

he thought, the poison of her father's spirit worked in her. Yet her bright eyes showed only interest in the game.

"Of course you can't. I'll give you another clue," said this Ariadne. "The second answer is in the same story, and it is n't about fighting the Persians. Now what is it?"

"What is the happiest kind" — he reflected. This time he really gave thought to the question. "Why," he said at last, with conviction, "the way this same fellow in the poem died, running into Athens with the news of the victory, among them all — still young" —

The slim white-gowned figure almost danced in the patch of fennel. "You're wonderful!" she cried, clapping her hands. "That was it —

*(To be continued.)*

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## A THEORY OF POETRY

BY HENRY TIMROD

[The bulk of Timrod's prose papers are scattered through the newspapers he was associated with, and have never been collected. The present paper has had an existence even more obscure. His immediate friends did not even know of it until it was read in public. Pressed to take part in some public occasion in Columbia, S. C., in the winter of 1863-64, he read this essay; upon leaving the platform he handed the manuscript to the lady who later became his wife, and it remained in her keeping thirty-five years. In 1899 she presented it to Hon. William A. Courtenay, LL. D. From a copy of this original manuscript it is printed here.]

IT is so familiar a topic, and to be familiar is in the opinion of so many to be commonplace, that I may well distrust my ability to give it interest, yet after all, it is not quite so old as the stars, which the knowledge that they have shone for thousands of centuries has not made commonplace to those who look at them right. I encourage myself by the reflection that the freshness of my theme is not less eternal; moreover as I design to discuss the subject with a special purpose, in regard to which I have some sincere and not carelessly digested opinions, I may hope perhaps to elicit so much attention, at least, as usually honest

'Like wine through clay,  
Joy bursting his heart, he died — the bliss!' Now you know just what this place always makes me think of, and you thought of it, too, nearly all by yourself."

It was idle to pretend that this simple game had not established a bond between them. The world might have been young again, or they might have known each other since Marathon itself. For a moment they stood in the warm sunlight, with faces shining on each other, undisguised; then they began to climb toward the bare skyline of the heights, slipping on the yellow grass, scrambling, helping each other up the steep bank, happy as the encircling sunshine. The warm breeze followed them, sweet with pennyroyal crushed underfoot.

thought, however weakly embodied, and earnest convictions, however inadequately maintained, receive.

I desire to arrive, if possible, at a comprehensive and satisfactory theory of poetry, but more especially to examine and to enter my protest against certain narrow creeds which seem to me to be growing into fashion, to expose the falsity of that taste which is formed by particular schools, and which leads necessarily to a narrow and limited culture, and to assist, as far as it lies in my power, in the establishment of a generous and catholic criticism.

I must premise that in the first portion

of my essay I shall use the word poetry in accordance with common usage, synonymous with poetical literature, or the embodiment of poetry, rhythmical language. As I proceed, however, I shall endeavor to show that it ought to be employed in a more restricted and less material sense. I will add that in whatever illustrations I may use I shall confine myself to English poetry, as amply sufficient for my purpose.

There have been few poetical eras without their peculiar theories of poetry. But no age was ever so rich in poetical creeds as the first half of the present century. The expositions of some of these creeds are not without some value; one or two, indeed, though incomplete, are profound and philosophical, but the majority are utterly worthless. Every little poet "Spins, toiling out his own cocoon," and wrapping himself snugly in it, to the exclusion of others, hopes to go down thus warmly protected to posterity.

I shall pass most of these theories to consider only two, one of which I shall discuss at some length. The first is that definition of poetry which represents it simply as the expression in verse of thought, sentiment, or passion, and which measures the difference between the poet and versifier only by the depth, power, and vivacity of their several productions. This definition was ably advocated not long ago in a well-known Southern periodical by one of the most acute of Southern writers. It would not be difficult to prove its total inadequacy, but I do not think it necessary to do so, except so far as the truth of that inadequacy may be involved in the establishment of a theory altogether opposed to it. I am the less inclined to give it a minute examination because though the idea is an old one and in strict accordance with the common usage of the word poetry, it has never become popular, nor is it likely to become so, as it fails to satisfy even those who, displeased, they do not know why, and dimly conscious of the true faith, are yet unable to discover in their undefined emotions a

logical refutation of the heresy. The genuine lovers of poetry feel that its essential characteristics underlie the various forms which it assumes, however dim and shadowy those characteristics may seem to them, and notwithstanding that they elude the search, like the jar of gold which is fabled to be buried at the foot of the rainbow.

The second theory which I desire to examine critically was propounded a number of years ago by the most exquisite poetical genius to which America has yet given birth.

Poe begins his disquisition with the dogma that a long poem does not exist; that the phrase "a long poem" is simply a flat contradiction in terms. He proceeds: "A poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites by elevating the soul. The value of a poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, by a psychical necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be called so at all cannot be sustained throughout a composition of great length. After the lapse of half an hour at the very utmost, it flags, fails; a revulsion ensues, and then the poem is in effect and in fact no longer such."

I am disposed to think that the young lady who pores over the metrical novels of Scott till midnight and wakes up the next morning with her bright eyes dimmed and a little swollen, or the young poet who follows for the first time the steps of Dante and his guide down to the spiral abysses of his imaginary hell, could not be easily induced to assent to these assertions. The declaration made with such cool metaphysical dogmatism "that all excitements are, through a psychical necessity, transient," needs considerable qualification. All violent excitements are, indeed, transient; but that moderate and chastened excitement which accompanies the perusal of the noblest poetry, of such poetry as is characterized, not by a spasmodic vehemency and the short-lived power imparted by excessive passion, but

by a thoughtful sublimity and the matured and almost inexhaustible strength of a healthy intellect, may be sustained, and often is, during a much longer period than the space of thirty minutes. I am willing to grant, however, that this excitement has also its limit, and that this limit is too narrow to permit the perusal, with any pleasure, at one sitting, of more than a fraction of a poem of the length of *Paradise Lost*. I shall quote another paragraph and then proceed to show that such acknowledgment leads to no deduction that justifies the theory Poe has built upon it.

“There are, no doubt, many who find it difficult to reconcile the critical dictum, that the *Paradise Lost* is to be devoutly admired throughout, with the absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which the critical dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, is to be regarded as poetical only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of art, unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its unity, we read it, as would be necessary, at a single sitting, the result is but constant alternation of excitement and depression. After a passage of platitude, which no critical prejudice can force us to admire, there follows inevitably a passage of what we feel to be true poetry. But if, on completing the work, we read it again, omitting the first book — that is to say, commencing with the second — we shall be surprised at finding admirable that which we before condemned. It follows from all this that the ultimate or absolute effect of even the best epic under the sun is a nullity — and this is precisely the fact.”

Let me call attention to the fact that, even if the argument I have just read prove all it assumes to prove, it amounts only to this: it shows, not that a long poem does not exist, or may not exist, but that, if there should be such a thing as a long poem, its effect, except as a series of short poems, would be null and void.

This fact, however, if properly established, would be an almost sufficient justification of Poe's theory; and I only mention it by way of causing it to be remembered that the demonstration is not quite so direct and positive as appears at first sight, or as it might appear if the author had analyzed the work of which he speaks and shown at what point the first poem ends and the second begins.

But I deny boldly and without reservation the truth of that assertion upon which the whole argument hinges: that in order to preserve in effect the unity of a great poem, it should be read through at a single sitting. And to substantiate my denial, I shall not fear to examine the effect of that very poem to which Poe appealed. I suppose, then, that the reader who takes up *Paradise Lost* begins its perusal in a spirit not unbecoming that divine production and with the reverence of one who enters on holy ground. He must have “docile thoughts and purged ears.” A poem, the aim of which is to “justify the ways of God to man,” is not to be entered on at any season; and never when our only wish is to beguile a vacant moment. The time and even the place should be in harmony with the lofty theme. Charles Lamb, in a spirit of proper appreciation, says that Milton almost needs a solemn service of music to be played before we approach him. I can understand the earnest reader opening the book with feelings of devotion not much inferior to that which inspired the great bard himself in his sublime invocation to the third person of the Trinity:

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,  
Assist me, for thou know'st, thou from the first  
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread  
Dove-like sat'st brooding o'er the vast abyss  
And mad'st it pregnant. What in me is dark  
Illumine; what is low, raise and support;  
That to the height of this great argument,  
I may assert Eternal Providence  
And justify the ways of God to Man.

I affirm that he who takes up *Paradise Lost* in this spirit will lay it down at the

completion of the first book, or — if, as is not unlikely, he should have been beguiled further — at the completion of the second book, not simply with an impression of satisfaction, but in a state of mind in which awe and delight are blended together in a deep though sober rapture. I say, too, that upon resuming the book at some future time, if he come to it with the same reverential precautions, and not as one who must finish a book to-night simply because he began it yesterday, there will occur no such utter disconnection between his perusal of the first and his perusal of the second part of the poem as will produce an effect at all similar to that which is produced by the perusal of two distinct poems. I say that no hiatus of platitude, whether real or the result of mere jaded attention, is sufficient so to separate two parts of an artistically constructed poem, like *Paradise Lost*, as to disturb the general harmony of its effect. And the thoughtful reader, instead of sitting down to the study of the third book as to a new poem, brings with him all the impressions of his former reading to heighten the color and deepen the effect of that which is before him. The continuation of the poem seems all the more beautiful because he is familiar with the beginning, and necessarily so from the roundness and completeness of a structure the parts of which add alike to the strength and grace of the whole and of each other. It has been correctly remarked of the extracts that go by the name of *The Beauties of Shakespeare* that those passages lose more by being torn from the context than the dramas themselves would lose by being deprived of those passages altogether. This is true also, though doubtless not to so great an extent, of *Paradise Lost*, and it could not be true if each book or part of a book, when considered merely as portions of a series of poems, could so strongly affect us as they do when regarded as the fractions of a harmonious whole. For instance the situation of the happy pair in Paradise is rendered a thousand times more pathetic than it would

have been otherwise by our knowledge of the power of the tempter who is plotting their destruction without; and of that power we could have no adequate conception if we had not seen the mighty Archdemon, his form not yet deprived of all its original brightness, his face intrenched with the deep scars of thunder, treading in unconquerable fortitude the burning marl; or if we had not beheld him in the mighty council assembled under the roof of Pandemonium, opening, in haughty preëminence of courage and hatred, the bold adventure of scouting with hostile purpose the universe of God Omnipotent; if we had not followed him in his dusky flight through hell and his encounter with the grim though kingly shadow; in his painful voyage through Chaos, and his meeting — in which the mean but profound subtlety of his genius is brought distinctly into action — with the Archangel Uriel; and so on, down to the moment when he alights upon the summit of Niphates and turns to reproach the Sun and blaspheme the Creator; in fine, if we had not from all these sources derived an indelible impression of the cunning, the ferocity, the indomitable pride and daring recklessness of his character.

Again, the fate of the guilty but repentant lovers touches us infinitely more deeply because we have been made familiar with the beauty of the home from which their sin had expelled them, that vast garden which, with the eternal bloom of forests, abounds with fruits more precious than those of the Hesperides, amid undulations of hill and valley, with grottoes, fountains and crisped brooks, “rolling on Orient pearl and sands of gold,” and feeding with nectar “Flowers of all hues and without thorn the rose;” — a garden which with all this variety seemed almost as extensive as a kingdom, and yet is compact enough to occupy only the champaign head of a steep and imperious wildness that surrounds it as with a protecting wall. But of course, that which affects us most profoundly, and that which the poet meant to affect us most pro-

foundly, is not the loss of Eden, but the difference between the primal condition of innocence from which they fell (and which is described with a softness and purity no merely amatory poet has ever equaled) and the state of mind in which, after dismissal by the angel, they look back to behold the Eastern Gate, "With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms," and then turning, with the world before them, but with slow and wandering steps, "Through Eden take their solitary way."

I might go on and by minuter examination show still subtler connections between the several parts of the poem, but it is not necessary. I am satisfied to reaffirm my position that every portion of *Paradise Lost* is bound together by the closest relations, each helping to give force to all; and just as the light about us is not produced solely by the rays of the sun, but is composed of millions of atmospherical and other reflections, so the ultimate and aggregate effect of this truly great creation is made up of the innumerable lights and cross-lights that each book sheds upon the others. Hence, as day by day the reader — such a reader at least as I have described — moves onward through the varied beauties and sublimities of the poem, its grand purport and harmonious proportions become more and more clearly apparent; it is "vastness which grows, but grows to harmonize, all musical in its immensities;" and when, at the conclusion, he lays the book reverently aside, he does this with the feelings, not of one who has passed through a series of noble, transient excitements, but rather of one whose spirit, filled with a long train of lofty thought and unsurpassable imagery, has expanded almost to the size of that which it has been contemplating. To such a reader it would not seem too much to inscribe on the title-page of *Paradise Lost*, as an invitation to all those yet unacquainted with it, the fine stanza applied by a later bard to the most magnificent of earthly temples: —

Enter: its grandeur overwhelms thee not;  
And why? It is not lessened, but thy mind,

Expanded by the genius of the spot,  
Has grown colossal, and can only find  
A fit abode wherein appear enshrined  
Thy hopes of immortality; and thou  
Shalt one day, if found worthy, so defined,  
See thy God face to face, as thou dost now  
His Holy of Holies, nor be blasted by his brow.

I shall not notice the sarcasms which Poe directs against those who measure the merit of a book by its length, since I have said nothing from which it could be inferred that I regard mere size as a criterion of excellence. It is one thing to say that a poem of twelve books may be good, and another thing to say that a poem is good because it contains twelve books. I am not going to deny, however, that a poem may be so extended as to preclude the possibility of its operating on our feelings with unity of effect; witness the *Faërie Queene*. Yet it now should be observed, in justice to Spenser, that his production is in fact what Poe maintains the epic of Milton to be, a succession of poems having no real connection with each other. Perhaps the same may be said of the *Iliad* of Homer. I do not refer to the *Columbiad*, because, if that ponderous production could be crushed into a space no bigger than that occupied by an epigram, not a drop of genuine poetry could be forced from it. If I should be asked to fix a limit beyond which a poem should not be extended, I can only answer that this must be left to the taste and judgment of the poet, based upon a careful and appreciative study of the few great masters. The ordeal of criticism will settle afterward how far unity has been preserved or violated. In general it should be remembered that the plot of a poem should be so compact as not to involve scenes and subjects of too great diversity. As a consequence of this principle I have always considered *The Divine Comedy* of Dante in its progress through hell, purgatory, and heaven, as three distinct poems.

I do not wish it to be supposed that I look at *Paradise Lost* as a perfect poem. It has many of the faults inseparable from all human productions. Indeed, I so far

agree with Poe as to concede that by no possibility can a poem so long as *Paradise Lost* be all poetry (and Coleridge, the profoundest poetical critic of any age, says: It "ought not to be all poetry") from beginning to end. However noble the theme, there will be parts and aspects which do not admit of the presence of genuine poetry. Herein, however, I differ with Poe; inasmuch as I maintain that these parts may be raised so far above the ordinary level of prose by skillful verse as to preserve the general harmony of the poem and materially to insure its unity as a work of art. And in the distinction between poetry and the poem, between the spirit and its body, which Poe recognizes when he comes to develop his theory, but which he blinks or ignores altogether in his remarks upon *Paradise Lost*, I shall look for the justification of my position. I hold that the confusion of these terms, of the subjective essence with the objective form, is the source of most of the errors and contradictions of opinion prevalent upon this theme. The two should be carefully distinguished and should never in any critical discussion be allowed to mean the same thing.

What, then, is poetry? In the last century, if one had asked the question, one would have been answered readily enough; and the answer would have been the definition which I dismissed a little while ago as unworthy of minute examination. But the deeper philosophical criticism of the present century will not remain satisfied with such a surface view of poetry. Its aim is to penetrate to the essence, to analyze and comprehend those impressions and operations of the mind, acting upon and being acted upon by mental or physical phenomena, which when incarnated in language all recognize as the utterance of poetry and which affect us like the music of angels. That this is the aim of present criticism I need not attempt to show by quotation, since it looks out from the pages of the most popular writers of the day. Indeed, so very general has the feeling become that

it is not of the forms of poetry that we need a description, that if you ask any man of common intelligence, who is not merely a creature of facts and figures, to define poetry, he will endeavor to convey to you his idea, vague, doubtless, and shadowy, of that which in his imagination constitutes its spirit. The poets who attempt to solve the question look rather into themselves than into the poems they have written. One, very characteristically, when his own poems are considered, defines it as "emotions recollected in tranquillity;" and another as "the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds." These definitions, if definitions they can be called, are unsatisfactory enough, but they indicate correctly the direction in which the distinctive principle of poetry is to be sought.

I think that Poe in his eloquent description of the poetical sentiment as the sense of the beautiful, and, in its loftiest action as a struggle to apprehend a super-natural loveliness, a wild effort to reach a beauty above that which is about us, has certainly fixed with some definiteness one phase of its merely subjective manifestation. It is, indeed, to the inspiration which lies in the ethereal, the remote and the unknown, that the world owes some of its sweetest poems; and the poetry of words has never so strange a fascination as when it seems to suggest more than it utters; to call up by implication rather than by expression those thoughts which refuse to be embodied in language; to hint at something ineffable and mysterious of which the mind can attain but partial glimpses. But in making this feeling and this feeling only constitute the poetic sentiment, Poe simply verifies the remark of one of the most luminous critics of this century, that we must look as little to men of peculiar and original genius as to the multitude for broad and comprehensive critical theories. Such men have usually one faculty developed at the expense of the others; and the very clearness of their perception of one kind of excellence impairs their perception of other kinds.

Their theories, being drawn from their own particular tastes and talents, just suffice to cover themselves and those who resemble them. The theory of Poe leads directly to the conclusion, and this he boldly avows, that Tennyson is the noblest poet that ever lived, since no other poet that ever lived has possessed so much of that ethereality and dim suggestiveness which Poe regards, if not the sole, at least as the highest characteristic of poetry. I am constrained to add, too, that while the theory leads to the conclusion that Tennyson is the noblest of poets, it leads equally to the conclusion that Poe is the next. At the same time I must do Poe the justice to acquit him of the petty vanity of wishing to lead his readers to such a conclusion. His theory I regard as the natural and logical result evolved from his own beautiful and very peculiar genius. Like the fabled Narcissus, he fell in love unconsciously with his own shadow in the water. I yield to few, and only to that extravagant few who would put him over the head of Milton himself, in my admiration of Poe, and I yield to none in a love which is almost a worship of Tennyson, with whose poems I have been familiar from boyhood, and whom I yet continue to study with ceaseless profit and pleasure. But I can by no means consent to regard him as the First of Poets, and I am sure that Tennyson himself would repudiate the compliment and the theory that seems to justify it. The very merit that theory mainly insists upon is not characteristic of more than one third part of the poems of Tennyson, who as a poet possesses what Poe had not, — other qualities besides his intense spiritualism; qualities of a more human and earthly tendency, which could not fail to bring him into affinity with other tastes and constrain him to demand a broader creed.

In order to perceive the real narrowness of Poe's theory, it is but necessary to examine the list of those elements which he says induce in the poet the true poetical effect, and to mark how carefully he selects only such appearances as are sim-

ply beautiful or simply mysterious, and how sedulously he excludes all of the sublime and terrible in the phenomena of nature.

"The poet," he says, "recognizes the ambrosia that nourishes his soul in the bright orbs of heaven, in the volutes of the flower, in the low clustering of the shrubberies, in the slanting of tall Eastern trees, in the blue distance of mountains, in the grouping of clouds, in the gleaming of silver rivers, in the repose of sequestered lakes. He perceives it in the songs of birds, in the harp of Æolus, in the sighing of the night-wind, in the perfume of the violet, and in the suggestive odors that come to him at eventide over dim oceans from far distant and undiscovered lands."

I have not enumerated all the influences to which he refers, but every one of them will be found upon examination to bear the same general character of quiet and gentle beauty. Let me ask in my turn whether there be no excitement of the poetical faculty in the clouded night as well as in the bright one; in the wrack of clouds by which the stars are driven in as well as in the purple islands and crimson archipelagoes of sunset; in the terror-stricken rain fleeing before the tempest as well as in the gentle and refreshing showers of April; in the craggy dangers as well as in the blue distances on mountains; in the rush of the tornado which opens a road through deep untraveled and illimitable forests, as well as in the faint and fragrant sigh of the zephyr; in the lightning that shatters "some great admiral," doomed never again to be heard of; in the ear-splitting crash of the thunder, the stricken pine, the blasted heath; in the tiger-haunted jungles of the Orient; in the vast Sahara, over which the sirocco sweeps like the breath of hell; in the barren and lonely cape strewn with wrecks and the precipitous promontory which refuses to preserve even a single plank of the ships that have been crushed against it; in the fearful tale suggested by the discovery of a human skeleton upon a desert island; in the march of the pestilence; in

the bloody battles of freedom, and in the strange noises and wild risks of an Arctic night, when the Great Pack is broken up and an Arctic storm is grinding and hurling the floes in thunder against each other.

In the same manner, when the eloquent poet comes to seek the mental or moral stimulants of poetry, he finds them "in all unworldly motives, in all holy impulses, in all chivalrous and self-sacrificing deeds;" but he does not, like the pro-founder Wordsworth, find them in the tranquil comforts of home, in the dignity of honest labor, in the charities of the beggar, and in those every-day virtues over which the human soul of Wordsworth's Muse broods in pleased contemplation. He sees no appeal to the faculties in the "common things that around us lie," in the fairy tales of science, in the magic of machinery, in the pen that writes and the types that immortalize his argument, in truth as truth merely, and in the lessons in which nature is so bountiful that they may be gathered from the very dust we tread beneath our feet. I think when we recall the many and varied sources of poetry, we must perforce confess that it is wholly impossible to reduce them all to the simple element of beauty. Two other elements at least must be added; and these are power, when it is developed in some noble shape, and truth, whether abstract or not, when it affects the common heart of mankind. For the suggestion of these two additional principles, I suppose I ought to say that I am indebted to Leigh Hunt; but I cannot help adding that I had fixed upon the same trinity of elements long before I became acquainted with his delightful book on *Imagination and Fancy*.

It is then in the feelings awakened by certain moods of the mind, when we stand in the presence of Truth, Beauty, and Power, that I recognize what we all agree to call poetry. To analyze the nature of these feelings, inextricably tangled as they are with the different faculties of the mind, and especially with that great faculty which is the prime minister of po-

etry, imagination, is not absolutely necessary to the present purpose. Let us be satisfied with having ascertained the elements which excite in us the sentiment of poetry; and having thus in a measure fixed its boundaries, let us proceed to consider it as it appears when embodied in language. Of course, I hold with those who maintain that poetry may be developed in various moods, — in painting, sculpture, architecture, music, as well as in words. Indeed, there is no divining in what quarter this subtle and ethereal spirit may not make its appearance. The verse is its most natural garment; it sometimes looks out upon mankind in the guise of prose where

its delights

Are dolphin-like, and show themselves above  
The element they sport in.

We are talking with a lovely, intelligent woman, who assures us that she has no expression for the poetry that is in her, and afterward proceeds to recount the story of some noble martyrdom, when behold! in the proud flush that mantles her forehead and the smile that comes up from the depths of her beautiful eyes, the visible presence of poetry itself! Our present business, however, is only with the development of poetry in words.

I look upon every poem strictly as a work of art, and on the poet, in the act of putting poetry into verse, simply as an artist. If the poet have his hour of inspiration, though I am so sick of the cant of which this word has been the fruitful source that I dislike to use it, this hour is not at all during the work of composition. A distinction must be made between the moment when the great thought strikes for the first time along the brain and flushes the cheek with the sudden revelation of beauty or grandeur and the hour of patient, elaborate execution. The soul of the poet, though constrained to utter itself at some time or other, does not burst into song as readily as a maiden of sixteen bursts into musical laughter. Many poets have written of grief, but no poet in the first agony of his heart ever sat



down to strain that grief through iambs. Many poets have given expression to the first raptures of successful love, but no poet in the delirium of joy has ever bubbled it in anapests. Could this have been possible the poet would have been the most wonderful of improvisers; and perhaps a poem would be no better than what improvisations always are. It would be easy to prove the truth of these few general remarks by the confessions of the poets themselves. Poe has described to the world how he slowly built up the poem of *The Raven*. A greater poet than Poe speaks of himself as

not used to make

A present joy the matter of his song,  
and of his poems, which the "Muse accepts, deliberately pleased," as very thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre. The labor through which Tennyson has obtained that perfection of style which is characteristic of his poems must have been almost infinite. And Matthew Arnold, a poet not widely known in this country, but one who, in the estimation of the English critical public, sits not very far below Tennyson, separates, as I have separated, the hours of insight from the hours of labor.

We cannot kindle when we will  
The fire that in the heart resides;  
The spirit bloweth and is still;  
In mystery our soul abides;  
But tasks in hours of insight willed  
May be through hours of gloom fulfilled.

Does this fact lessen the merit of the poet or the charm of the poem? I do not see why it should, any more than because the Eve in your library was once but a beautiful idea in the mind of its creator, was slowly chiseled from a block of shapeless marble, it should deprive the sculptor of his glory, or mar for a single instant the effect of the faultless symmetry and suggestive countenance of the statue. It must not be forgotten that my present aim is to show that a poem, without being all poetry from beginning to end, may be complete as a work of art. Now, there are two classes of poets, differing essentially

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in their several characters. The one class desires only to utter musically its own peculiar thoughts, feelings, sentiments, or passions, without regard to their truth or falsehood, their morality or want of morality, but in simple reference to their poetical effect. The other class, with more poetry at its command than the first, regards poetry simply as the minister, the highest minister indeed, but still only the minister, of Truth, and refuses to address itself to the sense of the beautiful alone. The former class is content simply to create beauty, and writes such poems as *The Raven* of Poe or *The Corsair* of Byron. The latter class aims to create beauty also, but it desires at the same time to mould this beauty into the shape of a temple dedicated to Truth. It is to this class that we owe the authorship of such poems as the *Paradise Lost* of Milton, the *Lines at Tintern Abbey* and the *Excursion* of Wordsworth, and the *In Memoriam* of Tennyson.

The former class can afford to write brief and faultless poems, because its end is a narrow one; the second class is forced to demand an ampler field, because it is influenced by a vaster purpose.

Take a poet of the last mentioned class at the commencement of his work. Imbued with a love of truth, conscious of the noble character of his mission as a poet, convinced that a poem should, to use the words of Bacon, "help and confer to magnanimity and morality as well as to delectation," he chooses a subject the beauty of which may be so well developed as to serve an ulterior and loftier end. The end of Milton's poem is the glory of God and a justification of his ways toward man. The end of the poem of Wordsworth is to involve the spiritual meanings that lie behind phenomena of nature, and to show that the materials of poetry may be gathered from the common and familiar things of existence. The end of the poems of Tennyson, who in his large nature touches Poe on the one side and Wordsworth on the other, is at times as purely the creation of beauty as Poe could

desire it to be. But it is not less often to inculcate the profoundest lessons of a human philosophy; and to do this he sounds in one poem the remotest metaphysical depths, he embodies the whole history of a sorrow in another, and in a third he converts into magnificent verse the doubts, fears, and perplexities through which the soul attains at last a ground on which to rest its hopes of immortality.

The poet who has such ends as these in view is not likely to measure the length of his poem by the rules of Poe's theory. If his subject be in the main poetical, he is careless whether its complete development involve the treatment here and there of a prosaic type and necessitate the composition of a few thousand instead of one hundred and fourteen lines. But at the same time, in the development of this subject, he will not forget that he is an artist, and that he is bound to produce, as far as possible, a harmonious work of art. He will take care that all his topics have reference to the general purpose of the poem; and when they are unpoetical he may not seldom use them as the musician uses discords, or the painter shadows, to strengthen by contrast the effect of that which is genuinely poetical. He will endeavor also, by every artifice of verse and language, to raise these necessarily unpoetical portions as near as may be to the height of the loftier portions of his creation. Thus Milton has contrived by a melodious arrangement to impart a wonderful charm to a mere list of geographical names. And thus Tennyson, by clearness and sometimes picturesqueness of expression, and by the unequalled perfection of his rhythm, has succeeded in giving a poetical air to thoughts which in any other hands would have been the baldest and most prosaic abstractions.

It seems to me that I have now made plain what I mean, when I say that a poem may be complete without being in the highest and most legitimate sense poetical in all its parts. If a poem have one purpose and the materials of which it is composed are so selected and arranged

as to help enforce it, we have no right to regard it as a series of minor poems merely because there may occur an occasional flaw in the structure. And he who persists in reading such a poem as so many short ones, besides losing the pleasure of contemplating the symmetrical development of a work of art, will fail to grasp the central purpose of the poet.

It seems to me that I may strengthen still further my theory that truth as much as beauty is the source of poetry by reference to the works of a poet who always refused to separate them. When Poe speaks of the impossibility of "reconciling the obstinate oils and waters of poetry and truth," he is, unconsciously to himself, confounding truth with science and matter of fact. It is, of course, impossible to see poetry in the dry facts and details of business, or in the arguments and commonplaces of politicians, or in the fact that the three angles of any triangle are equal to two right angles. But there is poetry in the truths of the mind and heart, in the truths that affect us in our daily relations with men, and even in the grand general truths of science, when they become familiar to us and help us to understand and appreciate the beauties of the universe. This is what Coleridge meant in part, when he said that poetry was "the blossom and the fragrance of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language;" and what Wordsworth meant, when he, not less eloquently, described it "as the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science." But a few specimens from those poems, the source of whose inspiration is truth, will do more than any remarks of mine to establish my opinion. The poet who first taught the few simple but grand and impressive truths which have blossomed into the poetic harvest of the nineteenth century was Wordsworth. The poetic literature of the age which preceded the appearance of Wordsworth was, in general, wholly artificial and conventional. In saying this

I do not mean to condemn it; on the contrary, I am grateful to those poets who gave expression to the very little poetry that was to be found in the forms, fashions, and sentiments of an age which, in face of the materialism about us, I believe to have been infinitely more material than the present one. But the moment these poets wandered away from society into the domain of nature, they became blind; or if they saw at all, it was through a haze of falsehood. The descriptive poems of Pope are below contempt. I need not call to mind his translation of the famous moonlight scene in the *Iliad* which Coleridge, De Quincey, and Macaulay have shown to be full of the most absurd inaccuracies. Passages equally inaccurate might be taken from *Windsor Forest*. It is to Wordsworth mainly that we owe that couching of the poetic eye which enables it to observe truly the appearances of nature and to describe them correctly.

I have already said something as to the aims of the poetry of Wordsworth. When he began to write, it was with the purpose of embodying in all the poetic forms at his command the two truths of which the poets and readers of his time seemed to him completely incognizant. These were, first, that the materials and stimulants of poetry might be found in the commonest things about us; and second, behind the sights, sounds, and hues of external nature there is "something more than meets the senses, something undefined and unutterable which must be felt and perceived by the soul" in its moments of rapt contemplation. This latter feeling it is that constitutes the chief originality of Wordsworth. It is not to be found in Shakespeare or his contemporaries. It is not to be found in Milton, and of course, not in Milton's successors; not in Dryden or Pope; not in Thomson or Cowper. It appeared for the first time in literature in the lines of Wordsworth written near Tintern Abbey. Since then it has been caught up and shadowed forth by every poet from Byron to the present English

Laureate. I cannot understand how any one can read that profound poem and then remain satisfied with the dictum of Poe that the sole office of a poem should be the development of beauty alone. I shall not apologize for quoting an extract from it. After describing the mere animal pleasure with which the appearance of nature affected his youth, the poet proceeds to speak of the moods in which he has looked behind those appearances to detect the spirit of which they were but the varied expression:—

I cannot paint  
 What then I was. The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colors and their forms were then to me  
 An appetite; a feeling and a love  
 That had no need of a remoter charm  
 By thought supplied, or any interest  
 Unborrowed from the eye. That time is passed  
 And all its aching joys are now no more,  
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
 Faint I, nor mourn, nor murmur; other gifts  
 Have followed; for such loss I would believe  
 Abundant recompense. For I have learned  
 To look on nature, not as in the hour  
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
 The still, sad music of humanity;  
 Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power  
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round Ocean and the living air,  
 And the blue sky and in the mind of man,  
 A motion and a spirit that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things.

In the prefatory verses to the *Excursion* he announces his doctrine that the domain of poetry lies in the familiar as well as in the remote:—

Beauty — a living presence of the earth,  
 Surpassing the most fair ideal forms  
 Which craft of delicate spirits hath composed  
 From Earth's materials — waits upon my steps;  
 Pitches her tent before me as I move,  
 An hourly neighbor. Paradise and groves  
 Elysian, fortunate fields, like those of old,  
 Sought in the Atlantic main, why should they be  
 A history only of departed things,  
 Or a mere fiction of what never was?

For the discerning intellect of man,  
 When wedded to this goodly universe  
 In love and holy passion, shall find there  
 A simple produce of the common day.

Wordsworth, indeed, always regarded the poet as a teacher, and in the elucidation in various modes of the ideas conveyed in the passages which I have quoted he recognizes the business of his life. And in sooth, if he had done nothing more than give these truths to the world, he would be entitled to our lasting gratitude. In his many exemplifications of them in his poems, he has opened new and unexplored regions of loveliness; he has shown us how it is possible by the mere act of pressing a spade into the earth to bring it up rich in poetic lore; and he has taught us how the soul may detect, not only in the changing clouds and the succession of the flowers, but in the fixed and steady lineaments of rock and mountain, an expression ever varying. And as if he had given us another sense, though in reality he has only roused us to the knowledge of one which we must often have used unconsciously, but whose revelations we had, in our ignorance, interpreted wrongly, he has enabled us to see, even in the material universe about us, the actual presence of the power of the invisible. But it is not the revelation alone of the two cardinal doctrines of his poetic creed that we owe to Wordsworth. We are indebted to him for the inculcation of a love of nature which in the passionate extent to which it was carried by Wordsworth, had never before found expression in the literature of any age or people. We are indebted to him for hundreds of single lines which in their brief compass enshrine more beauty and wisdom than are to be found in many whole poems, and which have stamped themselves like proverbs on the common memory. In the two books of the *Excursion* entitled "A Churchyard among the Mountains," and which, following out my theory, I have always separated in my mind from the body of the work as composing a complete poem in themselves, he has described

with exquisite pathos the heart-histories of the humble; and in the *Prelude*, —

An Orphic song, indeed;

A song divine of high and passionate thoughts,  
 To their own music chanted, —

he has given us, with as much metaphysical truth as poetic power, an account of the gradual growth and formation of a poetic mind; while, in the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, which, if we except perhaps Milton's *Hymn of the Nativity*, is undoubtedly the noblest ode in the language, he has flung a new and sacred light over the life of infancy.

In this brief summary I have by no means gone over all the ground upon which Wordsworth has built the immortal structure of his fame. I have said enough, however, to show how profoundly he recognizes the inspiration of Truth. But I cannot help calling attention further to the manner in which the element of truth appears in his descriptions of the feminine character. No other poet, save Tennyson and the great bard who depicted Cordelia and Miranda, Ophelia and Imogen, has ever depicted that character with the purity, tenderness, and fidelity of Wordsworth. There are no amatory poems in Wordsworth; at least, none of the sort Moore and Byron made popular, in which a woman is in the same breath addressed as an angel and wooed as the frailest of sinners. It is usually only in her relations of wife, mother, or friend that Wordsworth alludes to woman; and he speaks of her always with the respect, and at the same time with the gentle and courteous freedom, of an affectionate husband or brother. Familiar as they probably are to all, I cannot resist the temptation of quoting the lines in which the interesting wife of the poet will go down to posterity: —

She was a phantom of delight,  
 When first she gleamed across my sight;  
 A lovely apparition sent  
 To be a moment's ornament;  
 Her eyes as stars of twilight fair,  
 Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair;

But all things else about her drawn  
 From Maytime and the cheerful dawn;  
 A dancing shape, an image gay,  
 To haunt, to startle, and waylay.

I saw her, upon nearer view,  
 A spirit, yet a woman too,  
 With household motions light and free,  
 And steps of virgin liberty;  
 A countenance in which did meet  
 Sweet records, promises as sweet;  
 A creature not too bright and good  
 For human nature's daily food;  
 For transient sorrows, simple wiles,  
 Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

And now I see with eye serene  
 The very pulse of the machine;  
 A being breathing thoughtful breath,  
 A traveler between life and death;  
 The reason firm, the temperate will,  
 Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill;  
 A perfect woman, nobly planned,  
 To warn, to comfort, and command;  
 And yet, a spirit still and bright  
 With something of an angel light.

Wordsworth could never have been brought to agree with Poe that a true poem is written for the poem's sake alone. The theory which Poe very naturally evolved from his own genius Wordsworth quite as naturally would have thought incompatible with the high office of the poet as a teacher, thinker, and bard. On the other hand, the broader vision of Tennyson has enabled him to detect the truth that lies on the side of Poe and the truth that lies on the side of Wordsworth. The proof that a poet may aim at beauty alone, without an ulterior purpose, he sees in every daisy and buttercup of an English meadow.

Oh, to what uses shall we put  
 The wildwood flower that simply blows?  
 And is there any moral shut  
 Within the bosom of the rose?

Nevertheless does he recognize the right of the poet to make his art the vehicle of great moral and philosophical lessons; nevertheless does he see his right to grapple with the darkest problems of man's destiny, to discuss the fears and perplexities of the spirit and the faith that

triumphs over them; and even to drop now and then a silken line in the dim sea of metaphysics.

I have been induced to undertake a refutation of Poe's theory, while attempting to establish another, not because I believe Poe's the one most prevalently adopted, but because I regard it as the one most artfully put and at the same time most likely to excite interest in an American audience. There is an admirably written essay prefixed to the second edition of the poems of Matthew Arnold, in which that poet endeavors to show that all the poets of the present century have been working on mistaken principles, and that the ancients were the only true masters of the poetic art. A theory to the full as true as Poe's might also be drawn from the works of the Brownings, which would lead to the exclusion of Poe from the roll of great poets as surely as the theory of Poe leads to the exclusion of the Brownings. I do not regret, however, the necessity of passing over the many plausible half truths which go to make up the creed of this or that poet, since the principal object I proposed to myself in this essay was to call attention to the narrowness of them all. A very little examination will generally prove that they have grown out of the idiosyncrasies of the poets themselves, and so, necessarily, seldom attain a greater breadth than suffices to shelter the theorist and the models from which he has drawn his arguments and his inspiration.

Yet every one of these creeds has its disciples, and the consequence is the growth of particular schools, in the study of which the taste becomes limited and the poetic vision, except in one direction, deprived of all its clearness.

I am not protesting against an evil existing only in my imagination. I have known more than one young lover of poetry who read nothing but Browning, and there are hundreds who have drowned all the poets of the past and present in the deep music of Tennyson. But is it not possible, with the whole wealth of litera-

ture at our command, to attain views broad enough to enable us to do justice to genius of every class and character? That certainly can be no true poetical creed that leads directly to the neglect of those masterpieces which, though wrought hundreds of thousands of years ago, still preserve the freshness of perennial youth. It is not from gratitude simply, though we owe them much, to the many poets whose "thoughts have made rich the blood of the world" that I desire to press their claims upon attention. In the possession of a fame as immortal as Truth and Nature, they can afford to look with indifference upon a temporary suspension of admiration. The injury falls only on such as slight them, and the penalty they

pay is a contracted and a contracting insight, the shutting on them forever of many glorious vistas of mind and the loss of thousands of images of grace and beauty and grandeur. Oh! rest assured that there are no stereotyped forms of poetry. It is a vital power and may assume any guise and take any shape, at one time towering like an alp in the darkness, and at another sunning itself in the bell of a tulip or the cup of a lily; and until one shall have learned to recognize it in all its various developments he has no right to echo back the benison of Wordsworth,

Blessings be on them and eternal praise,  
The poets, who on earth have made us heirs  
Of Truth and pure delight in heavenly lays.

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## THE LESSER CHILDREN

A THRENODY AT THE HUNTING SEASON

BY RIDGELY TORRENCE

In the middle of August when the southwest wind  
Blows after sunset through the leisuring air,  
And on the sky nightly the mythic hind  
Leads down the sullen dog star to his lair,  
After the feverous vigil of July,  
When the loud pageant of the year's high noon  
Passed up the ways of time to sing and part,  
Grief also wandered by  
From out the lovers and the leaves of June,  
And by the wizard spices of his hair  
I knew his heart was very Love's own heart.  
Deep within dreams he led me out of doors  
As from the upper vault the night outpours,  
And when I saw that to him all the skies  
Yearned as a sea asleep yearns to its shores,  
He took a little clay and touched my eyes.

What saw I then, what heard?  
Multitudes, multitudes, under the moon they stirred!  
The weaker brothers of our earthly breed;  
Watchmen of whom our safety takes no heed;  
Swift helpers of the wind that sowed the seed