Poetry.

ODE TO AUTUMN.

BY THOMAS HOOD.

I saw old Autumn in the misty morn
Stand shadowless like silence, listening
To silence, for no lonely bird would sing
Into his hollow ear from woods forlorn,
Nor lowly hedge nor solitary thorn;—
Shaking his languid locks all dewy bright
With tangled gossamer that fell by night.
Pearling his coronet of golden corn.

Where are the songs of Summer?—With the sun
Oping the dusky eyelids of the South,
Till shade and silence waken up as one,
And Morning sings with a warm, odorous mouth.
Where are the merry birds ?—Away, away.
On panting wings through the inclement skies,
Lest owls should prey
Undazzled at noon day,
And tear with horny beak their lustrous eyes.

Where are the blooms of Summer ?—In the West,
Blushing their last to the last sunny hours,
When the mild Eve by sudden Night is prest,
Like tearful Proserpine, snatched from her flowers
To a most gloomy breast.

Where is the prime of Summer—the green prime—
The many, many leaves all twinkling ?—Three
On the mossed elm, three on the naked lime
Trembling,—and one upon the old oak tree !
Where is the Dryad's immortality ?—
Gone into mournful cypress and dark yew,
Or wearing the long, gloomy winter through
In the smooth holly's green eternity.
The squirrel gloats on his accomplished hoard,
The ants have brimmed their garners with ripe grain,
And honey bees have stored
The sweets of summer in their luscious cells ;
The swallows all have winged across the main ;
But here the Autumn melancholy dwells,
And sighs her tearful spells
Amongst the sunless shadows of the plain.
Alone, alone,
Upon a mossy stone
She sits and reckons up the dead and gone,
With the last leaves for a love-rosary.
Whilst all the withered world looks drearily
Like a dim picture of the drowned past
In the hushed mind's mysterious faraway,
Doubtful that ghostly thing will steal the last
Into that distance, grey upon the gray.

O go and sit with her, and be o'ershadowed
Under the languid downfall of her hair ;
She wears a coronal of flowers faded
Upon her forehead, and a face of care ;
There is enough withered everywhere
To make her bower, and enough of gloom ;
There is enough of sadness to invite,
If only for the rose that died,—whose doom
Is Beauty's—she that with the living bloom
Of conscious cheeks most beautifies the light :
There is enough of sorrowing and quite
Enough of bitter fruits the earth doth bear ;—
Enough of chilly droopings for her bowl ;
Enough of fear and shadowy despair
To frame her cloudy prison for the soul.

THE STORY OF ELIZABETH.

BY MISS THACKERAY,
[Daughter of the great English Novelist.]

CONTINUED.

9. 30.—*Reading Room, Flag Hotel, Boatstown.*—

Mr. William Dampier writing at a side-table to a married sister in India. Three old gentlemen come creaking in; select limp newspapers, and take their places. A young man who is going to town by the 10.30 train lies down on the sofa and falls asleep, and snores gently. A soothing silence. Mr. Dampier's blunt pen travels along the thin paper. . . . 'What a dear old woman Aunt Jenny is. How well she tells a story. Lady Dampier was telling me the same story the other day. I was very much bored. I thought each one person more selfish and disagreeable than the other. Now Aunt Jenny takes up the tale. The personages all brighten under her friendly old spectacles, and become good, gentle-hearted, romantic, and heroic all at once—as she is herself. I was a good deal struck by her report of poor John's sentimental imbroglio. I drank tea with the imbroglio this evening, and I can't help rather liking her. She has a sweet pretty face, and her voice, when she talks, pipes and thrills like a musical snuff-box. Aunt Jenny wants her for a niece, that is certain, and says that a man ought to marry the wife he likes best. You are sure to agree to that; I wonder what Miles says. But she's torn with sympathy, poor old dear, and first cries over one girl, and then over the other. She says John came to her one day at Paris in a great state of mind, declared he was quite determined to finish with all his uncertainty, and that he had made up his mind to break with Lætitia, and to marry Elizabeth, if she was still in her old way of thinking. Aunt Jean got frightened, refused to interfere, carried off the young lady, and has not spoken to her on the subject. John, who is really behaving very foolishly, is still at Paris, and has not followed them, as I know my aunt hoped he would have done. I can't help being very sorry for him. Lady Dampier has heard of his goings on. A Frenchman told some people; who told some people who———you know how things get about. Some day when I don't wish it, you will hear all about me, and write me a thundering letter all the way from Lucknow. There is no doubt about the matter. It would be a thousand pities if John were to break off with Lætitia, to speak nothing of the cruelty and the insult to the poor child, who is, I believe, sincerely attached to him.

'This Miss Gilmour certainly made a dead set at him, and we all know that poor John is not the man to resist any attack upon his vanity. Tishy knows nothing of all this, and, to tell the truth, did not object to a little quiet flirtation in her intended's absence. She is just as nice as ever, silent, unaffected, simple, gentle; perhaps it is a shame to say that she seems to want a little heart and tenderness.

'And so Rosey and Posey are a coming home. I am right sorry for their poor papa and mama. I hope you have sometimes talked to my nieces about their respectable uncle Will. They are sure to be looked after and happy with Aunt Jenny, but how you will be breaking your hearts after them! Miles is safe to be ordered home in a year or two, and that is a great consolation. A priest ought perhaps to talk to you of one other consolation more certain and more efficacious. But I have always found my dear Prue a better Christian than myself, and I have no need to preach to her.'

Will Dampier wrote a close, straight little hand-writing; only one side of his paper was full, but he did not care to write any more that night; he put up his letter in his case, and walked out into the garden.

It was a great starlight night. The sea gloomed vast and black on the horizon. A few other people were walking in the garden, and they talked in hushed yet distinct voices. Many of the windows were open and alight. Will looked up at the window of the room where he had been to see his aunt. That was alight and open, too, and some one was sitting with clasped hands, looking at the sky. Dampier lit a cigar, and he, too, walked along gazing at the stars, and thinking of Prue's kind face as he went along. Other constellations clustered above her head, he thought; between them lay miles of land and sea, great countries, oceans rushing, plains arid and unknown; vast jungles, deserted cities, crumbling in a broiling sun; it gave him a little vertigo to try and realize what hundreds of miles of distance stretched between their two beating hearts. Distance so great, and yet so little; for he could love his sister, and think of her, and see her, and talk to her, as if she was in the next room. What was that distance which could be measured by miles, compared to the immeasurable gulf that separates each one of us from the nearest and dearest whose hands we may hold in our own ?

Will walked on, his mind full of dim thoughts, such as come to most people on starlit nights; when constellations are blazing and the living soul gazes with awe-stricken wonder at the great living universe, in the midst of which it waits, and trembles, and adores. 'The world all about has faded away,' he thought, 'and lies dark and dim, and indistinct. People are lying like dead people stretched out, unconscious on their beds, heedless, unknowing. Here and there in the houses, a few dead people are lying like the sleepers. Are they as unconscious as the living?' He goes to the end of the garden, and stands looking upward, until he cannot think longer of things so far above him. It seems to him that his brain is like the string of an instrument, which will break under the passionate vibration of harmonies so far beyond his powers to render. He goes back into the house. Every thing suddenly grows strangely real and familiar, and yet it seemed, but a moment ago, as if to-day and its cares had passed away for ever.

Elly had a little Indian box that her father had once given to her. It served her for a work-box and a treasure casket. She kept her scissors in it, and her ruby ring; some lavender, a gold thimble, and her father's picture. And then in a lower tray were some cottons and tapes, one or two letters, a pencil, and a broken silver chain. She had a childish habit of playing with it still, sometimes, and setting it to rights. It was lying on the breakfast-table next morning when Will Dampier came in to see his aunt. Miss Dampier, who liked order, begged Elly to take it off, and Dampier politely, to save her the trouble, set it down somewhere else, and then came to the table and asked for some tea. The fishes had had no luck that morning, he told them; he had been out in a boat since seven o'clock, and brought back a basketful. The sea air made them hungry, no doubt, for they came by dozens—little feeble whiting—and nibbled at the bait. 'I wish you would come,' he said to his aunt; 'the boat bobs up and down in the sunshine, and the breeze is delightfully fresh, and the people come down on the beach, and stare at you through telescopes.' As he talked to his aunt he glanced at Elly, who was pouring out his tea; he said to himself that she was certainly an uncommonly pretty girl; and then he began to speculate about an odd soft look in her eyes. 'When I see people with that expression,' he wrote to his sister, 'I always ask myself what it means? I have seen it in the glass, sometimes, when I have been shaving. Miss Gilmour was not looking at me, but at the muffins and tea-cups. She was nicely dressed in blue calico; she was smiling; her hair trim and shiny. I could hardly believe it was my wailing banshee of the previous night.' (What follows is to the purpose, so I may as well transcribe a little more of Will's letter.) 'When she had poured out my tea, she took up her hat and said she should go down to the station and get the Times for my aunt. I should have offered my services, but Aunt Jean made me a sign to stay. What for, do you think? To show me a letter she had received in the morning from that absurd John who cannot make up his mind. Here it is before me. I will send you a piece of the rodomontade: 'Have you sounded her as to the state of her feelings? he writes. 'I do not wish to talk her into a partiality for me, but if she is still unhappy, if she still cares for me, I am determined to come after you, and to ask her to be my wife. I do not, as I tell you, want to talk poor Elly into a *grande passion*. But if her feelings are unchanged, I will marry her to-morrow, if she chooses; and I dare say she will not break her heart. Perhaps you will all think me a fool for my pains; but I shall not be alone in the world. What was little Elly herself when she cried for the moon?'

'Aunt Jean said, very sensibly, that she was very much puzzled, that she could not quite understand what was going on in his mind; it seemed to her after all that he was not really in love with anybody, but that he sincerely wished to do what was right.

'I cannot be so charitable as she is, I said (as I wrote to you last night); I thought he was behaving very strangely. I was very sorry for him, but there was no doubt as to whom he ought to marry. He was bound in honor by every possible promise to Tishy, whereas he was not in the least bound to Miss Gilmour; he was not even desperately in love with her. She had accepted her position—it was hard upon her, but it would be ten thousand times harder for Lætitia.

'And yet, won't it be hard for Lætitia,' says my aunt, 'if he marries her, liking Elizabeth best?'

'There was truth in that. 'He mustn't like her best,' said I. 'Miss Gilmour will get over her fancy for him, and he must get over his for her. If he had only behaved like a man and married her right off two years ago, and never hankered after the flesh-pots of Egypt, or if he had only left her alone to settle down with her French pasteur.'

'If—if,' said my aunt, impatiently—'you know her way—' he has done wrong and been sorry for it, Will, which of us can do more? I doubt whether you would have behaved a bit better in his place.'

'I dare say not; but that had nothing to do with the question, and I begged her to write to John and tell him why she had not showed Miss Gilmour his note—my advice was not good, but it seemed to me the best under the circumstances. They were not good either.'

This bit of Mr. Will's letter was written at his aunt's writing-book immediately after their little talk. Elly came in rosy from her walk, and Will went on diligently, looking up every now and then with the sense of *bien etre* which a bachelor experiences when he suddenly finds himself domesticated and at home with kind women.

Miss Dampier was sitting in the window. She had got *The Times* in her hand and was trying to read. Every now and then she looked up at her nephew with his curly head bent over his writing, and at Elly leaning lazily back in her chair, sewing idly at a little shred of work. Her hair was clipped, the color had faded out of her cheeks, her eyes gleamed. Pretty as she was, still she was changed—how changed from Elizabeth of eighteen months ago whom Miss Dampier could remember! The old lady went on with her paper, trying to read. She turned to the French correspondent, and saw something about the Chamber, the Emperor, about Italy; about M. X——, the rich banker, having resolved to terminate his existence, when fortunately his servant entered the room at the precise moment when he was preparing to precipitate himself. 'The servant to precipitate. . . . the window. . . . the. . . . poor Tishy! At my age I did think I should have done with sentimental troubles. Heigho! he likes Elly best, I do believe, and perhaps Elly cares most for him. I vow it is a good thing to be old and to be in love with one's dinner and one's arm-chair. I can keep them both in all honor. But this poor nephew Jack will have to give up one bundle of hay, and I am an old donkey myself to fash so much about it.'

Elly wanted some thread, and rose with a soft rustel and got her box and came back to her easy-chair. Out of the window they could see all the pleasant, idle business of the little sea-port going on, the people strolling in the garden, or sitting in all sorts of queer corners, the boats, the mariners (I do believe they are hired to stand about in blue shirts and shake their battered old noses as they prose for hours together). The waiter came and took away the breakfast, William went on with his letter, and Miss Dampier with John's little note in her pocket, was, as, I say, reading the most extraordinary thing in *The Times* all about her own private concerns. Nobody spoke for some ten minutes, when suddenly came a little gasp, a little sigh from Elly's low chair, and the girl said, 'Aunt Jean! look here,' almost crying, and held out something in her thin hand.

'What is it, my dear?' said Miss Dampier, looking up hastily and pulling off her spectacles; they were dim somehow, and wanted wiping.

'Poor dear, dearest Tishy,' cried Elly in her odd, impetuous way. 'Why does he not go to her? Aunt Jean, look here, I found it in my box—only look here,' and she put a little note into Miss Dampier's hand.

Will looked up curiously from his writing. Elly had forgotten all about him. Miss Dampier took the letter, and when she had read what was written, and then turned over the page, she took off her glasses again with a click and said, 'What nonsense !'

And so it was nonsense, and yet the nonsense touched Elizabeth and brought tears into her eyes. They came faster and faster, and then suddenly remembering that she was not alone, and ashamed that Dampier should see her cry again, she jumped up with a shining, blushing, tear-dimmed, tender face, and ran away out of the room. Aunt Jean looked at Will doubtfully, then hesitated, and gave him the little shabby letter that had brought these bright tears into the girl's eyes. Dear old soul, she made a sort of confessor of her nephew.

The confessor saw a few foolish word which Lætitia must have written days agos never thinking that her poor little words were to be scanned by stranger eyes—written perhaps unconsciously on a stray sheet of paper. There was, 'John. Dear John! Dear, dearest! I am so hap. . . . John and Lætitia. John my jo. Goose and gander.' And then, by some odd chance, she must have folded the blotted sheet together and forgotten what she had written, and sent it off to Elly Gilmour with a little careless note about Schlangenbad, and 'more fortunate next time,' on the other side.

'Poor little Letty! And I who called her indifferent and cold-hearted! What fools we are at times—at all times, I mean,' thought Dampier, as he doubled it up and put it back into the lavender box.

'All the same, Elly ought to know that he would marry if she wishes it,' said Miss Dampier, going back to the charge.

'There is always time enough to tell her so,' said Dampier, thoughtfully. When you have heard from John again——'

As he spoke the door opened, and Miss Gilmour came back into the room. She dried her eyes, she had fastened on her gray shawl. She picked up her hat, which was lying on the floor, and began pulling on two very formidable looking gauntlets over her slim white hands. 'I am going for a little walk,' she said, to Miss Dampier. Will you'—hesitating and blushing—, direct that little note of Lætitia's to Sir John? I am going along the cliff towards that pretty little bay.'

Will was quite melted and touched. Was this the scheming young woman against whom he had been warned? the woman who had entangled his cousin with her wiles? Here was one of the foolish, unexpected things he sometimes did. After making up his mind, and talking everybody over to his own way of thinking, he undoes it all by a single stroke.

'Aunt Jenny,' he says, 'are you going to tell her John Dampier does not go to Lætitia?'

'Why does he not go?' Elly repeats, losing her color a little.

He says that if you would like him to stay he thinks he ought not to go,' says Jean Dampier, hesitating, and tearing corners off *The Times* newspaper