

were its exponents. Only towards the latter part of his life did his association with Shelley and the growing feeling that they were one at heart, in hatred of the shams and formalities which were then being bound like grave-clothes round the head of struggling Europe, tend to produce anything like that sense of brotherhood which might have done so much to mellow and refine Byron's embittered temperament. The group of poets we now approach, Byron, Shelley, and Keats, produce on us the effect we might expect to feel if some grand trilogy by Sophocles were discovered, and ere the papyrus could be unrolled, the spoiler's hand were to tear away and destroy all but the opening stanzas of each masterpiece. All so great, all so deeply imbued with the love of Liberty, and all dying so young! How their minds would have matured, and possibly reacted upon each other, and what a noble fellowship they might have formed in some historic Italian city,—this we may picture to ourselves, but can never know. Constitutional despotism, engineered by its Metternichs, must have smiled grimly as the grave closed on them, one by one.

The recent reaction in favour of Byron's poetry is manifested in Mr. Symond's introductory remarks, and appears to rest upon a solid basis. English opinion yearly becomes more cosmopolitan, and a writer who holds the high position on the Continent which Byron does cannot be much longer frowned down by the now decadent spirit of second-rate pharisaical morality which has so long tabooed his works. Increased remoteness from his life will tend also to bring about a juster criticism upon his poems. Possibly Byron exaggerated his sentiments and delighted to overlay the shadows of his despair with the most melancholy tints,—this element of insincerity will die out as we forget the author and apply ourselves more closely to his productions.

To do the scantest justice to Shelley and Keats in the short space still left at our disposal would be an impossibility. Their names must simply stand on record as witnesses to the truth of the position we took up at the commencement of this notice:—the 'Ode to a Skylark' and 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' would alone suffice to redeem the age from the charge of having produced no poets. To mention for a moment a lower name, there

is a curious coincidence noticeable between the poem of Leigh Hunt, given at page 346, on the 'Grasshopper and Cricket' and Keats's sonnet on the same subject, commencing,

'The poetry of earth is never dead.'

Passing on to Landor, we find that a greater poet than Southey has lost much of the recognition that posterity undoubtedly won him from two faults not often found in company. Like Southey, his long poems, such as *Gebir*, are too long, and at the same time his thoughts are at times so involved as to be almost as inextricable as ordinary passages in 'Sordello.' But as Browning can be as pure as spring water when he chooses, so could Landor be. A lovely example of this, his better, style is to be found at page 479, in a short piece of blank verse on *Iphigenia and Agamemnon*; and when he was once driven to be clear and compressed as in his epigrams and epitaphs (whether couched in English or Latin) Landor was simply unsurpassable.

Campbell, Moore, Hood,—Ebenezer Elliot, the Corn Law Rhymers, Mrs. Browning and Charles Kingsley,—all must be passed over without a word of comment, and yet they would have taken no mean place among the poets our grandsires delighted to honour. But we cannot refrain from pointing out the forerunner of a new school of poetry in Clough, the first poet of that vast transition movement which is hurrying the world away from its old mooring-grounds out into the dark ocean of Doubt in search of some 'land which no man knows.'

The last glimpse of those familiar havens, which can no longer hold our dragging anchors,—the faint lift of the clouds on the sea of despair,—the first distant glimmer of hope as we see the new shore shaping itself beneath cloud and tempest and know that it is very fair,—these will furnish the poet of the future with themes for immortal verse.

Clough has sung the siren voices that would fain tempt us back from that perilous voyage,—but tempt in vain.

'Come back, come back;—and whither or for what?

To finger idly some old Gordian knot,  
Unskilled to sunder, and too weak to cleave,  
And with much toil attain to half-believe.

Come back. Come back!'