Flower of the Mind

Alice Meynell

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This etext was prepared by David Price, email ccx074@coventry.ac.uk
from the 1893 Grant Richards edition of The Flower of the Mind and
the 1902 John Lane edition of Later Poems.

INTRODUCTION

Partial collections of English poems, decided by a common subject or bounded by narrow dates and periods of literary history, are made at very short intervals, and the makers are safe from the reproach of proposing their own personal taste as a guide for the reading of others. But a general Anthology gathered from the whole of English literature—the whole from Chaucer to Wordsworth—by a gatherer intent upon nothing except the quality of poetry, is a more rare enterprise. It is hardly to be made without tempting the suspicion—nay, hardly without seeming to hazard the confession—of some measure of self−confidence. Nor can even the desire to enter upon that labour be a frequent one—the desire of the heart of one for whom poetry is veritably “the complementary life” to set up a pale for inclusion and exclusion, to add honours, to multiply homage, to cherish, to restore, to protest, to proclaim, to depose; and to gain the consent of a multitude of readers to all those acts. Many years, then—some part of a century—may easily pass between the publication of one general anthology and the making of another.

The enterprise would be a sorry one if it were really arbitrary, and if an anthologist should give effect to passionate preferences without authority. An anthology that shall have any value must be made on the responsibility of one but on the authority of many. There is no caprice; the mind of the maker has been formed for decision by the wisdom of many instructors. It is the very study of criticism, and the grateful and profitable study, that gives the justification to work done upon the strongest personal impulse, and done, finally, in the mental solitude that cannot be escaped at the last. In another order, moral education would be best crowned if it proved to have quick and profound control over the first impulses; its finished work would be to set the soul in a state of law, delivered from the delays of self−distrust; not action only, but the desires would be in an old security, and a wish would come to light already justified. This would be the second—if it were not the only—liberty. Even so an intellectual education might assuredly confer freedom upon first and solitary thoughts, and confidence and composure upon the sallies of impetuous courage. In a word, it should make a studious anthologist quite sure about genius. And all who have bestowed, or helped in bestowing, the liberating education have given their student the authority to be free. Personal and singular the choice in such a book must be, not without right.

Claiming and disclaiming so much, the gatherers may follow one another to harvest, and glean in the same fields in different seasons, for the repetition of the work can never be altogether a repetition. The general consent of criticism does not stand still; and moreover, a mere accident has until now left a poet of genius of the past here and there to neglect or obscurity. This is not very likely to befall again; the time has come when there is little or nothing left to discover or rediscover in the sixteenth century or the seventeenth; we know that there does not lurk

another Crashaw contemned, or another Henry Vaughan disregarded, or another George Herbert misplaced. There is now something like finality of knowledge at least; and therefore not a little error in the past is ready to be repaired. This is the result of time. Of the slow actions and reactions of critical taste there might be something to say, but nothing important. No loyal anthologist perhaps will consent to acknowledge these tides; he will hardly do his work well unless he believe it to be stable and perfect; nor, by the way, will he judge worthily in the name of others unless he be resolved to judge intrepidly for himself.

Inasmuch as even the best of all poems are the best upon innumerable degrees, the size of most anthologies has gone far to decide what degrees are to be gathered in and what left without. The best might make a very small volume, and be indeed the best, or a very large volume, and be still indeed the best. But my labour has been to do somewhat differently—to gather nothing that did not overpass a certain boundary−line of genius. Gray's Elegy, for instance, would rightly be placed at the head of everything below that mark. It is, in fact, so near to the work of genius as to be most directly, closely, and immediately rebuked by genius; it meets genius at close quarters and almost deserves that Shakespeare himself should defeat it. Mediocrity said its own true word in the Elegy:

“Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.”

But greatness had said its own word also in a sonnet:

“The summer flower is to the summer sweet
Though to itself it only live and die.”

The reproof here is too sure; not always does it touch so quick, but it is not seldom manifest, and it makes exclusion a simple task. Inclusion, on the other hand, cannot be so completely fulfilled. The impossibility of taking in poems of great length, however purely lyrical, is a mechanical barrier, even on the plan of the present volume; in the case of Spenser's Prothalamion, the unmanageably autobiographical and local passage makes it inappropriate; some exquisite things of Landor's are lyrics in blank verse, and the necessary rule against blank verse shuts them out. No extracts have been made from any poem, but in a very few instances a stanza or a passage has been dropped out. No poem has been put in for the sake of a single perfectly fine passage; it would be too much to say that no poem has been put in for the sake of two splendid passages or so. The Scottish ballad poetry is represented by examples that are to my mind finer than anything left out; still, it is but represented; and as the song of this multitude of unknown poets overflows by its quantity a collection of lyrics of genius, so does severally the song of Wordsworth, Crashaw, and Shelley. It has been necessary, in considering traditional songs of evidently mingled authorship, to reject some one invaluable stanza or burden—the original and ancient surviving matter of a spoilt song—because it was necessary to reject the sequel that has cumbered it since some sentimentalist took it for his own. An example, which makes the heart ache, is that burden of keen and remote poetry:

“O the broom, the bonnie, bonnie broom,
The broom of Cowdenknowes!”

Perhaps some hand will gather all such precious fragments as these together one day, freed from what is alien in the work of the restorer. It is inexplicable that a generation resolved to forbid the restoration of ancient buildings should approve the eighteenth century restoration of ancient poems; nay, the architectural “restorer” is immeasurably the more respectful. In order to give us again the ancient fragments, it is happily not necessary to break up the composite songs which, since the time of Burns, have gained a national love. Let them be, but let the old verses be also; and let them have, for those who desire it, the solitariness of their state of ruin. Even in the cases—and they are not few— where Burns is proved to have given beauty and music to the ancient fragment itself, his work upon the old stanza is immeasurably finer than his work in his own new stanzas following, and it would be less than impiety to part the two.

I have obeyed a profound conviction which I have reason to hope will be more commended in the future than perhaps it can be now, in leaving aside a multitude of composite songs—anachronisms, and worse than mere anachronisms, as I think them to be, for they patch wild feeling with sentiment of the sentimentalist. There are some exceptions. The one fine stanza of a song which both Sir Walter Scott and Burns restored is given with the restorations of both, those restorations being severally beautiful; and the burden, “Hame, hame, hame,” is printed with the Jacobite song that carries it; this song seems so mingled and various in date and origin that no apology is needed for placing it amongst the bundle of Scottish ballads of days before the Jacobites. Sir Patrick Spens is treated here as an ancient song. It is to be noted that the modern, or comparatively modern, additions to old songs full of quantitative metre—“Hame, hame, hame,” is one of these—full of long notes, rests, and interlinear pauses, are almost always written in anapaests. The later writer has slipped away from the fine, various, and subtle metre of the older. Assuredly the popularity of the metre which, for want of a term suiting the English rules of verse, must be called anapaestic, has done more than any other thing to vulgarise the national sense of rhythm and to silence the finer rhythms. Anapaests came quite suddenly into English poetry and brought coarseness, glibness, volubility, dapper and fatuous effects. A master may use it well, but as a popular measure it has been disastrous. I would be bound to find the modern stanzas in an old song by this very habit of anapaests and this very misunderstanding of the long words and interlinear pauses of the older stanzas. This, for instance, is the old metre:

“Hame, hame, hame! O hame fain wad I be!”

and this the lamentable anapaestic line (from the same song):

“Yet the sun through the mirk seems to promise to me—.”

It has been difficult to refuse myself the delight of including A Divine Love of Carew, but it seemed too bold to leave out four stanzas of a poem of seven, and the last four are of the poorest argument. This passage at least shall speak for the first three:

“Thou didst appear
A glorious mystery, so dark, so clear,
As Nature did intend
All should confess, but none might comprehend.”

From Christ's Victory in Heaven of Giles Fletcher (out of reach for its length) it is a happiness to extract here at least the passage upon “Justice,” who looks “as the eagle

“that hath so oft compared
Her eye with heaven's”;

from Marlowe's poem, also unmanageable, that in which Love ran to the priestess

“And laid his childish head upon her breast”;

with that which tells how Night,

“deep−drenched in misty Acheron,
Heaved up her head, and half the world upon
Breathed darkness forth”;

from Robert Greene two lines of a lovely passage:

“Cupid abroad was lated in the night,
His wings were wet with ranging in the rain”;

from Ben Jonson's Hue and Cry (not throughout fine) the stanza:

“Beauties, have ye seen a toy,
Called Love, a little boy,
Almost naked, wanton, blind;
Cruel now, and then as kind?
If he be amongst ye, say;
He is Venus' run−away”;

from Francis Davison:

“Her angry eyes are great with tears”;

from George Wither:

“I can go rest
On her sweet breast
That is the pride of Cynthia's train”;

from Cowley:

“Return, return, gay planet of mine east”!

The poems in which these are cannot make part of the volume, but the citation of the fragments is a relieving act of love.

At the very beginning, Skelton's song to “Mistress Margery Wentworth” had almost taken a place; but its charm is hardly fine enough.

If it is necessary to answer the inevitable question in regard to Byron, let me say that in another Anthology, a secondary Anthology, the one in which Gray's Elegy would have an honourable place, some more of Byron's lyrics would certainly be found; and except this there is no apology. If the last stanza of the “Dying Gladiator” passage, or the last stanza on the cascade rainbow at Terni,

“Love watching madness with unalterable mien,”

had been separate poems instead of parts of Childe Harold, they would have been amongst the poems that are here collected in no spirit of arrogance, or of caprice, of diffidence or doubt.

The volume closes some time before the middle of the century and the death of Wordsworth.

A. M.

[As there would be considerable overlap between the poems in this book and those already released the text of the poems is not included in this eText. The poems that Alice selected are shown below and are followed by her comments on them.− —DP]

ALICE MEYNELL'S COMMENTS/NOTES

EPITHALAMION

Written by Spensor on his marriage in Ireland, Elizabeth Boyle of Kilcoran, who survived him, married one Roger Seckerstone, and was again a widow. Dr. Grosart seems to have finally decided the identity of the heroine

of this great poem. It is worth while to explain, once for all, that I do not use the accented e for the longer pronunciation of the past participle. The accent is not an English sign, and, to my mind, disfigures the verse; neither do I think it necessary to cut off the e with an apostrophe when the participle is shortened. The reader knows at a glance how the word is to be numbered; besides, he may have his preferences where choice is allowed. In reading such a line as Tennyson's

“Dear as remembered kisses after death,”

one man likes the familiar sound of the word “remembered” as we all speak it now; another takes pleasure in the four light syllables filling the line so full. Tennyson uses the apostrophe as a rule, but neither he nor any other author is quite consistent.

ROSALYND'S MADRIGAL

It may please the reader to think that this frolic, rich, and delicate singer was Shakespeare's very Rosalind. From Dr. Thomas Lodge's novel, Euphues' Golden Legacy, was taken much of the story, with some of the characters, and some few of the passages, of As You Like It.

ROSALINE

This splendid poem (from the same romance), written on the poet's voyage to the Islands of Terceras and the Canaries, has the fire and freshness of the south and the sea; all its colours are clear. The reader's ear will at once teach him to read the sigh “heigh ho” so as to give the first syllable the time of two (long and short).

FAREWELL TO ARMS

George Peele's four fine stanzas (which must be mentioned as dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, but are better without that dedication) exist in another form, in the first person, and with some archaisms smoothed. But the third person seems to be far more touching, the old man himself having done with verse.

THE PASSIONATE SHEPHERD

The sixth stanza is perhaps by Izaak Walton.

TAKE, O TAKE THOSE LIPS AWAY

The author of this exquisite song is by no means certain. The second stanza is not with the first in Shakespeare, but it is in Beaumont and Fletcher.

KIND ARE HER ANSWERS

These verses are a more subtle experiment in metre by the musician and poet, Campion, than even the following, Laura, which he himself sweetly commended as “voluble, and fit to express any amorous conceit.” In Kind are her Answers the long syllables and the trochaic movement of the short lines meet the contrary movement of the rest, with an exquisite effect of flux and reflux. The “dancers” whose time they sang must have danced (with Perdita) like “a wave of the sea.”

DIRGE

I have followed the usual practice in omitting the last and less beautiful stanza.

FOLLOW

Campion's “airs,” for which he wrote his words, laid rules too urgent upon what would have been a delicate genius in poetry. The airs demanded so many stanzas; but they gave his imagination leave to be away, and they depressed and even confused his metrical play, hurting thus the two vital spots of poetry. Many of the stanzas for music make an unlucky repeating pattern with the poor variety that a repeating wall−paper does not attempt. And yet Campion began again and again with the onset of a true poet. Take, for example, the poem beginning with the vitality of this line, “touching in its majesty"−

“Awake, thou spring of speaking grace; mute rest becomes not thee!”

Who would have guessed that the piece was to close in a jogging stanza containing a reflection on the fact that brutes are speechless, with these two final lines—

“If speech be then the best of graces,
Doe it not in slumber smother!”

Campion yields a curious collection of beautiful first lines.

“Sleep, angry beauty, sleep and fear not me”

is far finer than anything that follows. So is there a single gloom in this—

“Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow!”

And a single joy in this—

“Oh, what unhoped−for sweet supply!”

Another solitary line is one that by its splendour proves Campion the author of Cherry Ripe—

“A thousand cherubim fly in her looks.”

And yet “a thousand cherubim” is a line of a poem full of the dullest kind of reasoning—curious matter for music—and of the intricate knotting of what is a very simple thread of thought. It was therefore no easy matter to choose something of Campion's for a collection of the finest work. For an historical book of representative poetry the question would be easy enough, for there Campion should appear by his glorious lyric, Cherry Ripe, by one or two poems of profounder imagination (however imperfect), and by a madrigal written for the music (however the stanzas may flag in their quibbling). But the work of choosing among his lyrics for the sake of beauty shows too clearly the inequality, the brevity of the inspiration, and the poet's absolute disregard of the moment of its flight and departure. A few splendid lines may be reason enough for extracting a short poem, but must not be made to bear too great a burden.

WHEN THOU MUST HOME

Of the quality of this imaginative lyric there is no doubt. It is fine throughout, as we confess even after the greatness of the opening:−

“When thou must home to shades of underground,
And there arrived, a new admired guest—”

It is as solemn and fantastic at the close as at this dark and splendid opening, and throughout, past description, Elizabethan. This single poem must bind Campion to that period without question; and as he lived thirty−six years in the actual reign of Elizabeth, and printed his Book of Airs with Rosseter two years before her death, it is by no violence that we give him the name that covers our earlier poets of the great age. When thou must Home is of the day of Marlowe. It has the qualities of great poetry, and especially the quality of keeping its simplicity; and it has a quality of great simplicity not at all child−like, but adult, large, gay, credulous, tragic, sombre, and amorous.

THE FUNERAL

Donne, too, is a poet of fine onsets. It was with some hesitation that I admitted a poem having the middle stanza of this Funeral; but the earlier lines of the last are fine.

CHARIS' TRIUMPH

The freshest of Ben Jonson's lyrics have been chosen. Obviously it is freshness that he generally lacks, for all his vigour, his emphatic initiative, and his overbearing and impulsive voice in verse. There is a stale breath in that hearty shout. Doubtless it is to the credit of his honesty that he did not adopt the country− phrases in vogue; but when he takes landscape as a task the effect is ill enough. I have already had the temerity to find fault for a blunder of meaning, with the passage of a most famous lyric, where it says the contrary of what it would say—

“But might I of Jove's nectar sup
I would not change for thine;”

and for doing so have encountered the anger rather than the argument of those who cannot admire a pretty lyric but they must hold reason itself to be in error rather than allow that a line of it has chanced to get turned in the rhyming.

IN EARTH

“I ever saw anything,” says Charles Lamb, “like this funeral dirge, except the ditty which reminds Ferdinand of his drowned father in the Tempest. As that is of the water, watery; so this is of the earth, earthy. Both have that intentness of feeling which seems to resolve itself into the element which it contemplates.”

SONG (Phoebus, arise!)

All Drummond's poems seem to be minor poems, even at their finest, except only this. He must have known, for the creation of that poem, some more impassioned and less restless hour. It is, from the outset to the close, the sigh of a profound expectation. There is no division into stanzas, because its metre is the breath of life. One might wish that the English ode (roughly called “Pindaric") had never been written but with passion, for so written it is the most immediate of all metres; the shock of the heart and the breath of elation or grief are the law of the lines. It has passed out of the gates of the garden of stanzas, and walks (not astray) in the further freedom where all is

interior law. Cowley, long afterwards, wrote this Pindaric ode, and wrote it coldly. But Drummond's (he calls it a song) can never again be forgotten. With admirable judgment it was set up at the very gate of that Golden Treasury we all know so well; and, therefore, generation after generation of readers, who have never opened Drummond's poems, know this fine ode as well as they know any single poem in the whole of English literature. There was a generation that had not been taught by the Golden Treasury, and Cardinal Newman was of it. Writing to Coventry Patmore of his great odes, he called them beautiful but fragmentary; was inclined to wish that they might some day be made complete. There is nothing in all poetry more complete. Seldom is a poem in stanzas so complete but that another stanza might have made a final close; but a master's ode has the unity of life, and when it ends it ends for ever.

A poem of Drummond's has this auroral image of a blush: Anthea has blushed to hear her eyes likened to stars (habit might have caused her, one would think, to bear the flattery with a front as cool as the very daybreak), and the lover tells her that the sudden increase of her beauty is futile, for he cannot admire more: “For naught thy cheeks that morn do raise.” What sweet, nay, what solemn roses!

Again:

“Me here she first perceived, and here a morn
Of bright carnations overspread her face.”

The seventeenth century has possession of that “morn” caught once upon its uplands; nor can any custom of aftertime touch its freshness to wither it.

TO MY INCONSTANT MISTRESS

The solemn vengeance of this poem has a strange tone—not unique, for it had sounded somewhere in mediaeval poetry in Italy—but in a dreadful sense divine. At the first reading, this sentence against inconstancy, spoken by one more than inconstant, moves something like indignation; nevertheless, it is menacingly and obscurely justified, on a ground as it were beyond the common region of tolerance and pardon.

THE PULLEY

An editor is greatly tempted to mend a word in these exquisite verses. George Herbert was maladroit in using the word “rest” in two senses. “Peace” is not quite so characteristic a word, but it ought to take the place of “rest” in the last line of the second stanza; so then the first line of the last stanza would not have this rather distressing ambiguity. The poem is otherwise perfect beyond description.

MISERY

George Herbert's work is so perfectly a box where thoughts “compacted lie,” that no one is moved, in reading his rich poetry, to detach a line, so fine and so significant are its neighbours; nevertheless, it may be well to stop the reader at such a lovely passage as this—

“He was a garden in a Paradise.”

THE ROSE

There is nothing else of Waller's fine enough to be admitted here; and even this, though unquestionably a beautiful poem, elastic in words and fresh in feeling, despite its wearied argument, is of the third−class. Greatness seems generally, in the arts, to be of two kinds, and the third rank is less than great. The wearied argument of The

Rose is the almost squalid plea of all the poets, from Ronsard to Herrick: “Time is short; they make the better bargain who make haste to love.” This thrifty business and essentially cold impatience was—time out of mind—unknown to the truer love; it is larger, illiberal, untender, and without all dignity. The poets were wrong to give their verses the message of so sorry a warning. There is only one thing that persuades you to forgive the paltry plea of the poet that time is brief—and that is the charming reflex glimpse it gives of her to whom the rose and the verse were sent, and who had not thought that time was brief.

L'ALLEGRO

The sock represents the stage, in L'Allegro, for comedy, and the buskin, in Il Penseroso, for tragedy. Milton seems to think the comic drama in England needs no apology, but he hesitates at the tragic. The poet of King Lear is named for his sweetness and his wood−notes wild.

IL PENSEROSO

It is too late to protest against Milton's display of weak Italian. Pensieroso is, of course, what he should have written.

LYCIDAS

Most of the allusions in Lycidas need no explaining to readers of poetry. The geography is that of the western coasts from furthest north to Cornwall. Deva is the Dee; “the great vision” means the apparition of the Archangel, St. Michael, at St. Michael's Mount; Namancos and Bayona face the mount from the continental coast; Bellerus stands for Belerium, the Land's End.

Arethusa and Mincius—Sicilian and Italian streams—represent the pastoral poetry of Theocritus and Virgil.

ON A PRAYER−BOOK

“Fair and flagrant things”—Crashaw's own phrase—might serve for a brilliant and fantastic praise and protest in description of his own verses. In the last century, despite the opinion of a few, and despite the fact that Pope took possession of Crashaw's line—

“Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep,”

and for some time of the present century, the critics had a wintry word to blame him with. They said of George Herbert, of Lovelace, of Crashaw, and of other light hearts of the seventeenth century— not so much that their inspiration was in bad taste, as that no reader of taste could suffer them. A better opinion on that company of poets is that they had a taste extraordinarily liberal, generous, and elastic, but not essentially lax: taste that gave now and then too much room to play, but anon closed with the purest and exactest laws of temperance and measure. The extravagance of Crashaw is a far more lawful thing than the extravagance of Addison, whom some believe to have committed none; moreover, Pope and all the politer poets nursed something they were pleased to call a “rage,” and this expatiated (to use another word of their own) beyond all bounds. Of sheer voluntary extremes it is not in the seventeenth century conceit that we should seek examples, but in an eighteenth century “rage.” A “noble rage,” properly provoked, could be backed to write more trash than fancy ever tempted the half−incredulous sweet poet of the older time to run upon. He was fancy's child, and the bard of the eighteenth century was the child of common sense with straws in his hair—vainly arranged there. The eighteenth century was never content with a moderate mind; it invented “rage”; it matched rage with a flagrant diction mingled of Latin words and simple English words made vacant and ridiculous, and these were the worst; it was resolved to be behind no century in passion—nay, to show the way, to fire the nations. Addison taught himself, as his hero

taught the battle, “where to rage”; and in the later years of the same literary age, Johnson summoned the lapsed and absent fury, with no kind of misgiving as to the resulting verse. Take such a phrase as “the madded land”; there, indeed, is a word coined by the noble rage as the last century evoked it. “The madded land” is a phrase intended to prove that the law−giver of taste, Johnson himself, could lodge the fury in his breast when opportunity occurred. “And dubious title shakes the madded land.” It would be hard to find anything, even in Addison, more flagrant and less fair.

Take The Weeper of Crashaw—his most flagrant poem. Its follies are all sweet−humoured, they smile. Its beauties are a quick and abundant shower. The delicate phrases are so mingled with the flagrant that it is difficult to quote them without rousing that general sense of humour of which any one may make a boast; and I am therefore shy even of citing the “brisk cherub” who has early sipped the Saint's tear: “Then to his music,” in Crashaw's divinely simple phrase; and his singing “tastes of this breakfast all day long.” Sorrow is a queen, he cries to the Weeper, and when sorrow would be seen in state, “then is she drest by none but thee.” Then you come upon the fancy, “Fountain and garden in one face.” All places, times, and objects are “Thy tears' sweet opportunity.” If these charming passages lurk in his worst poems, the reader of this anthology will not be able to count them in his best. In the Epiphany Hymn the heavens have found means

'To disinherit the sun's rise, Delicately to displace The day, and plant it fairer in thy face.”

To the Morning: Satisfaction for Sleep, is, all through, luminous. It would be difficult to find, even in the orient poetry of that time, more daylight or more spirit. True, an Elizabethan would not have had poetry so rich as in Love's Horoscope, but yet an Elizabethan would have had it no fresher. The Hymn to St. Teresa has the brevities which this poet—reproached with his longueurs— masters so well. He tells how the Spanish girl, six years old, set out in search of death: “She's for the Moors and Martyrdom. Sweet, not so fast!” Of many contemporary songs in pursuit of a fugitive Cupid, Crashaw's Cupid's Cryer: out of the Greek, is the most dainty. But if readers should be a little vexed with the poet's light heart and perpetual pleasure, with the late ripeness of his sweetness, here, for their satisfaction, is a passage capable of the great age that had lately closed when Crashaw wrote. It is in his summons to nature and art:

“Come, and come strong,
To the conspiracy of our spacious song!”

I have been obliged to take courage to alter the reading of the seventeenth and nineteenth lines of the Prayer−Book, so as to make them intelligible; they had been obviously misprinted. I have also found it necessary to re−punctuate generally.

WISHES TO HIS SUPPOSED MISTRESS

This beautiful and famous poem has its stanzas so carelessly thrown together that editors have allowed themselves a certain freedom with it. I have done the least I could, by separating two stanzas that repeated the rhyme, and by suppressing one that grew tedious.

ON THE DEATH OF MR. CRASHAW

This ode has been chosen as more nobly representative than that, better known, On the Death of Mr. William Harvey. In the Crashaw ode, and in the Hymn to the Light, Cowley is, at last, tender. But it cannot be said that his love−poems had tenderness. Be wrote in a gay language, but added nothing to its gaiety. He wrote the language of love, and left it cooler than he found it. What the conceits of Lovelace and the rest—flagrant, not frigid—did not do was done by Cowley's quenching breath; the language of love began to lose by him. But even then, even then, who could have foretold what the loss at a later day would be!

HYMN TO THE LIGHT

It is somewhat to be regretted that this splendid poem should show Cowley as the writer of the alexandrine that divides into two lines. For he it was who first used (or first conspicuously used) the alexandrine that is organic, integral, and itself a separate unit of metre. He first passed beyond the heroic line, or at least he first used the alexandrine freely, at his pleasure, amid heroic verse; and after him Dryden took possession and then Pope. But both these masters, when they wrote alexandrines, wrote them in the French manner, divided. Cowley, however, with admirable art, is able to prevent even an accidental pause, making the middle of his line fall upon the middle of some word that is rapid in the speaking and therefore indivisible by pause or even by any lingering. Take this one instance—

“Like some fair pine o'erlooking all the ignobler wood.”

If Cowley's delicate example had ruled in English poetry (and he surely had authority on this one point, at least), this alexandrine would have taken its own place as an important line of English metre, more mobile than the heroic, less fitted to epic or dramatic poetry, but a line liberally lyrical. It would have been the light, pursuing wave that runs suddenly, outrunning twenty, further up the sands than these, a swift traveller, unspent, of longer impulse, of more impetuous foot, of fuller and of hastier breath, more eager to speak, and yet more reluctant to have done. Cowley left the line with all this lyrical promise within it, and if his example had been followed, English prosody would have had in this a valuable bequest.

Cowley probably was two or three years younger than Richard Crashaw, and the alexandrine is to be found—to be found by searching—in Crashaw; and he took precisely the same care as Cowley that the long wand of that line should not give way in the middle—should be strong and supple and should last. Here are four of his alexandrines—

“Or you, more noble architects of intellectual noise.”
“Of sweets you have, and murmur that you have no more.”
“And everlasting series of a deathless song.”
“To all the dear−bought nations this redeeming name.”

A later poet—Coventry Patmore—wrote a far longer line than even these—a line not only speeding further, but speeding with a more celestial movement than Cowley or Crashaw heard with the ear of dreams.

“He unhappily adopted,” says Dr. Johnson as to Cowley's diction, “that which was predominant.” “That which was predominant” was as good a vintage of English language as the cycles of history have ever brought to pass.

TO LUCASTA

Colonel Richard Lovelace, an enchanting poet, is hardly read, except for two poems which are as famous as any in our language. Perhaps the rumour of his conceits has frightened his reader. It must be granted they are now and then daunting; there is a poem on “Princess Louisa Drawing” which is a very maze; the little paths of verse and fancy turn in upon one another, and the turns are pointed with artificial shouts of joy and surprise. But, again, what a reader unused to a certain living symbolism will be apt to take for a careful and cold conceit is, in truth, a rapture—none graver, none more fiery or more luminous. But even to name the poem where these occur might be to deliver delicate and ardent poetry over to the general sense of humour, which one distrusts. Nor is Lovelace easy reading at any time (the two or three famous poems excepted). The age he adorned lived in constant readiness for the fiddler. Eleven o'clock in the morning was as good an hour as another for a dance, and poetry, too, was gay betimes, but intricate with figures. It is the very order, the perspective, as it were, of the movement that seems to baffle the eye, but the game was a free impulse. Since the first day danced with the first night, no

dancing was more natural—at least to a dancer of genius. True, the dance could be tyrannous. It was an importunate fashion. When the Bishop of Hereford, compelled by Robin Hood, in merry Barnsdale, danced in his boots (“and glad he could so get away"), he was hardly in worse heart or trim than a seventeenth century author here and there whose original seriousness or work−a−day piety would have been content to go plodding flat−foot or halting, as the muse might naturally incline with him, but whom the tune, the grace, and gallantry of the time beckoned to tread a perpetual measure. Lovelace was a dancer of genius; nay, he danced to rest his wings, for he was winged, cap and heel. The fiction of flight has lost its charm long since. Modern art grew tired of the idea, now turned to commonplace, and painting took leave of the buoyant urchins—naughty cherub and Cupid together; but the seventeenth century was in love with that old fancy—more in love, perhaps, than any century in the past. Its late painters, whose human figures had no lack of weight upon the comfortable ground, yet kept a sense of buoyancy for this hovering childhood, and kept the angels and the loves aloft, as though they shook a tree to make a flock of birds flutter up.

Fine is the fantastic and infrequent landscape in Lovelace's poetry:

“This is the palace of the wood,
And court o' the royal oak, where stood
The whole nobility.”

In more than one place Lucasta's, or Amarantha's, or Laura's hair is sprinkled with dew or rain almost as freshly and wildly as in Wordsworth's line.

Lovelace, who loved freedom, seems to be enclosed in so narrow a book; yet it is but a “hermitage.” To shake out the light and spirit of its leaves is to give a glimpse of liberty not to him, but to the world.

In To Lucasta I have been bold to alter, at the close, “you” to “thou.” Lovelace sent his verses out unrevised, and the inconsistency of pronouns is common with him, but nowhere else so distressing as in this brief and otherwise perfect poem. The fault is easily set right, and it seems even an unkindness not to lend him this redress, offered him here as an act of comradeship.

LUCASTA PAYING HER OBSEQUIES

That errors should abound in the text of Lovelace is the more lamentable because he was apt to make a play of phrases that depend upon the precision of a comma—nay, upon the precision of the voice in reading. Lucasta Paying her Obsequies is a poem that makes a kind of dainty confusion between the two vestals—the living and the dead; they are “equal virgins,” and you must assign the pronouns carefully to either as you read. This, read twice, must surely be placed amongst the loveliest of his lovely writings. It is a joy to meet such a phrase as “her brave eyes.”

TO ALTHEA, FROM PRISON

This is a poem that takes the winds with an answering flight. Should they be “birds” or “gods” that wanton in the air in the first of these gallant stanzas? Bishop Percy shied at “gods,” and with admirable judgment suggested “birds,” an amendment adopted by the greater number of succeeding editors, until one or two wished for the other phrase again, as an audacity fit for Lovelace. But the Bishop's misgiving was after all justified by one of the Mss. of the poem, in which the “gods” proved to be “birds” long before he changed them. The reader may ask, what is there to choose between birds so divine and gods so light? But to begin with “gods” would be to make an anticlimax of the close. Lovelace led from birds and fishes to winds, and from winds to angels.

“When linnet−like confined” is another modern reading. “When, like committed linnets,” daunted the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it is right seventeenth century, and is now happily restored; happily, because Lovelace would not have the word “confined” twice in this little poem.

A HORATIAN ODE

“He earned the glorious name,” says a biographer of Andrew Marvell (editing an issue of that poet's works which certainly has its faults), “of the British Aristides.” The portly dulness of the mind that could make such a phrase, and having made, award it, is not, in fairness, to affect a reader's thought of Marvell himself nor even of his time. Under correction, I should think that the award was not made in his own age; he did but live on the eve of the day that cumbered its mouth with phrases of such foolish burden and made literature stiff with them. Andrew Marvell's political rectitude, it is true, seems to have been of a robustious kind; but his poetry, at its rare best, has a “wild civility,” which might puzzle the triumph of him, whoever he was, who made a success of this phrase of the “British Aristides.” Nay, it is difficult not to think that Marvell too, who was “of middling stature, roundish−faced, cherry−cheeked,” a healthy and active rather than a spiritual Aristides, might himself have been somewhat taken by surprise at the encounters of so subtle a muse. He, as a garden−poet, expected the accustomed Muse to lurk about the fountain−heads, within the caves, and by the walks and the statues of the gods, keeping the tryst of a seventeenth century convention in which there were certainly no surprises. And for fear of the commonplaces of those visits, Marvell sometimes outdoes the whole company of garden−poets in the difficult labours of the fancy. The reader treads with him a “maze” most resolutely intricate, and is more than once obliged to turn back, having been too much puzzled on the way to a small, visible, plain, and obvious goal of thought.

And yet this poet two or three times did meet a Muse he had hardly looked for among the trodden paths; a spiritual creature had been waiting behind a laurel or an apple−tree. You find him coming away from such a divine ambush a wilder and a simpler man. All his garden had been made ready for poetry, and poetry was indeed there, but in unexpected hiding and in a strange form, looking rather like a fugitive, shy of the poet who was conscious of having her rules by heart, yet sweetly willing to be seen, for all her haste.

The political poems, needless to say, have an excellence of a different character and a higher degree. They have so much authentic dignity that “the glorious name of the British Aristides” really seems duller when it is conferred as the earnings of the Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland than when it inappropriately clings to Andrew Marvell, cherry−cheeked, caught in the tendrils of his vines and melons. He shall be, therefore, the British Aristides in those moments of midsummer solitude; at least, the heavy phrase shall then have the smile it never sought.

The Satires are, of course, out of reach for their inordinate length. The celebrated Satire on Holland certainly makes the utmost of the fun to be easily found in the physical facts of the country whose people “with mad labour fished the land to shore.” The Satire on “Flecno” makes the utmost of another joke we know of− —that of famine. Flecno, it will be remembered, was a poet, and poor; but the joke of his bad verses was hardly needed, so fine does Marvell find that of his hunger. Perhaps there is no age of English satire that does not give forth the sound of that laughter unknown to savages—that craven laughter.

THE PICTURE OF T. C. IN A PROSPECT OF FLOWERS

The presence of a furtive irony of the sweetest kind is the sure sign of the visit of that unlooked−for muse. With all spirit and subtlety does Marvell pretend to offer the little girl T. C. (the future “virtuous enemy of man") the prophetic homage of the habitual poets. The poem closes with an impassioned tenderness not to be found elsewhere in Marvell.

THE DEFINITION OF LOVE

The noble phrase of the Horatian Ode is not recovered again, high or low, throughout Marvell's book, it we except one single splendid and surpassing passage from The Definition of Love—

“Magnanimous despair alone
Could show me so divine a thing.”

CHILDHOOD

One of our true poets, and the first who looked at nature with the full spiritual intellect, Henry Vaughan was known to few but students until Mr. E. K. Chambers gave us his excellent edition. The tender wit and grave play of Herbert, Crashaw's lovely rapture, are all unlike this meditation of a soul condemned and banished into life. Vaughan's imagination suddenly opens a new window towards the east. The age seems to change with him, and it is one of the most incredible of all facts that there should be more than a century—and such a century!—from him to Wordsworth. The passing of time between them is strange enough, but the passing of Pope, Prior, and Gray—of the world, the world, whether reasonable or flippant or rhetorical—is more strange. Vaughan's phrase and diction seem to carry the light. Il vous semble que cette femme degage de la lumiere en marchant? Vous l'aimez! says Marius in Les Miserables (I quote from memory), and it seems to be by a sense of light that we know the muse we are to love.

SCOTTISH BALLADS

It was no easy matter to choose a group of representative ballads from among so many almost equally fine and equally damaged with thin places. Finally, it seemed best to take, from among the finest, those that had passages of genius—a line here and there of surpassing imagination and poetry—rare in even the best folk−songs. Such passages do not occur but in ballads that are throughout on the level of the highest of their kind. “None but my foe to be my guide” so distinguishes Helen of Kirconnell; the exquisite stanza about the hats of birk, The Wife of Usher's Well; its varied refrain, The Dowie Dens of Yarrow; the stanza spoken by Margaret asking for room in the grave, Sweet William and Margaret; and a number of passages, Sir Patrick Spens, such as that beginning, “I saw the new moon late yestreen,” the stanza beginning “O laith, laith were our gude Scots lords,” and almost all the stanzas following. A Lyke Wake Dirge is of surpassing quality throughout. I am sorry to have no room for Jamieson's version of Fair Annie, for Edom o' Gordon, for The Daemon Lover, for Edward, Edward, and for the Scottish edition of The Battle of Otterbourne.

MRS. ANNE KILLIGREW

This most majestic ode—one of the few greatest of its kind—is a model of noble rhythm and especially of cadence. To print it whole would be impossible, and one of the very few excisions in this book is made in the midst of it. Dryden, so adult and so far from simplicity, bears himself like a child who, having said something fine, caps it with something foolish. The suppressed part of the ode is silly with a silliness which Dryden's age chose to dodder in when it would. The deplorable “rattling bones” of the closing section has a touch of it.

SONG, FROM ABDELAZAR

It is a futile thing—and the cause of a train of futilities—to hail “style” as though it were a separable quality in literature, and it is not in that illusion that the style of the opening of Aphra Behn's resounding song is to be praised. But it IS the style—implying the reckless and majestic heart—that first takes the reader of these great verses.

HYMN (The spacious firmament on high)

Whether Addison wrote the whole of this or not,—and it seems that the inspired passages are none of his—it is to me a poem of genius, magical in spite of the limited diction.

ELEGY TO THE MEMORY OF AN UNFORTUNATE LADY

Also in spite of limited diction—the sign of thought closing in, as it did fast close in during those years—are Pope's tenderness and passion communicated in this beautiful elegy. It would not be too much to say that all his passion, all his tenderness, and certainly all his mystery, are in the few lines at the opening and close. The Epistle of Eloisa is (artistically speaking) but a counterfeit. Yet Pope's Elegy begins by stealing and translating into the false elegance of altered taste that lovely and poetic opening of Ben Jonson's—

“What beckoning ghost, besprent with April dew,
Hails me so solemnly to yonder yew?”

All the gravity, all the sweetness, one might fear, must be lost in such a change as Pope makes—

“What beckoning ghost along the moonlight shade
Invites my steps, and points to yonder glade?”

Yet they are not lost. Pope's awe and ardour are authentic, and they prevail; the succeeding couplet—inimitably modulated, and of tragic dignity—proves, without delay, the quality of the poem. The poverty and coldness of the passage (towards the end), in which the roses and the angels are somewhat trivially sung, cannot mar so veritable an utterance. The four final couplets are the very glory of the English couplet.

LINE ON RECEIVING HIS MOTHER'S PICTURE

Cowper, again, by the very directness of human feeling makes his narrowing English a means of absolutely direct communication. Of all his works (and this is my own mere and unshared opinion) this single one deserves immortality.

LIFE

This fragment (the only fragment, properly so called, in the present collection) so pleased Wordsworth that he wished he had written the lines. They are very gently touched.

THE LAND OF DREAMS

When Blake writes of sleep and dreams he writes under the very influence of the hours of sleep—with a waking consciousness of the wilder emotion of the dream. Corot painted so, when at summer dawn he went out and saw landscape in the hours of sleep.

SURPRISED BY JOY

It is not necessary to write notes on Wordsworth's sonnets—the greatest sonnets in our literature; but it would be well to warn editors how they print this one sonnet; “I wished to share the transport” is by no means an uncommon reading. Into the history of the variant I have not looked. It is enough that all the suddenness, all the clash and recoil of these impassioned lines are lost by that “wished” in the place of “turned.” The loss would be

the less tolerable in as much as perhaps only here and in that heart−moving poem, 'Tis said that some have died for love, is Wordsworth to be confessed as an impassioned poet.

STEPPING WESTWARD

This and the preceding two exquisite poems of sympathy are far more justified, more recollected and sincere than is that more monumental composition, the famous poem of sympathy, Hartleap Well. The most beautiful stanzas of this poem last−named are so rebuked by the truths of nature that they must ever stand as obstacles to the straightforward view of sensitive eyes upon the natural world. Wordsworth shows us the ruins of an aspen−wood, a blighted hollow, a dreary place forlorn because an innocent creature, hunted, had there broken its heart in a leap from the rocks above; grass would not grow, nor shade linger there—

“This beast not unobserved by Nature fell,
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.”

And the signs of that sympathy are cruelly asserted to be these arid woodland ruins—cruelly, because the common sight of the day blossoming over the agonies of animals and birds is made less tolerable by such fictions. We have to shut our ears to the benign beauty of this stanza especially—

“The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creature whom He loves.”

We must shut our ears because the poet offers us, as a proof of that “reverential care,” the visible alteration of nature at the scene of suffering—an alteration we are obliged to dispense with every day we pass in the woods. We are tempted to ask whether Wordsworth himself believed in a sympathy he asks us—upon such grounds!—to believe in? Did he think his faith to be worthy of no more than a fictitious sign or a false proof?

To choose from Wordsworth is to draw close a net with very large meshes—so that the lovely things that escape must doubtless cause the reader to protest; but the poems gathered here are not only supremely beautiful but exceedingly Wordsworthian.

YOUTH AND AGE

Close to the marvellous Kubla Khan—a poem that wrests the secret of dreams and brings it to the light of verse—I place Youth and Age as the best specimen of Coleridge's poetry that is quite undelirious—to my mind the only fine specimen. I do not rate his undelirious poems highly, and even this, charming and nimble as it is, seems to me rather lean in thought and image. The tenderness of some of the images comes to a rather lamentable close; the likeness to “some poor nigh−related guest” with the three lines that follow is too squalid for poetry, or prose, or thought.

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

This poem is surely more full of a certain quality of extreme poetry—the simplest “flower of the mind,” the most single magic— than any other in our language. But the reader must be permitted to call the story silly.

Page 265 (Are those her ribs through which the Sun)

Coleridge used the sun, moon, and stars as a great dream uses them when the sleeping imagination is obscurely threatened with illness. All through The Ancient Mariner we see them like apparitions. It is a pity that he followed the pranks also of a dream when he impossibly placed a star WITHIN the tip of the crescent.

Page 266 (I feer thee, ancient Mariner!)

The likeness of “the ribbed sea sand” is said to be the one passage actually composed by Wordsworth,—who according to the first plan should have written The Ancient Mariner with Coleridge—“and perhaps the most beautiful passage in the poem,” adds one critic after another. It is no more than a good likeness, and has nothing whatever of the indescribable Coleridge quality.

Coleridge reveals, throughout this poem, an exaltation of the senses, which is the most poetical thing that can befall a simple poet. It is necessary only to refer, for sight, to the stanza on “the moving Moon” at the bottom of page 267; for hearing, to the supernatural stanzas on page 271; and, for touch, to the line—

“And still my body drank.”

ROSE AYLMER

Never was a human name more exquisitely sung than in these perfect stanzas.

THE ISLES OF GREECE

One really fine and poetic stanza—of course, the third; three stanzas that are good eloquence—the fourth, fifth, and seventh; and one that is a fair bit of argument—the tenth—may together perhaps carry the rest.

HELLAS

The profounder spirit of Shelley's poem yet leaves it a careless piece of work in comparison with Byron's. The two false rhymes at the outset may not be of great importance, but there is something annoying in the dissyllabic rhymes of the second stanza. Dissyllabic rhymes are beautiful and enriching when they fall in the right place; that is, where there is a pause for the second little syllable to stand. For example, they could not be better placed than they would have been at the end of the shorter lines of this same stanza, where they would have dropped into a part of the pause. Another sin of sheer heedlessness—the lapse of grammar in The Skylark, at the top of page 296 (With thy clear keen joyance)— will remind the reader of the special habitual error of Drummond of Hawthornden.

THE WANING MOON

In these few lines the Shelley spirit seems to be more intense than in any other passage as brief.

ODE TO THE WEST WIND

This magnificent poem is surely the greatest of a great poses writings, and one of the most splendid poems on nature and on poetry in a literature resounding with odes on these enormous themes.

THE INVITATION

No need to point to a poem that so shines as does this lucent verse.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

Keats is here the magical poet, as he is the intellectual poet in the great sonnet following; and it is his possession or promise of both imaginations that proves him greater than Coleridge. In his day they seem to have found Coleridge to be a thinker in his poetry. To me he seems to have had nothing but senses, magic, and simplicity, and these he had to the utmost yet known to man. Keats was to have been a great intellectual poet, besides all that in fact he was.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

Of the five odes of Keats, the Nightingale is perhaps the most perfect, and certainly the most imaginative. But the Grecian Urn is the finest, even though it has fancy rather than imagination, for never was fancy more exquisite. The most conspicuous idea—the emptying of the town because its folk are away at play in the tale of the antique urn—is merely a fancy, and a most antic fancy—a prank; it is an irony of man, a rallying of art, a mockery of time, a burlesque of poetry, divine with tenderness. The six lines in which this fancy sports are amongst the loveliest in all literature: the “little town,” the “peaceful citadel,”—were ever simple adjectives more happy? But John Keats's final moral here is undeniably a failure; it says so much and means so little. The Ode to Autumn is an exterior ode, and not in so high a rank, but lovely and perfect. The Psyche I love the least, because its fancy is rather weak and its sentiment effusive. It has a touch of the deadly sickliness of Endymion. None the less does it remain just within the group of the really fine odes of English poets. The eloquent Melancholy more narrowly escapes exclusion from that group.