

thought, of tender and impassioned emotions. To write a detailed history of the English sonnet is not my object; but I may mention in passing that he who desires such reading will find much to satisfy his desires in the essays on the sonnet prepared by such writers as Mr. Hall Caine, Mr. Main, Mr. Ashcroft Noble, the late Archbishop French, Mr. J. Addington Symond, Mr. Theodore Watts, and Mr. William Sharp. By referring to the collection of sonnets published by Hall Caine and William Sharp we are at once convinced that the mightiest of the British poets, not urged thereto by any form of necessity, but of their own free choice, have one after another chosen this form of verse in which to embody and preserve some of their very choicest thoughts, their most personal and most vivid utterances. As an exercise in metre and compression, the sonnet form commends itself forcibly to the poetic worker. The mold has ever been a favorite one with our poets, who, no doubt, felt the advantage of that check to diffusiveness, that necessity of condensation, which its narrow limit imposes. The point is made clear on Wordsworth's famous Sonnet on the Sonnet, wherein we are told of the many great poets who loved it, and found it the casket in which they were pleased to treasure some of the very best which they possessed. Our sonnet literature is, consequently, extremely rich and various, and the influence exercised by the sonnet must be great on the more cultivated and scholarly minds, as the English sonnets contain a large amount of the material from which none, capable of enjoying true poetry, should willingly cut themselves off.

But while the sonnet form has always been, and is, a prime favorite with the poets, so much cannot be affirmed of their readers. To resort to paradox, the sonnet is a popular form of verse which is not popular. Leaving aside the fact that good sonnets are crammed with high thought, the work of quarrying which marble many good people dread, the chief reasons for the dislike are, I believe, two in number. A great number of bad sonnets have found their way into our literature, commonly through the kitchen door of our lesser magazines; for, be it remembered, some of our truest poets have been and are unable to write sonnets of the first order, and, where the great ones failed the little ones simply floundered. On the other hand some of the lesser lights