F. A. N. Pessôa.

The Canterbury Poets.

EDITED BY WILLIAM SHARP.

SONNETS OF THIS CENTURY.

*** FOR FULL LIST OF THE VOLUMES IN THIS SERIES, SEE CATALOGUE AT END OF BOOK.

SONNETS OF THIS CENTURY. EDITED AND ARRANGED, WITH A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION ON THE SONNET, BY WILLIAM SHARP.

Un sonnet sans défaut vaut seul un long poëme.

BOILEAU.

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AUTHORS AND TITLES.

(Names prefixed by an asterisk are those of deceased writers.)

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SONNETS QUOTED IN THE APPENDIX.

Dedicated

TO THE MEMORY OF

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI,

WHOSE GLORY IT IS TO HAVE DONE SO MUCH TO
STRENGTHEN THE LOVE OF BEAUTY IN ART,
IN LITERATURE, AND IN LIFE.

To D. G. R.

I.

From out the darkness cometh never a sound:
No voice doth reach us from the silent place:
There is one goal beyond life's blindfold race,
For victor and for victim—burial-ground.
O friend, revered, belov'd, mayst thou have found
Beyond the shadowy gates a yearning face,
A beckoning hand to guide thee with swift pace
From the dull wave Lethean gliding round.

Hope dwelt with thee, not Fear; Faith, not Despair:
But little heed thou hadst of the grave's gloom.
What though thy body lies so deeply there
Where the land throbs with tidal surge and boom,
Thy soul doth breathe some Paradisal air
And Rest long sought thou hast where amaranths bloom.

II.

Yet even if Death indeed with pitiful sign
Bade us drink deep of some oblivious draught,
Is it not well to know, ere we have quaffed
The soul-deceiving poppied anodyne,
That not in vain erewhile we drank the wine
Of life—that not all blankly or in craft
Of evil went the days wherein we laughed
And joyed i' the sun, unknowing aught divine?

Not so thy doom, whatever fate betide:
Not so for thee, O poet-heart and true,
Who fearless watched, as evermore it grew,
The shadow of Death creep closer to thy side.—
A glory with thy ebbing life withdrew,
And we inherit now its deathless Pride.

WILLIAM SHARP.

The Sonnet:

ITS CHARACTERISTICS AND HISTORY.

FOR the concise expression of an isolated poetic thought—an intellectual or sensuous "wave" keenly felt, emotionally and rhythmically—the sonnet would seem to be the best medium, the means apparently prescribed by certain radical laws of melody and harmony, in other words, of nature: even as the swallow's wing is the best for rapid volant wheel and shift, as the heron's for mounting by wide gyrations, as that of the kite or the albatross for sustained suspension.

To bring this more clearly home to the mind of the reader unacquainted with the true scope of our sonnet-literature and of the technique of the sonnet itself, and to illustrate its development and capacities, is the aim of this introductory note. For comparatively brief this introductory essay must be, not attempting to be anything more than a broadly executed free-hand sketch, certainly not a complete and minutely-finished study.

It is no new ground that is here broken. The sonnet has had many apologists and critical historians, and has been considered from many points of view. Chief among those of our countrymen who have devoted themselves to the special study of this fascinating poetic vehicle may be named the following: Capel Lofft, who in 1813-14 published under the title of *Laura* a valuable and interesting but very unequal and badly arranged anthology of original and translated sonnets; R. H. Housman, who in 1833 issued a good selection, with an interesting prefatory note; Dyce, whose small but judiciously compiled volume was a pleasant possession at a time when sonnet-literature gained but slight public attention; Leigh Hunt, who laboured in this field genuinely *con amore;* Mr. Tomlinson, whose work on the sonnet has much of abiding value; Mr. Dennis, whose "English Sonnets" served as an unmistakable index to the awakening of general interest in this poetic form; Mr. D. M. Main, an accomplished student of literature and a critic possessing the true instinct, whose honour it is to have produced the most exhaustive sonnet-anthology—with quite a large volumeful of notes—in our language (for Capel Lofft's *Laura* is largely made up of Italian sonnets and translations); Mr. S. Waddington, who a year or two ago produced two pleasant little volumes of selections; and, finally, Mr. Hall Caine, whose *Sonnets of Three Centuries* at once obtained the success which that ably edited compilation deserved. To all these writers, but more especially, of course, to Mr. Main—from the student's point of view—the

present editor is indebted, as must be every future worker in this secluded but not least beautiful section of the Garden of Poetry. There are, moreover, one or two students who have done good service in this cause without having published in book form either their opinions or any sonnet-anthology; especially among these should reference be made to the anonymous writer of two admirable papers on the sonnet in *The Quarterly Review* (1866); to the anonymous author of the thoughtful and suggestive article in *The Westminster Review* (1871); and to the anonymous contributor of the two highly interesting papers on sonnet-literature which appeared in *The Dublin Review* for 1876 and 1877; to Mr. Ashcroft Noble, a capable and discriminating critic, whose article in *The Contemporary Review* attracted considerable notice; to the late Rector of Lincoln College, Mr. Mark Pattison, who prefaced his edition of Milton's sonnets with a suggestive essay; to the late Archbishop Trench, the value of whose edition of Wordsworth's sonnets is heightened in the same way; to Mr. J. Addington Symonds; and to Mr. Theodore Watts, whose influence in this direction is very marked. Nor should I omit to mention two charming French anthologies, *La Monographie des Sonnets* of Louis de Veyrières and *Le Livre des Sonnets* of M. Charles Asselineau; nor, again, Dr. Karl Lentzner's able treatise, *Uber das Sonett und Seine Gestaltung in der englischen Dichtung bis Milton* (1886).

There are two leading reasons for now issuing a new collection: to show how much of the poetic

thought of our own time has been cast in the mould of the sonnet, and how worthy that mould is of the honour ; and to meet, by the formation of an anthology of which the first and only absolute principle is the inclusion of no sonnet that does not possess—of course in varying degree—distinct poetic value, the widespread and manifestly increasing appreciation of and liking for this metrical form. Even yet no more can with justice be said than that it is limitedly popular, for not only is there still a general ignorance of what a sonnet really is and what technical qualities are essential to a fine specimen of this poetic genus, but a perfect plague of feeble productions in fourteen-lines has done its utmost, ever since Wordsworth's influence became a recognised factor, to render the sonnet as effete a form of metrical expression as the irregular ballad-stanza with a meaningless refrain.

Concerning every method of expression, in each of the arts, there is always a *pro* and *contra*, but few metrical forms have been more fortunate than the sonnet, for its *contras* have generally been pronounced either by persons quite ignorant of what they were discussing or incapable of appreciating any excellence save when meted out as it were by the yard. On the other hand, those who have studied it love it as the naturalist loves his microscope—and veritably, like the microscope, it discloses many beautiful things which, if embedded in some greater mass, might have been but faintly visible and incoherent. Then some of the greatest of poets have used it, not a few having

selected it as the choicest mould into which to cast their most personal, their most vivid utterances: thus did Petrarca, and thus in less exclusive degree did Dante and Milton; thus Shakespeare did, and Mrs. Browning, and Wordsworth, and Rossetti, and many another true poet in our own and other lands. The stirring of the poetic impulse is very markedly at work among us at present, and there is no more remarkable sign of the times than the steadily growing public appreciation of the sonnet as a poetic vehicle. For one thing, its conciseness is an immense boon in these days when books multiply like gossamer-flies in a sultry June; it is realised that if good a sonnet can speedely be read and enjoyed, that if exceptionally fine it can with ease be committed to memory, and that if bad it can be recognised as such at a glance, and can be relegated to oblivion by the turning of a single page. There is no doubt that a writer in *The Dublin Review* is correct when he regards "the increasing attention bestowed on the history and structure of the sonnet as an indication of the growth of a higher and healthier poetical taste." It may be remembered that Leigh Hunt makes a statement to the effect that the love of Italian poetry has always been greatest in England when English genius has been in its most poetical condition; this has, as I think most will agree, been true in the past, even up to so late a date as the middle of this century, and if a renascence of this interest have a prophetic quality, then we should be on the eve of a new poetic period, for once again early Italian poetry is claiming its

students and its many admirers. And perhaps nothing in Italian poetry is better worth study than its beautiful sonnet-literature. Whether in Italy or in England, "no form of verse," as Mr. Waddington has well remarked, "no description of poetic composition, has yielded a richer harvest than the sonnet." One can agree with this without fully endorsing Menzini's statement that the sonnet is the touchstone of great geniuses; for it must not be overlooked that some of our truest poets, living as well as dead, are unable to write sonnets of the first class—noticeably, for instance, two such masters of verbal music as Shelley and Coleridge—nor must it for a moment be forgotten that no one form has a monopoly of the most treasurable poetic beauty, that the mould is a very secondary matter compared with the substance which renders it vital, and that a fine poem in not altogether the best form is infinitely better than a poor or feeble one in a flawless structure. As a matter of fact, poetic impulse that arises out of the suddenly kindled imagination may generally be trusted to instinctively find expression through the medium that is most fitting for it. To employ a humble simile, a poetic idea striving towards or passing into utterance is often like one of those little hermit-crabs which creep into whatever shell suits them the moment they are ready to leave their too circumscribed abodes. Poetry I take to be the dynamic condition of the imaginative and rhythmical faculties in combination, finding expression verbally and metrically—and the animating principle is always of necessity greater than the animated

form, as the soul is superior to the body. Before entering on the subject of the technique of the sonnet, on its chief types, and on its legitimate and irregular variations, a few words may be said concerning the derivation of its name and its earliest history.

It is generally agreed that "sonnet" is an abbreviation of the Italian *sonetto*, a short strain (literally, a little sound), that word being the diminutive of *suono* = sound. The *sonetto* was originally a poem recited with sound, that is, with a musical accompaniment, a short poem of the *rispetto* kind, sung to the strains of lute or mandolin. Probably it had an existence, and possibly even its name, at a period considerably anterior to that where we first find definite mention of it, just as the irregular stanzaic form known as the ballad existed in England and Scotland prior to any generally accepted definition thereof. As to its first birth-place there is some uncertainty: it has been asserted to have been a native of Provence, that mother of poets, but some have it that the sonnet is an outcome of the Greek epigram. This idea is certainly not defensible, but while it has been ridiculed as unworthy of entertainment the scoffers seem generally to have had in mind the modern epigram, a very different thing: the essential principle of the ancient epigram was the presentment of a single idea, emotion, or fact, and in this it is entirely at one with the rival that has supplanted it—but in technique it was much simpler. It is much more likely that the *stornello* was the Italian equivalent

of the sonnet—that fleeting bar of verbal melody, which in its narrow compass of two lines presents one fact of nature and one metaphorical allusion based thereon. The *stornello* stands in perhaps even closer relationship to the ancient epigram than the *rispetto* to the modern sonnet. To readers interested in the true epigram, and unacquainted with recent translations of or works thereon, I may recommend Dr. Richard Garnett's delightful little volume, *Idylls and Epigrams* (Macmillan), and Mr. William Watson's *Original Epigrams*, with its admirable Note. Housman compares the epigram and the sonnet to the well-known Grecian architectural types, the Ionic column and the Corinthian—the former a specimen of pure and graceful beauty, the latter of more elaborate but still of equally pure and graceful genius. A very far-fetched theory is that the sonnet is an Italian shadow of the ancient ode, its divisions corresponding with the strophe, antistrophe, epode, and antepode. It is not in the least likely that this may have been its origin; it is scarcely more probable that its source may have been the ancient epigram; in all likelihood it was of Sicilian birth, gradually forming or being moulded into a certain recognised type, and apparently the outcome of the *stornelli* which every contadino sang as he pruned his olive-trees or tended his vines. It ought to be mentioned, also, that another origin has been claimed for the word, viz., that it is the French *sonnette*, and that its parentage may be primarily ascribed to the tinkling sheep-bells of Provençal days. The *stornello* is the germ of its

popular allies, the *sestina rima*, *ottava rima*, and the *rispetto*. The *stornello* consists of two lines, or it may be of four, on two rhymes; and from this metrical type issues in time the sonnet. The *sestina rima* is the original quatrain with an added couplet on a new rhyme; the *ottava rima* is an expansion of the original form into six lines on two rhymes, with a concluding couplet as in the *sestina;* in the *rispetto*, as accurately characterised by Mr. J. A. Symonds, the quatrain is doubled or prolonged indefinitely, and is followed by an additional system of one or more couplets which return or reflect upon the original theme: the quatrain or its expansion is composed upon two rhymes—the prolongation, or return, is composed upon two other rhymes. In the sonnet the germinal four lines have developed into two quatrains, still on two rhymes: and the prolongation invariably consists of six lines, on either two or three rhymes, with some freedom of arrangement.

Like a plant of steady growth, the seedling of the sonnet, having fallen into suitable ground somewhere about the middle of the thirteenth century, gradually forced its obscure and tortuous way towards the light. Considerably before the close of the thirteenth century we find it in fulfilled bud, in due time to open into the mature Petrarcan flower, the perfected stock whence such a multiplicity of varieties has come. Many buds did indeed arise about the same period, and there is still preserved at Milan (according to Muratori, in his *Perfetta Poesia*) a manuscript Latin treatise on poems in the Italian vernacular—

Poetica volgare—written in the year 1332 by a learned and ingenious judge of Padua named Antonio di Tempo, wherein mention is made of sixteen distinct species of sonnet, most of them posterior to the unfolding of the finest and most energetic bud, but some anterior thereto. To carry on the metaphor a little further, the gardener who tended and cultivated this choice bud was a certain clerical poet known widely as Fra Guittone d'Arezzo —not the least worthy among the illustrious little band which that small Italian town has produced. At the same time, such honour as is due must be rendered to a little known predecessor in the art, the author of the sonnet beginning *Però ch'amore*, which, as Mr. Symonds has pointed out, is presumably the earliest extant example of this metrical structure. The poet in question was Pier delle Vigne, Secretary of State to Frederick II. of Sicily, and while his little poem differs from the typical Italian sonnet in that the rhyme-arrangement of the octave is simply that of two ordinary conjoint quatrains, or two rhymes throughout, it is a true example in all other particulars. Fra Guittone flourished during the greater part of the thirteenth century, and he it was who first definitely adopted and adhered to what was even then recognised as the best modern form for the expression of an isolated emotion, thought, or idea. His sonnets are not only the model of those of his great successor, Petrarca, but are also in themselves excellent productions, and especially noteworthy when considered in relation to the circumstances under which they came into existence. From the work

of Guittone d'Arezzo—whom Capel Lofft called the Columbus of poetic literature, from his having discovered the sonnet even as the Genoese navigator discovered America—to that of the sweetest-voiced of all Italian poets, there is a considerable step. The period was eminently an experimental one, and in sonnet-literature as elsewhere. While the Guittonian sonnet remained the most admired model, many variations thereof and divergencies therefrom became temporarily popular, exerting an unfortunate influence by allowing free scope to slovenly or indifferent workmanship. But Petrarca and Dante laid an ineffaceable seal on the Guittonian form, not prohibiting minor variations, and even themselves indulging in experimental divergencies: in the hands of the one it gained an exquisite beauty, a subtle music abidingly sweet, and in those of the other a strength and vigour that supplied as it were the masculine element to the already existent feminine. Tasso and the other great Italians followed suit, and the sonnet became the favourite Italian poetic vehicle, as it remains to this day, though, alas! but the body still lives, the soul having fled or—it may be—lying in a profound and apparently undisturbable trance. Mr. Symonds has objected that this statement can hardly be taken literally in view of the excellent poems of Stecchetti and the Veristi, but, broadly speaking, it can hardly be doubted that the sonnet in Italy has fallen upon evil days when it is mostly to be found adorning young ladies' albums, or as an accompaniment to presents of flowers and confectionery. In due course Camoens in the South

Bellay and the early French poets in the West, and Surrey and Spenser in England, turned towards this form as birds towards a granary unroofed by the wind. Concerning Mr. Hall Caine's theory that the English sonnet is an indigenous growth, I shall have something to say later on.

It will be well to consider the sonnet in a threefold aspect: the aspect of Formal Excellence, that of Characteristic Excellence, and that of Ideal Excellence. By the first I refer to technique simply; by the second to individuality, expression; by the third to the union of imagination, suggestiveness, melody of word and line, and harmony of structure. The section of this introductory note devoted to the consideration of Formal Excellence may be comprehensively headed *Sonnet-Structure.*

Sonnet-Structure. It is a matter of surprise that even now there are many well-read people who have no other idea of what a sonnet is than that it is a short poem—what kind of short poem they very vaguely apprehend. I have heard it described as any short poem of one or more stanzas used for filling up blank spaces in magazine-pages—a definition not so very absurd when we remember that a poet and critic like Coleridge pronounced it "a medium for the expression of a mere momentary burst of passion." But the majority of readers of poetry know that it is limited to fourteen lines in length: beyond this the knowledge of all save a comparative few does not go. Even among verse-writers themselves there is some vagueness on this point: I have heard one well-known writer say that so-and-so's sonnet was a fine one, when the piece in

question consisted of three octosyllabic quatrains; another spoke of *In Memoriam* as made up of a number of linked sonnets; and one of the contributors to this volume lately remarked to me that any one could write a sonnet—it was simply to say something in fourteen lines instead of in ten or twenty!

The commonest complaint against the sonnet is its supposed arbitrariness—a complaint based on a complete misconception of its nature. In the sense that a steersman must abide by the arbitrary law of the compass, in the sense that the engine-driver must abide by the arbitrary machinery of the engineer, in the sense that the battalion must wheel to the right or the left at the arbitrary word of command—in this sense is the sonnet an arbitrary form. Those who complain seem to forget that the epic, the tragedy, the ode, are also arbitrary forms, and that it is somewhat out of place to rail against established rules of architecture in the erection of a cottage, and to blink those in the building of a mansion or a palace. Any form of creative art, to survive, must conform to certain restrictions: would *Paradise Lost* hold its present rank if Milton had interspersed Cavalier and Roundhead choruses throughout his epic? What would we think of the *Æneid* if Virgil had enlivened its pages with Catullian love-songs or comic interludes after the manner of Plautus or Terence? The structure of the sonnet is arbitrary in so far that it is the outcome of continuous experiment moulded by mental and musical influences: it is not a form to be held sacred simply because this or that great poet, or a dozen poets, pronounced it

to be the best possible poetic vehicle for its purpose. It has withstood the severest test that any form can be put to : it has survived the changes of language, the fluctuations of taste, the growth of culture, the onward sweep and the resilience of the wave of poetry that flows to and fro, "with kingly pauses of reluctant pride," across all civilised peoples : for close upon six hundred years have elapsed since Fra Guittone and Dante and Petrarca found the perfected instrument ready for them to play their sweetest music upon. Guittone was like the first man who adventured frequently upon the waters in a wedge-shaped craft, after whom everyone agreed that grooved and narrow bows were better than the roundness of a tub or the clumsy length of a hollowed tree-trunk. Or again, he may be compared with the great Florentine painter Masaccio, who first introduced the reality of life into Italian art, or with the even greater Fleming, Jan van Eyck, who invented, or at any rate inaugurated, painting in oils as now understood ; though he too of course had his predecessor, even as Masolino foreshadowed Masaccio, and the monk Theophilus foretold the discovery that is commonly attributed to Hubert van Eyck and his more famous brother.

The Guittonian limitation of the sonnet's length to fourteen lines was, we may rest assured, not wholly fortuitous. The musical and poetic instinct probably, however, determined its final form more than any apprehension of the fundamental natural law beneath its metrical principles. The multiplicity and easy facility of Italian

rhymes rendered the more limited epigram of the ancients too malleable a metrical material in one way, and too obstinate a material in another, for while almost anyone with a quick ear and ready tongue could have rattled off a loose quatrain, it was difficult to give sufficient weight and sonority thereto with a language where rhyme-sounds are as plentiful as pebbles in a shallow mountain-stream. It became necessary, then, to find a mould for the expression of a single thought, emotion, or poetically apprehended fact, which would allow sufficient scope for sonority of music and the unfolding of the motive and its application, and which yet would not prove too ample for that which was to be put into it. Repeated experiments tended to prove that twelve, fourteen, or sixteen lines were ample for the presentation of any isolated idea or emotion ; again, that the sensitive ear was apt to find the latter number a shade too long, or cumbrous ; and still later, that while a very limited number of rhymes was necessitated by the shortness of the poem, the sixteen reverberations of some three or four terminal-sounds frequently became monotonous and unpleasing. Ten or twelve-line poems were ascertained to be as a rule somewhat fragmentary, and only worthily served when the poet was desirous of presenting to his readers a simple pearl rather than a diamond with its flashing facets, though here also there was not enough expansion for restricted rhyme, while there was too much for merely two or at the most three distinct terminal sounds. Again, it was considered advisable that the expression should be twofold, that is,

that there should be the presentation of the motive, and its application ; hence arose the division of the fourteen-line poem into two systems. How were these systems to be arranged ? were seven lines to be devoted to the presentation of the idea or emotion, and seven to its application : seven to the growth of the tree, and seven to its fruitage : seven to the oncoming wave, and seven to its resurge ? The sensitive ear once more decided the question, recognising that if there were to be a break in the flow of melody—and the necessity of pauses it had already foreseen—it could not be at a seventh line, which would bring about an overbalance of rhyme. Experience and metrical music together coincided to prove that the greatest amount of dignity and beauty could be obtained by the main pause occurring at the end of the eighth line. Here, then, we arrive at the two systems into which the sonnet is divided—the major and the minor : and because the major system consists of eight lines, it is called the "octave," and correspondingly the minor system is known as the "sestet." It soon became evident, however, that something more was wanted : it was as if a harpist had discovered that with another string or two he could greatly add to the potential powers of his instrument. This was the number and the true distribution of rhyme-sounds. How many were to occur in the octave, how many in the sestet ? or were they to pervade both systems indiscriminately ? Even before Dante and Petrarca wrote their sonnets it was an accepted canon that the octave lost its dignity if it contained more than two distinct rhyme-sounds, or

at most three. In the sestet it was recognised that a greater freedom was allowable, if not in the number of rhyme-sounds, at least in their disposition. Again, Guittone had definitely demonstrated that in length each sonnet-line should consist of ten syllables, the decasyllabic metre permitting a far greater sonority than the octosyllabic; and that acute experimentalist probably quite realised that continuous sonority and unbroken continuity of motive were two of the most essential characteristics of the sonnet. No one who has any knowledge of the laws both of musical and of poetical forms would be surprised if it were proved, as has been asserted, that Fra Guittone or his predecessors perceived and acted in accordance with the close analogy existing between their chosen metrical form and the musical system established by Guido Bonatti in the eleventh century. Throughout Fra Guittone's work it is evident that he is no blind blunderer, but a poet striving to make his vehicle the best possible, working upon it with a determinate aim.

In most of his sonnets we find the following arrangement: in the octave the first, fourth, fifth, and eighth lines rhyme, and so do the second, third, sixth, and seventh. By this arrangement the utmost attainable dignity and harmony is obtained, there being no clashing of rhymes, no jingle, but a steady sweeping wave-like movement entirely satisfactory to the ear. There have been some fine sonnets written with the introduction of a third rhyme-sound into the octave (the terminations of the sixth and seventh lines), and there can be no

doubt that if this were equally satisfactory to the ear, a still greater and most valuable expansion would be given to the English sonnet: but to the sensitive ear, especially sensitive among Italians, it is as out of place as some new strain is in a melody that is already in itself amply sufficient, and that loses in effect by the alien introduction. This variation never gained ground in Italy, though in Spain it found favour with some of the Castilian sonneteers as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century.

It gained instead of losing in what Mr. Theodore Watts calls the solidarity of the outflowing wave by its nominal subdivision into two *basi* or bases, as the Italians name what we call the quatrains: upon these *basi* the poetic image could rest, either rendered clear to the reader supported on both, or appealing to him by an illuminating gleam from one base, and then by an added light from the other. The octave of the perfect sonnet, then, we find to consist of two quatrains, capable of divisional pause yet forming a solid whole: in all, eight lines following a prescribed rhyme-arrangement, which may be thus expressed—

a — b — b — a — a — b — b — a

The sestet in like manner is subdivided equally, in this case into sections of three lines each: these sections are called *the tercets*. There can be either three rhymes or two, and the variations thereupon are numerous. The Guittonian, or, as it is generally called, the Petrarcan sestet-type, is

one containing three distinct rhyme-sounds, and employing the valuable pause permitted by the true use of the double-tercet; but a system of two rhyme sounds is, as far as "metrical emphasis" goes, much stronger, and any arrangement of the rhymes (whether two or three) is permissible, save that of a couplet at the close. It is a difficult question to decide even for one's-self whether it is better for the sestet to contain only two rhymes or three: personally I am inclined to favour the restriction to two, on account of the great accession of metrical emphasis resulting to this restriction. But, on the other hand, the normal type (the Petrarcan) affords a better opportunity for a half-break at the end of the first tercet, corresponding to the same midway in the octave and to the full break at the latter's close. It would be a mistake, however, to dogmatise upon the point, and the poet will probably instinctively use the tercets in just correspondence with his emotional impulse. The Italian masters recognised as the best that division of the sestet into two distinct tercets (which they termed *volte*, or turnings), which, while not interfering with what Mr. Watts calls the ebb-movement of the sestet, are fully capable of throwing out two separate lights in one gleam—like the azure hollow and yellow flame in burning gas.

The sestet of the pure Guittonian sonnet, then, may be expressed by the following formula:—

$$\underline{a-b-c:-a-b-c}$$

The following are among the more or less appropriate variations :—

1	2	3*	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a	a
b	b	b	b	a	a	b	b	b	b	b	b	a	a	b	b	b	a
a	b	b	a	b	b	c	a	c	c	c	b	b	b	a	b	c	b
b	a	a	b	b	a	b	c	c	b	c	c	c	c	c	c	a	b
a	a	b	b	a	a	a	b	b	c	a	c	c	b	c	a	c	c
b	b	a	a	b	b	c	c	a	a	b	a	b	c	b	c	b	c
viii.	cxxix.	ii.	xi.	cxxiii.	cxlv.	xcviii.	v.	clxxiii.	cxl.	c.	iv.	ccxii.	xxxviii.	lxxiii.	xci.	cxxxiv.	xc.

The figures in the third division of this Table denote examples among the Sonnets in this book of the variation in question.

Of these, it seems to me that the two most musical—the least disturbant to the melodic wave —are the first and third,

$$\frac{a-b-a-b-a-b}{a-b-b-a-b-a}$$

The occurrence of a rhymed couplet at the close of the sonnet is rare indeed in Italian literature : I cannot recall a single example of it among the classic masters of the sonnet, and even in later times I fancy it would be difficult to find a single good Italian example worthy the name with this termination. But it does not necessarily follow that a closing

* Rossetti used to say that he considered this (No. 3) to be the best form of sestet, if it could be achieved without any damage to intellectual substance.

couplet is equally unpleasant to the ear in English, for in the latter practically all sonnets are what the Italians call *mute*, that is, the rhyming terminals are in one syllable, while in the language of Petrarca and Dante they are trisyllabic and dissyllabic —a circumstance materially affecting our consideration of this much-debated point. Not only are there few good English sonnets with dissyllabic terminals (I remember none with trisyllabic throughout, and do not suppose there is an example thereof to be found), but there are few of any quality. In Mrs. Alice Meynell's *Preludes* there are one or two partially so constructed, *e.g.*, "A Day to Come," quoted in the Appendix to this volume. But, notwithstanding the differences in terminal structure, it is open to question whether the rhymed couplet-ending be not almost as disagreeable to the English as to the Italian ear, unless the form be that of the so-called Shakespearian sonnet. One of the chief pleasures of the sonnet is the expectancy of the closing portion, and when the ear has become attuned to the sustained flow of the normal octave and also of the opening lines of the sestet, the couplet is apt to come upon one with an unexpected jar, as if someone had opened and banged-to a door while the musician was letting the last harmonious chords thrill under his touch. There has been a good deal written on this point, and Mr. Hall Caine and others have succinctly pointed out their reasons for strongly objecting to it. It is, moreover, perhaps the last point on which sonneteers themselves will agree. Writing some three or four years ago on this subject, I stated that "if the

arrangement of lines suits the emotion, I am not offended by a concluding rhymed couplet, or by the quatrains used to such purpose by Shakespeare, Drayton, and Tennyson-Turner;" but then, undoubtedly, only one side of the question was clear to me. Continuous study of the sonnet has convinced me that, while many English sonnets of the Guittonian type, even by good writers, are markedly weakened by rhymed couplet-endings, in the Shakespearian form the closure in question is not only not objectionable but is absolutely as much the right thing as the octave of two rhymes is for the Petrarcan sonnet. Most writers on the sonnet either state generally that they object or that they do not object to the rhymed couplets at the close: thus one anonymous critic writes that he fails "to see wherein a couplet ending is not as musical as any other arrangement, that indeed it is demonstratably so by the citation of some of the most striking sonnets in our language"—while, on the other hand, Mr. Caine refers to the closure in question as being as offensive to his ear as the couplets at the ends of scenes and acts in some Shakespearian plays. It seems to me now that there are, broadly speaking, but two normal types in English of sonnet-structures—the Petrarcan and the Shakespearian: whenever a motive is cast in the mould of the former a rhymed couplet ending is, to my own ear at least, quite out of place; whenever it is embodied in the latter the final couplet is eminently satisfactory.

Before, however, considering the five chief types (primarily, two), I may finish my general remarks on the early history of the sonnet.

That by the fourteenth century the mature sonnet was fully understood and recognised is evident from the facts (set forth by Mr. Tomlinson) that of the forty examples attributed (one or two of them somewhat doubtfully) to Dante, thirty-three belong to the strict Guittonian type: of the three hundred and seventeen produced throughout a long period by Petrarca, not one has more than two rhymes in the octave, and only fifteen have any variations from the normal type (eleven in alternate rhymes, and four with the first, third, sixth, and eighth lines harmonising); while two hundred and ninety agree in having nothing more than a double rhyme both in the major and in the minor system —one hundred and sixteen belonging to the pure Guittonian type, one hundred and seven with the tercets in two alternate rhymes (Type I. in foregoing table), and sixty-seven with three rhyme-sounds, arranged as in Type VII. in foregoing table. Again, of the eighty sonnets of Michael Angelo, seven-eighths are in the normal type. It is thus evident that, at a period when the Italian ear was specially keen to all harmonious effects, the verdict of the masters in this species of poetic composition was given in favour of two sonnet formations—the Guittonian structure as to the octave, and the corelative arrangement of the sestet a—b—c—a—b—c, or a—b—a—b—a—b, with a preference for the former. Another variation susceptible of very beautiful effect is that of Type IX. (*ante*), but though it can most appropriately be used when exceptional tenderness, sweetness, or special impressiveness is sought after, it does not seem to

have found much favour. I may quote here in exemplification of it one of the most beautiful of all Italian sonnets. It is one of Dante's, and is filled with the breath of music as a pine-tree with the cadences of the wind—the close being supremely exquisite : while it will also afford to those who are unacquainted with Italian an idea of the essential difference between the trisyllabic and dissyllabic terminals of the southern and the one-syllable or "mute" endings of the English sonnet, and at the same time serve to illustrate what has been already said concerning the pauses at the quatrains and tercets :—

Tanto gentile, e tanto onesta pare
La donna mia, quand' ella altrui saluta,
Ch' ogni lingua divien tremando muta,
E gli occhi non l' ardiscon di guardare.

Ella sen va, sentendosi laudare,
Umilimente d' onestà vestuta ;
E par che sia una cosa venuta
Di cielo in terra a miracol mostrare.

Mostrasi sì piacente a chi la mira,
Che dà per gli occhi una dolcezza al core,
Che'ntender non la può chi non la pruova.

E par, che dalla sua labbia si mova,
Uno spirito soave, pien d' amore,
Che va dicendo all' anima : sospira.

I need not here enter into detail concerning all the variations that have been made upon the normal type : in Italian these are very numerous, as also in French. In Germany the model type (where,

by-the-by, the sonnet was first known by the name of *Klang-gedicht*, a very matter-of-fact way of rendering *sonetto* in its poetic sense!) has always been the Petrarcan, as exemplified in the flawless statuesque sonnets of Platen. The following six Italian variations represent those most worthy of notice :—(1) *Versi sdruccioli*, twelve-syllabled lines, *i.e.* (*Leigh Hunt*) slippery or sliding verses, so called on account of their terminating in dactyls—tēnĕrĕ—Vēnĕrĕ. (2) Caudated, or Tailed Sonnets —*i.e.*, sonnets to which as it were an unexpected augmentation of two or five or more lines is made : an English example of which will be found in any edition of Milton's works, under the title, "On the New Forcers of Conscience." (3) Mute Sonnets : on one-syllable terminals, but generally used only for satirical and humorous purposes—in the same way as we, contrariwise, select dissyllabic terminals as best suited for badinage. (4) Linked, or Interlaced Sonnets, corresponding to the Spenserian form, which will be formulated shortly. (5) The Continuous or Iterating Sonnet, on one rhyme throughout, and (6) the same, on two rhymes throughout. French poets (who, speaking generally, are seen to less advantage in the sonnet than in any other poetic vehicle) have delighted in much experimentalising : their only commendable deviation, one commonly made, is a commencement of the sestet with a rhymed couplet (a mould into which Mr. Swinburne is fond of casting his impulsive speech)—but their octosyllabic and dialogue sonnets, and other divergencies, are nothing more than experiments, more or less interesting and able.

The paring-down system has reached its extreme level in the following clever piece of trifling by Comte Paul de Resseguier—a "sonnet" of single-syllable lines :—

EPITAPHE D'UNE JEUNE FILLE.

Fort
Belle,
Elle
Dort !

Sort
Frêle
Quelle
Mort !

Rose
Close—
La

Brise
L'a
Prise.

Among English sonnets the chief variations are the rhymed-couplet ending added to the preceding twelve line cast in the regular form : the sonnet ending with an Alexandrine (*vide* No. c.) : the sonnet with an Alexandrine closing both octave and sestet (*vide* No. xxxv.) : the Assonantal Sonnet, *i.e.*, a sonnet without rhymes, but with the vowel sounds of the words so arranged as to produce a distinctly harmonious effect almost identical with that of rhyme-music. Of this form Mr. Wilfred Blunt, among others, has given a good example in his *Love-Sonnets of Proteus :* the octosyllabic

sonnets (mere experiments), written by Mr. E. Cracroft Lefroy and Mr. S. Waddington and others: and the sonnet constructed on two rhyme-sounds throughout. Among the last named I may mention Mr. William Bell Scott's "Garland for Advancing Years," Mr. Edmund Gosse's "Pipe-Player," and Lord Hanmer's "Winter." The latter I may quote as a fine but little-known example of this experimental variation :—

WINTER.

To the short days, and the great vault of shade
The whitener of the hills, we come—alas,
There is no colour in the faded grass,
Save the thick frost on its hoar stems arrayed.
Cold is it : as a melancholy maid,
The latest of the seasons now doth pass,
With a dead garland, in her icy glass
Setting its spikes about her crisped braid.
The streams shall breathe, along the orchards laid,
In the soft spring-time ; and the frozen mass
Melt from the snow-drift ; flowerets where it was
Shoot up—the cuckoo shall delight the glade ;
But to new glooms through some obscure crevasse
She will have past—that melancholy maid.

This interesting and poetic experiment would have been still better but for the musical flaw in the first line (d*a*ys—sh*a*de) and those in the 13th-14th (cre*v*asse—p*a*st), though of course in this instance the repetition of *maid* as a terminal is intentional, and is a metrical gain rather than a flaw. In the Appendix will be quoted a sonnet by Mr. J. A. Symonds, constructed on three rhymes throughout. Dialogue-sonnets are not an English variation : I am aware of very few in our language,—the earliest

which I have met with is that written by Alexander, Earl of Stirling (1580-1640). There are one or two sonnets in French with octaves where the first *three* lines rhyme, and therewith also the fifth, sixth, and seventh: one, in English, will be found in the Appendix.

We may now pass to the consideration of the five standard formal types, thereby closing the first section of this Introduction, that on "Sonnet-structure."

These formal types are (1) The Petrarcan. (2) The Spenserian. (3) The Shakespearian. (4) The Miltonic: and (5) The Contemporary.

The Guittonian, or Petrarcan sonnet, has already been explained from the structural point of view: but its formal characteristics may be summarised once more. (1) It, like all sonnets, must primarily consist of fourteen decasyllabic lines. (2) It must be made up of a major and minor system: the major system consisting of eight lines, or two quatrains, to be known as the octave; the minor consisting of six lines, or two tercets, to be known as the sestet. (3) Two rhyme-sounds only must pervade the octave, and their arrangement (nominally arbitrary, but in reality based on an ascertainable melodic law) must be so that the first, fourth, fifth, and eighth terminals rhyme, while the second, third, sixth, and seventh do so also on a different note. (4) What is generally looked upon as completing the normal type is a sestet with the tercet divisions clearly marked, and employing three rhyme-sounds, the co-relatives being the terminals of lines 1 and 4, 2 and 5, 3 and 6.

Among the numerous sonnets (the great majority naturally) in this anthology conforming to the two archetypal forms, the reader of these remarks may glance for reference at Mr. Matthew Arnold's "Immortality," and at Mr. Theodore Watts' "Foreshadowings."

The first English sonnets were composed by Sir Thomas Wyat (1503-1542), and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (*c.* 1517-1547); and the first appearance of any in book form was in the rare publication briefly known as *Tottle's Miscellany*, whose full title is "Songs and Sonettes written by the ryght honourable lorde Henry Howard late earle of Surrey, and other." These accomplished young noblemen had resided in Italy, and, themselves delighting in Italian poetic literature—especially Petrarca's work—hastened, on their return to their own country, to acclimatise the new poetic vehicle which had become so famous in the hands of two of Italy's greatest writers. Their efforts, with a new and difficult medium and a language which was still only approaching that state in which Spenser and Marlowe and Shakespeare found it, were only very partially successful, and, as we now know, their sonnets owed most of what was excellent in them to Italian sources. The remarkable thing about them is that they all end with rhymed-couplets, an arrangement distinctly opposed to any with which they were acquainted in another language. On the other hand, it must be noted (this point should be remembered a little later when we come to discuss Mr. Caine's theory) that Wyat's are otherwise mostly on the Italian model.

Surrey, again, evidently found his task over-difficult of satisfactory performance, and so constantly experimented with a fourteen-line sonnet-mould—like a musician who, arriving in his own land, finds his countrymen's ears not easily attuned to the melodies of the new instrument he brings with him from abroad, and so tries again and again to find some way of making his novel mandolin or lute-sounds attractive to ears accustomed to the harsher strains of fife or windpipe. Thus we find him composing on the two-rhyme-throughout system; linking the three elegiac quatrains and a couplet; and otherwise feeling his way—evidently coming ultimately to the conclusion that the three quatrains and the couplet constituted the form best suited to the English language. This may concisely be set forth in the following formula :—

A—B—A—B C—D—C—D E—F—E—F G—G

A much more original and more potent poetic nature next endeavoured to find meet expression in the sonnet. Spenser, that great metricist and genuine poet, notwithstanding all his power in verse, was unable to acclimatise the new vehicle, the importance and beauty of which he undoubtedly fully recognised. Having tried the effect of a fourteen-line poem in well-modulated blank verse, he found that he was dissatisfied with the result; equally dissatisfied was he with the quatrains-and-couplet mould of Wyat and Surrey: and so at last, after continuous experiments, he produced a modification of both the English and the Italian

form, retaining something of the rhyme-iteration of the latter along with the couplet-ending of the former: or perhaps he simply adopted this structure from a similar Italian experiment, discerning through translation its seeming appropriateness. That he considered this the best possible mould of the sonnet for the English poet is evident from the fact that in this structure he composed his famous love sonnets, the *Amoretti*. The Spenserian sonnet may be regarded as representing that transitional stage of development which a tropical plant experiences when introduced into a temperate clime. In this case the actual graft proved short-lived, but the lesson was not lost upon cultivators, in whose hands manifold seed lay ready for germination. Spenser's method was to interlace the quatrains by using the last rhyme-sound of each as the key-note of the next—b^2, for example, if I may use a musical comparison, constituting the dominant of b^3 and b^5, as of course c^2 of c^3 and c^5—and then to clinch those by an independent rhyme-couplet. It will more easily be understood by this formula:—

A — B — A — B
B — C — B — C
C — D — C — D
E — E

But this form pleased the ear neither of his contemporaries nor of his successors: it was suited for gentle tenderness, for a lover's half-assumed languor—but in it neither Dante on the one hand, nor Shakespeare nor Milton on the other, would

have found that rhythmical freedom, or rather that amplitude in confinement, which they obtained in the structures they adopted. After Spenser there set in the flood of Elizabethan sonneteering, which culminated in the Shakespearian sonnets. Before mentioning Shakespeare and his immediate forerunners, however, an interesting feature should be noted. This is a fine sonnet foreshadowing what is now called the Miltonic mould, by that great Englishman, Sir Walter Raleigh: though structurally of the Surrey type, it has the Miltonic characteristic of unbroken continuity between octave and sestet. It may be added that the author of *Paradise Lost* modelled his well-known lines on his dead wife on this sonnet by Raleigh.

What is styled the Shakespearian sonnet is so called only out of deference to the great poet who made such noble use of it: in the same way as Petrarca is accredited with the structural form bearing his name. As "the sweete laureate of Italie" had predecessors in Guittone d'Arezzo and Amalricchi, so Shakespeare found that the English sonnet—as it should be called—having been inefficiently handled by Surrey, discarded by Spenser, taken up and beautified by Sir Philip Sidney (who seemed unable to definitely decide as to what form to adopt), was at last made thoroughly ready for his use by Daniel and Drayton. To show how the so-called Shakespearian sonnet was led up to and how it actually existed in its maturity prior to the splendid poems of the young player-poet, a sonnet by each of these admirable writers may be quoted. But previous thereto it may again be made clear

that the English or Shakespearian sonnet is distinctly different from the normal Italian type. Unlike the latter, it is not divided into two systems —though a pause corresponding to that enforced by the separation of octave and sestet is very frequently observed. Instead of having octave and sestet, the Shakespearian sonnet is made up of four elegiac quatrains clinched by a rhymed couplet with a new sound; and, generally, it presents the motive as it were in a transparent sphere, instead of as a cameo with two sides. As regards swiftness of motion, its gain upon the Spenserian, to which it is so closely allied, is great.

Referring, in a chapter dealing with the sonnets of Rossetti, to the two archetypal forms, I wrote some four years ago that "The Shakespearian sonnet is like a red-hot bar being moulded upon a forge till—in the closing couplet—it receives the final clinching blow from the heavy hammer: while the Petrarcan, on the other hand, is like a wind gathering in volume and dying away again immediately on attaining a culminating force." The anterior simile is the happier: for the second I should now be inclined to substitute—the Petrarcan sonnet is like an oratorio, where the musical divisions are distinct, and where the close is a grand swell, the culmination of the foregoing harmonies. Petrarca himself, in one of his numerous marginalia to his sonnets, remarked that the end should invariably be more harmonious than the beginning, *i.e.*, should be *dominantly borne-in* upon the reader.

In selecting the "Sleep" of Samuel Daniel, I

do so not because it is in the true Shakespearian type (as is Drayton's)—though he wrote mostly in the latter mould—but because in this example is shown the final transition from an octave of two rhymes to the English archetype as already formulated. It must not be overlooked, however, that he used and used well the Shakespearian form.

TO SLEEP.

Care-charmer Sleep, son of the sable Night,
Brother to Death, in silent darkness born,
Relieve my languish, and restore the light;
With dark forgetting of my care return,
And let the day be time enough to mourn
The shipwreck of my ill-adventured youth;
Let waking eyes suffice to wail their scorn,
Without the torment of the night's untruth.
Cease, dreams, the images of day-desires,
To model forth the passions of the morrow;
Never let rising Sun approve you liars,
To add more grief to aggravate my sorrow;
Still let me sleep, embracing clouds in vain,
And never wake to feel the day's disdain.

The sonnet by Michael Drayton which I shall next quote is not only the finest of Elizabethan sonnets by writers other than Shakespeare, but in condensed passion is equalled only by one or two of those of the great master, and is surpassed by none, either of his or of any later poet:—

A PARTING.

Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part,—
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,
That thus so cleanly I myself can free:

Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,
And when we meet at any time again,
Be it not seen in either of our brows
That we one jot of former love retain.
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,—
Now, if thou would'st, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover!

But it was in Shakespeare's hands that this form of sonnet first became immutably established in our literature. These magnificent poems—magnificent notwithstanding many minor flaws—must always hold their high place, not only as the personal record of the greatest of our poets, but for the sake of their own consummate beauty and intellectual force. I may repeat the words I wrote in the Introductory Essay to my edition of his *Songs and Sonnets*—"It is because this great master over the passions and follies and heroisms of man has at least once dropped the veil of impersonality that we are so fascinated by the sonnets. Here the musician who has otherwise played for all generations of humanity, pipes a solitary tune of his own life, its love, its devotion, its fervour, its prophetic exaltation, its passion, its despair, its exceeding bitterness. Veritably we are here face to face with 'a splendour amid glooms.'"

Rossetti, the greatest master of sonnet-music posterior to the "starre of poets," declared while expressing his unbounded admiration for Skakespeare's sonnets that "conception—*fundamental brain-work*—is what makes the difference in all

art. . . . A Shakespearian sonnet is better than the most perfect in form because Shakespeare wrote it." Again, the opinion of so acute a critic and genuine a poet as Mr. Theodore Watts may here be appropriately quoted:—"The quest of the Skakespearian form is not," he writes in his article on "The Sonnet" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "like that of the sonnet of octave and sestet sonority, and, so to speak, metrical counterpoint, but sweetness: and the sweetest of all possible arrangements in English versification is a succession of decasyllabic quatrains in alternate rhymes knit together, and clinched by a couplet—a couplet coming not too far from the initial verse, so as to lose its binding power, and yet not so near the initial verse that the ring of epigram disturbs 'the linked sweetness long drawn out' of this movement, but sufficiently near to shed its influence over the poem back to the initial verse." This is admirably expressed, and true so far as it goes; but to a far wider scope than "sweetness" does the Shakespearian sonnet reach. Having already given a good example of sonnets cast in this mould, it is not necessary to quote another by the chief master of the English sonnet: still I may give one of the latter's greatest, perhaps *the* greatest of Shakespeare's or any other, which will not only serve as a supreme example of the type, but will demonstrate a capability of impressiveness unsurpassed by any sonnet of Dante or Milton:—

> The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action; and till action, lust
> Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
> Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,

Enjoy'd no sooner but despisèd straight,
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had
Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
Mad in pursuit and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

Between the sonnets of Shakespeare and those of Milton there is not much to chronicle concerning the history of the sonnet. Its chief intermediate composer was Drummond of Hawthornden, a graceful poet, but assuredly not the master he has again and again been represented to be. His essential weakness may be seen in his inability to adopt any pure mould: his sonnets may either be regarded as English bastards of Italian parentage, or as Italian refugees disguised in a semi-insular costume. Hitherto, and this notwithstanding several noble examples by Shakespeare of a more impersonal scope, most English sonnets were amatory—amatory to such an extent indeed that "sugred sonettes" became as much the stereotyped medium of lovers' prayers and plaints as was the border-ballad that of the virile energies of a semi-civilised people. In this state they still were after the close of the Elizabethan period—indeed they were, with the minor poets, fast degenerating into florid and insipid imbecilities. But when Milton recognised the form as one well suited even for the voice which was in due time to chant the rebellion of the Prince of Evil, he took it up to regenerate it.

In his hands it "became a trumpet." Recognising the rhythmical beauty of the normal Italian type he adopted its rhyme-arrangement, discarding both the English sonnet and all bastard intermediates: but, either from imperfect acquaintance with or understanding of the Italian archetype (which seems improbable, considering the circumstances of his life and the breadth of his culture), or out of definite intention, he did not regard as essential or appropriate the break in the melody between octave and sestet. And here, according to Mr. Mark Pattison, he "missed the very end and aim of the Petrarcan scheme." He considered—so we may infer—that the English sonnet should be like a revolving sphere, every portion becoming continuously visible, with no break in the continuity of thought or expression anywhere apparent. Sir Henry Taylor described this characteristic well as the absence of point in the evolution of the idea. I need not quote one of these "soul-animating strains," as Wordsworth sympathetically styled Milton's sonnets, so familiar as they are to all lovers of English poetry: but I may point to an admirable sonnet in the Miltonic mould in this volume, which readers may examine with advantage —*viz.*, the impressive "Democracy Downtrodden" of Mr. William Michael Rossetti.

A second reference may here appropriately be made to Mr. Hall Caine's claim for the inherent independence of the English sonnet. This gentleman is so accomplished and generally so acute a critic that I differ from him only after the most careful consideration of his arguments. To the

independent existence of the English sonnet as such I am, of course, as will have been seen, no opponent: but there is a difference between a poetic form being national and its being indigenous. An English skate, for example, is at once recognisable from that of any other northern country, has, in a word, the seal of nationality impressed on its familiar aspect: but everyone knows that originally that delightful means towards "ice-flight" came to us from the Dutch, and was not the invention of our countrymen. So is it with the national sonnet. Wyat and Surrey did not invent the English form of sonnet, they introduced it from Italy; Spenser played with and altered it; Shakespeare as it were translated it into our literature; Drummond—half-Italian, half-English, regarded critically—used it variously; the Elizabethan sonneteers piped through it their real or imaginary amatory woes; and at last came Milton, and made it shine newly, as if he had cut his diamond in such a way that only one luminous light were visible to us. The Shakespearian or English sonnet is no bastard form, nor is the Miltonic; each is derivative, one more so than the other to all appearance,—and the only bastard forms are those which do not belong to the pure types—those sonnets, for instance, which have the octave regular and a sestet consisting of a quatrain and a couplet, or those which, like the *Love-Sonnets of Proteus*, are irregular throughout. Mr. Hall Caine was desirous to remove the charge of illegitimacy against the English sonnet: where I differ from him is only that I can see no real basis for bringing up the charge against the pure types at all.

What is known as the Contemporary, and sometimes as the Natural sonnet, was first formulated by Mr. Theodore Watts. With the keen insight that characterises the critical work of this writer, and that no less gives point to his imaginative faculty, he recognised not only the absolute metrical beauty of the Petrarcan type, but also that it was based on a deep melodic law, the law which may be observed in the flow and ebb of a wave; and, indeed, the sonnet in question was composed at a little seaside village in Kent, while the writer and a friend were basking on the shore. It was Mr. Watts who first explained the reason why the separate and complete solidarity of the octave was so essential to perfect harmony, finding in this metrical arrangement nothing less than the action of the same law that is manifested in the inflowing wave solidly gathering into curving volume, culminating in one great pause, and then sweeping out again from the shore. This is not only a fine conception, but it was accepted at once by Rossetti, Mr. J. A. Symonds, Mr. Mark Pattison, Mr. Caine, Karl Lentzner (in his treatise on the sonnet before mentioned), and by others who have given special attention to the sonnet. "The striking metaphorical symbol," says Mr. J. A. Symonds, "drawn by Mr. Theodore Watts from the observation of the swelling and declining wave can even, in some examples, be applied to sonnets on the Shakespearian model; for, as a wave may fall gradually or abruptly, so the sonnet may sink with stately volume or with precipitate subsidence to its close." In France the revival of the sonnet has been only

less marked than in England, and among French poets it is also now recognised as indubitable that the octave must be in the normal mould, and that the sestet should have no more doubtful variation than a commencing couplet. Mr. Theodore Watts' theory naturally excited much comment: and his sonnet on the Sonnet, wherein that theory was first formulated, may be appropriately quoted here.

THE SONNET'S VOICE.

(*A metrical lesson by the seashore.*)

Yon silvery billows breaking on the beach
  Fall back in foam beneath the star-shine clear,
  The while my rhymes are murmuring in your ear
A restless lore like that the billows teach;
For on these sonnet-waves my soul would reach
  From its own depths, and rest within you, dear,
  As, through the billowy voices yearning here
Great nature strives to find a human speech.

A sonnet is a wave of melody:
  From heaving waters of the impassioned soul
  A billow of tidal music one and whole
Flows in the "octave;" then returning free,
  Its ebbing surges in the "sestet" roll
Back to the deeps of Life's tumultuous sea.

At the same time Mr. Watts is no mere formalist, and he has himself expressed his conviction both in *The Athenæum* and in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, that the same form is not always the best for every subject. I, for my part, think that, broadly speaking, the Contemporary Sonnet, as formulated by Mr. Watts, may be regarded in a dual light.

When it is a love-sonnet, or the emotion is tender rather than forceful, the music sweet rather than dignified, it will be found to correspond to the law of *flow* and *ebb*—*i.e.*, of the inflowing solid wave (the octave), the pause, and then the broken resilient wash of the wave (the sestet) : when, on the other hand, it is intellectually or passionately forceful rather than tender or pathetic, dignified and with impressive amplitude of imagery rather than strictly beautiful, then it will correspond to the law of *ebb* and *flow*—*i.e.*, of the steady resilient wave-wash till the culminating moment when the billow has curved and is about to pour shoreward again (the octave), and of the solid inflowing wave, sweeping strongly forward (the sestet)—in Keats's words

Swelling loudly
Up to its climax, and then dying proudly.

Examples of either will be found among the sonnets in this volume, *e.g.*, "The Dream" (p. 247) of *flow* and *ebb*, "Natura Benigna" (p. 245) of *ebb* and *flow*.

It is thus evident that the contemporary type is no variation from the Petrarcan, but is simply an artistically understood development thereof.

Readers will already have gathered that there can thus only be three genuine sonnet-types.

THE PETRARCAN OR NATURAL SONNET (comprehending the *Contemporary*).

THE ENGLISH OR SHAKESPEARIAN SONNET.

THE MILTONIC SONNET (any Sonnet, whether in the Petrarcan or Shakespearian mould, with unbroken continuity, metrically and otherwise, in its presentation).

In the wide scope thus afforded no poet can with justice complain of too rigid limitations: such objection-making must simply be an exemplification of the well-known saying as to the workman and his tools. To these moreover may be addressed Capel Lofft's words (who, however, adapted them from Menzini)—"No Procrustes has obliged you to be lopped to the measure of this bed: Parnassus will not be in ruins even if you should not publish a sonnet."

I will not here attempt any adequate survey of the history of the sonnet in England from Milton to the present day. A cursory glance must be sufficient.

With Milton the Italian influence in our literature waned, and that of France (inaugurated by Dryden) took its place. A corresponding change in the poetic temperament rapidly took place.

After Milton the sonnet almost languished out of existence in this country. Many years after the great Puritan poet was laid in his grave Gray wrote an often-praised (but to me, I must confess, a very indifferent) sonnet on the death of "Mr. Richard West," and Mason and Warton several of fair quality. Cowper, who died as may be remembered in the last year of the eighteenth century, wrote one fine poem of this class to Mary Unwin. Gradually the sonnet began to awake from its poetic hibernation, and though one or two women writers not altogether unworthily handled it, and though William Roscoe and Egerton Brydges even used it with moderate success, the first real breath of spring came in the mild advent of William Lisle

Bowles. His sonnets move us now hardly at all, but when we remember the season of their production we may well regard them with more kindly liberality. Bowles was born just eight years before William Wordsworth, to whom, more than anyone else, is due the great revival and increasing study and appreciation of the sonnet. Coleridge wrote no fine sonnets, though he just missed writing one of supreme excellence (*vide Notes*). Blanco White concentrated all his poetic powers in one great effort, and wrote a sonnet which will live as long as the language, as in French literature Félix Arvers will be remembered always for his unique example, that beautiful sonnet commencing "*Mon âme a son secret, ma vie a son mystère.*" Leigh Hunt, true poet in his degree as he was, did truer service by his admirable efforts in critical literature towards the popularisation of the sonnet; and after him (by "after" reference is made to birth-sequence) came a constantly increasing number, the chief of whom will be found represented in this volume—among the most important being Sir Aubrey de Vere, little known, but a true poet and a fine sonneteer, Byron (who wrote some half-dozen compositions of this class, and wrote them well too, notwithstanding his real or pretended dislike of the form), Barry Cornwall, Shelley (whose "Ozymandias" is a fine poem but not a fine sonnet), and Keats. Though Keats has never been and probably never will be a really popular poet, his influence on other poets and on poetic temperaments generally has been quite incalculable. Some of his sonnets are remarkable for their power and

beauty, while others are indifferent and a few are poor. With all his love for the beauty of isolated poetic lines—music condensed into an epigram more concise than the Greeks ever uttered—as, for example, his own splendid verse,

There is a budding morrow in mid-night—

and with all that sense of verbal melody which he manifested so remarkably in his odes, it is strange that in his sonnets he should so often be at fault in true harmony. Even the beautiful examples which are included in this anthology afford instances of this; as in "Ailsa Rock," where the penultimate word of the ninth line and the penultimate word of the tenth (not forming part of the rhyme-sound, the two terminals indeed being antagonistic) are identical: as in the "Elgin Marbles," where "*weak*" midway in the first line has an unpleasing assonantal relation with "*sleep*," the terminal of the second line: as in "To Homer," where after the beautiful eleventh line already quoted, ending in "*mid-night*," there succeeds "sight" midway in the twelfth. These are genuine discords, and those who are unable to perceive them simply prove their deficiency in ear. Born a year later than Keats, Hartley Coleridge, the poetic son of a greater father, finely fulfilled the impulse that had come to him from Wordsworth, making an abiding name for himself through his sonnet-work alone. His "Birth of Speech"—as I have styled one of his best-known but unnamed sonnets—is a fine example of a sonnet in the Miltonic

mould. Thomas Hood, that true poet—so little understood by the public generally—not only wrote some fine sonnets, but wrote two of special excellence, one of them ("Silence") taking place in the very front rank. Ten years younger than Hood was Charles Tennyson-Turner. Charming, even permanently beautiful as many of his sonnet-stanzas are, their form cannot be admired: if we have been correct in considering the so-called pure types to be the true expression of certain metrical laws, then certainly these compositions of his are not sonnets, but only (to repeat Mr. Ashcroft Noble's appropriate term for similar productions) sonnet-stanzas. The rhythm is much broken up, and the charm of assured expectancy is destroyed. But a greater poet than Tennyson-Turner, true singer as the latter was, came into the world about the same time. No more impassioned soul ever found expression in rhythmical speech than Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and there is nothing in her poetry which is finer than that famous love-record, the so-called "Sonnets from the Portuguese." Impetuous as was her genius, hasty and frequently careless as she was in production, she never found the archetypal sonnet too circumscribed for her. The pathetic beauty, the fascinating personality, the pure poetry displayed in these sonnets, have touched many and many a heart since the tired singer was laid to rest under the cypresses not far from that beloved river whose flow she had so often followed in thought down to the far-off Pisan sea. Only those who have thoroughly studied contemporary poetry, and not only the poetry which is

familiar to many but that also which is quite unknown, and by minor writers of no reputation or likelihood of reputation, can realise the potency of Mrs. Browning's influence, especially among women. Even to mention by name all those who have charmed, or interested, or transiently attracted us by their sonnets throughout the last fifty years, would take up much more space than I have to spare, nor can I even refer in detail to those who are no longer with us. One name, however, stands out from all others since Wordsworth and Mrs. Browning, like a pine-tree out of a number of graceful larches. Dante Gabriel Rossetti is not only one of the great poets of the century, but the one English poet whose sonnet-work can genuinely be weighed in the balance with that of Shakespeare and with that of Wordsworth. No influence is at present more marked than his: its stream is narrower than that of Tennyson and Browning, but the current is deep, and its fertilising waters have penetrated far and wide into the soil. The author of *The House of Life* thus holds a remarkable place in the literary and artistic history of the second Victorian epoch. No critic of this poet's work will have any true grasp of it who does not recognise that "Rossetti" signifies something of greater import than the beautiful productions of one man—the historian of the brilliant period in question will work in the dark if he is unable to perceive one of the chief well-springs of the flood, if he should fail to recognise the relationship between certain radical characteristics of the time and the man who did so much to inaugurate or embody them,

Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Mrs. Browning, Rossetti. Italy herself cannot present a finer body of pure poetry in the mould of this form than is to be found in the collective sonnets of these great English writers. As to the vexed question of priority among these sonneteers, I need not attempt to gauge the drift of capable opinion. For myself—and this I set forward the less reluctantly as I know the opinion is shared by so many better judges than I claim to be—I would simply say (1) that the three greatest sonneteers of our language seem to me to be Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Rossetti; (2) that the two greatest, regarding their work *en masse* and not by this or that sonnet, or this or that group of sonnets, seem to me to be Shakespeare and Rossetti; and (3) that no poet of our own or any language could show ten sonnets equal in breadth of thought, verity of poetry, and beauty of expression to the ten greatest of Wordsworth. In "fundamental brain-work," to use Rossetti's phrase, or in the composition of "Deep-brained sonnettes," to quote Shakespeare's, these two poets stand above Wordsworth; but in impersonal humanity Shakespeare rarely, Rossetti a little less rarely, approach the highest reach of one who in general is their poetic inferior. For what great poet at his poorest is so poor as Wordsworth: in what other great poetic nature has there ever been so abundant a leaven of the prosaic? One of the chief poets in our country, his garden has more desert-spaces in it than any other, and the supreme beauties are almost lost to all who have no guide to the labyrinth. But these

super-excellent treasures, when once found, how we are carried away by their exquisite perfume, their extreme beauty: we forget the sand and the many weeds, and for a time believe that in no other of the many gardens of verse blooms there such loveliness, breathes there such fragrance. But in one thing Rossetti is greater than Wordsworth, greater even than Shakespeare, and that is in weight and volume of sound. As a wind-swayed pine seems literally to shake off music from its quivering branches, so do his sonnets throb with and disperse deep-sounding harmonies. What sonority of pure poetic speech there is in this from "The Dark Glass":—

Not I myself know all my love for thee:
How should I reach so far, who cannot weigh
To-morrow's dower by gage of yesterday?
Shall birth and death and all dark names that be
As doors and windows bared to some loud sea,
Lash deaf mine ears and blind my face with spray;
And shall my sense pierce love,—the last relay
And ultimate outpost of eternity?

or in this from "Lovesight":—

O love, my love! If I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring,—
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope
The ground-whirl of the perished leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?

How transcendently Shakespearian this beautiful opening of the sestet of the sonnet on page 189:—

> The sunrise blooms and withers on the hill
> Like any hillflower ; and the noblest troth
> Dies here to dust !

On the sonnet-work of living writers I need not dwell, especially as a short note accompanies the name of each author as sequently referred to in the Appendix: but I may here add a few general remarks thereupon as represented in this collection. When I first thought of making this anthology, it was my intention to strictly exclude any sonnet not belonging to one of the pure types, Petrarcan, Shakespearian, or Miltonic (the regular and not the illegitimate Miltonic, of course), but ere long I discovered that this aim, admirable in a collection covering the whole reach of our sonnet literature, would not at all adequately represent all that is worthy in that portion of contemporary or nineteenth century poetry which is cast in the fourteen-line mould. So I came to the conclusion that it would be as well, not only for the reason just stated, but also in order that each reader might be placed in a position to form individual judgment, to include a large number of irregular sonnets: and that I have been catholic enough in selection I do not think even the most ardent controversialist opponent would deny! Moreover, it seems to me that after careful comparison, allowing the brain and the ear to act conjointly, the conclusion will be come to even from this limited anthology that the pure moulds are the best, and that the so-called arbitrary restrictions of this poetic vehicle should be strictly preserved.

My second principle in selection was—Individuality, with distinct poetic value: and in accordance with this I endeavoured to choose. For the selection of nine-tenths of the sonnets I am alone responsible, but in a few instances I have yielded to the special request of a contributor and substituted some other for the one already chosen, or have inserted a sonnet which I could not honestly endorse as specially excellent. Instances of the latter are so extremely rare, however, that the matter need scarcely have been mentioned.

My third principle was—Adequacy of sonnet-motive. As out of every five hundred sonnets there are at most one hundred genuinely in conformity therewith, it may be imagined that I do not claim that each of the two hundred and seventy following examples has this characteristic—but I certainly think that the majority have.

Surely it is not extravagant to entertain the hope that this collection will enlighten many as to the great beauty of the sonnet as a poetical vehicle—that it will make manifest how well it is fitted for the enshrinement of the noblest as well as the most passionate or tender emotion—that it will prove how large a quantity of the finest poetic work of this century is therein embodied—and that it will serve to convince the reader of the great future the sonnet still has before it?

For a poem does not require to be an epic to be great, any more than a man need be a giant to be noble. When a fine thing is adequately and completely stated, it does not gain by being embedded in an environment too great for it, like an amethyst

in a great boulder of quartz. In the words of an early sonnet commentator—"like the small statue by the chisel of Lysippus, they demonstrate that the *idea of greatness* may be excited independently of the magnitude of size." Look at the majesty of this imagery—

> "Even as, heavy-curled,
> Stooping against the wind, a charioteer
> Is snatched from out his chariot by the hair,
> So shall Time be; and as the void car, hurled
> Abroad by reinless steeds, even so the world:
> Yea, even as chariot-dust upon the air,
> It shall be sought and not found anywhere:"
>
> (p. 193.)

or at the amplitude of that magnificent sonnet, 'The Sun-God' (p. 55): or at the spaciousness of that entitled 'The Sublime' (p. 22).

Only those who have undertaken some task similar to this which I have accomplished know the great labour that is involved. Hundreds of sonnets have to be read and judged ere a good selection be made, and then this selection has to be sifted, and sonnet weighed against sonnet, and a score of contrarieties to be considered ere the final choice be made. Then the correspondence, and illustrative notes, and variorum readings, and other matters conspire to make the editorial task an eminently unenviable one for the time being. It is, therefore, with genuine gratitude that I acknowledge in this place my indebtedness to all the living writers who are here represented, for their uniform courtesy in leaving me freedom to make my own selection, and

for various other methods of welcome assistance. If there are any who have not had direct communication with me, I trust they will attribute my negligence not to any indifference or discourtesy, but either to ignorance of the omission, or to some special urgency.

As to the arrangement of the sonnets: it will be seen at a glance that they are placed according to the alphabetical sequence of authors' names—because I found that a greater variety and freshness could so be given to the collection than by any other means.

When it is fully realised that a sonnet must be the complete development of a single motive, and that it must at once be reticent and ample, it will be understood how true is that line of Boileau which is quoted on the title-page. Sonnets are like waves of the sea, each on a small scale that which the ocean is on a large. "A sonnet is a moment's monument," wrote Rossetti, in one of his own compositions—not improbably unconsciously reproducing that line of de Musset, in his *Impromptu en réponse à cette question: Qu'est-ce que la poésie?*—'Eterniser peut-être un rêve d'un instant.' And it is to indulge in no mere metaphysical subtlety to say that life can be as ample in one divine moment as in an hour, or a day, or a year. And there is a wide world of sensation open to the sonneteer if he will but exercise not only a wise reticence, but also vivid perception and acute judgment. As the writer in *The Quarterly Review* has well said, "the sonnet might almost be called the alphabet of the human heart, since

almost every kind of emotion has been expressed, or attempted to be expressed in it." And in this, more than in any other poetic form, it is well for the would-be composer to study, not only every line and every word, but every vowel and every part of each word, endeavouring to obtain the most fit phrase, the most beautiful and original turn to the expression—to be, like Keats, "misers of sound and syllable." And in no form is revision more advisable: in none is it less likely to be harmful, for pre-eminently a sonnet is a form embodying emotion remembered in tranquillity, as Wordsworth defined poetry generally. We know that Petrarca has himself recorded how he passed the file athwart his handiwork over and over again, and but rarely, even then, saw the gem leave his cabinet without reluctance—how he wrote not hurriedly, and issued with still greater circumspection, letting each sonnet, as Leigh Hunt expresses it, lie polishing in his mind for months together, like a pebble on the sea-shore. And not less enamoured of perfection for perfection's sake was the greatest sonneteer of our own time, every one of whose sonnets was passed again and again through the white-heat of imaginative and critical comparative study: in Rossetti's own words, the first and highest quality of finish in poetic execution, "is that where the work has been all mentally 'cartooned,' as it were, beforehand, by a process intensely conscious, but patient and silent—an occult evolution of life."

Some score or more of essential rules might well be formulated for the behoof, not only of those who

wish to write in the sonnet-form, but also of those who do not even yet fully realise how many things go to the making of a really good sonnet. These regulations, main and minor, are to be found fully set forth by Leigh Hunt and the late Mark Pattison, but a complete statement of points to be observed is here now unnecessary. It will suffice if I set forth the ten absolutely essential rules for a good sonnet.

I. The sonnet must consist of fourteen decasyllabic lines.

II. Its octave, or major system, whether or not this be marked by a pause in the cadence after the eighth line, must (unless cast in the Shakespearian mould) follow a prescribed arrangement in the rhyme-sounds—namely, the first, fourth, fifth, and eighth lines must rhyme on the same sound, and the second, third, sixth, and seventh on another.

III. Its sestet, or minor system, may be arranged with more freedom, but a rhymed couplet at the close is *only* allowable when the form is the English or Shakespearian.

IV. No terminal should also occur in any portion of any other line in the same system; and the rhyme-sounds (1) of the octave should be harmoniously at variance, and (2) the rhyme-sounds of the sestet should be entirely distinct in intonation from those of the octave. Thus (1) no octave should be based on a monotonous system of nominally distinct rhymes, such as *sea—futurity — eternity—be—flee—adversity—inevitably—free.*

V. It must have no slovenliness of diction, no weak or indeterminate terminations, no vagueness of conception, and no obscurity.

VI. It must be absolutely complete in itself—*i.e.*, it must be the evolution of *one* thought, or *one* emotion, or *one* poetically-apprehended fact.

VII. It should have the characteristic of apparent inevitableness, and in expression be ample, yet reticent. It must not be forgotten that dignity and repose are essential qualities of a true sonnet.

VIII. The continuity of the thought, idea, or emotion must be unbroken throughout.

IX. Continuous sonority must be maintained from the first phrase to the last.

X. The end must be more impressive than the commencement—the close must not be inferior to, but must rather transcend what has gone before.

If these rules are adequately fulfilled, there will be every chance of the sonnet proving a super-excellent one. But there must be no mere music, no mere sonority, no fourteen-line descriptions of aspects of nature in the manner of Wordsworth in his Duddon-sonnets, for example. Beneath the intermingling lights of apt simile and imaginative metaphor, beneath the melody of vowels and words melting into the melody of the line, and the harmony of the due proportion of the lines themselves from first to last, there must lie, clear and undisturbed by its environment, the dominating motive —the idea, the thought, the emotion.

But after all these remarks upon technicalities—after all this talk about octaves and sestets, vowels and consonants, I must not let the reader suppose that such matters form anything more than the mere scaffolding of poetry. Whether in sonnet-

form or in any other guise, "poetry must always," as has been said by a writer often quoted in this essay, "reflect the life of Nature or the life of Man, else it is nothing worth."

I write these last words not far from the sombre shadow of Ben Ledi—the Hill of God, as the name signifies—sombre notwithstanding the white garment of snow in which it is enveloped. The stream flowing far beneath it is apparently one sheet of dark ice: not a familiar object is in view, and nothing is audible save the occasional snapping of a frost-bitten branch, or that strangest of all sounds, the north wind ruffling the snow-drifts on the upper hill-slopes; not a living thing is visible, though far up, on a vast expanse of unbroken white, a tiny blue-black shadow moves like a sweeping scimitar, and I know that an eagle is passing from peak to lonely peak.

Away—for a brief space—from the turmoil and many conflicting interests of the great city, "mother of joys and woes," I realise the more clearly how much more beautiful and reposeful and stimulative Nature is than any imitation of her, how much greater Life than its noblest artistic manifestation. I realise, also, how true it is that the sincerest poetic function—for sonneteer as for lyrist or epicist—is not the creation of what is strange or fanciful, but the imaginative interpretation of what is familiar, so that a thing is made new to us: in the words of an eminent critic, Mr. Leslie Stephen, "the highest triumph of style is to say what everybody has been thinking in such a way as to make it new."

Here, also, in this soothing solitude, this dignified, this majestic silence, this secret and "holy lair" of her who is, the poet tells us, *Natura Benigna* or *Natura Maligna* according to the eyes that gaze and the ears that hearken, it seems as if all that is morbid and unreal and merely fanciful were indeed petty enough, and that perfect sanity of mind is as essential to the creation of any great and lasting mental product as perfect robustness to the due performance of any prolonged and fatiguing physical endurance. In the words of Mr. Stephen, the highest poetry, like the noblest morality, is the product of a thoroughly healthy mind.

WILLIAM SHARP.

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