

of power more finely developed, and was no doubt the growth of larger wisdom and experience. His *Life Drama* is sown with beautiful pearls of expression, and, to be enjoyed, must be read in the country on a golden summer's day, for there is a freshness, a simplicity, and terseness of expression in every page, which contributes to it its greatest charm; and truly does the Westminster Review remark, in speaking of his book:—"The most striking characteristic of these poems is their abundant *imagery*—fresh, vivid concrete images, actually present to the poet's mind, and thrown out with a distinctiveness and a delicacy only poets can achieve. There is not a page of this volume on which we cannot find some novel image, some Shakspearean felicity of expression, or some striking simile." There are a few sonnets in his volume of the *Life Drama*, which bear a very strong resemblance to those of Wordsworth's: indeed, everywhere in his poetry, we find evidence of that appreciative love of Nature in all her moods, which eminently characterizes the writing of the former poet. From his sonnets we select the following, a rare poetic gem, revealing as it does the tender and emotional heart of the writer:—

"Last night my cheek was wetted with warm tears,
Each worth a world. They fell from eyes divine.
Last night a loving lip was pressed to mine,
And at its touch fled all the barren years:
And softly couched upon a bosom white,
Which came and went beneath me like a sea,
An emperor I lay in empire bright,
Lord of the beating heart, while tenderly
Love words were glutting my love greedy ears.
Kind love, I thank thee for that happy night!
Richer this cheek with those warm tears of thine
Than the vast midnight, with its gleaming spheres.
Leander, toiling through the midnight brine,
Kingdomless Antony, were scarce my peers."

These poems, the fruits of his early labours, placed their author at once upon the list for fame, and was soon followed by the mythical romance of Edwin de Deira, which, however, did not attract so much notice as the *Life Drama*. He soon turned his attention to other fields of labour, and wrote those inimitable essays published under the title *Dreamthorp*. In this volume the reader is enabled to comprehend the artistic and esthetic spirit of the writer. The book as a book, cannot be excelled for the beauty and simplicity of the style, the freshness and correctness of its description, and for the tenderness, the pathos and wisdom, which everywhere abound in its pages. One lingers with pleasure on its homely texts of morals, manners, and the conduct of life, and learns to respect and love the writer. The writing of this book seems to our mind to have been a labour of love, the style is so free, so flowing and so easy, pervaded as it is with the pure spirit of poetry. The imagination of the author is so vivid, and his descriptions so graphic and natural, that the mind of the reader is insensibly carried away. We seem to be denizens of the old fashioned conservative village he so beautifully describes: we mingle with the villagers, and, with our poetic *Cicerone*, are led from scene to scene. This work shows

that Alexander Smith possessed the highest qualities of the literary artist, revealing a rare command and power of good homely English, combined with a style original, terse, and expressive.

Two novels and a racy entertaining book of travel sum up the completion of his labours.—What he might have done further in the great world of art can only be conjectured; but we think he has done enough to secure for himself an honourable position in that great temple of genius, hallowed by the recollections of the good and the wise of every clime. We have no hesitation in placing Smith side by side with such writers as Lamb, Hawthorne, and others of the same school, nor will we deny him the place of being first upon the list. His genius was not in the highest sense of the word creative; like his old favourite, Montaigne, he loved to observe and depict the homely ways and manners of men, with a feeling of tenderness mixed with humour for their faults and follies. If an author's style is judged by his variety of expression, no one, we think, will stand the test better than Smith. It has all the charm and simplicity of our old writers, combined with the force of illustration and beauty of sentiment of those of our day.

His easy flowing and graceful expression, is the great charm of all his writings. His skill in the construction of sentences, shows at once the great literary artist, and this can only be acquired by him or her who has in some measure that sense of the poetic, combined with a taste for harmony and song. It is upon this ground we contend that writers of poetry are also the best writers of prose, which the literature of every country sufficiently attest. But this art of composition can only be acquired by long and laborious practice, by the exercise of patience and persevering application. We have evidence in many of the lives of literary men, born with great powers of conception, but who lacked expression—such a great German called the dumb ones of heaven. In fact, expression is everything in art, and the maxims and thoughts of writers expressed in one generation are repeated in the next, only under different forms.

Mr. Smith died at an age which is said to be generally very fatal to men of genius, having barely completed his thirty-seventh year. But, there is no doubt, his excessive application to study, hastened his end. He was born at Kilmarnock, 31st December, 1829, and died at Gesto Villa, Wardie, Jan. 5, 1867. Towards the close of his life he contributed to Blackwood, Macmillan's Magazine, The North British Review, the Museum, the West of Scotland Magazine, Good Words, and latterly to the Argosy and Quiver. In the language of a celebrated reviewer, we can only say "his work is done; the too short day of performance merged forever in night." In the language of Mrs. Browning, applied to another lamented poet, we say—

"Earth surely now can give her calm
To whom she gave her anguish."