From Milnes's Poems.

‘THE MEN OF OLD,’

" I know not that the men of old
Were better than men now,
Of heart more kind, of hand more bold,
Of more ingenuous brow:
I heed not those who pine for force
A ghost of Time to raise,
As if they thus could check the course
Of these appointed days.

" Still is it true, and over true,
That I delight to close
This book of life self-wise and new,
And let my thoughts repose
On all that humble happiness,
The world has since foregone,—
The daylight of contentedness
That on those faces shone!

" With rights, though not too closely scanned,
Enjoyed, as far as known,—
With will by no reverse unmanned,—
With pulse of even tone,—
They from to-day and from to-night
Expected nothing more,
Than yesterday and yesternight
Had proffered them before.

" To them was life a simple art
Of duties to be done,
A game where each man took his part,
A race where all must run;
A battle whose great scheme and scope
They little cared to know,
Content, as men at arms, to cope
Each with his fronting foe.

"Man now his Virtue's diadem
Puts on and proudly wears,—
Great thoughts, great feelings, come to them,
Like instincts, unawares:
Blending their souls' sublimest needs
With tasks of every day,
They went about their gravest deeds,
As noble boys at play.

"And what if Nature's fearful wound
They did not probe and bare,
For that their spirits never swooned
To watch the misery there,—
For that their love but flowed more fast,
Their charities more free,
Not conscious what mere drops they cast,
Into the evil sea.

" A man's best things are nearest him,
Lie close about his feet,
It is the distant and the dim
That we are sick to greet:
For flowers that grow our hands beneath
We struggle and aspire,—
Our hearts must die, except they breathe
The air of fresh Desire.

" But, Brothers, who up Reason's hill
Advance with hopeful cheer,—
O! loiter not, those heights are chill,
As chill as they are clear;
And still restrain your haughty gaze,
The loftier that ye go,
Rememb'ring distance leaves a haze
On all that lies below."

From the Monthly Chronicle.

PRESENT STATE OF POETRY.*

Byron is unquestionably a much more doubtful and dangerous model than Scott. His marvellous eloquence of sentiment, which seems now to be philosophy—and now to be passion—and is not always either—has a fascination to which, as long as the world lasts, we believe nine poets out of ten will yield, at one time or other, in their intellectual career. Practical life, with its social cares, its healthful struggles, and its stern experience of wisdom and passion, will work away the opiate—for those at least whom practical life will lead to the highest callings of the poet: but still at that twilight age between youth and manhood, when imaginative minds are mostly haunted with a certain melancholy, and

"Let their frail thoughts dally with false surmise,"

the dreamer of Childe Harold will be a congenial comrade and a beloved friend—the dearer, perhaps, for the very sadness of his counsels. We grant that there is danger in Byron's views of life—in his frequent want of that earnest truthfulness and that moral reality of character and creation which ought to be ever before the ambition of a man who feels the destinies of a poet; but in Byron it is easy, after some experience of the world, and some careful and studious discipline of the intellect, to separate the faults to be shunned from the merits to be conned. In his general style—while his mere mannerism may be avoided—the student can discover secrets of the noblest art. Byron never over-adorns. His poems are not wholes, but the great passages in his poems are. In the middle of his descriptions, he never breaks off the effect by the undue glitter of individual lines. The passage itself fills you with a sense of completeness;—you remember it entirely;—its effect becomes an indelible association. This is entirely opposed to the style of Shelley, who, except in his " Cenci," has scarcely one passage complete in itself. Each line is a separate thought; the effect glitters on the eye till it aches at the glare: it is the mirror broken into a thousand pieces; and the representation it would give is rendered confused and phantasmagoric by the multiplication of the images.

We cannot imagine a worse model for a young poet of genius, who has allowed his admiration for Shelley to suffuse his whole mind, than that most dazzling poet. Nor is it only this elaborate over-richness of every line, that, while it captivates, perverts the taste, to which we object in Shelley; it is an utter want of that masculine and robust simplicity which should distinguish the poet whom we set before us as a model, even in his richest robes, and when soaring to the highest heaven. We must here make a distinction;—Shelley himself was one of the most genuine of mortals, and his poetry is an honest reflex of his own nature,—why, then, is it not simple? It is simple, and it is not simple;—it is simple as regards himself, it is not simple as it is presented to others. Shelley's heart was simple, his intellect was not. He had filled his mind with the strangest systems of philosophy, the oddest compound of motley knowledge,—the most heated, erratic, extravagant fancies that ever met together in a fervid and prolific imagination. Where he suffers his heart to speak to us, nothing can be more beautifully simple, more eloquent of true feeling and unaffected nobleness of emotion; but where his mind or his fancy only addresses us (that is, in by far the greater portion of his poetry), his imagery is far-fetched, and his meaning elaborately obscure. To say that Shelley is an affected writer, would be unjust; because what was most natural to that strange thinker and most fanciful idealist is often what to ordinary persons may seem the least natural. His life, his thoughts, his habits, were all, like his poetry, out of the beaten track. Shelley himself, is never, perhaps, affected; but he who imitates Shelley is certain to contract affectation: and what is remarkable, they who

"Enamel with pied flowers his thoughts of gold,"

invariably set before them his earliest and most vicious style and diction, and seem quite to forget how completely, in his most natural and vigorous poem of the " Cenci," he abandoned the poetry of words for the poetry of things. The mere plot of the Cenci is to our taste inartistical, because revolting; and the hero of the tragedy, the monster-father, is a creation that, if Shelley had lived longer and mixed more with men as they are, we believe he himself would have confessed to be a mere abstraction of ideal and impossible wickedness. But the diction and dialogue of that colossal temple of terror are sculptured out in the severest and most classical school of language;—and his versification in this poem might, indeed, be an admirable study to all who wish to observe how few are the flowers necessary to adorn the thyrsus of the inspiring god. But the " Prometheus Unbound," and " Alastor," and the " Siege of Islam," attract a thousand moths by their glitter; while the Cenci, like moon-light, seems to them less luminous, from the very equality and diffusion of its lustre.

The influence of Wordsworth is certainly far less likely to be deleterious than that of Shelley. His style in his graver pieces is more free from the dazzling faults of Shelley's; and his ethics, if somewhat obscure, and rather suited for recluses and dreamers than for that practical life which we hold to be necessary in ninety-nine instances out of a hundred, to the full education, whether of a reasoner or a poet, are still exempt from the bewildering subtleties which, even in Shelley, are scarcely intelligible, and which, when re-echoed by imitators less profoundly versed in the old Greek systems, from which they are deduced, become the very vocabulary of jargon. But we see, in the immediate influence of this most admirable poet, certain effects it would be well to guard against. In the first place, it must be observed that the great sphere in which the music of Wordsworth is heard aloft, is the Influence of Nature upon Man. He is eminently a metaphysical poet,—perhaps the greatest metaphysical poet the world ever saw; and we are far from wishing that Wordsworth himself should have departed from the peculiar province he has so sublimely appropriated to his genius. But we think that there are very few poets, indeed, for whom this province is the fittest land; and we incline to doubt whether it be the natural and native air for poetry itself. We rather opine that Shakspeare is more orthodox in his creed, and more to be studied as a model. Shakspeare dealt little with the natural influences upon individual man, but most largely with social influences upon man*kind*. He is essentially the active poet, Wordsworth the passive. To arouse, not to allay the passions, was his ambition; to individualise emotions,—to paint men in the market place, not in the hermitage,—to embody the *quidquid agunt* in all its varieties and forms,—to make the Common-place and Familiar poetical, not by expatiating on their internal and mystic beauty, but by uniting them to stirring events and breathing passions,—this was the object and the art of Shakspeare. Phœbus forbid that we should say that all poets must seek the same paths to fame, or imitate the old formalist of whom the ancient writer tells us, who would not suffer his bees to roam abroad for sweets, but cut their wings, and placed before them flowers of his own sagacious selection. We repeat, that we rejoice that Wordsworth is first in his line, rather than being second in Shakespeare's; but since those who imitate Wordsworth must be content to be second to their master, we think it allowable to state our opinion that for the vast majority of minds genuinely poetical, the art and school of Shakspeare will afford much safer models than those of Wordsworth, and will be likely to lead to more novel combinations and more valuable results. We will not raise the question, how far Wordsworth is right, as an artist, in his conceptions of the Beautiful, as found in the Homely. We incline to agree with him, but we doubt much whether what is called his *simple* poetry fairly carries out his conceptions. We doubt if it be healthfully and practically simple—whether it be not rather the simplicity of a schoolman and idealist—of a man visibly stooping from his throne than a man moving easily, and at home, among the beings and things he visits—whether, like other great people, he is not over-condescending and over-familiar, when he shakes hands with the vulgar or plays with the puerile. As a test of this doubt, which we hazard with due diffidence, we wish that one of Wordsworth's implicit disciples would make an experiment. Let him read to an intelligent shepherd or intelligent child, we will not say a song by Burns, but a passage in the " Deserted Village," or one of Cowper's occasional poems, such as that on " His Mother's Picture," or even a description of scenery from " The Lady of the Lake," and then read to the same unbiassed critic Wordsworth's " Peter Bell;"—ask him which he considers the most natural and the most simple; see which comes home the most to his healthy understanding and unadulterated feelings. We venture to conjecture that the listener will not decide in favor of " Peter Bell." Yet such would be a fair critic of the genuine Natural. Educated and refining men rarely *are* judges of the Natural. We need not be metaphysicians to know what is the simple language of homely truth. It was the over-refiners, not the children and the shepherds, who found simplicity in Theocritus.

Now, in the most approved imitations of Wordsworth, we find the most noticeable affectation of the homeliness of their master, which perhaps indeed they find easier to attain than his etherial and high-wrought sublimity. Where he lisps, they slobber; and what is childish in him, is perfect babyism with them.

We have been led into these remarks by our very reverence for the Archimandrites, and our very hopes for the Neophytes. It is rarely the founders, it is the followers, that bring the school into disrepute. We should probably have had few decriers of Pope, if we had not had such an infinity of popelings. Nor would men have grown tired of hearing Byron called the Great, if there had not been Byronic homunculi in every corner of the streets. We ostracise our Aristides, not for himself, but for the cuckoo cry of his idolaters.

From Blackwood for June.

THOUGHTS ON BEAUTY.

But instead of being poetical let us be philosophical, or both, and sitting on this mossy stump, soft as velvet, and with " withered boughs grotesque," like an arm-chair, imagine ourselves for a moment a rural Dean lecturing to a fixed-eyed audience of the youth of both sexes, showing us what we would discourse on in their faces and in their eyes.

Let us take, our dear audience, in the first place, as examples of Beauty, some of the simplest kind, and which are universally felt—those which are found in the great appearances of Nature—and of these what may be called most elementary, and because strongly affecting the senses, what seem least to require any cultivation of mind or aid of thought to make them felt. Such is the beauty of a blue and radiant sky—a sunset rich in the gorgeous hues of a thousand painted clouds—the splendour of the nocturnal heavens, green valleys, with their clear bright waters, and the luxuriance of summer woods—snows shining in the sunlight—the still calm glittering ocean. In these and similar instances which may be distinguished, for the elementary nature of some of the principal feelings involved in them, as well as for the earliness and the universality with which they are felt, there is to be remarked, in the first place, a very vivid affection of the sense of sight, such as there is reason to believe, from the earliest observation we are able to make, is a primary pleasure, independent of all association, either by the vivid impression of the organ itself, or by the vivid excitation immediately and necessarily carried into the spirit itself, which is called up into a state of animated sensibility—the pleasure of light in all its various modifications. And in all such cases, this first vivid sensuous delight is united, it is to be observed, with very expansive conceptions of the soul. That primary pleasure of the mere sensitive being in light, and brightness, and beautiful colour, has been, from the beginning, continually nourished and heightened by their union with the great objects and appearances of Nature, with the whole activity of the living spirit. Light is to us life, and darkness the extinction of life. Nor can there be a doubt that this deep feeling of our animation, not in the sentient body alone, but in the spirit, connected at every moment with the presence and power of light, and with all the vital influences that flow with it upon the earth, has become so blended with it in our conception, that it has, on this

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* Concluded from our last.