

and an almost rugged versification was now the aim of the poets.

Byron and Wordsworth are the central figures of this period, and are surrounded by an almost innumerable host of lights scarcely less brilliant, and all possessing prominent characteristics, but we must be content to separate these two great ones who are similar yet so different. Byron, wrapped up in himself—essentially selfish, transcribing himself with all his gloomy sadness in his poems, yet in every word breathing an emotion that is overwhelming in its power. In his descriptions pre-eminent, showing in the nobleness of his descriptive lines one of his highest characteristics—sympathy with nature. Impulsive and loving, he has ministered to the appetite for poetry in warmth and force of passion which have made his poems immortal. Wordsworth, in his wide sympathy for man and plainness of sentiment and expression, is a contrast, but the two are united in their love of nature. In Wordsworth we find the influence of the lofty, elevated thoughts, clothed in simple words, yet none the less beautiful. He has probably spiritualized modern imaginative literature more than any other poet. Morley says of him.—“As yet, too little sensuous to be widely popular, but that popularity will extend in proportion as the general mind ascends to his mount of vision.” We have selected the following, as showing his love of nature as a passion and his rare spirituality :

“For I have learned
To look on Nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
The still sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling in the light of setting suns
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts
And rolls through all things.”

This school, so admirable in its predominant features, was not without its

mistakes. When we consider the theory that brought it into existence we will cease to wonder at the absence of the Epic and Drama to which the judgment of many generations had assigned the palm of superiority among poetic forms. The truth is, no complex or extensive poem was ever composed without great help from the constructive faculty—which it was the object of this theory to undervalue. Great as were some of the poems produced, we cannot but think they are not so good as they might have been, owing to a lack of painstaking in construction.

Among other things that were mistakes of the school, inferior poets were not silenced, and in this age they were inferior poets of an inferior kind—men “gifted with a fatal faculty of rhyme,” and possessing minds teeming with trivial thoughts. Productions from such as these were soon so numerous that a poem of any excellence was lost in a shoal of works utterly worthless. It was not long ere this degraded the school and the divine afflatus ceased. The influences from the great productions of the age are lasting and, on the whole, beneficial. A taste for genuine feeling was created ; refined emotions existed, brightening daily life with images of beauty and grace. But in some, genuine feeling was degraded into sensuality, and monsters in whom “one virtue is linked with a thousand crimes” were held up to admiration, and dignity was conferred on vice. But beside these are seen beauty, loveliness, pity, faith and charity. So it is with the whole school, “in the fadeless gardens, flowers and weeds are commingled.”

American poetry has followed a pathway of its own, not occupying itself with classical subjects and studies, but writing graceful verses of an emotional, lyrical or descriptive kind, aroused by natural landscape and patriotism. Surrounded by the greatest beauties of nature, and breathing the atmosphere of freedom and prosperity, the poetic nature is moved to its greatest depth, and gives to the world poems of surpassing sweetness that cannot fail to touch the true cord in the heart. It has been said by some critic that “the American poets