the stream, and shall not cease to glide;
The form remains, the function never dies;
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish;—be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know."

A third series is entitled "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty," reminding us by their title and content of the great Puritan sonneteer who preceded Wordsworth, and sounded the note of personal and national freedom so loud and long as to catch the ear of all England. In this series there are sixty-eight selections, divided into two parts or sections, one of them, the thirty-fourth, departing from the ordinary sonnet structure. It is in this series that we find some ex-

amples of special note, such as the one "To Toussaint l'Ouverture,"—

> "the most unhappy man of men!
>
> . . . .
>
> Yet die not; do thou
> Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
> Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
> Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
> Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
> There's not a breathing of the common wind
> That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
> Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind."

In the twelfth, we have the striking couplet:—

> "Two voices are there; one is of the sea,
> One of the mountains; each a mighty voice."

In the thirteenth, are the famous lines:—

> "Plain living and high thinking are no more;
> The homely beauty of the good old cause
> Is gone."

The fourteenth is one of the historic sonnets of literature, as we read the poet's tribute to his great forerunner,—

> "Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
> England hath need of thee."

So, in the sixteenth, the equally famous lines:—

> "We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakespeare spoke; the faith and morals hold
> Which Milton held."

In the ninth stanza, Part Second, we have a stirring sonnet to the Tyrolese hero, "Höffer," as in the eleventh an appeal to the loyalty of the Tyrolese:—

> "The land we from our fathers had in trust,
> And to our children will transmit, or die:
> This is our maxim, this our piety;
> And God and Nature say that it is just."

Nowhere else does Wordsworth sound a truer note than in these utterances on behalf of political liberty and the rights of man, and nowhere have his poetic sentiments a more distinctively Miltonic movement, so that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are thus conjoined in their impassioned plea for common justice.

A fourth series is made up of "Miscellaneous Sonnets," Parts First and Second, ninety-seven in all, some of the examples being especially impressive. It is quite noticeable that in each of the Parts there is a sonnet in defense of this particular type of lyric, the second selection of Part First beginning:—

> "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room,"

and the opening stanza of Part Second:—

> "Scorn not the sonnet."

Some of the most noteworthy in Part First are the following: the fourteenth and fifteenth, "To Sleep," opening so beautifully:—

> "A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by,
> One after one; the sound of rain, and bees
> Murmuring; the fall of rivers, winds and seas,
> Smooth fields, white sheets of water, and pure sky;
> By turns have all been thought of, yet I lie
> Sleepless";

the twenty-fourth, "The Decay of Piety"; the thirty-second, with its exquisite lines:—

> "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
> The holy time is quiet as a Nun
> Breathless with adoration";

the thirty-fifth, so often quoted:—

> "The world is so much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."

In Part Second, the eleventh opens:—

> "There is a pleasure in poetic pains
> Which only poets know";

and the twenty-sixth, in which the poet represents himself as standing on Westminster Bridge in the early morning just before the great city is waking into life:—

> "Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
> A sight so touching in its majesty."

A collection known as "Memorials of a Tour on the Continent" contains, among other forms of lyrics, seventeen examples of sonnets, that might be included under the miscellaneous order, in which the poet makes reference to such continental places and scenes as Calais, Bruges, Waterloo, Liege, Cologne, the Rhine, the Danube, Lauterbrunnen, St. Gothard, Milan, Aix la Chapelle, Chamouni, Boulogne and Dover, the less distinctive merit of these selections, as compared with the others cited, strikingly revealing the fact that the poet was more at home and more the master of his art when among the hills and vales of his native England. The valley of Grasmere was far more to him than the valley of Dover or Chamouni, and Derwentwater than Lake Como and Brienz.

A single sonnet, the fourteenth in the series, entitled "Epitaphs and Elegiac Poems," may be said to complete the more than three hundred Sonnets represented in the several series we have studied, a content and range and quality, despite all defects and limitations, that justly entitle the author to a place in the first list of English sonneteers where Shakespeare and Spenser and Milton had already set the form and established the record.

SOME LATER SONNETEERS.

As the history of our literature develops from the days of Wordsworth to the time of Victoria and throughout her illustrious reign, it is a significant fact, and yet in the line of normal poetic process, that we have from nearly every leading English poet from Coleridge to Swinburne some examples of the sonnet stanza, expressed in varying forms of rhyme and with varying degrees of excellence. Lyric verse in general assumed commanding prominence at the opening of the Romantic Era, and in the later literature the sonnet shared in this poetic revival, as being fully in keeping with what Courthope has called "the Liberal Movement in English Literature," which was primarily a poetic and lyrical movement. A brief study of some of the leading names of this list will be full of interest.

The first that suggests itself is that of Keats, author of but a few sonnets, twenty-four in all, and yet of substantive merit along this line of lyric, and characterized by that same exquisite classical taste that marks his "Eve of St. Agnes" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." He was a kind of transitional sonneteer between the earlier and the later eras, the last of the Georgians, as Milton was the last of the Elizabethans. Some of these are especially beautiful, as that beginning,—

> "As late I rambled in the happy fields,
> What time the skylark shakes the tremulous dew
> From his lush clover covert."

So, the one:—

> "O solitude! if I must with thee dwell,
> . . . .
> where the deer's swift leap
> Startles the wild bee from the foxglove bell."

So, the tenth:—

> "To one who has been long in city pent
> 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
> And open face of heaven."

His Sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" is justly celebrated, while among those entitled "Posthuma" there are two of special charm, the first:—

> "When I have fears that I may cease to be,"

and the fifth, "The Human Seasons":—

> "Four seasons fill the measure of the year
> There are four seasons in the mind of man."

Saintsbury speaks of Keats as "a germinal" poet, "the father of every English poet born within the present century." "He begot Tennyson, and Tennyson begat all the rest," words of eulogy which, applicable alike to the sonnets and all his verse, indicate not so much any large amount of poetic product or any epic and dramatic gift, but that "new note" which he struck in the poetry of his time and the fresh inspiration that he gave to his generation just when it was most needed. The ten or twelve Sonnets of Coleridge, whose literary repute lay in prose and other forms of verse; Shelley's Sonnet "To Wordsworth," which makes us regret that he confined his lyric product of this order to a half-dozen examples; and Moore's Songs and Melodies, which have endeared him to every lover of verse, though lying outside the sonnet circle, need not detain us in the poetic survey now in hand. Even Tennyson, the acknowledged poetic master of his age, so seldom essayed this structure that it scarcely enters into the examination of his work; while Robert Browning's Lyrics and Idylls were, as he termed them, "Dramatic" and expressed in the unrestricted

varieties outside of the traditional fourteen lines of the sonnet.

The Sonnets of Matthew Arnold, twenty-five in number, deserve more than a passing comment, such as "Quiet Work," "Youth's Agitations," with its suggestive close:—

> "And sigh that one thing only has been lent
> To youth and age in common — discontent."

"Worldly Place," "The Better Part," "Immortality," and "Shakespeare" scarcely surpassed in English verse:—

> "Others abide our question. Thou art free.
> We ask and ask — Thou smilest and art still,
> Out-topping knowledge,"—

poems in which this serious-minded author seeks to solve, as in all he wrote, the complex problem of human life, — a problem that agitated and evaded him down to the day of his death. Clough, the author of some fifteen Sonnets, is naturally suggested when writing of Matthew Arnold, in that his soul was stirred and distressed by the same unavailing discussion of the problem of life; a poet, who, according to Lowell, "will be thought a hundred years hence, to have been the truest expression in verse of the doubt and struggle toward settled convictions of the period in which he lived." The very captions of his sonnets indicate this feverish unrest of spirit, as the series entitled "Blank Misgivings," and "On the Thought of Death." Even his sonnet entitled "All Is Well" is a despondent outburst on the mystery of being, as indicated in its closing couplet:—

> "The wind it blows, the ship it goes,
> Though where and whither no one knows."

He is the Omar-Khayyam of Modern English verse.

In Dante Gabriel Rossetti we have a representative sonnet-writer, worthily continuing the lyric succession already es-

tablished. His collection of poems entitled "The House of Life," he calls "A Sonnet-Sequence," opening with an Introductory Sonnet and divided into two extensive parts — Part First, "Youth and Change," consisting of fifty-nine Sonnets, and Part Second, "Change and Fate," of forty-two, thus exceeding the Spenserian limit of eighty-eight. In addition to this elaborate series, we note, "Sonnets on Pictures," eleven in number; and "Sonnets for Works of Art," thirteen in all. Among his "Poems in Italian" there are two of the sonnet order, and in his "Miscellaneous Poems" we note no less than thirty-one selections, making a total of one hundred and fifty-eight, thus surpassing by four the extended Shakespearian collection. To cite particular sonnets from this elaborate list is almost invidious. The most representative series is "The House of Life," with its deep emotive quality, reminding us of Spenser's "Amoretti" and Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese"; so that it might well be called, as suggested, "The House of Love." It is a presentation in verse of the philosophy of life, of the bitter-sweet element in all human experience, and yet submitted in hope and faith, and thus sharply distinguished in tone from the pessimistic strains of Arnold and Clough.

Such titles as "Love Enthroned," "Heart's Hope," "Life-In-Love," "Love and Hope," "Love's Last Gift," "Transfigured Life," "Soul's Beauty," "Lost Days," "The One Hope," "Passion and Worship," will serve to suggest the dominance of feeling and the sentiment of love. In other Collections, the range of topics is wider, as seen in "The Church-Porch," "Spring," "Winter"; tributes to the poets, as "Coleridge," "Keats," and "Shelley"; while even here the purely sentimental dominates the mental, and confirms the consensus of literary critics that Rossetti rarely rises to

the Shakespearian or Miltonic level as a sonnet-writer, there being, as Benson states it, "a passionate voluptuousness which must offend the temperate and controlled spirit." The emotion and artistic charm are present, verbal richness and structural beauty, undoubted poetic personality and a consistent, lyric ideal, but little that stirs the better nature to its depths or lifts the reader to inspiring experiences and outlook.

In opening the poems of Swinburne, we find, as with Burns and Moore and Byron, comparatively few examples of the sonnet proper, his lyric product best expressing itself in ode and ballad and song, outside the limited structure of the sonnet stanza. The twenty-four Sonnets under the caption "Dirae," and some half-dozen others in "Poems and Ballads," such as "Love and Sleep," "The White Czar," "To Kossuth," and "To Rizpah," include the sum-total of his work along this special line, and evince little poetic merit above the average. We look in vain in any of them for that peculiar lyric melody and charm that we so often find in such collections as "Songs before Sunrise" and "Songs of the Springtide."

In Mrs. Browning we have a more distinctive sonnet-writer, as seen in her two collections, — the forty-five examples of a somewhat miscellaneous nature, and the forty-four examples under the title "Sonnets from the Portuguese," which, as we know, were a tribute to her husband, and have no special reference to the title which they bear. As Saintsbury insists, they rank "with the noblest efforts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in this exquisite form," "which can only be paralleled," as another critic states it, "in the immortal lines in which Dante has embalmed the name of Beatrice." "Sonnets from her own

Heart," they have fittingly been called, as she well-nigh exhausts the deep devotion of her ardent nature in her attempt fully to embody her truly passionate love. In their pervasive emotive quality they are thus superior to the "Amoretti" of Spenser and Rossetti's "House of Life," where the dominance of mere personal sentiment so often degenerates into fulsome amatory tribute, so as to impair the mental vigor of the stanzas and far remove them from the virile verses of Milton and Wordsworth. Constituting, as they do, a cycle of elegies, we are reminded, as we read them, of the "In Memoriam" of Tennyson, though Mrs. Browning's most zealous defenders would not insist upon placing these selections on the same poetic level with the Laureate's elegy. Worthy of all praise as a tender tribute to a lost husband, they seldom rise to the level of poetry that can be called great. Indeed, it is in her Miscellaneous Sonnets, as we view them, that Mrs. Browning is best seen in this form of lyric, where she feels herself at liberty to go out beyond the narrow limits of personal sorrow and choose her themes in the wider world of human thought and life. Hence, on such topics as "The Soul's Expression," "The Seraph and Poet," "On a Portrait of Wordsworth," "Work," "Futurity," "Finite and Infinite," "Insufficiency," and "Life" the author gives us suggestive and often inspiring stanzas, marked alike by intellectual and emotive vitality and literary art. The first one of the collection — "The Soul's Expression — is as representative as any of this higher type —

> "With stammering lips and insufficient sound
> I strive and struggle to deliver right
> That music of my nature, day and night
> With dream and thought and feeling interwound,
> And inly answering all the senses round

With octaves of a mystic depth and height
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual ground.
This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and whole,
And utter all myself into the air:
But if I did it,—as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there,
Before that dread apocalypse of soul."

The Sonnet entitled "Insufficiency" is of this same ennobling order:—

"When I attain to utter forth in verse
Some inward thought, my soul throbs audibly
Along my pulses, yearning to be free
And something farther, fuller, higher, rehearse."

Here we have the inward and passionate struggle toward self-expression, the chafing of the spirit under the restraints of the flesh, and the outlook of the finite into the realm and glories of the infinite.

Thus have we seen from a brief survey of the English sonnet from Spenser to Mrs. Browning that it partakes of the general history of our literature in its substantive features, and in the diversity of excellence that it exhibits as the literature develops, though it cannot be said to have reached that maximum merit to which the English poetry as a whole attained in the Victorian Era. The two master-poets of the age, Tennyson and Browning, scarcely acknowledged its claims, while most of those who essayed to illustrate it, as Matthew Arnold and Swinburne, seemed to reserve their best poetic skill and vigor for other forms of verse. It is possible that the golden age of the sonnet-lyric is yet to appear as our literary history expands. Certain it is that our vernacular verse cannot well dispense with so historic and attractive a form. While its required structure may be said to limit in a sense the play of the poetic imagi-

nation and hold the poet somewhat too strictly within a definitely determined province, this very limitation tends to concentrate poetic genius and by the pronounced emphasis of the quality of the verse more than atone for mere amount of poetic product. Though our American Poe was wrong when he insisted that a long poem is a contradiction in terms, there is a sense in which as a poem develops in unlimited freedom, the quantitative tends to take the place of the qualitative and the poet's power abates as the composition of his verse continues.

Especially in the province of the lyric is this principle of brevity important, in that the expression of feeling should be held steadily under rational control lest it pass the borders of the sane and wholesome in poetic art. Even poetic license must have its metes and bounds; while, on the principle of literary variety, epic and dramatic verse and the larger examples of the lyric stand in need of this " little song " to complete the cycle of poetic forms and insure the most beneficent poetic effect.