

mankind recorded in Scripture is not too solemn to be used as a comparison with the life-teeming thought of Shakespeare, and the personal close is saved from the weakness of mere eulogy by the application of the highest phase of philosophy.

TO SHAKESPEARE.

The soul of man is larger than the sky,
Deeper than ocean, or the abysmal dark
Of the unfathomed centre. Like that Ark,
Which in its sacred hold uplifted high,
O'er the drowned hills, the human family,
And stock reserved of every living kind;
So, in the compass of the single mind,
The seeds and pregnant forms in essence lie,
That make all worlds. Great Poet, 'twas thy art
To know thyself, and in thyself to be
Whate'er love, hate, ambition, destiny,
Or the firm, fatal purpose of the heart,
Can make of Man. Yet thou wert still the same
Serene of thought, unhurt by thy own flame.

The above sonnet is very fine; but the following is still superior and in the truly sublime flash of genius Matthew Arnold reveals not a little of the master's nature. It is the best sonnet on Shakespeare yet written, and is likely to retain its pre-eminent position.

SHAKESPEARE.

Others abide our question. Thou art free.
We ask and ask—thou smilest and art still,
Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill
Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty,
Planting his steadfast footsteps in the sea,
Making the heaven of heavens his dwelling place,
Spares but the cloudy border of his base
To the foiled searching of mortality;
And thou, who did the stars and sunbeams know,
Self-school'd, self-scann'd, self-honour'd, self-secure,
Didst stand on earth unguess'd at. Better so!
All pains the immortal spirit must endure,
All weakness which impairs, all griefs which bow,
Find their sole voice in that victorious brow.

The third sonnet (in order of excellence) is the following most artistic poem, by Frederick George Scott. It is truly a noble sonnet; the imagery is beautiful and sufficient; it is at once simple and grand; it appeals to all, and the touch of the poet is imprinted on every line. The invisibility of the personal Shakespeare, that crux to all humanity, and the universality of his creative genius are alike embodied.

In its construction it does not belong to any so-called proper sonnet-form. As a matter of fact it is really a short poem of two seven-line verses, according to the critics. It contains what may be called two base rhymes, according to the first, fourth, and seventh line of each septette, and in each verse there are two other rhymes in the second and sixth, and third and fifth lines respectively. But the critics cannot prevent or alter sonnets—they can merely comment, and with such a comment as to the construction of his sonnet, Mr. Scott's poem must be acknowledged remarkably fine and deserving a place in any collection. This is not the only remarkable sonnet written by this gentleman, whose poems, though not propped up by cheap sticks of critical taffy, are built on such a solid basis of thoughtful beauty as to speak for themselves.

SHAKESPEARE.

Unseen in the great minster dome of time,
Whose shafts are centuries, its spangled roof
The vaulted universe, our master sits,
And organ voices like a far-off chime
Roll thro' the aisles of thought. The sunlight flits
From arch to arch, and, as he sits aloof,
Kings, heroes, priests, in concourse vast, sublime,
(Glances of love and cries from battle-field,
His wizard power breathes on the living air.
Warm faces gleam and pass, child, woman, man,
In the long multitude; but he, concealed,
Our hard eludes us, vainly each face we scan,
It is not he; his features are not there;
But, being thus hid, his greatness is revealed.

Among the great living poets who have not written many sonnets is Robert Browning; but he has given us an expression of thought regarding Shakespeare, which is great but laboured and altogether lacking in the polished requirements of this form of verse. Mr. Browning is more at home in long than short poems. He requires plenty of room wherein to spread his thoughts, and cannot easily be bounded in a nutshell. He can chisel exquisitely as small work as may be necessary to filling in the details of his larger masses; but he is rarely able to cut an intaglio. The following sonnet seems too great an effort to be a success, and sonnet language should be clear as the globe of dew to which the form has been likened. Carlyle might have written this sonnet, which has somewhat the air of an orchestra in full force, where there should only be the strain of a violin. However, the fact of its having been written by Robert Browning will carry it into our chapter, as the name of this great poet will not often appear as a writer of sonnets.

Shakespeare! to such name sounding what succeeds
Fitly as silence! Faiter forth the spell—
Act follows word, the speaker knows full well,
Nor tampers with its magic more than needs.
Two names there are: That which the Hebrew reads
With his soul only: If from lips it fell,
Echo, back thundered by earth, heaven and hell,
Would own, "Thou didst create us!" Nought impedes.
We voice the other name, man's most of might,
Awe-some, lovingly; let awe and love
Mutely await their working, leave to sight
All of the issue as—below—above—
Shakespeare's creation rises; one remove,
Though dread—this finite from that infinite.

The following sonnet speaks for itself, and many Shakespearean readers will endorse the scornful sentiments of William McGill, which appeared some time ago in THE WEEK, ominously entitled:—

SHAKESPEARIAN GHOULS.

Shakespeare, thy muse, like Atlas, holds a heaven
Of literature above our pigmy souls,

The science of its shining stars enrolls
Full many a modern sage, to whom is given
A parasitic fame for having striven
To search the sparkling spaces of thy mind.
Fear not, Great Bard, though infidels unkind
The Maker from his universe have driven
On their poor charts. Forgive such crack-brained spite.
"These undevout astronomers are mad,"
And in the bitter curse which thou didst write,
Include them not; although in truth as bad
As body-smatchers is the impious wight
Who delves to earth thy living name from sight.

After the contemplation of the highest genius the mind is apt to lose touch with ability of a lesser order. As a natural scene is infinitely superior to the finest landscape painted, so is genius, which is the gift of nature, out of the sphere of that talent which results in imitative acquirement of art. Yet the painter is not to be despised because his production is bounded by the limitation of thought and material, and cannot affect us in the same degree as a sight of the green fields and sky. This was the train of thought that led Barry Cornwall to write on the fly leaf of a copy of the 1632 folio Shakespeare, which he gave to John Forster, the following sonnet:

TO JOHN FORSTER.

I do not know a man who better reads
Or weighs the great thoughts of the Book I send,
Better than he whom I have called my friend
For twenty years and upwards. He who feeds
Upon Shakespearean pastures never needs
The humbler food which springs from plains below;
Yet may he love the little flowers that blow,
And him excuse who for their beauty pleads.
Take then my Shakespeare to some sylvan nook;
And pray thee, in the name of Days of Old,
(Good-will and Fellowship, never bought or sold,
Give me assurance thou wilt always look
With kindness still on Spirits of humbler mould:
Kept firm by resting on that Wondrous Book,
Wherein the Dream of Life is all unrolled.

1856.

BARRY CORNWALL.

The above is not strictly a sonnet, inasmuch as it has fifteen lines; but, whether this was the result of accident or design, the fault is not without precedent. Shakespeare's 99th Sonnet, "The forward violet thus did I chide," is another specimen. Bryan Waller Proctor was not an extensive sonnet writer; but among the few he has left are one or two worth remembering. Rather as a lyrical poet will he be admired among the Victorian writers. His *nom de plume* was part of an imperfect anagram from his name—"Barry Cornwall, poet."

Thomas Hood, whom we can never call Tom, except when regarding him as a humourist, wrote a few excellent sonnets. The following was inscribed in a volume of Shakespeare, and the rich images employed are certainly very beautiful and natural. One cannot help wishing that Hood's genius (like that of Ingoldsby) had not been so largely wasted on the trifling wit of life; for he has proved himself able to touch with a steady hand some of the most beautiful and pathetic strings in the poetic lyre:

WRITTEN IN A VOLUME OF SHAKESPEARE.

How bravely Autumn paints upon the sky
The gorgeous fume of Summer which is fled!
Hues of all flowers that in their ashes lie,
Trophied in that fair light whereon they fed;
Tulip and hyacinth and sweet rose-red,
Like exhalations from the leafy mould,
Look here how honour glorifies the dead,
And warms their scutcheons with a glance of gold.
Such is the memory of poets old,
Who on Parnassus hill have bloomed elate:
How they are laid under their marbles cold,
And turned to clay, whereof they were create:
But good Apollo hath them all enrolled,
And blazoned on the very clouds of fate.

Hood was a great lover of Shakespeare, and the following sonnet addressed "To Fancy" is very richly wrought from the spirit of that matchless masterpiece, "The Tempest":

Most delicate Ariel! submissive thing,
Won by the mind's high magic to its best—
Invisible embassy or secret guest,
Weighing the light air on a lighter wing;
Whether into the midnight moon, to bring
Illuminate visions to the eye of rest—
Or rich romances from the florid West—
Or to the sea, for mystic whispering;
Still by thy charmed allegiance to the will,
The fruitful wishes prosper in the brain,
As by the fingering of fairy skill—
Moonlight, and waters, and soft music's strain,
Odours and blooms, and my Miranda's smile,
Making this dull world an enchanted isle.

The following is a good study of King Lear, written in the form of a soliloquy, also by Tom Hood:

A poor old king, with sorrow for my crown,
Throned upon straw, and mantled with the wind,
For pity, my own tears have made me blind
That I might never see my children's frown;
And, may be, Madness, like a friend, has thrown
A folded fillet over my dark mind,
So that unkindly speech may sound for kind—
Albeit I know not. I am childish grown—
And have not gold to purchase wit withal—
I that have once maintain'd most royal state—
A very bankrupt now that may not call
My child, my child—all beggar'd save in tears,
Wherein I daily weep an old man's fate,
Foolish—and blind—and overcome with years.

But the grand tragedy of Lear brought a sonnet from Keats which is characteristic of that poet. It will be noticed that the last line contains twelve syllables, an ending of which Keats was rather fond:

WRITTEN BEFORE RE-READING KING LEAR.

O golden-tongued Romance with serene lute!
Fair plumed Syren! Queen! if far away!
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
Shut up thine olden volume, and be mute.
Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute,
Betwixt Hell torment and impassioned clay
Must I burn through; and once more assay
The bitter sweet of this Shakespearean fruit.
Chief Poet! and ye clouds of Albion,
Begetters of our deep eternal theme,
When I am through the old oak forest gone,

Let me not wander in a barren dream,
But when I am consumed with the Fire,
Give me new Phoenix-wings to fly at my desire.

Poets of the United States—(for after recent utterances from young Canada, the whole literary continent of America can no longer be claimed by those living below the line)—have written a few sonnets connected with Shakespeare. The following is by Richard Watson Gilder, and was, according to the title, "Written on a fly leaf of Shakespeare's Sonnets." Although not directly associated with our subject, we give it a place from its having been occasioned by the love-sonnets of the great dramatist:

When shall true love be love without alloy;
Shine free at last from sinful circumstance?
When shall the canker of unheavenly chance
Eat not the bud of that most heavenly joy?
When shall true love meet love not as a coy
Retreating light that leads a deathful dance,
But as a firm fixed fire that doth enhance
The beauty of all beauty? Will the employ
Of poets ever be too well to show
That mightiest love with sharpest pain doth writhe;
That underneath the fair, caressing glove
Hides evermore the iron hand; and though
Love's flower alone is good, if we could prove
Its perfect bloom, our breath slays like a scythe?

Charles Edward Markham has recorded his feelings "After reading Shakespeare" in the following sonnet which is a very fanciful treatment, and certainly not of the highest order of sonnets.

Blythe Fancy lightly builds with airy hands,
Or on the edges of the darkness peers
Breathless and frightened at the Voice she hears,
Imagination (lo! the sky expands)
Travels the blue arch and Cimmerian sands,
Homeless on earth, the pilgrim of the spheres,
The rush of light before the hurrying years,
The Voice that cries in unfamiliar lands,
Men weigh the moons that flood with eerie light
The dusky vales of Saturn—wood and stream—
But who shall follow on the awful sweep
Of Neptune through the dim and dreadful deep?
Onward he wanders in the unknown night,
And we are shadows moving in a dream.

Mr. George Martin, of Montreal, has in his published collection of poems a very irregular poem, called a sonnet, addressed "To G. I. at Stratford on Avon." In the matter of structure it is peculiar, and breaks all rhyme-ending traditions. The similarity of vowel-sounds in the rhymes of the last six lines entirely spoil the close. The last line is, singular to say, in blank verse so far as the rest of the poem is concerned. As a sonnet it is a failure; but as an expression of sentiment no fault can be found with it. It was occasioned by the author having received a leaf from Shakespeare's garden. Whether it was from the modern garden of the New Place, which was brought into existence by Mr. Halliwell's loving exertions, or from the garden of the Henley Street cottage, where Shakespeare is said to have been born, cannot be determined, nor can we discover whether the leaf was from the famous mulberry tree (the lineal descendant of Shakespeare's own mulberry, which the Reverend and Irreverend Francis Gastrell cut down in 1756 because people came to sit in its shade—*magni nominis umbra*). But the leaf may not have come from the New Place at all, or rather from the new garden that occupies the place of the old New Place, which the Reverend and Uncharitable Mr. Gastrell aforesaid also pulled down because he did not care to pay a *poor tax* on Shakespeare's old residence; after all it may have been gathered by that historical old lady who looked after Shakespeare's house and sold as a souvenir a small selection of flowers from the garden attached. In either case the leaf is valuable, as having called up the following expression of Mr. Martin's feelings and opinion on the question of Shakespeare's immortality. It has also led us into a little Stratford ramble, for which the reader will probably excuse us:

The leaf you plucked from Shakespeare's garden plot,
And sent me, my most estimable friend,
The voyage of the Salt Sea injured not,
Green as it grew upon its native spot.
It nestled mid the kindly words you penned,
The poet's genius, free from flaw or blot,
In which Melpomene found naught to mend,
My fancy with this leaflet loved to blend;
But though with care I guard it all my days,
In fret of time 'twill fade and fall away,
Like hope, once fresh, will crumble to decay.
Not so our Dramatist's perennial bays;
Not so the bloom and sunshine of his Plays,
Rejoicing in their immortality.

We end our selection of sonnets on Shakespeare with the convictions that the subject is scarcely one which is suitable for the talent of the average sonnet-writer, and that there is a small chance for any sonnet to be written which will take its place in the high rank reached already by the three specimens quoted from Hartley Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, and Frederick George Scott.

SAREPTA.

We have too many reformers who think to take society by the bit and fetch it about by main force into the path of rectitude. This is not easy, especially if the end aimed at be to keep it there.

THE Burma papers announce that rubies of good quality have been found at Nansaka, in the Shan State of Mamlong, a tributary State of the Theebaw Tsawbwa. Mining is carried on successfully at Nansaka by the Shans. Rubies are also found in the Shan State of Momeit. The *Rangoon Gazette* states that rubies are known to exist in many localities in Upper Burma outside the tract leased to the Burma Ruby Mines Company. It urges that all future concessions of mining rights should be offered for public competition, and says that a substantial increase of the revenue may be anticipated.