as she tended her flowers. That old song acted like a charm in removing the barrier between us, and dissipating those causeless fears, which never returned again during that happy and memorable visit.

What a large population of people, even in the most elevated and intellectual society, there are who prefer hearing a simple old ballad before anything else; although very many want the courage to confess it. Look round you, for instance, at the *soiree* or concert-room—first, perhaps, comes an instrumental performance by a brilliant and popular musician, whose spirit, as Bellini says of Beethoven, "actually seems to create the inconceivable, while his fingers perform the impossible!" A few enter into the beauty of the conception, others admire and marvel at the rapidity, and at the same time the exquisite finish of his execution. Some, lulled by those sweet sounds, suffer their thoughts to wander away in a pleasant, dreamy, idleness, the spell of which is only broken at last by their cessation. And not a few wonder when it is to end, and the singing begin.

And now follows an Italian air from the last new Opera. Half the people present, in all probability, do not understand the language, and are trying to look as if they did: but in spite of that splendid voice, it is a dull affair for them. And even when the talent of the singer rises, as we have known it to do, superior to all language, electrifying, and taking the admiration of her hearers, as it were by storm, with her charming cadences, and bird-like notes, and drawing down one unanimous burst of applause—it is still but a poor triumph compared to that achieved by old songs.

"Now, Fanny, dear," whispered an elderly gentleman nearest to his companion, "they are going to sing *your song!*"

We turned involuntarily: but one glance was sufficient to assure us that the simple little woman who looked up to him with her sweet, loving smile, was no authoress or song-writer, but his wife; and the air, one which in all probability she had sung to him years ago—before they were married perhaps.

The song was touching and plaintive. Old enough to have its memories—no right recommendation in these days of "new music"—all could understand—many *felt* it. Tears rushed unbidden into eyes, almost unused to weeping. Those who smiled then, and there were not a few glad young hearts to whom sorrow and sadness were but names, will weep perchance when they hear it again, at the recollection of that happy evening, and those who made its happiness for them. There were less apparent manifestations of applause, and more deep and silent gratification. The elderly gentleman was the only one who did not look quite satisfied—nothing could equal the remembrance of Fanny's singing for him; and yet as he said, "it was pleasant enough to listen, and think of old times."

A venerable-looking woman, with the tears still glistening on her pale cheeks, and mourning in her dress, but still more in her face, turned to whisper something to her companion:—

"That was our poor Mary's song—bless her!"

We thought of "she—the silver tongued," so exquisitely described by Christopher North, in his paper on Christmas Dreams, "as about to sing an old ballad, words and air alike, hundreds of years old—and sing she doth, while tears begin to fall, with a voice too mournfully beautiful long to breathe below. And ere another Christmas shall have come with its falling snows, doomed to be mute on earth, but to be hymning in Heaven."

But, after all, the Mary referred to might have been married only, and gone away from the home of her youth, or unhappy. The word "poor" has a thousand significations, and is used in endearment as well as commiseration.

Why is it that we are "never merry when we hear sweet music?" That, according to Shelley,—

"Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

Can there be aught of truth in the wild and poetical creed of the Hindoos, regarding musical effect, which they strictly connect with past events, believing that it arises from our recalling to memory the airs of Paradise, heard in a state of pre-existence mistaking the inspirations of genius for the dreams of immortality? The Egyptians believe that men were spirits fallen from a brighter world, and that a genius stands at the entrance of mortal life with a Lethean cup in his hand, from which every soul before it wanders out, is forced to take a deep oblivious draught, *awakening with only a confused and indistinct recollection of the* past. Among these glimpses of the "better-land," harmony is suppposed to be one of the most frequent occurrence. Plato has a similar faith, and looks upon the human soul as an exile from its radiant home, followed by infinite aspirations, and haunting recollections of the Beautiful in sight and sound. How exquisitely *has this idea been shadowed forth by one of the sweetest of* our living poetesses:*—

"A yearning to the Beautiful denied you,
Shall strain your powers;
Ideal sweetness shall over-glide you,
Resumed from ours!
In all your music our pathetic minor
Your ears shall cross;
And all fair sights shall mind you of diviner,
With sense of loss!"

How often do we hear of some sweet air which seems strangely familiar, and yet, if we ever heard it before, it must have been thus—or in our dreams!—a wild creed which Fancy revels in, at the same time that Reason rejects. But we willingly quit the mysteries of philosophy, for the realities of truth and experience.

A few years since, at a large *soireé*, where half the company were unknown to us, we chanced to sit opposite a lady, who, but for subsequent events, would in all probability have been passed over unnoticed in our eager search after the principal stars in the literary hemisphere—those wandering lights which had ever a strange charm for us. She was below the middle size, with nothing striking either in dress or manner—one of those every-day faces which Professor Longfellow happily compares to "a book, where no line is written, save perhaps a date!"

On a sudden the hum of eager voices was hushed into silence, or only heard in suppressed whispers; and some one commenced singing an old Scotch ballad, simple and characteristic, but not remarkable for any depth of sentiment. The heart creates its own pathos. The lady before mentioned shuddered, and changed color as she listened. Her bosom heaved with some hidden and painful emotion. She struggled evidently and vainly against it, becoming at length so fearfully pale, that we could not help asking if she were ill. She looked up half-unconsciously—the look was no longer a fair unwritten scroll, but deeply indented with the traces of sorrow and anguish.

"Take me away!" exclaimed she wildly, and imploringly. "I cannot bear this!"

We went into the ante-room. Fortunately there was no one there; and sitting down, she covered her face with her hands, and wept and sobbed like a child, evidently forgetting that she was not alone. And then recovering herself by a strong effort, and with a convulsive laugh, that was sadder far than tears, began to apologise for the trouble she had given, and to murmur something about the heat and the crowd, as she carelessly arranged her dark hair, so that it fell like a shadow over her pale face. Just then, one of her party, who were all strangers to us, came in search of her, and we re-entered the room together.

We saw her once again in the course of the evening, laughing and talking with much animation, and apparent *gaieté de cœur;* but failed in all our endeavors to learn her name. Nor could our kind hostess, among her two hundred guests, be brought to recollect and identify that particular one who had so much interested us. And having no means of ascertaining her real history, we were forced to content ourselves with imagining a dozen different ones, all more or less connected with Old Songs.

"Shew me a heart," writes L. E. L., "without its hidden wound!" And we verily believe, that however outwardly calm and self-possessed, each have their secret sorrow, unguessed, unpitied, unrevealed, but for those lightning touches of association, which, unlocking the barriers of a cold, but necessary reserve, give us transient glimpses of a sad and sorrowful romance, oftentimes when least expected.

* Miss E. B. Barrett.