

1850-60, and that from the latter date there had been a very strange and lamentable decline to the end of the reign, would, he thought, be amply demonstrated. A glorious galaxy of talent adorned the years 1850-60. There were two great poets, two great novelists, and two great historians. The two great poets were Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning. The first named would always stand at the head of the literature of the Victorian period. There was no poet in the whole course of our history whose works were more likely to live as a complete whole than he, and there was not a line which his friends would wish to see blotted out. Robert Browning was a poet of strange inequality and of extraordinary and fantastic methods in his composition. However much one could enjoy some of his works, one could only hope that two-thirds of them would be as promptly as possible forgotten—not, however, from any moral objection to what he wrote. He was the Carlyle of poetry. By his *Lives of Schiller and Sterling*, Carlyle showed that he *could* write beautiful and pure English, but that he should descend to the style of some of his later works was a melancholy example of misdirected energy. . . . Charles Dickens was perhaps the most extraordinary genius of those who had endeavoured to deal with fiction as illustrative of the actual experiences of life. With Dickens there stood the great figure of Thackeray, who had left a great collection of books, very unequal in their quality, but containing amongst them some of the finest things ever written in the English tongue. The two great historians were Macaulay and Froude. To-day we had no great novelists. Would anyone suggest we had a poet? (Laughter.) After the year 1860 there were two great names in poetry—the two Rossettis. There had been no book produced in the last ten years which could compete with any one of the books produced from 1850 to 1860."

To this Mr. Edmund Gosse replied a week later at the Dinner of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. He reminded his audience that even the most perspicuous people in past times had made the grossest blunders when they judged their own age. Let them remember the insensibility of Montaigne to the merits of all his contemporaries. In the next age, and in their own country, Ben Jonson took occasion at the very moment when Shakespeare was producing his masterpieces, to lament the total decay of poetry in England. We could not see the trees for the wood behind them, but we ought to be confident they were growing all the time.

Mr. Gosse also wrote to the *Times* on behalf of "the Profession" of Letters, reminding Sir Edward of the names of Swinburne and William Morris, Hardy and Stevenson, Creighton and Gardiner, and asking what would be the feelings of the learned gentleman if Meredith or Leslie Stephen (of whose existence he was perhaps unaware) should put the question in public, "Would anyone suggest we have an Advocate?"

Sir Edward, in his rejoinder, had no difficulty in showing that Mr.