

Arthur Hallam

**"On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry,
and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson"**

[This review of Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, 1830, appeared unsigned in Moxon's *Englishman's Magazine* for August, 1831, pp. 616-628. It was reprinted in part in all editions of the *Remains*, and in full in LeGallienne's edition of 1893. Of it Hallam wrote Edward Spedding under postmark of July 28, 1831: "My general occupations have been of a more grave character; I have read a great deal of Justinian, who is infinitely more entertaining than Miss Edgeworth (*N.B.* I read them at the same time, so ought to know), and I have been writing a review of Alfred's poems in the forthcoming number of the *Englishman's Magazine*, an affair of my acquaintance Mr. Moxon, who I hope will succeed in it. . . . Perhaps my article will not be in time for the August number." (From a letter owned by Lady Charnwood and printed in her *An Autograph Collection and the Making of It*, New York [1930], pp. 177-179). Since the August issue was announced to appear August 1 (Cf. Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* for July 31, 1831, p. 494) not much time was allowed for typesetting. It is not surprising, therefore to read, in a letter from Hallam to Charles Merivale of August 14, 1831 that the August *Englishman's Magazine* contains "a sonnet of Tennyson's and a review of his book written by your humble servant, but so execrably printed that every line contains an error, and these not always palpable. But this is parenthetical – a little by-play of author-vanity." (*Autobiography of Dean Merivale*, London, 1899, pp. 119-121). A full discussion of the review appears in an unpublished letter from Hallam to Edward Spedding in the possession of the present editor. Writing on August 23, Hallam said: "I am glad you are pleased with my article. I would sooner have the approbation of one such man, as I take you to be, than of a whole generation of fools. . . . You treat what I have written better than it deserves: it was the hasty product of the evenings of one week: I had no time for revision, or that adding & subtracting work, by means of which Good Sense, 'θνητος περ έων,' follows up the άθανατοις ίπποιοι,' of Imagination. My article went up to its final audit with all its sins on its head, mortal as well as venial: 'unhoused and unanealed' the poor child of my brain was hurled into the eternity of Print, which alas! is too often one of damnation. . ."

The damnation followed 'tardily in Christopher North's "Tennyson's Poems" in *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* for May, 1832, pp. 721-741. Referring to the fact that Moxon's venture failed with the October, 1831, issue, the critic wrote: "The *Englishman's Magazine* ought not to have died; for it threatened to be a very pleasant periodical. An Essay 'on the genius of Alfred Tennyson,' sent it to the grave. The superhuman-nay, supernatural-pomposity of that one paper, incapacitated the whole work for living one day longer in this unceremonious world. The solemnity with which the critic approached the object of his adoration, and the sanctity with which he laid his offerings on the shrine, were too much for our irreligious age. The Essay 'on the genius of Alfred Tennyson' awoke a general guffaw, and it expired in convulsions. Yet the Essay was exceedingly well written—as well as if it had been 'on the genius of Sir Isaac Newton.' Therein lay the mistake. Sir Isaac discovered the law of gravitation; Alfred had but written some pretty verses, and mankind were not prepared to set him among the stars. But that he has genius is proved by his being at this moment alive; for had he not, he must have breathed his last under that critique."

The opening paragraphs of the review allude to two exceedingly popular works by a young man named Robert Montgomery, whose deficiencies in breeding and education

no less than his lack of poetical power inevitably attracted the furious scorn of all critics of the ruling caste. *Oxford*, which went through at least three editions soon after its publication in 1831, flowered into several additional editions early in that same year with illustrations by one T. Skelton "and other Artists." That Hallam soon realized the unfortunateness of his participation in the general hue and cry after Montgomery is clear when he wrote Spedding (in the letter of August 23): "in parts I endeavored, [sic] as you observe, to put myself in a Magazine humour, and the result was trash that you are very properly ashamed of, and so am I." The references to Montgomery were among the parts eliminated in 1834 by Henry Hallam. (Lounsbury deals illuminatingly with Montgomery in *The Life and Times of Tennyson*, pp. 181-203.)

The text of the review here given is that of its first publication, with corrections as noted.]

So Mr. Montgomery's *Oxford*, by the help of some pretty illustrations, has contrived to prolong its miserable existence to a second edition! But this is slow work, compared to that triumphant progress of the *Omnipresence*, which, we concede to the author's friends, was "truly astonishing." We understand, moreover, that a new light has broken
5 upon this "desolator desolate;" and since the "columns" have begun to follow the example of "men and gods," by whom our poetaster has long been condemned, "it is the fate of genius," he begins to discover, "to be unpopular."

Now, strongly as we protest against Mr. Montgomery's application of this maxim to his own case, we are much disposed to agree with him as to its abstract correctness. Indeed,
10 the truth which it involves seems to afford the only solution of so curious a phenomenon as the success, partial and transient though it be, of himself, and others of his calibre. When Mr. Wordsworth, In his celebrated Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, asserted that immediate or rapid popularity was not the test of poetry, great was the consternation and clamour among those farmers of public favour, the established
15 critics. Never had so audacious an attack been made upon their undoubted privileges and hereditary charter of oppression.

"What! *The Edinburgh Review* not infallible!" shrieked the amiable petulance of Mr. Jeffrey.

"*The Gentleman's Magazine* incapable of decision!" faltered the feeble garrulity of
20 Silvanus Urban.

And straightway the whole sciolist herd, men of rank, men of letters, men of wealth, men of business, all the "mob of gentlemen who think with ease," and a terrible number of old ladies and boarding-school misses began to scream in chorus, and prolonged the notes of execration with which they overwhelmed the new doctrine, until their wits and
25 their voices fairly gave in from exhaustion. Much, no doubt, they did, for much persons will do when they fight for their dear selves: but there was one thing they could not do, and unfortunately it was the only one of any importance. They could not put down Mr. Wordsworth by clamour, or prevent his doctrine, once uttered, and enforced by his example, from awakening the minds of men, and giving a fresh impulse to art. It was the
30 truth, and it prevailed; not only against the exasperation of that hydra, the Reading Public, whose vanity was hurt, and the blustering of its keepers, whose delusion was exposed, but even against the false glosses and narrow apprehensions of the Wordsworthians themselves. It is the madness of all who loosen some great principle, long buried under a snow-heap of custom and superstition, to imagine that they can

35 restrain its operation, or circumscribe it by their purposes. But the right of private judgment was stronger than the will of Luther; and even the genius of Wordsworth cannot expand itself to the full periphery of poetic art.

It is not true, as his exclusive admirers would have it, that the highest species of poetry is the reflective; it is a gross fallacy, that because certain opinions are acute or profound, 40 the expression of them by the imagination must be eminently beautiful. Whenever the mind of the artist suffers itself to be occupied, during its periods of creation, by any other predominant motive than the desire of beauty, the result is false in art.

Now there is undoubtedly no reason why he may not find beauty in those moods of emotion, which arise from the combinations of reflective thought; and it is possible that 45 he may delineate these with fidelity, and not be led astray by any suggestions of an unpoetical mood. But though possible, it is hardly probable; for a man whose reveries take a reasoning turn and who is accustomed to measure his ideas by their logical relations rather than the congruity of the sentiments to which they refer, will be apt to mistake the pleasure he has in knowing a thing to be true, for the pleasure he would 50 have in knowing it to be beautiful, and so will pile his thoughts in a rhetorical battery, that they may convince, instead of letting them flow in a natural course of contemplation, that they may enrapture.

It would not be difficult to shew, by reference to the most admired poems of Wordsworth, that he is frequently chargeable with this error; and that much has been 55 said by him which is good as philosophy, powerful as rhetoric, but false as poetry. Perhaps this very distortion of the truth did more in the juncture of our literary affairs to enlarge and liberalize the genius of our age, than could have been effected by a less sectarian temper.

However this may be, a new school of reformers soon began to attract attention, who, 60 professing the same independence of immediate favor, took their stand on a different region of Parnassus from that occupied by the Lakers,¹ and one, in our opinion, much less liable to perturbing currents of air from ungenial climates. We shall not hesitate to express our conviction, that the cockney school (as it was termed in derision from a cursory view of its accidental circumstances) contained more genuine inspiration, and 65 adhered more steadily² to that portion of truth which it embraced, than any *form* of art that has existed in this country since the days of Milton. Their *caposetta* was Mr. Leigh Hunt, who did little more than point the way, and was diverted from his aim by a thousand personal predilections and political habits of thought.

But he was followed by two men of very superior make; men who were horn poets, 70 lived poets, and went poets to their untimely graves. Shelley and Keats were indeed of opposite genius; that of the one was vast, impetuous, and sublime, the other seemed to be "fed with honeydew," and to have "drunk the milk of Paradise," Even the softness of Shelley comes out in bold, rapid, comprehensive strokes; he has no patience for minute beauties, unless they can be massed into a general effect of grandeur. On the other 75 hand, the tenderness of Keats cannot sustain a lofty flight; he does not generalize or

¹ This cant term was justly ridiculed by Mr. Wordsworth's supporters; but it was not so easy to substitute an inoffensive denomination. We are not at all events the first who have used it without a contemptuous intention, for we remember to have heard a disciple quote Aristophanes in its behalf:—'Ουτος ου τών ήθαδων τώνδ' ών δζάθ' ύμεις άεί, άλλά ΛΙΜΝΑΙΟΣ. "This is no common, no barn-door fowl: No, but a *Lakist*." [H.]

² 1831 and 1893 have 'speedily.' But the obvious misprint was corrected in 1834 and all subsequent editions to 1893.

allegorize Nature; his imagination works with few symbols. and reposes willingly on what is given freely.

Yet in this formal opposition of character there is, it seems to us, a groundwork of similarity sufficient for the purposes of classification, and constituting a remarkable
80 point in the progress of literature. They are both poets of sensation rather than reflection. Susceptible of the slightest impulse from external nature, their fine organs trembled into emotion at colors, and sounds, and movements, unperceived or unregarded by duller temperaments. Rich and clear were their perceptions of visible forms; full and deep their feelings of music. So vivid was the delight attending the
85 simple exertions of eye and ear, that it became mingled more and more with their trains of active thought, and tended to absorb their whole being into the energy of sense. Other poets *seek* for images to illustrate their conceptions; these men had no need to seek; they lived in a world of images; for the most important and extensive portion of their life consisted in those emotions which are immediately conversant with the
90 sensation. Like the hero of Goethe's novel, they would hardly have been affected by what is called the pathetic parts of a book; but the *merely beautiful* passages, "those from which the spirit of the author looks clearly and mildly forth," would have melted them to tears. Hence they are not descriptive, they are picturesque. They are not smooth and *negatively* harmonious; they are full of deep and varied melodies.

95 This powerful tendency of imagination to a life of immediate sympathy with the external universe, is not nearly so liable to false views of art as the opposite disposition of purely intellectual contemplation. For where beauty is constantly passing before "that inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude;" where the soul seeks it as a perpetual and necessary refreshment to the sources of activity and intuition; where all the other sacred
100 ideas of our nature, the idea of good, the idea of perfection, the idea of truth, are habitually contemplated through the medium of this predominant mood, so that they assume its colour, and are subject to its peculiar laws, there is little danger that the ruling passion of the whole mind will cease to direct its creative operations, or the energetic principle of love for the beautiful sink, even for a brief period, to the level of a
105 mere notion in the understanding.

We do not deny that it is, on other accounts, dangerous for frail humanity to linger with fond attachment in the vicinity of sense. Minds of this description are especially liable to moral temptations; and upon them, more than any, it is incumbent to remember, that their mission as men, which they share with their fellow-beings, is of
110 infinitely higher interest than their mission as artists, which they possess by rare and exclusive privilege. But it is obvious that, critically speaking, such temptations are of slight moment. Not the gross and evident passions of our nature, but the elevated and less separable desires, are the dangerous enemies which misguide the poetic spirit in its attempts at self-cultivation. That delicate sense of fitness which grows with the growth of
115 artist feelings, and strengthens with their strength, until it acquires a celerity and weight of decision hardly inferior to the correspondent judgments of conscience, is weakened by every indulgence of heterogeneous aspirations, however pure they may be, however lofty, however suitable to human nature.

We are therefore decidedly of opinion that the heights and depths of art are most
120 within the reach of those who have received from nature the "fearful and wonderful" constitution we have described, whose poetry is a sort of magic, producing a number of impressions, too multiplied, too minute, and too diversified to allow of our tracing them to their causes, because just such was the effect, even so boundless and so bewildering, produced on their imaginations by the real appearance of Nature.

125 These things being so, our friends of the new school had evidently much reason to
recur to the maxim laid down by Mr. Wordsworth, and to appeal from the immediate
judgment of lettered or unlettered contemporaries to the decision of a more equitable
posterity. How should they be popular; whose senses told them a richer and ampler tale
130 than most men could understand, and who constantly expressed, because they
constantly felt, sentiments of exquisite pleasure or pain, which most men were not
permitted to experience? The public very naturally derided them as visionaries and
gibbeted *in terrorem* those inaccuracies of diction occasioned sometimes by the speed
of their conceptions, sometimes by the inadequacy of language to their peculiar
conditions of thought.

135 But it may be asked, does not this line of argument prove too much? Does it not prove
that there is a barrier between these poets and all other persons so strong and
immovable, that, as has been said of the Supreme Essence, we must be ourselves
before we can understand them in the least? Not only are they not liable to sudden
and vulgar estimation, but the lapse of ages, it seems, will not consolidate their fame,
140 nor the suffrages of the wise few produce any impression, however remote or slow
matured, on the judgment of the incapacitated many.

We answer, this is not the import of our argument. Undoubtedly the true poet
addresses himself, in all his conceptions, to the common nature of us all. Art is a lofty
tree, and may shoot up far beyond our grasp, but its roots are in daily life and
145 experience. Every bosom contains the elements of those complex emotions which the
artist feels, and every head can, to a certain extent, go over in itself the process of their
combination, so as to understand his expressions and sympathize with his state. But this
requires exertion; more or less, indeed, according to the difference of occasion, but
always some degree of exertion. For since the emotions of the poet, during
150 composition, follow a regular law of association, it follows that to accompany their
progress up to the harmonious prospect of the whole, and to perceive the proper
dependence of every step on that which preceded, it is absolutely necessary *to start from
the same point*, i.e. clearly to apprehend that leading sentiment of the poet's mind, by
their conformity to which the host of suggestions are arranged.

155 Now this requisite exertion is not willingly made by the large majority of readers. It is
so easy to judge capriciously, and according to indolent impulse! For very many,
therefore, it has become *morally* impossible to attain the author's point of vision, on
account of their habits, or their prejudices, or their circumstances; but it is never
physically impossible, because nature has placed in every man the simple elements, of
160 which art is the sublimation. Since then this demand on the reader for activity, when he
wants to peruse his author in a luxurious passiveness, is the very thing that moves his
bile, it is obvious that those writers will be always most popular who require the least
degree of exertion. Hence, whatever is mixed up with art, and appears under its
semblance, is always more favorably regarded than art free and unalloyed. Hence, half
165 the fashionable poems in the world are mere rhetoric, and half the remainder are,
perhaps, not liked by the generality for their substantial merits. Hence, likewise, of the
really pure compositions, those are most universally agreeable which take for their
primary subject the *usual* passions of the heart, and deal with them in a simple state,
without applying the transforming powers of high imagination. Love, friendship,
170 ambition, religion, &c., are matters of daily experience even amongst unimaginative
tempers. The forces of association, therefore, are ready to work in these directions, and
little effort of will is necessary to follow the artist.

175 For the same reason, such subjects often excite a partial power of composition, which is no sign of a truly poetic organization. We are very far from wishing to depreciate this class of poems, whose influence is so extensive, and communicates so refined a pleasure. We contend only that the facility with which its impressions are communicated is no proof of its elevation as a form of art, but rather the contrary.

180 What, then, some may be ready to exclaim, is the pleasure derived by most men, from Shakespeare, or Dante, or Homer, entirely false and factitious? If these are really masters of their art, must not the energy required of the ordinary intelligences that come in contact with their mighty genius, be the greatest possible? How comes it then, that they are popular? Shall we not say, after all, that the difference is in the power of the author, not in the tenor of his meditations? Those eminent spirits find no difficulty in conveying to common apprehensions their lofty sense and profound observation of Nature. They keep no aristocratic state, apart from the sentiments of society at large; they speak to the hearts of all, and by the magnetic force of their conceptions, elevate inferior intellects into a higher and purer atmosphere.

190 The truth contained in this observation is undoubtedly important; geniuses of the most universal order, and assigned by destiny to the most propitious era of a nation's literary development, have a clearer and a larger access to the minds of their compatriots than can ever open to those who are circumscribed by less fortunate circumstances. In the youthful periods of any literature there is an expansive and communicative tendency in mind which produces unreservedness of communion, and reciprocity of vigor between different orders of intelligence.

195 Without abandoning the ground which has always been defended by the partisans of Mr. Wordsworth, who declare with perfect truth, that the number of real admirers of what is really admirable in Shakespeare and Milton is much fewer than the number of apparent admirers might lead one to imagine, we may safely assert that the intense thoughts set in circulation by those "orbs of song" and their noble satellites "in great Eliza's golden time," did not fail to awaken a proportionable intensity of the nature of numberless auditors. Some might feel feebly, some strongly; the effect would vary according to the character of the recipient; but upon none was the stirring influence entirely unimpressive. The knowledge and power thus imbibed became a part of national existence; it was ours as Englishmen; and amid the flux of generations and customs we retain unimpaired this privilege of intercourse with greatness.

200 But the age in which we live comes late in our national progress. That first raciness and juvenile vigor of literature, when nature "wanton'd as in her prime, and played at will her virgin fancies" is gone, never to return. Since that day we have undergone a period of degradation. "Every handicraftsman has worn the mask³ of Poesy." It would be tedious to repeat the tale so often related of the French contagion and the heresies of the Popian school.

210 With the close of the last century came an era of reaction, an era of painful struggle to bring our over-civilised condition of thought into union with the fresh productive spirit that brightened the morning of our literature. But repentance is unlike innocence; the laborious endeavor to restore has more complicated methods of action than the freedom of untainted nature. Those different powers of poetic disposition, the energies of Sensitive⁴, of Reflective, of Passionate Emotion, which in former times were

³ 1831 has 'mark,' as does 1893. All other editions, from 1834 on, correct to 'mask.'

⁴ We are aware that this is not the right word, being appropriated by common use to a different signification. Those who think the caution given by Caesar should not stand in the way of urgent

intermingled, and derived from mutual support an extensive empire over the feelings of men, were now restrained within separate spheres of agency. The whole system no longer worked harmoniously, and by intrinsic harmony acquired external freedom; but there arose a violent and unusual action in the several component functions, each for itself, all striving to reproduce the regular power which the whole had once enjoyed.

Hence the melancholy which so evidently characterises the spirit of modern poetry; hence that return of the mind upon itself and the habit of seeking relief in idiosyncrasies rather than community of interest. In the old times the poetic impulse went along with the general impulse of the nation; in these it is a reaction against it, a check acting for conservation against a propulsion towards change.

We have indeed seen it urged in some of our fashionable publications, that the diffusion of poetry must be in the direct ratio of the diffusion of machinery, because a highly civilized people must have new objects of interest, and thus a new field will be open to description. But this notable argument forgets that against this *objective* amelioration may be set the decrease of *subjective* power, arising from a prevalence of social activity, and a continual absorption of the higher feelings into the palpable interests of ordinary life. The French Revolution may be a finer theme than the war of Troy; but it does not so evidently follow that Homer is to find his superior.

Our inference, therefore, from this change in the relative position of artists to the rest of the community is, that modern poetry in proportion to its depth and truth is likely to have little immediate authority over public opinion. Admirers it will have; sects consequently it will form; and these strong under currents will in time sensibly affect the principal stream. Those writers whose genius, though great, is not strictly and essentially poetic, become mediators between the votaries of art and the careless cravers for excitement.⁵ Art herself, less manifestly glorious than in her periods of undisputed supremacy, retains her essential prerogatives, and forgets not to raise up chosen spirits who may minister to her state and vindicate her title.

One of the faithful Islâm, a poet in the truest and highest sense, we are anxious to present to our readers. He has yet written little and published less; but in these "preludes of a loftier strain" we recognize the inspiring god. Mr. Tennyson belongs decidedly to the class we have already described as Poets of Sensation. He sees all the forms of nature with the "eruditus oculus," and his ear has a fairy fineness. There is a strange earnestness in his worship of beauty which throws a charm over his impassioned song, more easily felt than described, and not to be escaped by those who have once felt it. We think he has more definiteness and roundness⁶ of general conception than the late Mr. Keats, and is much more free from blemishes of diction and hasty capriccios of fancy. He has also this advantage over that poet and his friend Shelley. that he comes before the public unconnected with any political party or peculiar system of opinions. Nevertheless, true to the theory we have stated, we believe his participation in their characteristic excellences is sufficient to secure him a share of their unpopularity.

The volume of "Poems, chiefly Lyrical," does not contain above 154 pages; but it shews us much more of the character of its parent mind, than many books we have known of

occasion, may substitute "sensuous;" a word in use amongst our elder divines, and revived by a few bold writers in our own time. [H.]

⁵ May we not compare them to the bright but unsubstantial clouds which, in still evenings, girdle the sides of lofty mountains, and seem to form a natural connection between the lowly vallies spread out beneath, and those isolated peaks above that hold the "last parley with the setting sun?" [H.]

⁶ 1831 and 1893 have 'definiteness and soundness.' 1834 has 'definiteness and roundness.' 1853 and all following editions have 'definitiveness and roundness.'

260 much larger compass and more boastful pretensions. The features of original genius are clearly and strongly marked. The author imitates nobody; we recognise the spirit of his age, but not the individual form of this or that writer. His thoughts bear no more resemblance to Byron or Scott, Shelley or Coleridge, than to Homer or Calderon, Firdúsi or Calidasa.⁷

265 We have remarked five distinctive excellencies of his own manner. First, his luxuriance of imagination, and at the same time his control over it. Secondly his power of embodying himself in ideal characters, or rather moods of character, with such extreme accuracy of adjustment, that the circumstances of the narration seem to have a natural correspondence with the predominant feeling, and, as it were, to be evolved from it by
270 assimilative force. Thirdly his vivid, picturesque delineation of objects, and the peculiar skill with which he holds all of them *fused*, to borrow a metaphor from science, in a medium of strong emotion. Fourthly, the variety of his lyrical measures, and exquisite modulation of harmonious words and cadences to the swell and fall of the feelings expressed. Fifthly, the elevated habits of thought, implied in these compositions, and
275 imparting a mellow soberness of tone, more impressive, to our minds, than if the author had drawn up a set of opinions in verse, and sought to instruct the understanding rather than to communicate the love of beauty to the heart.

We shall proceed to give our readers some specimens in illustration of these remarks, and, if possible, we will give them entire; for no poet can be fairly judged of by
280 fragments, least of all, a poet like Mr. Tennyson, whose mind conceives nothing isolated, nothing abrupt, but every part with reference to some other part, and in subservience to the idea of the whole.

Recollections of the Arabian Nights! –What a delightful, endearing title! How we pity those to whom it calls up no reminiscence of early enjoyment, no sentiment of
285 kindness as towards one who sings a song they have loved, or mentions with affection a departed friend! But let nobody expect a multifarious enumeration of Viziers, Barmecides, Fireworshippers, and Cadis; trees that sing, horses that fly, and Goules that eat rice-pudding!

Our author knows what he is about; he has, with great judgment, selected our old
290 acquaintance, "the good Haroun Alraschid," as the most prominent object of our childish interest, and with him has called up one of those luxurious garden scenes, the account of which, in plain prose, used to make our mouth water for sherbet, since luckily we were too young to think much about Zobeide! We think this poem will be the favourite among Mr. Tennyson's admirers; perhaps upon the whole it is our own; at
295 least we find ourselves recurring to it oftener than to any other, and every time we read it, we feel the freshness of its beauty increase, and are inclined to exclaim with Madame de Sévigné, "*a force d'être ancien, il m'est nouveau.*" But let us draw the curtain

[The poem is reprinted here]

Criticism will sound but poorly after this; yet we cannot give silent votes. The first
300 stanza, we beg leave to observe, places us at once in the position of feeling, which the poem requires. The scene is before us, around us; we cannot see its localities, or blind ourselves to its colours. That happy ductility of childhood returns for the moment; "true Mussulmans are we, and sworn," and yet there is a latent knowledge, which heightens the pleasure, that to our change from really childish thought we owe the capacities by which we enjoy the recollection.

⁷ 1831 and 1893 have "Firdusi," "Calidas." 1834, "Ferdusi," 1853 and following, as here given.

305 As the poem proceeds, all is in perfect keeping. There is a solemn distinctness in every image, a majesty of slow motion in every cadence, that aids the illusion of thought, and steadies its contemplation of the complete picture. Originality of observation seems to cost nothing to our author's liberal genius; he lavishes images of exquisite accuracy and elaborate splendour, as a common writer throws about metaphorical truisms, and
 310 exhausted tropes. Amidst all the varied luxuriance of the sensations described, we are never permitted to lose sight of the idea which gives unity to this variety, and by the recurrence of which, as a sort of mysterious influence, at the close of every stanza, the mind is wrought up, with consummate art, to the final disclosure. This poem is a perfect gallery of pictures; and the concise boldness, with which in a few words an object
 315 is clearly painted, is sometimes (see the 6th stanza) majestic as Milton, sometimes (see the 12th) sublime as Aeschylus.

We have not, however, so far forgot our vocation as critics, that we would leave without notice the slight faults which adhere to this precious work. In the 8th stanza, we doubt the propriety of using the bold compound "black-green," at least in such close vicinity to
 320 "gold-green;" nor is it perfectly clear by the term, although indicated by the context, that "diamond plots" relates to shape rather than colour. We are perhaps very stupid, but "vivid stars unrayed" does not convey to us a very precise notion. "Rosaries of scented thorn," in the 10th stanza is, we believe, an entirely unauthorized use of the word. Would our author translate "*biferique rosaria Paesti*"—And *rosaries* of Paestum,
 325 twice in bloom?"

To the beautiful 13th stanza we are sorry to find any objection; but even the bewitching loveliness of that "Persian girl" shall not prevent our performing the rigid duty we have undertaken, and we must hint to Mr. Tennyson that "redolent" is no synonyme for "fragrant." Bees may be redolent of honey; spring may be "redolent of
 330 youth and love;" but the absolute use of the word has, we fear, neither in Latin nor English any better authority than the monastic epitaph on Fair Rosamond: "*Hic iacet in tombâ Rosa Mundi, non Rosa Munda, non redolet, sed olet quae redolere solet.*"

We are disposed to agree with Mr. Coleridge when he says "no adequate compensation can be made for the mischief a writer does by confounding the distinct senses of words."
 335 At the same time our feelings in this instance rebel strongly in behalf of "redolent;" for the melody of the passage, as it stands, is beyond the possibility of improvement, and unless he should chance to light upon a word very nearly resembling this in consonants and vowels, we can hardly quarrel with Mr. Tennyson if, in spite of our judgment, he retains the offender in his service.

340 Our next specimen is of a totally different character, but not less complete, we think, in its kind. Have we among our readers any who delight in the heroic poems of Old England, the inimitable ballads? Any to whom Sir Patrick Spens, and Clym of the Clough, and Glorious Robin are consecrated names? Any who sigh with disgust at the miserable abortions of simpleness mistaken for simplicity, or florid weakness substituted
 345 for plain energy which they may often have seen dignified with the title of Modern Ballads?

Let such draw near and read *The Ballad of Oriana*. We know no more happy seizure of the antique spirit in the whole compass of our literature; yet there is no foolish self-desertion, no attempt at obliterating the present, but everywhere a full discrimination of
 350 how much ought to be yielded and how much retained. The author is well aware that the art of one generation cannot *become* that of another by any will or skill; but the artist may transfer the spirit of the past, making it a temporary form for his own spirit, and so effect, by idealizing power, a new and legitimate combination. If we were asked

355 to name among the real antiques that which bears greatest resemblance to this gem, we should refer to the ballad of *Fair Helen of Kirkconnel Lea* in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. It is a resemblance of mood, not of execution. They are both highly wrought lyrical expressions of pathos; and it is very remarkable with what intuitive art every expression and cadence in *Fair Helen* is accorded to the main feeling.

360 The characters that distinguish the language of our *lyrical* from that of our *epic* ballads have never yet been examined with the accuracy they deserve. But, beyond question, the class of poems which in point of harmonious combination *Oriana* most resembles, is the Italian. Just thus the meditative tenderness of Dante and Petrarch is embodied in the clear, searching notes of Tuscan song. These mighty masters produce two-thirds of their effect by *sound*. Not that they sacrifice sense to sound, but that sound conveys their
365 meaning where words would not. There are innumerable shades of fine emotion in the human heart, especially when the senses are keen and vigilant, which are too subtle and too rapid to admit of corresponding phrases. The understanding takes no definite note of them; how then can they leave signatures in language? Yet they exist; in plenitude of being and beauty they exist; and in music they find a medium through which they pass
370 from heart to heart. The tone becomes the sign of the feeling; and they reciprocally suggest each other.

Analogous to this suggestive power may be reckoned, perhaps, in a sister art, the effects of Venetian colouring. Titian *explains* by tints, as Petrarch by tones. Words would not have done the business of the one, nor any groupings or *narration by form*, that of
375 the other. But, shame upon us! we are going back to our metaphysics, when that "sweet, meek face" is waiting to be admitted.

[*The poem is reprinted here.*]

We have heard it objected to this poem that the name occurs once too often in every stanza. We have taken the plea into our judicial consideration, and the result is that we
380 overrule it and pronounce that the proportion of the melodious cadences to the pathetic parts of the narration could not be diminished without materially affecting the rich lyrical impression of the ballad.

For what is the author's intention? To gratify our curiosity with a strange adventure? To shake our nerves with a painful story? Very far from it. Tears indeed may "blind our sight" as we read; but they are "blissful tears." The strong musical delight prevails over
385 every painful feeling and mingles them all in its deep swell until they attain a composure of exalted sorrow, a mood in which the latest repose of agitation becomes visible, and the influence of beauty spreads like light over the surface of the mind.

The last line, with its dreamy wildness, reveals the design of the whole. It is transferred, if we mistake not, from an old ballad (a freedom of immemorial usage with ballad-
390 mongers, as our readers doubtless know) but the merit lies in the abrupt application of it to the leading sentiment so as to flash upon us in a few little words a world of meaning, and. To consecrate the passion that was beyond cure or hope by resigning it to the accordance of inanimate Nature, who, like man, her tempests and occasions of horror, but august in their largeness of operation, awful by their dependence on a fixed
395 and perpetual necessity.

We must give one more extract, and we are almost tempted to choose by lot among many that crowd on our recollection, and solicit our preference with such witchery as it is not easy to withstand. The poems towards the middle of the volume seem to have been written at an earlier period than the rest. They display more unrestrained fancy

400 and are less evidently proportioned to their ruling ideas than those which we think of later date. Yet in the *Ode to Memory* – the only one which we have the poet's authority for referring to early life – there is a majesty of expression, united to a truth of thought, which almost confounds our preconceived distinctions.

405 *The Confessions of a Second-rate, Sensitive Mind* are full of deep insight into human nature, and into those particular trials which are sure to beset men who think and feel for themselves at this epoch of social development. The title is perhaps ill-chosen. Not on has it an appearance of quaintness which has no sufficient reason, but it seems to us incorrect. The mood portrayed in this poem, unless the admirable skill of delineation has deceived us, is rather the clouded season of a strong mind than the habitual
410 condition of one feeble and "second-rate." Ordinary tempers build up fortresses of opinion on one side or another; they will see only what they choose to see. The distant glimpse of such an agony as is here brought out to view is sufficient to keep them for ever in illusions, voluntarily raised at first, but soon trusted in with full reliance as inseparable parts of self.

415 Mr. Tennyson's mode of "rating" is different from ours. He may esteem none worthy of the first order who has not attained a complete universality of thought, and such trustful reliance on a principle of repose which lies beyond the war of conflicting opinions, that the grand ideas, "*qui planent sans cesse au dessus de l'humanité*" cease to affect him with bewildering impulses of hope and fear. We have not space to enter
420 further into this topic; but we should not despair of convincing Mr. Tennyson that such a position of intellect would not be the most elevated, nor even the most conducive to perfection of art.

The "How" and the "Why" appears to present the reverse of the same picture. It is the same mind still: the sensitive sceptic, whom we have looked upon in his hour of distress,
425 now scoffing at his own state with an earnest mirth that borders on sorrow. It is exquisitely beautiful to see in this, as in the former portrait, how the feeling of art is kept ascendant in our minds over distressful realities, by constant reference to images of tranquil beauty, whether touched pathetically, as the Ox and the Lamb in the first piece, or with fine humour, as the "great bird" and "little bird" in the second.

430 *The Sea Fairies* is another strange title; but those who turn to it with the very natural curiosity of discovering who these new births of mythology may be, will be unpardonable if they do not linger over it with higher feelings. A stretch of lyrical power is here exhibited which we did not think the English language had possessed. The proud swell of verse as the harp tones "run up the ridged sea," and the soft and
435 melancholy lapse as the sounds die along the widening space of water, are instances of that right imitation which is becoming to art, but which in the hands of the unskilful, or the affecters of easy popularity, is often converted into a degrading mimicry, detrimental to the best interests of the imagination.

440 A considerable portion of this book is taken up with a very singular and very beautiful class of poems on which the author has evidently bestowed much thought and elaboration. We allude to the female characters, every trait of which presumes an uncommon degree of observation and reflection. Mr. Tennyson's way of proceeding seems to be this. He collects the most striking phenomena of individual minds until he arrives at some leading fact, which allows him to lay down an axiom or law; and then,
445 working on the law thus attained, he clearly discerns the tendency of what new particulars his invention suggests, and is enabled to impress an individual freshness and unity on ideal combinations. These expressions of character are brief and coherent; nothing extraneous to the dominant fact is admitted, nothing illustrative of it, and, as it

were, growing out of it, is rejected. They are like summaries of mighty dramas. We do
450 not say this method admits of such large luxuriance of power as that of our real
dramatists; but we contend that it is a new species of poetry, a graft of the lyric on the
dramatic, and Mr. Tennyson deserves the laurel of an inventor, an enlarger of our
modes of knowledge and power.

We must hasten to make our election; so, passing by the "airy, fairy Lilian," who "clasps
455 her hands" in vain to retain us; the "stately flower" of matronly fortitude, "revered
Isabel"; Madeline, with her voluptuous alteration of smile and frown; Mariana, last, but
oh not least – we swear by the memory of Shakespeare, to whom a monument of
observant love has here been raised by simply expanding all the latent meanings and
460 beauties contained in one stray thought of his genius – we shall fix on a lovely, albeit
somewhat mysterious lady, who has fairly taken our "heart from out our breast."

[Here follows Adeline]

Is not this beautiful? When this Poet dies, will not the Graces and the Loves mourn
over him, "*fortunatâque favilla nascentur violae?*" How original is the imagery, and how
delicate! How wonderful the new world thus created for us, the region between real and
465 unreal! The gardens of Armida were but poorly musical compared with the roses and
lillies that bloom around thee, thou faint smiler, Adeline, on whom the glory of
imagination reposes, endowing all thou lookest on with sudden and mysterious life. We
could expatiate on the deep meaning of this poem, but it is time to twitch our critical
mantles; and, as our trade is not that of mere enthusiasm, we shall take our leave with
470 an objection (perhaps a cavil) to the language of cowslips, which we think too
ambiguously spoken of for a subject on which nobody, except Mr. Tennyson, can have
any information. The "ringing bluebell," too, if it be not a pun, suggests one, and might
probably be altered to advantage.

One word more before we have done, and it shall be a word of praise. The language of
this book, with one or two rare exceptions, is thorough and sterling English. A little
475 more respect, perhaps, was due to the "*jus et norma loquendi*"; but we are inclined to
consider as venial a fault arising from generous enthusiasm for the principles of sound
analogy, and for that Saxon element, which constituted the intrinsic freedom and
nervousness of our native tongue. We see no signs in what Mr. Tennyson has written of
the Quixotic spirit which has led some persons to desire the reduction of English to a
480 single form, by excluding nearly the whole of Latin and Roman derivatives. Ours is
necessarily a compound language; as such alone it can flourish and increase; nor will
the author of the poems we have extracted be likely to barter for a barren appearance
of symmetrical structure that fertility of expression and variety of harmony which "the
speech that Shakespeare spoke" derived from the sources of southern phraseology.

In presenting this young poet to the public as one not studious of instant popularity,
nor likely to obtain it, we may be thought to play the part of a fashionable lady who
deludes her refractory mate into doing what she chooses by pretending to wish the
exact contrary; or of a cunning pedagogue who practises a similar manoeuvre on some
self-willed Flibbertigibbet of the schoolroom. But the supposition would do us wrong.
485 We have spoken in good faith, commenting this volume to feeling hearts and
imaginative tempers, not to the stupid readers, or the voracious readers, or the
malignant readers, or the readers after dinner!

We confess, indeed, we never knew an instance in which the theoretical abjurers of
popularity have shewn themselves very reluctant to admit its actual advances. So much

495 virtue is not, perhaps, in human nature; and if the world should take a fancy to buy up these poems, in order to be revenged on the *Englishman's Magazine*, who knows whether even we might not disappoint its malice by a cheerful adaptation of our theory to "existing circumstances?"