

succeeded where the bright suns shed few rays. Matthew Arnold and Alfred Austin, for example have sauntered gracefully down the sonnet glades, where Percy Bysshe Shelley and Samuel Taylor Coleridge cut poor enough figures. Again, the sonnet is not popular because it is not everyone, even among the most cultivated, can tell precisely what a sonnet should be.

A sonnet has been defined by an intelligent young lady as "a thing that rhymes with bonnet." A young gentlemen of some literary pretensions and a turn for satire perhaps, has called the sonnet "a little poem used to stop holes in magazine copy." A learned pedagogue in reply to a question of the present writer replied: "a sonnet is fourteen lines of decasyllabic metre." Now, all these definitions are lamentably deficient. As Mr. R. K. Munckittrick recently reminded the readers of a magazine, a decasyllabic poem of fourteen lines is not a sonnet any more than an octasyllabic poem of twenty lines is a lyric, or a poem of eighteen thousand lines in iambic pentameter is an epic. Sonnets are, it is true, extensively used to fill in blanks in magazines, and as tail-pieces for prose articles, but this use does not made them sonnets. As to the definition of the intelligent young lady it can be truly averred that it is as nearly right as any one that would be submitted by the average member of any social circle. In fine, the sonnet is a form of very often used but little understood.

Spirit goes for much in a sonnet. Perhaps the best way of briefly showing the spirit which should actuate this form of poetry would be to analyse the thought of one of the greatest sonnets in the language, if not the greatest—poor Blanco White's sonnet on Night. The grand thought of it I take to be this: Night, which at first threatens to hide all things from view, in fact reveals to us those illimitable starry worlds of which, and of the existence of which, except for it, we should not have had the least suspicion. What if death, which in like manner threatens to hide so much, shall indeed reveal far more than it hides? This profound thought is worked out by means of two quatrains, its octave, or major system, and two tercets, its sestet, or minor system. The quatrains are, you perceive, objective, and make a statement, and the tercets are subjects, and express the simile suggested in the quatrains, just as William Clarke says they should. The sonnet