THE POETIC PRINCIPLE.

BY THE LATE EDGAR A. POE.

[FROM advance sheets of the new volume by Mr. Poe, in the press of Mr. Redfield, we present the following admirable essay embodying the critic's theory of poetry. It appropriately introduces his discussions of the individual merit of many of our prominent authors. This concluding volume of Poe's works, making some six hundred pages, is entitled "The Literati," and will be published in about three weeks.]

In speaking of the Poetic Principle, I have no design to be either thorough or profound. While discussing, very much at random, the essentiality of what we call Poetry, my principal purpose will be to cite for consideration, some few of those minor English or American poems which best suit my own taste, or which, upon my own fancy, have left the most definite impression. By "minor poems" I mean, of course, poems of little length. And here, in the beginning, permit me to say a few words in regard to a somewhat peculiar principle, which, whether rightfully or wrongfully, has always had its influence in my own critical estimate of the poem. I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, "a long poem," is simply a flat contradiction in terms.

I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitaments are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all, cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags — fails — a revulsion ensues — and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.

There are, no doubt, many who have found difficulty in reconciling the critical dictum that the "Paradise Lost" is to be devoutly admired throughout, with the absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critical dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its Unity — its totality of effect or impression — we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression. After a passage of what we feel to be true poetry, there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude which no critical pre-judgment can force us to admire; but if, upon completing the work, we read it again, omitting the first book — that is to say, commencing with the second — we shall be surprised at now finding that admirable which we before condemned — that damnable which we had previously so much admired. It follows from all this that the ultimate, aggregate, or absolute effect of even the best epic under the sun, is a nullity: — and this is precisely the fact.

In regard to the Iliad, we have, if not positive proof, at least very good reason for believing it intended as a series of lyrics; but, granting the epic intention, I can say only that the work is based in an imperfect sense of art. The modern epic is, of the supposititious ancient model, but an inconsciderate and blindfold imitation. But the day of these artistic anomalies is over. If, at any time, any very long poem were popular in reality, which I doubt, it is at least clear that no very long poem will ever be popular again.

That the extent of a poetical work is, ceteris paribus, the measure of its merit, seems undoubtedly, when we thus state it, a proposition sufficiently absurd — yet we are indebted for it to the Quarterly Reviews. Surely there can be nothing in mere size, abstractly considered — there can be nothing in mere bulk, so far as a volume is concerned, which has so continuously elicited admiration from these satirum pamphlets! A mountain, to be sure, by the mere sentiment of physical magnitude which it conveys, does impress us with a sense of the sublime — but no man is impressed after this fashion by the material grandeur of even "The Columbiad." Even the Quarterlies have not instructed us to be so impressed by it. As yet, they have not insisted on our estimating Lamar" tine by the cubic foot, or Pollock by the pound — but what else are we to infer from their continual prating about "sustained effort!" If, by "sustained effort," any little gentleman has accomplished an epic, let us frankly commend him for the effort — if this indeed be a thing commendable — but let us forbear praising the epic on the effort's account. It is to be hoped that common sense, in the time to come, will prefer deciding upon a work of Art, rather by the impression it makes — by the effect it produces — than by the time it took to impress the effect, or by the amount of "sustained effort" which had been found necessary in effecting the impression. The fact is, that perseverance is one thing and genius quite another — nor can all the Quarterlies in Christendom confound them. By and by, this proposition, with many which I have been just urging, will be received as self-evident. In the meantime, by being generally condemned as falsities, they will not be essentially damaged as truths.

On the other hand, it is clear that a poem may be improperly brief. Undue brevity degenerates into mere epigrammatism. A very short poem, while now and then producing a brilliant or vivid, never produces a profound or enduring effect. There must be the steady pressing down of the stamp upon the wax. De Béranger has wrought innumerable things, pungent and spirit-stirring; but, in general, they have been too imponderous to stamp themselves deeply into the public attention; and thus, as so many feathers of fancy, have been blown aloft only to be whistled down the wind.

A remarkable instance of the effect of undue brevity in depressing a poem — in keeping [column 2:] it out of the popular view — is afforded by the following exquisite little Serenade:

| I arise from dreams of thee | O, lift me from the grass! |
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
And the stars are shining bright.
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Has led me — who knows how? —
To thy chamber-window, sweet!

The wandering airs they faint
On the dark, the silent stream —
The champak odors fail
Like sweet thoughts in a dream;
The nightingale's complaint,
It dies upon her heart,
As I must die on thine,
O, beloved as thou art!

Very few perhaps are familiar with these lines — yet no less a poet than Shelley is their author. Their warm, yet delicate and ethereal imagination will be appreciated by all, but by none so thoroughly as by him who has himself arisen from sweet dreams of one beloved to bathe in the aromatic air of a southern midsummer night.

One of the finest poems by Willis — the very best, in my opinion, which he has ever written — has, no doubt, through this same defect of undue brevity, been kept back from its proper position, not less in the critical than in the popular view:

The shadows lay along Broadway,
'Twas near the twilight-tide —
And slowly there a lady fair
Was walking in her pride.

Alone walk'd she; but, viewlessly,
Walk'd spirits at her side.

Peace charm'd the street beneath her feet,
And Honor charm'd the air;
And all astir looked kind on her,
And called her good as fair —

For all God ever gave to her
She kept with chary care.

She kept with care her beauties rare
From lovers warm and true —
For her heart was cold to all but gold,
And the rich came not to woo —
But honor'd well are charms to sell
If priests the selling do.

In this composition we find it difficult to recognize the Willis who has written so many mere "verses of society." The lines are not only richly ideal, but full of energy; while they breathe an earnestness — an evident sincerity of sentiment — for which we look in vain throughout all the other works of this author.

While the epic mania — while the idea that, to merit in poetry, prolixity is indispensable — has, for some years past, been gradually dying out of the public mind, by mere dint of its own absurdity — we find it succeeded by a heresy too palpably false to be long tolerated, but one which, in the brief period it has already endured, may be said to have accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other enemies combined. I allude to the heresy of The Didactic. It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. We Americans especially have patronized this happy idea; and we Bostonians, very especially, have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true poetic dignity and force: — but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls we should immediately there discover that
under the sun there neither exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified — more supremely noble than this very poem — this poem per se — this poem which is a poem and nothing more — this poem written solely for the poem's sake.

With as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man, I would nevertheless, limit, in some measure, its modes of incultation. I would limit to enforce them. I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of Truth are severe. She has no sympathy with the myrtles. All that which is so indispensable in Song, is precisely all that with which she has nothing whatever to do. It is but making her a flaunting paradox, to wreath her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth, we need severity rather than efflorescence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind indeed who does not perceive the radical and chasmal differences between the truthful and the poetical modes of incultation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

Dividing the world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position which, in the mind, it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme; but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the offices of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction. Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful while the Moral Sense is regardful of Duty. Of this latter, while Conscience teaches the obligation, and Reason the expediency, Taste contents herself with displaying the charms: — waging war upon Vice solely on the ground of her deformity — her disproportion — her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonious — in a word, to Beauty.

An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors, and sentiments amid which he exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colors, and odors, and sentiments, a duplicate source of delight. But this mere repetition is not poetry. He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odors, and colors, and sentiments, which greet him in common with all mankind — he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the soul, which it (the world) has ever been enabled at once to understand and to feel as poetic.

The Poetic Sentiment, of course, may develop itself in various modes — in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance — very especially in Music — and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the composition position of the Landscape Garden. Our present theme, however, has regard only to its manifestation in words. And here let me speak briefly on the topic of rhythm. Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected — is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance, I will not now pause to maintain its absolute essentiality. It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles — the creation of supernal Beauty. It may be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained in fact. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which cannot have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. The old Bards and Minnesingers had advantages which we do not possess — and Thomas Moore, singing his own songs, was, in the most legitimate manner, perfecting them as poems.

To recapitulate, then: — I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.

A few words, however, in explanation. That pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, of the soul, which we recognise as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart. I make Beauty, therefore — using the word as inclusive of the sublime — I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes: — no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the
peculiar elevation in question is at least most readily attainable in the poem. It by no means follows, however, that the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work: — but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem.

I cannot better introduce the few poems which I shall present for your consideration, than by the citation of the Pröem to Mr. Longfellow's "Waif"

| The day is done, and the darkness | For, like strains of martial music, |
| falls from the wings of Night, | Their mighty thoughts suggest |
| as a feather is wafted downward | Life's endless toil and endeavor; |
| from an Eagle in his flight. | And to-night I long for rest. |
| I see the lights of the village | Read from some humbler poet, |
| gleam through the rain and the mist, | whose songs gushed from his heart, |
| and a feeling of sadness comes o'er me, | as showers from the clouds of summer, |
| that my soul cannot resist; | or tears from the eyelids start; |
| a feeling of sadness and longing, | who through long days of labor, |
| that is not akin to pain, | and nights devoid of ease, |
| and resembles sorrow only | still heard in his soul the music |
| as the mist resembles the rain. | of wonderful melodies. |
| come, read to me some poem, | such songs have power to quiet |
| some simple and heartfelt lay, | the restless pulse of care, |
| that shall soothe this restless feeling, | and come like the benediction |
| and banish the thoughts of day. | that follows after prayer. |
| not from the grand old masters, | then read from the treasured volume |
| not from the bards sublime, | the poem of thy choice, |
| whose distant footsteps echo | and lend to the rhyme of the poet |
| through the corridors of time. | the beauty of thy voice. |

With no great range of imagination, these lines have been justly admired for their delicacy of expression. Some of the images are very effective. Nothing can be better than —

------------- the bards sublime, |
Whose distant footsteps echo |
Down the corridors of Time.

The idea of the last quatrain is also very effective. The poem, on the whole, however, is chiefly to be admired for the graceful insouciance of its metre, so well in accordance with the character of the sentiments, and especially for the ease of the general manner. This "ease," or naturalness, in a literary style, it has long been the fashion to regard as ease in appearance alone — as a point of really difficult attainment. But not so: — a natural manner is difficult only to him who should never meddle with it — to the unnatural. It is but the result of writing with the understanding, or with the instinct, that the tone, in composition, should always be that which the mass of mankind would adopt — and must perpetually vary, of course, with the occasion. The author who, after the fashion of "The North American Review," should be, upon all occasions, merely "quiet," must necessarily upon many occasions, be simply silly, or stupid; and has no more right to be considered "easy," or "natural," than a Cockney exquisite, or than the sleeping Beauty in the waxworks.

Among the minor poems of Bryant, none has so much impressed me as the one which he entitles "June." I quote only a portion of it: [column 4:]

| There, through the long, long summer hours, | I know, I know I should not see |
| the golden light should lie, | the season's glorious show, |
And thick young herbs and groups of flowers
   Stand in their beauty by.
The oriole should build and tell
   His love-tale, close beside my cell;
The idle butterfly
   Should rest him there, and there be heard
The housewife-bee and humming bird.

And what, if cheerful shouts at noon,
   Come, from the village sent,
Or songs of maids, beneath the moon,
   With fairy laughter blent?
And what if, in the evening light,
   Betrothed lovers walk in sight
Of my low monument?
I would the lovely scene around
Might know no sadder sight nor sound.

Nor would its brightness shine for me,
   Nor its wild music flow;
But if, around my place of sleep,
The friends I love should come to weep,
   They might not haste to go.
Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom
   Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

These to their soften’d hearts should bear
   The thought of what has been,
And speak of one who cannot share
   The gladness of the scene;
Whose part in all the pomp that fills
   The circuit of the summer hills,
Is — that his grave is green;
And deeply would their hearts rejoice
   To hear again his living voice.

The rhythmical flow, here, is even voluptuous — nothing could be more melodious. The poem has always affected me in a remarkable manner. The intense melancholy which seems to well up, perforce, to the surface of all the poet's cheerful sayings about his grave, we find thrilling us to the soul — while there is the truest poetic elevation in the thrill. The impression left is one of a pleasurable sadness. And if, in the remaining compositions which I shall introduce to you, there be more or less of a similar tone always apparent, let me remind you that (how or why we know not) this certain taint of sadness is inseparably connected with all the higher manifestations of true Beauty. It is, nevertheless,

A feeling of sadness and longing
   That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
   As the mist resembles the rain.

The taint of which I speak is clearly perceptible even in a poem so full of brilliancy and spirit as the "Health" of Edward Coote Pinkney: —

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The taint of which I speak is clearly perceptible even in a poem so full of brilliancy and spirit as the "Health" of Edward Coote Pinkney: —
It was the misfortune of Mr. Pinkney to have been born too far south. Had he been a New Englander, it is probable that he would have been ranked as the first of American lyriists, by that magnanimous cabal which has so long controlled the destinies of American Letters, in conducting the thing called "The North American Review." The poem just cited is especially beautiful; but the poetic elevation which it induces, we must refer chiefly to our sympathy in the poet's enthusiasm. We pardon his hyperboles for the evident earnestness with which they are uttered.

It was by no means my design, however, to expatiate upon the merits of what I should read you. These will necessarily speak for themselves. Boccalini, in his "Advertisements from Parnassus," tells us that Zoilus once presented Apollo a very caustic criticism upon a very admirable book: — whereupon the god asked him for the beauties of the work. He replied that he only busied himself about the errors. On hearing this, Apollo, handing him a sack of unwinnowed wheat, bade him pick out all the chaff for his reward.

Now this fable answers very well as a hit at the critics — but I am by no means sure that the god was in the right. I am by no means certain that the true limits of the critical duty are not grossly misunderstood. Excellence, in a poem especially, may be considered in the light of an axiom, which need only be properly put, to become self-evident. It is not excellence if it require to be demonstrated as such: — and thus, to point out too particularly the merits of a work of Art, is to admit that they are not merits altogether.

Among the "Melodies" of Thomas Moore, is one whose distinguished character as a poem proper, seems to have been singularly left out of view. I allude to his lines beginning — "Come, rest in this bosom." The intense energy of their expression is not surpassed by anything in Byron. There are two of the lines in which a sentiment is conveyed that embodies the all in all of the divine passion of Love — a sentiment which, perhaps, has found its echo in more, and in more passionate, human hearts than any other single sentiment ever embodied in words:

Come, rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer,
Though the herd have fled from thee, thy home is still here;
Here still is the smile, that no cloud can o'ercast,
And a heart and a hand all thy own to the last.

Oh! what was love made for, if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through torment, through glory and shame?
I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart,
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art.

Thou hast call'd me thy Angel in moments of bliss,
And thy Angel I'll be, 'mid the horrors of this, —
Through the furnace, unshrinking, thy steps to pursue,
And shield thee, and save thee, — or perish there too!

It has been the fashion, of late days, to deny Moore Imagination, while granting him Fancy — a distinction originating with Coleridge — than whom no man more fully comprehended the great powers of Moore. The fact is, that the fancy of this poet so far predominates over all his other faculties, and over the fancy of all other men, as to have induced, very naturally, the idea that he is fanciful only. But never was there a greater mistake. Never was a grosser wrong done the fame of a true poet. In the compass of the English language I can call to mind no poem more profoundly — more wierdly imaginative, in the best sense, than the lines commencing — "I would I were [column 5:] by that dim lake" — which are the composition of Thomas Moore. I regret that I am unable to remember them.

One of the noblest — and, speaking of Fancy, one of the most singularly fanciful of modern poets, was Thomas Hood. His "Fair Ines" had always, for me, an inexpressible charm:

| O saw ye not fair Ines? Isaw thee, lovely Ines, |
| She's gone into the West, Descend along the shore, |
| To dazzle when the sun is down, With bands of noble gentlemen, |
| And rob the world of rest: And banners waved before; |
| She took our daylight with her: And gentle youth and maidens gay, |
| The smiles that we love best, And snowy plumes they wore; |
| With morning blushes on her cheek, It would have been a beauteous dream, |
| And pearls upon her breast, — If it had been no more! |
| O, turn again, fair Ines, Alas, alas, fair Ines, |
| Before the fall of night, She went away with song, |
| For fear the moon should shine alone, With music waiting on her steps, |
And stars unrivall'd bright;  
And blessed will the lover be  
    That walks beneath their light,  
And breathes the love against thy cheek  
    I dare not even write!

Would I had been, fair Ines,  
    That gallant cavalier,  
Who rode so gaily by thy side,  
And whisper'd thee so near!  
Were there no bonny dames at home,  
Or no true lovers here,  
That he should cross the seas to win  
The dearest of the dear?

And shoutings of the throng;  
But some were sad and felt no mirth,  
    But only Music's wrong,  
In sounds that sang Farewell, Farewell,  
To her you've loved so long.

Farewell, farewell, fair Ines,  
    That vessel never bore  
So fair a lady on its deck,  
Nor danced so light before, —  
Alas, for pleasure on the sea,  
And sorrow on the shore!  
The smile that blest one lover's heart  
Has broken many more!

"The Haunted House," by the same author, is one of the truest poems ever written — one of the truest — one of the most unexceptionable — one of the most thoroughly artistic, both in its theme and in its execution. It is, moreover, powerfully ideal — imaginative. I regret that its length renders it unsuitable for the purposes of this Lecture. In place of it, permit me to offer the universally appreciated "Bridge of Sighs": —

| One more Unfortunate, | Who was her father? |
| Weary of breath, | Who was her mother? |
| Rashly importunate, | Had she a sister? |
| Gone to her death! | Had she a brother? |
| Take her up tenderly, | Or was there a dearer one |
| Lift her with care; —— | Still, and a nearer one |
| Fashion'd so slenderly, | Yet, than all other? |
| Young, and so fair! | Alas! for the rarity |

Look at her garments | Of Christian charity |
Clinging like cerements; | Under the sun! |
Whilst the wave constantly | Oh! it was pitiful! |
Drips from her clothing; | Near a whole city full, |
Take her up instantly, | Home she had none. |
Loving, not loathing. — |

Touch her not scornfully; | Sisterly, brotherly, |
Think of her mournfully, | Fatherly, motherly, |
Gently and humanly; | Feelings had changed: |
Not of the stains of her, | Love, by harsh evidence, |
All that remains of her, | Thrown from its eminence; |
Now is pure womanly. | Even God's providence |
Make no deep scrutiny |   Seeming estranged. |
Into her mutiny | Where the lamps quiver |
Rash and undutiful; | So far in the river, |
Past all dishonor, |    With many a light |
Death has left on her | From window and casement, |
Only the beautiful. | From garret to basement, |

Still, for all slips of hers, | She stood, with amazement, |
One of Eve's family — | Houseless by night. |
Wipe those poor lips of hers | The bleak wind of March |
Oozing so clammyly. | Made her tremble and shiver; |

Loop up her tresses | But not the dark arch, |
Escaped from the comb, | Or the black flowing river: |
Her fair auburn tresses; | Mad from life's history; |

In she plunged boldly, | Perishing gloomily, |
No matter how coldly | Spurred by contumely, |
The rough river ran, — | Cold inhumanity, |
Over the brink of it, | Burning insanity, |
Picture it, — think of it, | Into her rest, — |
Disolute Man! | Cross her hands humbly, |
Lave in it, drink of it | As when with the daring |
Then, if you can! | Last look of despairing |

Take her up tenderly, | Fixed on futurity. |
Lift her with care; | Perishing gloomily, |
Fashion'd so slenderly, | Spurred by contumely, |
Young, and so fair! | Cold inhumanity, |
Ere her limbs frigidly | Burning insanity, |
Stiffen too rigidly, | Into her rest, — |
Decently, — kindly, — | Cross her hands humbly, |
Smooth and compose them; | As if praying dumbly, |
And her eyes, close them, | Over her breast! |
Staring so blindly! | Owning her weakness, |

Dreadfully staring | Her evil behavior, |
Through muddy impurity, | And leaving, with meekness, |
As when with the daring | Her sins to her Savior! |
Last look of despairing |
Fixed on futurity. |
The vigor of this poem is no less remarkable than its pathos. The versification, although carrying the fanciful to the very verge of the fantastic, is nevertheless admirably adapted to the wild insanity which is the thesis of the poem.

Among the minor poems of Lord Byron, is one which has never received from the critics the praise which it undoubtedly deserves:

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<th>Original Text</th>
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| Whilst wonderment guesses  
Where was her home? | Out of the world! |

"Though the day of my destiny's over,  
And the star of my fate hath declined,  
Thy soft heart refused to discover  
The faults which so many could find;  
Though thy soul with my grief was acquainted,  
It shrunk not to share it with me,  
And the love which my spirit hath painted  
It never hath found but in thee. [column 6:]

Then when nature around me is smiling,  
The last smile which answers to mine,  
I do not believe it beguiling,  
Because it reminds me of thine;  
And when winds are at war with the ocean,  
As the breasts I believed in with me,  
If their billows excite an emotion,  
It is that they bear me from thee.

Though the rock of my last hope is shivered,  
And its fragments are sunk in the wave,  
Though I feel that my soul is delivered  
To pain — it shall not be its slave.  
There is many a pang to pursue me:  
They may crush, but they shall not contemn —  
They may torture, but shall not subdue me —  
'Tis of thee that I think — not of them.

Yet I blame not the world, nor despise it,  
Nor the war of the many with one —  
If my soul was not fitted to prize it,  
'Twas folly not sooner to shun:  
And if dearly that error hath cost me,  
And more than I once could foresee,  
I have found that whatever it lost me,  
It could not deprive me of thee.

From the wreck of the past, which hath perished,  
Thus much I at least may recall,  
It hath taught me that which I most cherished  
Deserved to be dearest of all:  
In the desert a fountain is springing,  
In the wide waste there still is a tree,  
And a bird in the solitude singing,  
Which speaks to my spirit of thee.

Although the rhythm, here, is one of the most difficult, the versification could scarcely be improved. No nobler theme ever engaged the pen of poet. It is the soul-elevating idea, that no man can consider himself entitled to complain of Fate while, in his adversity, he still retains the unwavering love of woman.

From Alfred Tennyson — although in perfect sincerity I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived — I have left myself time to cite only a very brief specimen. I call him, and think him the noblest of poets — not because the impressions he produces are, at all times, the most profound — not because the poetical excitement which he induces is, at all times, the most intense — but because it is, at all times, the most ethereal — in other words, the most elevating and most pure. No poet is so little of the earth, earthy. What I am about to read is from his last long poem, "The Princess:"

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| Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tears from the depth of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more.  
Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,  
That brings our friends up from the underworld,  
Sad as the last which reddens over one  
That sinks with all we love below the verge; | Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns  
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds  
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes  
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;  
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.  
Dear as remember'd kisses after death,  
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd  
On lips that are for others; deep as love,  
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret; |
Thus, although in a very cursory and imperfect manner, I have endeavored to convey to you my conception of the Poetic Principle.

It has been my purpose to suggest that, while this Principle itself is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty, the manifestation of the Principle is always found in an elevating excitement of the Soul — quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart — or of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason. For, in regard to Passion, alas! its tendency is to degrade, rather than to elevate the Soul. Love, on the contrary — Love — the true, the divine Eros — the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionæan Venus — is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes. And in regard to Truth — if, to be sure, through the attainment of a truth, we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before, we experience, at once, the true poetical effect — but this effect is referable to the harmony alone, and not in the least degree to the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest.

We shall reach, however, more immediately a distinct conception of what the true Poetry is, by mere reference to a few of the simple elements which induce in the Poet himself the true poetical effect. He recognizes the ambrosia which nourishes his soul, in the bright orbs that shine in Heaven — in the volutes of the flower — in the clustering of low shrubberies — in the waving of the grain-fields — in the slanting of tall, Eastern trees — in the blue distance of mountains — in the grouping of clouds — in the twinkling of half-hidden brooks — in the gleaming of silver rivers — in the repose of sequestered lakes — in the star-mirroring depths of lonely wells. He perceives it in the songs of birds — in the harp of Æolus — in the sighing of the night-wind — in the repining voice of the forest — in the surf that complains to the shore — in the fresh breath of the woods — in the scent of the violet — in the voluptuous perfume of the hyacinth — in the suggestive odor that comes to him, at eventide, from far-distant, undiscovered islands, over dim oceans, illimitable and unexplored. He owns it in all noble thoughts — in all unworldly motives — in all holy impulses — in all chivalrous, generous, and self-sacrificing deeds. He feels it in the beauty of woman — in the grace of her step — in the lustre of her eye — in the melody of her voice — in her soft laughter — in her sigh — in the harmony of the rustling of her robes. He deeply feels it in her winning endearments — in her burning enthusiasm — in her gentle charities — in her meek and devotional endurances — but above all — ah, far above all — he kneels to it — he worships it in the faith, in the purity, in the strength, in the altogether divine majesty — of her love.

Let me conclude — by the recitation of yet another brief poem — one very different in character from any that I have before quoted. It is by Motherwell, and is called "The Song of the Cavalier." With our modern and altogether rational ideas of the absurdity and impiety of warfare, we are not precisely in that frame of mind best adapted to sympathize with the sentiments, and thus to appreciate the real excellence of the poem. To do this fully, we must identify ourselves, in fancy, with the soul of the old cavalier.

Then mounte! then mounte, brave gallants, all,
    And don your helmes amaine:
Deathe's couriers, Fame and Honor, call
    Us to the field againe.
No shrewish teares shall fill our eye
    When the sword-hilt's in our hand, —
Heart-whole we'll part, and no whit sighe
    For the fayrest of the land;
Let piping swaine, and craven wight,
    Thus wepe and puling crye,
Our business is like men to fight.
    And hero-like to die!