CHAPTER VI.

Poetry. — Tennyson.

1.

When Tennyson published his first poems, the critics found fault with them. He held his peace; for ten years no one saw his name in a review, nor even in a publisher’s catalogue. But when he appeared again before the public, his books had made their way alone and under the surface, and he passed at once for the greatest poet of his country and his time.

Men were surprised, and with a pleasing surprise. The potent generation of poets who had just died out, had passed like a whirlwind. Like their forerunners of the sixteenth century, they had carried away and hurried everything to its extreme. Some had culled gigantic legends, piled up dreams, ransacked the East, Greece, Arabia, the Middle Ages, and overloaded the human imagination with hues and fancies from every clime. Others had buried themselves in metaphysics and moral philosophy, had mused indefatigably on the condition of man, and spent their lives on the sublime and the monotonous. Others, making a medley of crime and heroism, had conducted, through darkness and flashes of lightning, a train of contorted and terrible figures, desperate with remorse, relieved by their grandeur. Men wanted to rest after so many efforts and so
much excess. On the going out of the imaginative, sentimental and Satanic school, Tennyson appeared exquisite. All the forms and ideas which had pleased them were found in him, but purified, modulated, set in a splendid style. He completed an age; he enjoyed that which had agitated others; his poetry was like the lovely evenings in summer: the outlines of the landscape are then the same as in the daytime; but the splendour of the dazzling celestial arch is dulled; the re-invigorated flowers lift themselves up, and the calm sun, on the horizon, harmoniously cast a network of crimson rays over the woods and meadows which it just before burned by its brightness.

II.

What first attracted people were Tennyson's portraits of women. Adeline, Eleanore, Lilian, the May Queen, were keepsake characters, from the hand of a lover and an artist. The keepsake is gilt-edged, embossed with flowers and decorations, richly got up, soft, full of delicate faces, always elegant and always correct, which we might take to be sketched at random, and which are yet drawn carefully, on white vellum, slightly touched by their outline, all selected to rest and occupy the soft, white hands of a young bride or a girl. I have translated many ideas and many styles, but I shall not attempt to translate one of these portraits. Each word of them is like a tint, curiously deepened or shaded by the neighbouring tint, with all the boldness and results of the happiest refinement. The least alteration would obscure all. And there an art so just, so consummate, is necessary to paint the charming prettinesses, the sudden hauteur, the half blushes, the imperceptible and
fleeting caprices of feminine beauty. He opposes, harmonises them, makes of them, as it were, a gallery. Here is the frolicsome child, the little fluttering fairy, who claps her tiny hands, who,

"So innocent-arch, so cunning-simple,  
From beneath her gather'd wimple  
Glancing with black-beaded eyes,  
Till the lightning laughter's dimple  
The baby-roses in her cheeks;  
Then away she flies."  

Then the pensive fair, who dreams, with large open blue eyes:

"Whence that acry bloom of thine,  
Like a lily which the sun  
Looks thro' in his sad decline,  
And a rose-bush leans upon,  
Thou that faintly smilest still,  
As a Naiad in a well,  
Looking at the set of day."  

Anew "the ever varying Madeline," now smiling, then frowning, then joyful again, then angry, then uncertain between the two:

"Frowns perfect-sweet along the brow  
Light-glooming over eyes divine,  
Like little clouds sun-fringed."  

The poet returned well pleased to all things, refined and exquisite. He caressed them so carefully, that his verses appeared at times far-fetched, affected, almost euphuistic. He gave them too much adornment and

1 Poems by A. Tennyson, 7th ed. 1851; Lilian, 5.
2 Ibid. Adelina, 88.
3 Ibid. Madeline, 15.
polishing; he seemed like an epicurean in style, as well as in beauty. He looked for pretty rustic scenes, touching remembrances, curious or pure sentiments. He made them into elegies, pastorals, and idyls. He wrote in every accent, and delighted in entering into the feelings of all ages. He wrote of St. Agnes, St. Simeon Stylites, Ulysses, Ænone, Sir Galahad, Lady Clare, Fatima, the Sleeping Beauty. He imitated alternately Homer and Chaucer, Theocritus and Spenser, the old English poets and the old Arabian poets. He gave life successively to the little real events of English life, and the great fantastic adventures of extinguished chivalry. He was like those musicians who use their bow in the service of all masters. He strayed through nature and history, with no foregone conclusions, without fierce passion, bent on feeling, relishing, culling from all parts, in the flower-stand of the drawing-room and in the rustic hedgerows, the rare or wild flowers whose scent or beauty could charm or amuse him. Men entered into his pleasure; smelt the grateful bouquets which he knew so well how to put together; preferred those which he took from the country; found that his talent was nowhere more at ease. They admired the minute observation and refined sentiment which knew how to grasp and interpret the fleeting aspects of things. In the _Dying Swan_ they forgot that the subject was almost threadbare, and the interest somewhat slight, that they might appreciate such verses as this

"Some blue peaks in the distance rose,
And white against the cold-white sky,
Shone out their crowning snows"
One willow over the river wept,
And shook the wave as the wind did sigh;
Above in the wind was the swallow,
Chasing itself at its own wild will,
And far thro' the marish green and still
The tangled water-courses slept,
Shot over with purple, and green, and yellow.”

But these melancholy pictures did not display him entirely; men accompanied him to the land of the sun, toward the soft voluptuousness of southern seas; they returned, with an involuntary fascination, to the verses in which he depicts the companions of Ulysses, who, slumbering in the land of the Lotos-eaters, happy dreamers like himself, forgot their country, and renounced action:

“A land of streams! some, like a downward smoke,
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go;
And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,
Rolling a slumberous sheet of foam below.
They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
From the inner land: far off, three mountain-tops,
Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
Stood sun-set flush'd: and, dew'd with showery drops,
Up-climb the shadowy pine above the woven copee. . . .

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petal from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentler on the spirit lies,
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.

1 Poems by A. Tennyson, 7th ed. 1851; The Dying Swan, 45.
Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep...

Lo! in the middle of the wood,
The folded leaf is woo'd from out the bud
With winds upon the branch, and there
Grows green and broad, and takes no care,
Sun-steep'd at noon, and in the moon
Nightly dew-fed; and turning yellow
Falls, and floats adown the air.
Lo! sweeten'd with the summer light,
The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow,
Drops in a silent autumn night.
All its allotted length of days,
The flower ripens in its place,
Ripens and fades, and falls, and hath no toil,
Fast-rooted in the fruitful soil...

But, propt on beds of amaranth and moly,
How sweet (while warm airs lull us, blowing lowly),
With half-dropt eyelids still,
Beneath a heaven dark and holy.
To watch the long bright river drawing slowly
His waters from the purple hill—
To hear the dewy echoes calling
From cave to cave thro' the thick-twined vine—
To watch the emerald-colour'd water falling
Thro' many a wov'n acanthus-wreath divine!
Only to hear and see the far-off sparkling brine,
Only to hear were sweet, stretch'd out beneath the pine."

Poems by A. Tennyson, 7th ed. 1851; The Lotus-Eaters, 140.
III.

Was this charming dreamer simply a dilettante? Men liked to consider him so; he seemed too happy to admit violent passions. Fame came to him easily and quickly, at the age of thirty. The Queen had justified the public favour by creating him Poet Laureate. A great writer declared him a more genuine poet than Lord Byron, and maintained that nothing so perfect had been seen since Shakspeare. The student, at Oxford, put Tennyson's works between an annotated Euripides and a handbook of scholastic philosophy. Young ladies found him amongst their marriage presents. He was said to be rich, venerated by his family, admired by his friends, amiable, without affectation, even unsophisticated. He lived in the country, chiefly in the Isle of Wight, amongst books and flowers, free from the annoyances, rivalries, and burdens of society, and his life was easily imagined to be a beautiful dream, as sweet as those which he had pictured.

Yet the men who looked closer saw that there was a fire of passion under this smooth surface. A genuine poetic temperament never fails in this. It feels too acutely to be at peace. When we quiver at the least touch, we shake and tremble under great shocks. Already here and there, in his pictures of country and love, a brilliant verse broke with its glowing colour through the calm and correct outline. He had felt that strange growth of unknown powers which suddenly arrest a man with fixed gaze before revealed beauty. The specialty of the poet is to be ever young, for ever virgin. For us, the vulgar, things are threadbare; sixty centuries of civilisation have worn out their primitive
freshness; things have become commonplace; we perceive them only through a veil of ready-made phrases; we employ them, we no longer comprehend them; we see in them no longer magnificent flowers, but good vegetables; the luxuriant primeval forest is to us nothing but a well-planned, and too well-known, kitchen garden. On the other hand, the poet, in presence of this world, is as the first man on the first day. In a moment our phrases, our reasonings, all the trappings of memory and prejudice, vanish from his mind; things seem new to him; he is astonished and ravished; a headlong stream of sensations oppresses him; it is the all-potent sap of human invention, which, checked in us, begins to flow in him. Fools call him mad, but in truth he is a seer: for we may indeed be sluggish, but nature is always full of life; the rising sun is as beautiful as on the first dawn, the streaming floods, the teeming flowers, the trembling passions, the forces which hurl onward the stormy whirlwind of existence, aspire and strive with the same energy as at their birth; the immortal heart of nature beats yet, heaving its coarse trappings, and its beatings work in the poet's heart when they no longer echo in our own. Tennyson felt this, not indeed always; but twice or thrice at least he has dared to make it heard. We have found anew the free action of full emotion, and recognised the voice of a man in these verses of Locksley Hall:

"Then her cheek was pale and thinner than should be for one so young,
And her eyes on all my motions with a mute observance hung.
And I said, 'My cousin Amy, speak, and speak the truth to me,
Trust me, cousin, all the current of my being sets to thee.'
On her pallid cheek and forehead came a colour and a light,
As I have seen the rosy red flushing in the northern night.
And she turn'd—her bosom shaken with a sudden storm of sighs—
All the spirit deeply dawning in the dark of hazel eyes—
Saying, 'I have hid my feelings, fearing they should do me wrong';
Saying, 'Dost thou love me, cousin?' weeping, 'I have loved thee long.'

Love took up the glass of Time, and turn'd it in his glowing hands;
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.
Love took up the harp of Life, and smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd in music out of sight.

Many a morning on the moorland did we hear the copses ring,
And her whisper throng'd my pulses with the fulness of the Spring.

Many an evening by the waters did we watch the stately ships,
And our spirits rush'd together at the touching of the lips.
O my cousin, shallow-hearted! O my Amy, mine no more!
O the dreary, dreary moorland! O the barren, barren shore!

Falser than all fancy fathoms, falser than all songs have sung,
Puppet to a father's threat, and servile to a shrewish tongue!

Is it well to wish thee happy?—having known me—to decline
On a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart than mine!

Yet it shall be: thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathise with clay.
As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated with a clown.
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down.

He will hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,
Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse.

What is this? his eyes are heavy: think not they are glazed with wine.
Go to him: it is thy duty: kiss him: take his hand in thine.

It may be my lord is weary, that his brain is overwrought:
Soothe him with thy finer fancies, touch him with thy lighter thought.

He will answer to the purpose, easy things to understand—
Better thou wert dead before me, tho' I slew thee with my hand!"  

This is very frank and strong. Maud appeared, and was still more so. In it the rapture broke forth with all its inequalities, familiarities, freedom, violence. The correct, measured poet betrayed himself, for he seemed to think and weep aloud. This book is the diary of a gloomy young man, soured by great family misfortunes, by long solitary meditations, who gradually became enamoured, dared to speak, found himself loved. He does not sing, but speaks; they are the hazarded, reckless words of ordinary conversation; details of everyday life; the description of a toilet, a political dinner, a service and sermon in a village church. The prose of Dickens and Thackeray did not more firmly grasp real and actual manners. And by its side, most splendid poetry abounded and blossomed, as in fact it blossoms

1 Poems by A. Tennyson, 7th ed. 1851; Locksley Hall, 266.
and abounds in the midst of our commonplaces. The smile of a richly dressed girl, a sunbeam on a stormy sea, or on a spray of roses, throws all at once these sudden illuminations into impassioned souls. What verses are these, in which he represents himself in his dark little garden:

“A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime
In the little grove where I sit—ah, wherefore cannot I be
Like things of the season gay, like the bountiful season bland,
When the far-off sail is blown by the breeze of a softer clime,
Half lost in the liquid azure bloom of a crescent of sea,
The silent sapphire-spangled marriage ring of the land.”

What a holiday in his heart when he is loved! What madness in these cries, that intoxication, that tenderness which would pour itself on all, and summon all to the spectacle and the participation of his happiness! How all is transfigured in his eyes; and how constantly he is himself transfigured! Gaiety, then ecstasy, then archness, then satire, then disclosures, all ready movements, all sudden changes, like a crackling and flaming fire, renewing every moment its shape and colour: how rich is the soul, and how it can live a hundred years in a day! The hero of the poem, surprised and insulted by the brother of Maud, kills him in a duel, and loses her whom he loved. He flees; he is seen wandering in London. What a gloomy contrast is that of the great busy careless town, and a solitary man haunted by true grief! We follow him down the noisy thoroughfares, through the yellow fog, under the wan sun which rises above the river like a “dull red ball,” and we hear the heart full of anguish, deep sobs, insensate agitation.

1 Tennyson's Maud, 1856, iv. 1, p. 15.
of a soul which would but cannot tear itself from its memories. Despair grows, and in the end the reverie becomes a vision:

"Dead, long dead,
Long dead!
And my heart is a handful of dust,
And the wheels go over my head,
And my bones are shaken with pain,
For into a shallow grave they are thrust,
Only a yard beneath the street,
And the hoofs of the horses beat, beat,
The hoofs of the horses beat,
Beat into my scalp and my brain,
With never an end to the stream of passing feet,
Driving, hurrying, marrying, burying,
Clamour and rumble, and ringing and clatter.\(^1\) . . .
O me! why have they not buried me deep enough?
Is it kind to have made me a grave so rough,
Me, that was never a quiet sleeper?
Maybe still I am but half-dead;
Then I cannot be wholly dumb;
I will cry to the steps above my head,
And somebody, surely, some kind heart will come
To bury me, bury me
Deeper, ever so little deeper."\(^2\)

However, he revives, and gradually rises again. War breaks out, a liberal and generous war, the war against Russia; and the big, manly heart, wounded by deep love, is healed by action and courage.

"And I stood on a giant deck and mix'd my breath
With a loyal people shouting a battle cry. . . .
Yet God's just wrath shall be wreak'd on a giant liar ;

\(^1\) Tennyson's *Maud*, 1856, xxvii. 1, p. 99.
And many a darkness into the light shall leap,
And shine in the sudden making of splendid names,
And noble thought be freer under the sun,
And the heart of a people beat with one desire;
For the peace, that I deem’d no peace, is over and done,
And now by the side of the Black and the Baltic deep,
And deathful-grinning mouths of the fortress, flames
The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.”

This explosion of feeling was the only one; Tennyson has not again encountered it. In spite of the moral close, men said of Maud that he was imitating Byron; they cried out against these bitter declamations; they thought that they perceived the rebellious accent of the Satanic school; they blamed this uneven, obscure, excessive style; they were shocked at these crudities and incongruities; they called on the poet to return to his first well-proportioned style. He was discouraged, left the storm-clouds, and returned to the azure sky. He was right; he is better there than anywhere else. A fine soul may be transported, attain at times to the fire of the most violent and the strongest beings: personal memories, they say, had furnished the matter of Maud and of Locksley Hall; with a woman’s delicacy, he had the nerves of a woman. The fit over, he fell again into his “golden languors,” into his calm reverie. After Locksley Hall he wrote the Princess; after Maud the Idylls of the King.

IV.

The great task of an artist is to find subjects which suit his talent. Tennyson has not always succeeded in this. His long poem, In Memoriam, written in

1 Tennyson’s Maud, xxviii. 3 and 4, p. 108.
praise and memory of a friend who died young, is cold, monotonous, and too prettily arranged. He goes into mourning; but, like a correct gentleman, with bran new gloves, wipes away his tears with a cambric handkerchief, and displays throughout the religious service, which ends the ceremony, all the compunction of a respectful and well-trained layman. He was to find his subjects elsewhere. To be poetically happy is the object of a dilettante-artist. For this many things are necessary. First of all, that the place, the events, and the characters shall not exist. Realities are coarse, and always, in some sense, ugly; at least they are heavy; we do not treat them as we should like, they oppress the fancy; at bottom there is nothing truly sweet and beautiful in our life but our dreams. We are ill at ease whilst we remain glued to earth, hobbling along on our two feet, which drag us wretchedly here and there in the place which impounds us. We need to live in another world, to hover in the wide-air kingdom, to build palaces in the clouds, to see them rise and crumble, to follow in a hazy distance the whims of their moving architecture, and the turns of their golden volutes. In this fantastic world, again, all must be pleasant and beautiful, the heart and senses must enjoy it, objects must be smiling or picturesque, sentiments delicate or lofty; no crudity, incongruity, brutality, savageness, must come to sully with its excess the modulated harmony of this ideal perfection. This leads the poet to the legends of chivalry. Here is the fantastic world, splendid to the sight, noble and specially pure, in which love, war, adventures, generosity, courtesy, all spectacles and all virtues which suit the instincts of our European races, are assembled, to
furnish them with the epic which they love, and the model which suits them.

The *Princess* is a fairy tale as sentimental as those of Shakspere. Tennyson here thought and felt like a young knight of the Renaissance. The mark of this kind of mind is a superabundance, as it were, a superfluity of sap. In the characters of the *Princess*, as in those of *As You Like It*, there is an over-fullness of fancy and emotion. They have recourse, to express their thought, to all ages and lands; they carry speech to the most reckless rashness; they clothe and burden every idea with a sparkling image, which drags and glitters around it like a brocade clustered with jewels. Their nature is over-rich; at every shock there is in them a sort of rustle of joy, anger, desire; they live more than we, more warmly and more quickly. They are ever in excess, refined, ready to weep, laugh, adore, jest, inclined to mingle adoration and jests, urged by a nervous rapture to opposite extremes. They sally in the poetic field with impetuous and ever changing caprice and joy. To satisfy the subtlety and superabundance of their invention, they need fairy-tales and masquerades. In fact, the *Princess* is both. The beautiful Ida, daughter of King Gama, who is monarch of the South (this country is not to be found on the map), was affianced in her childhood to a beautiful prince of the North. When the time appointed has arrived, she is claimed. She, proud and bred on learned arguments, has become irritated against the rule of men, and in order to liberate women has founded a university on the frontiers, which is to raise her sex, and to be the colony of future equality. The prince sets out with Cyril and Florian, two friends, obtains
permission from good King Gama, and, disguised as a girl, gets admission to the maiden precincts, which no man may enter on pain of death. There is a charming and sportive grace in this picture of a university for girls. The poet gambols with beauty; no badinage could be more romantic or tender. We smile to hear long learned words come from these rosy lips:

"There sat along the forms, like morning doves
That sun their milky bosoms on the thatch,
A patient range of pupils." \(^1\)

They listen to historic dissertations and promises of a social revolution, in "Academic silks, in hue the lilac, with a silken hood to each, and zoned with gold, . . . as rich as moth from dusk cocoons." Amongst these girls was Melissa, a child—

"A rosy blonde, and in a college gown
That clad her like an April daffodilly
(Her mother's colour), with her lips apart,
And all her thoughts as fair within her eyes,
As bottom agates seem to wave and float
In crystal currents of clear morning seas." \(^2\)

The site of this university for girls enhances the magic of the scene. The words "College" and "Faculty" bring before the mind of Frenchmen only wretched and dirty buildings, which we might mistake for barracks or boarding-houses. Here, as in an English university, flowers creep up the porches, vines cling round the bases of the monuments, roses strew the alleys with their petals; the laurel thickets grow around the gates, the courts pile up their marble architecture, bossed with

\(^1\) *The Princess*, a Medley, 12th ed. 1864, ii. 34. \(^2\) *Ibid.* ii. 46.
sculptured friezes, varied with urns from which droops the green pendage of the plants. "The Muses and the Graces, group'd in threes, enring'd a billowing fountain in the midst." After the lecture, some girls, in the deep meadow grass, "smoothed a petted peacock down;" others,

"Leaning there on those balusters, high
Above the empurpled champaign, drank the galo
That blown about the foliage underneath,
And sated with the innumerable rose
Beat balm upon our eyelids." ¹

At every gesture, every attitude, we recognise young English girls; it is their brightness, their freshness, their innocence. And here and there, too, we perceive the deep expression of their large dreamy eyes:

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more..."

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more." ²

This is an exquisite and strange voluptuousness, a reverie full of delight, and full, too, of anguish, the shudder of delicate and melancholy passion which we have already found in Winter's Tale or in Twelfth Night.

The three friends have gone forth with the princess

¹ The Princess, a Medley, 12th ed. 1864, iii. 60. ² Ibid. v. 76.
and her train, all on horseback, and pause "near a coppice-feather'd chasm;"

"till the Sun
Grew broader toward his death and fell, and all
The rosy heights came out above the lawns."

Cyril, heated by wine, begins to troll a careless tavern-catch, and betrays the secret. Ida, indignant, turns to leave; her foot slips, and she falls into the river; the prince saves her, and wishes to flee. But he is seized by the Proctors and brought before the throne, where the haughty maiden stands ready to pronounce sentence. At this moment

"... There rose
A hubbub in the court of half the maids
Gather'd together: from the illumined hall
Long lanes of splendour slanted o'er a press
Of snowy shoulders, thick as herded ewes,
And rainbow robes, and gems and gemlike eyes,
And gold and golden heads; they to and fro
Fluctuated, as flowers in storm, some red, some pale,
All open-mouth'd, all gazing to the light,
Some crying there was an army in the land,
And some that men were in the very walls,
And some they cared not; till a clamour grew
As of a new-world Babel, woman-built,
And worse-confounded: high above them stood
The placid marble Muses, looking peace." ¹

The father of the prince has come with his army to deliver him, and has seized King Gama as a hostage. The princess is obliged to release the young man. With distended nostrils, waving hair, a tempest raging in her heart, she thanks him with bitter irony. She

¹ The Princess, a Medley, 12th ed. 1864, iv. 99.
trembles with wounded pride; she stammers, hesitates; she tries to constrain herself in order the better to insult him, and suddenly breaks out;

"'You have done well and like a gentleman,
And like a prince: you have our thanks for all:
And you look well too in your woman's dress:
Well have you done and like a gentleman.
You saved our life: we owe you bitter thanks:
Better have died and spilt our bones in the flood—
Then men had said—but now—What hinders me
To take such bloody vengeance on you both?—
Yet since our father—Wasps in our good hive,
You would-be quenchers of the light to be,
Barbarians, grosser than your native bears—
O would I had his sceptre for one hour!
You that have dared to break our bound, and gull'd
Our servants, wronged and lied and thwarted us—
I wed with thee! I bound by precontract
Your bride, your bondslave! not tho' all the gold
That veins the world were pack'd to make your crown,
And every spoken tongue should lord you. Sir,
Your falsehood and yourself are hateful to us:
I trample on your offers and on you:
Begone: we will not look upon you more.
Here, push them out at gates.'" ¹

How is this fierce heart to be softened, fevered with feminine anger, embittered by disappointment and insult, excited by long dreams of power and ascendancy, and rendered more savage by its virginity! But how anger becomes her, and how lovely she is! And how this fire of sentiment, this lofty declaration of independence, this chimerical ambition for reforming the

¹ The Princess, a Medley, iv. 102.
future, reveal the generosity and pride of a young heart, enamoured of the beautiful! It is agreed that the quarrel shall be settled by a combat of fifty men against fifty other men. The prince is conquered, and Ida sees him bleeding on the sand. Slowly, gradually, in spite of herself, she yields, receives the wounded in her palace, and comes to the bedside of the dying prince. Before his weakness and his wild delirium pity expands, then tenderness, then love:

"From all a closer interest flourish'd up
Tenderness touch by touch, and last, to these,
Love, like an Alpine harebell hung with tears
By some cold morning glacier; frail at first
And feeble, all unconscious of itself,
But such as gather'd colour day by day." ¹

One evening he returns to consciousness, exhausted, his eyes still troubled by gloomy visions; he sees Ida before him, hovering like a dream, painfully opens his pale lips, and "utter'd whisperingly:"

"'If you be, what I think you, some sweet dream,
I would but ask you to fulfil yourself:
But if you be that Ida whom I knew,
I ask you nothing: only, if a dream,
Sweet dream be perfect. I shall die to-night.
Stoop down and seem to kiss me ere I die."
... She turned; she paused;
She stoop'd; and out of languor leapt a cry;
Leapt fiery Passion from the brinks of death;
And I believe that in the living world
My spirit closed with Ida's at the lips;
Till back I fell, and from mine arms she rose

¹ The Princess, a Medley, v. 163.
Glowing all over noble shame; and all
Her falser self slipt from her like a robe,
And left her woman, lovelier in her mood
Than in her mould that other, when she came
From barren deeps to conquer all with love;
And down the streaming crystal dropt; and she
Far-fleeted by the purple island-sides,
Naked, a double light in air and wave.”

This is the accent of the Renaissance, as it left the heart of Spenser and Shakspere; they had this voluptuous adoration of form and soul, and this divine sentiment of beauty.

V.

There is another chivalry, which inaugurates the Middle Age, as this closes it; sung by children, as this by youths; and restored in the Idylls of the King, as this in the Princess. It is the legend of Arthur, Merlin and the Knights of the Round Table. With admirable art, Tennyson has modernised the feelings and the language; this pliant soul takes all tones, in order to give itself all pleasures. This time he has become epic, antique, and ingenuous, like Homer, and like the old trouvères of the chansons de Geste. It is pleasant to quit our learned civilisation, to rise again to the primitive age and manners, to listen to the peaceful discourse which flows copiously and slowly, as a river in a smooth channel. The distinguishing mark of the ancient epic is clearness and calm. The ideas were newborn; man was happy and in his infancy. He had not had time to refine, to cut down and adorn his thoughts; he showed them bare. He was not yet pricked by

1 The Princess, a Medley, v. 185.
manifold lusts; he thought at leisure. Every idea interested him; he unfolded it curiously, and explained it. His speech never jerks; he goes step by step, from one object to another, and every object seems lovely to him: he pauses, observes, and takes pleasure in observing. This simplicity and peace are strange and charming; we abandon ourselves, it is well with us; we do not desire to go more quickly; we fancy we would gladly remain thus, and for ever. For primitive thought is wholesome thought; we have but marred it by grafting and cultivation; we return to it as our familiar element, to find contentment and repose.

But of all epics, this of the Round Table is distinguished by purity. Arthur, the irreproachable king, has assembled

"A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds." ¹

There is a sort of refined pleasure in having to do with such a world; for there is none in which purer or more touching fruits could grow. I will show one—"Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat"—who, having seen Lancelot once, loves him when he has departed, and for her whole life. She keeps the shield, which he has left in

¹ *Idylls of the King*, 1864: *Guinevere*, 249.
a tower, and every day goes up to look at it, counting "every dint a sword had beaten in it, and every scratch a lance had made upon it," and living on her dreams. He is wounded: she goes to tend and heal him:

"She murmur'd, 'vain, in vain: it cannot be.
He will not love me: how then? must I die?'
Then as a little helpless innocent bird,
That has but one plain passage of few notes,
Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it, so the simple maid
Went half the night repeating, 'must I die?'"¹

At last she confesses her secret; but with what modesty and spirit! He cannot marry her; he is tied to another. She droops and fades; her father and brothers try to console her, but she will not be consoled. She is told that Lancelot has sinned with the queen; she does not believe it:

"At last she said, 'Sweet brothers, yeaster night
I seem'd a curious little maid again,
As happy as when we dwelt among the woods,
And when you used to take me with the flood
Up the great river in the boatman's boat.
Only you would not pass beyond the cape
That hast the poplar on it; there you fixt
Your limit, oft returning with the tide.
And yet I cried because you would not pass
Beyond it, and far up the shining flood
Until we found the palace of the king.
... Now shall I have my will.'"²

¹ Idylls of the King, 1864; Elaine, 193. ² Ibid. 201.
She dies, and her father and brothers did what she had asked them to do:

“But when the next sun brake from underground,
Then, those two brethren slowly with bent brows
Accompanying, the sad chariot-brier
Past like a shadow thro' the field, that shone
Full summer, to that stream whereon the barge,
Pall'd all its length in blackest samite, lay.
There sat the lifelong creature of the house,
Loyal, the dumb old servitor, on deck,
Winking his eyes, and twisted all his face.
So those two brethren from the chariot took
And on the black decks laid her in her bed,
Set in her hand a lily, o'er her hung
The silken case with braided blazonings
And kiss'd her quiet brows, and saying to her:
‘Sister, farewell for ever,’ and again
‘Farewell, sweet sister,’ parted all in tears.
Then rose the dumb old servitor, and the dead
Steer'd by the dumb went upward with the flood—
In her right hand the lily, in her left
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down—
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold
Drawn to her waist, and she herself in white
All but her face, and that clear-featured face
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead
But fast asleep, and lay as tho' she smiled.” ¹

Thus they arrive at Court in great silence, and King Arthur read the letter before all his knights and weeping ladies:

“Most noble lord, Sir Lancelot of the Lake,
I, sometime call'd the maid of Astolat,

¹ Idylls of the King; Elaine, 206.
Come, for you left me taking no farewell,
Hither, to take my last farewell of you.
I loved you, and my love had no return,
And therefore my true love has been my death,
And therefore to our lady Guinevere,
And to all other ladies, I make moan.
Pray for my soul, and yield me burial.
Pray for my soul thou too, Sir Lancelot,
As thou art a knight peerless." ¹

Nothing more: she ends with this word, full of so sad a regret and so tender an admiration: we could hardly find anything more simple or more delicate.

It seems as if an archæologist might reproduce all styles except the grand, and Tennyson has reproduced all, even the grand. It is the night of the final battle; all day the tumult of the mighty fray "roll'd among the mountains by the winter sea;" Arthur's knights had fallen "man by man;" he himself had fallen, "deeply smitten through the helm," and Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights, bore him to a place hard by,

"A chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full." ²

Arthur, feeling himself about to die, bids him take his sword Excalibur "and fling him far into the middle meer;" for he had received it from the sea-nymphs, and after him no mortal must handle it. Twice Sir Bedivere went to obey the king: twice he paused, and

¹ *Idylls of the King*; *Elaine*, 213.
² Poems by A. Tennyson, 7th ed. 1851; *Morte d'Arthur*, 189.
came back pretending that he had flung away the sword; for his eyes were dazzled by the wondrous diamond setting which clustered and shone about the haft. The third time he throws it:

"The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon.
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shook
By night, with noises of the northern sea,
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere." 1

Then Arthur, rising painfully, and scarce able to breathe, bids Sir Bedivere take him on his shoulders and "bear me to the margin." "Quick, quick! I fear it is too late, and I shall die." They arrive thus, through "icy caves and barren chasms," to the shores of a lake, where they saw "the long glories of the winter moon:"

"They saw then how there hove a dusky barge
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold—and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills

1 Poems by A. Tennyson, 7th ed. 1851: Morte d'Arthur, 194.
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.
Then murmur'd Arthur: 'Place me in the barge,'
And to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud. . . .’ ¹

Before the barge drifts away, King Arthur, raising his slow voice, consoles Sir Bedivere, standing in sorrow on the shore, and pronounces this heroic and solemn farewell:

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. . . .
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. . . .
For so the whole round earth is every way Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest,—if indeed I go—
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avalon;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound." ²

Nothing, I think, calmer and more imposing has been seen since Goethe.

¹ Poems by A. Tennyson, 7th ed. 1851; Morte d'Arthur, 196.
² Ibid. 197.
How, in a few words, shall we assemble all the features of so manifold a talent? Tennyson is a born poet, that is, a builder of airy palaces and imaginary castles. But the individual passion and absorbing preoccupations which generally guide the hands of such men are wanting to him; he found in himself no plan of a new edifice; he has built after all the rest; he has simply chosen amongst all forms the most elegant, ornate, exquisite. Of their beauties he has taken but the flower. At most, now and then, he has here and there amused himself by designing some genuinely English and modern cottage. If in this choice of architecture, adopted or restored, we look for a trace of him, we shall find it, here and there, in some more finely sculptured frieze, in some more delicate and graceful sculptured rose-work; but we only find it marked and sensible in the purity and elevation of the moral emotion which we carry away with us when we quit his gallery of art.

VI.

The favourite poet of a nation, it seems, is he whose works a man, setting out on a journey, prefers to put into his pocket. Now-a-days it would be Tennyson in England, and Alfred De Musset in France. The two publics differ: so do their modes of life, their reading, and their pleasures. Let us try to describe them; we shall better understand the flowers if we see them in the garden.

Here we are at Newhaven, or at Dover, and we glide over the rails looking on either side. On both sides fly past country houses; they exist everywhere in
England, on the margin of lakes, on the edge of the bays, on the summit of the hills, in every picturesque point of view. They are the chosen abodes; London is but a business-place; men of the world live, amuse themselves, visit each other, in the country. How well ordered and pretty is this house! If near it there was some old edifice, abbey, or castle, it has been preserved. The new building has been suited to the old; even if detached and modern, it does not lack style; gable-ends, mullions, broad-windows, turrets perched at every corner, have a Gothic air in spite of their newness. Even this cottage, though not very large, suited to people with a moderate income, is pleasant to see with its pointed roofs, its porch, its bright brown bricks, all covered with ivy. Doubtless grandeur is generally wanting; in these days the men who mould opinion are no longer great lords, but rich gentlemen, well brought up, and landholders; it is pleasantness which appeals to them. But how they understand the word! All round the house is turf fresh, and smooth as velvet, rolled every morning. In front, great rhododendrons form a bright thicket, in which murmur swarms of bees; festoons of exotics creep and curve over the short grass, honeysuckles clamber up the trees; hundreds of roses, drooping over the windows, shed their rain of petals on the paths. Fine elms, yew-trees, great oaks, jealously tended, everywhere combine their leafage or rear their heads. Trees have been brought from Australia and China to adorn the thickets with the elegance or the singularity of their foreign shapes; the copper-beech stretches over the delicate verdure of the meadows the shadow of its dark metallic-hued foliage. How delicious is the freshness of this verdure! How it glistens, and how it
abounds in wild flowers brightened by the sun! What
care, what cleanliness, how everything is arranged, kept
up, refined, for the comfort of the senses and the
pleasure of the eyes! If there is a slope, streamlets
have been devised with little islets in the glen, peopled
with tufts of roses; ducks of select breed swim in the
pools, where the water-lilies display their satin stars.
Fat oxen lie in the grass, sheep as white as if fresh
from the washing, all kinds of happy and model animals,
fit to delight the eyes of an amateur and a master.
We return to the house, and before entering I look upon
the view; decidedly the love of Englishmen for the
country is innate; how pleasant it will be from that
parlour window to look upon the setting sun, and the
broad network of sunlight spread across the woods!
And how cunningly they have disposed the house, so
that the landscape may be seen at distance between the
hills, and at hand between the trees! We enter. How
nicely everything is got up, and how commodious. The
smallest wants have been forestalled, and provided for;
there is nothing which is not correct and perfect; we
imagine that everything in the house has received a
prize, or at least an honourable mention, at some indus-
trial exhibition. And the attendance of the servants is
as good as everything else; cleanliness is not more
scrupulous in Holland; Englishmen have, in proportion,
three times as many servants as Frenchmen; not too
many for the minute details of the service. The domes-
tic machine acts without interruption, without shock,
without hindrance; every wheel has its movement and
its place, and the comfort which it dispenses falls like
honey in the mouth, as clear and as exquisite as the
sugar of a model refinery when quite purified.
We converse with our host. We very soon find that his mind and soul have always been well balanced. When he left college he found his career shaped out for him; no need for him to revolt against the Church, which is half rational; nor against the Constitution, which is nobly liberal: the faith and law presented to him are good, useful, moral, liberal enough to maintain and employ all diversities of sincere minds. He became attached to them, he loves them, he has received from them the whole system of his practical and speculative ideas; he does not waver, he no longer doubts, he knows what he ought to believe and to do. He is not carried away by theories, dulled by sloth, checked by contradictions. Elsewhere youth is like water, stagnant or running to waste; here there is a fine old channel which receives and directs to a useful and sure end the whole stream of its activities and passions. He acts, works, rules. He is married, has tenants, is a magistrate, becomes a politician. He improves and rules his parish, his estate, and his family. He founds societies, speaks at meetings, superintends schools, dispenses justice, introduces improvements; he employs his reading, his travels, his connections, his fortune, and his rank, to lead his neighbours and dependants amicably to some work which profits themselves and the public. He is influential and respected. He has the pleasures of self-esteem and the satisfaction of conscience. He knows that he has authority, and that he uses it loyally, for the good of others. And this healthy state of mind is supported by a wholesome life. His mind is beyond doubt cultivated and occupied; he is well-informed, knows several languages, has travelled, is fond of all precise information; he is kept by his newspapers
conversant with all new ideas and discoveries. But, at the same time, he loves and practises all bodily exercises. He rides, takes long walks, hunts, yachts, examines for himself all the details of breeding and agriculture; he lives in the open air, he withstands the encroachments of a sedentary life, which always elsewhere leads the modern man to agitation of the brain, weakness of the muscles, and excitement of the nerves. Such is this elegant and common-sense society, refined in comfort, regular in conduct, whose dilettante tastes and moral principles confine it within a sort of flowery border, and prevent it from having its attention diverted.

Does any poet suit such a society better than Tennyson? Without being a pedant, he is moral; he may be read in the family circle by night; he does not rebel against society and life; he speaks of God and the soul, nobly, tenderly, without ecclesiastical prejudice; there is no need to reproach him like Lord Byron; he has no violent and abrupt words, extravagant and scandalous sentiments; he will pervert nobody. We shall not be troubled when we close the book; we may listen when we quit him, without being shocked by the contrast, to the grave voice of the master of the house, who reads evening prayers before the kneeling servants. And yet, when we quit him, we keep a smile of pleasure on our lips. The traveller, the lover of archaeology, has been pleased by the imitations of foreign and antique sentiments. The sportsman, the lover of the country, has relished the little country scenes and the rich rural pictures. The ladies have been charmed by his portraits of women; they are so exquisite and pure! He has laid such delicate blushes on those lovely cheeks! He has depicted so well the
changing expression of those proud or candid eyes! They like him because they feel that he likes them. He even honours them, and rises in his nobility to the height of their purity. Young girls weep in listening to him; certainly when, a little while ago, we heard the legend of *Elaine* or *Enid* read, we saw the fair heads drooping under the flowers which adorned them, and white shoulders heaving with furtive emotion. And how delicate was this emotion! He has not rudely trenched upon truth and passion. He has risen to the height of noble and tender sentiments. He has gleaned from all nature and all history what was most lofty and amiable. He has chosen his ideas, chiselled his words, equalled by his artifices, successes, and versatility of style, the pleasantness and perfection of social elegance in the midst of which we read him. His poetry is like one of those gilt and painted stands in which flowers of the country and exotics mingle in artful harmony their stalks and foliage, their clusters and cups, their scent and hues. It seems made expressly for these wealthy, cultivated, free business men, heirs of the ancient nobility, new leaders of a new England. It is part of their luxury as well as of their morality; it is an eloquent confirmation of their principles, and a precious article of their drawing-room furniture.

We return to Calais, and travel towards Paris, without pausing on the road. There are on the way plenty of noblemen’s castles, and houses of rich men of business. But we do not find amongst them, as in England, the thinking elegant world, which, by the refinement of its taste and the superiority of its mind, becomes the guide of the nation and the arbiter of the beautiful. There are two peoples in France: the provinces and
Paris; the one dining, sleeping, yawning, listening; the other thinking, daring, watching, and speaking: the first drawn by the second, as a snail by a butterfly, alternately amused and disturbed by the whims and the audacity of its guide. It is this guide we must look upon! Let us enter Paris! What a strange spectacle! It is evening, the streets are aflame, a luminous dust covers the busy noisy crowd, which jostles, elbows, crushes, and swarms near the theatres, behind the windows of the cafés. Have you remarked how all these faces are wrinkled, frowning or pale; how anxious are their looks, how nervous their gestures? A violent brightness falls on these shining heads; most are bald before thirty. To find pleasure here, they must have plenty of excitement: the dust of the boulevard settles on the ice which they are eating; the smell of the gas and the steam of the pavement, the perspiration left on the walls dried up by the fever of a Parisian day, "the human air full of impure rattle"—this is what they cheerfully breathe. They are crammed round their little marble tables, persecuted by the glaring light, the shouts of the waiters, the jumble of mixed talk, the monotonous motion of gloomy walkers, the flutter of loitering courtesans moving about anxiously in the dark. Doubtless their homes are not pleasant, or they would not change them for these bagmen's delights. We climb four flights of stairs, and find ourselves in a polished, gilded room, adorned with stuccoed ornaments, plaster statuettes, new furniture of old oak, with every kind of pretty nick-nack on the mantelpieces and the whatnot. "It makes a good show;" you can give a good reception to envious friends and people of standing. It is an advertisement, nothing more; we pass half-an-hour
there agreeably, and that is all. You will never make more than a house of call out of these rooms; they are low in the ceiling, close, inconvenient, rented by the year, dirty in six months, serving to display a fictitious luxury. All the enjoyments of these people are factitious, and, as it were, snatched hurriedly; they have in them something unhealthy and irritating. They are like the cookery of their restaurants, the splendour of their cafés, the gaiety of their theatres. They want them too quick, too pungent, too manifold. They have not cultivated them patiently, and culled them moderately: they have forced them on an artificial and heating soil; they grasp them in haste. They are refined and greedy; they need every day a stock of word-paintings, broad anecdotes, biting railleries, new truths, varied ideas. They soon get bored, and cannot endure tedium. They amuse themselves with all their might, and find that they are hardly amused. They exaggerate their work and their expense, their wants and their efforts. The accumulation of sensations and fatigue stretches their nervous machine to excess, and their polish of social gaiety chips off twenty times a day, displaying an inner ground of suffering and ardour.

But how quick-witted they are, and how unfettered is their mind! How this incessant rubbing has sharpened them! How ready they are to grasp and comprehend everything! How apt this studied and manifold culture has made them to feel and relish tendernesses and sadnesses, unknown to their fathers, deep feelings, strange and sublime, which hitherto seemed foreign to their race! This great city is cosmopolitan; here all ideas may be born; no barrier checks the mind: the vast field of thought opens before them without a
beaten or prescribed track. Use neither hinders nor guides them; an official Government and Church rid them of the care of leading the nation: the two powers are submitted to, as we submit to the beadle, or the policeman, patiently and with chaff; they are looked upon as a play. In short, the world here seems but a melodrama, a subject of criticism and argument. And be sure that criticism and argument have full scope. An Englishman entering on life, finds to all great questions an answer ready made. A Frenchman entering on life finds to all great questions simply suggested doubts. In this conflict of opinions he must create a faith for himself, and, being mostly unable to do it, he remains open to every uncertainty, and therefore to every curiosity and to every pain. In this gulf, which is like a vast sea, dreams, theories, fancies, intemperate, poetic and sickly desires, collect and chase each other like clouds. If in this tumult of moving forms we seek some solid work to prepare a foundation for future opinions, we find only the slowly-rising edifices of the sciences, which here and there obscurely, like submarine polypes, construct of imperceptible coral the basis on which the belief of the human race is to rest.

Such is the world for which Alfred de Musset wrote: in Paris he must be read. Read? We all know him by heart. He is dead, and it seems as if we daily hear him speak. A conversation among artists, as they jest in a studio, a beautiful young girl leaning over her box at the theatre, a street washed by the rain, making the black pavement shine, a fresh smiling morning in the woods of Fontainebleau, everything brings him before us, as if he were alive again. Was there ever a more vibrating and genuine accent? This man, at least, never
lied. He only said what he felt, and he has said it as he felt it. He thought aloud. He made the confession of every man. He was not admired, but loved; he was more than a poet, he was a man. Every one found in him his own feelings, the most transient, the most familiar; he did not restrict himself, he gave himself to all; he possessed the last virtues which remain to us, generosity and sincerity. And he had the most precious gift which can seduce an old civilisation, youth. As he said, "that hot youth, a tree with a rough bark, which covers all with its shadow, prospect and path." With what fire did he hurl onward love, jealousy, the thirst of pleasure, all the impetuous passions which rise with virgin blood from the depths of a young heart, and how did he make them clash together! Has any one felt them more deeply? He was too full of them, he gave himself up to them, was intoxicated with them. He rushed through life, like an eager racehorse in the country, whom the scent of plants and the splendid novelty of the vast heavens urge, headlong, in its mad career, which shatters all before him, and himself as well. He desired too much; he wished strongly and greedily to enjoy life in one draught, thoroughly; he did not glean or enjoy it; he tore it off like a bunch of grapes, pressed it, crushed it, twisted it; and he remains with stained hands as thirsty as before. Then broke forth sobs which found an echo in all hearts. What! so young, and already so wearied! So many precious gifts, so fine a mind, so delicate a tact, so rich and

1 "O médiocrité! celui qui pour tout bien
T'apporte à ce tripot dégoûtant de la vie
Est bien poltron au jeu s'il ne dit : Tout ou rien."
varied a fancy, so precocious a glory, such a sudden blossom of beauty and genius, and yet anguish, disgust, tears, and cries! What a mixture! With the same attitude he adores and curses. Eternal illusion, invincible experience, keep side by side in him to fight and tear him. He became old, and remained young; he is a poet, and he is a sceptic. The Muse and her peaceful beauty, Nature and her immortal freshness, Love and his happy smile, all the swarm of divine visions barely passed before his eyes, when we see approaching with curses, and sarcasms, all the spectres of debauchery and death. He is as a man in a festive scene, who drinks from a chased cup, standing up, in front, amidst applause and triumphal music, his eyes laughing, his heart full of joy, heated and excited by the generous wine he quaffed, whom suddenly we see growing pale; there was poison in the cup; he falls, and the death-rattle is in his throat; his convulsed feet beat upon the silken carpet, and all the terrified guests look on. This is what we felt on the day when the most beloved, the most brilliant amongst us, suddenly quivered from an unseen attack, and was struck down, being hardly able to breathe, amid the lying splendours and gaieties of our banquet.

Well! such as he was, we love him for ever: we cannot listen to another; beside him, all seem cold or false. We leave at midnight the theatre in which he had heard Malibran, and we enter the gloomy rue des Moulins, where, on a hired bed, his Rolla¹ came to sleep and die. The lamps cast flickering rays on the slippery pavement. Restless shadows march past the doors, and trail along their dress of draggled silk to

¹ See vol. i. p. 237, n. 1.
meet the passers-by. The windows are fastened; here
and there a light pierces through a half closed shutter,
and shows a dead dahlia on the edge of a window-sill.
To-morrow an organ will grind before these panes, and
the wan clouds will leave their droppings on these dirty
walls. From this wretched place came the most im-
passioned of his poems! These vilenesses and vul-
garities of the stews and the lodging-house caused this
divine eloquence to flow! it was these which at such a
moment gathered in this bruised heart all the splendours
of nature and history, to make them spring up in
sparkling jets, and shine under the most glowing
poetic sun that ever rose! We feel pity; we think of
that other poet, away there in the Isle of Wight, who
amuses himself by dressing up lost epics. How
happy he is amongst his fine books, his friends, his
honeysuckles and roses! No matter. De Musset, in
this wretched abode of filth and misery, rose higher.
From the heights of his doubt and despair, he saw the
infinite, as we see the sea from a storm-beaten pro-
montory. Religions, their glory and their decay, the
human race, its pangs and its destiny, all that is sublime
in the world, appeared there to him in a flash of
lightning. He felt, at least this once in his life, the
inner tempest of deep sensations, giant-dreams, and
intense voluptuousness, the desire of which enabled
him to live, the lack of which forced him to die. He
was no mere dilettante; he was not content to taste
and enjoy; he left his mark on human thought; he
told the world what was man, love, truth, happiness.
He suffered, but he imagined; he fainted, but he
created. He tore from his entrails with despair the
idea which he had conceived, and showed it to the eyes
of all, bloody but alive. That is harder and lovelier than to go fondling and gazing upon the ideas of others. There is in the world but one work worthy of a man, the production of a truth, to which we devote ourselves, and in which we believe. The people who have listened to Tennyson are better than our aristocracy of townsfolk and bohemians; but I prefer Alfred de Musset to Tennyson.