CHAPTER VI

PESSIMISTS AND THEIR KINDRED

NOT because he takes the first rank but because his *nom-de-plume* of Meredith brings him into startling contrast with George Meredith, we may first consider the work of the younger Bulwer-Lytton. He was born in 1831, the son of the great novelist, Sir Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton. Robert Bulwer-Lytton inherited something of his father's talent, but never had much opportunity to develop his powers along the direction in which they really existed. His father wanted very much to be a poet and could not — grew jealous of Tennyson, and wrote satirically upon Tennyson's poetry. Tennyson was the most magnanimous of men, but he was a very dangerous person to make angry, and he replied to this outburst of jealousy with ten or fifteen lines of terrible satire which crushed Bulwer-Lytton for ever, and makes his memory ridiculous even to this day. Perhaps the longing of the father to become a poet was inherited by the son. At all events he began at a rather early date to publish poetry over the signature of Owen Meredith. On the whole he must be considered to have succeeded amazingly well in some small departments of verse, and to have failed whenever he attempted anything large. He tried to follow even the subjects of Tennyson, attempted to treat the same thing in another way. Here his work is simply worthless. Then he attempted a kind of novel in poetry called "Lucile." It was modelled after a French story, and caused him to be accused of plagiarism. Nevertheless, it was very popular for a short time—partly because it was of the mediocrity which met the demand of a large mass of middle-class readers, and partly

because of the social position of its author. But it is quite unnecessary to do more than mention this work. Robert Lytton became a real poet only in small things.

The reason of this may partly be sought in the busy life of the man. A letter from the elder Bulwer-Lytton has been recently published which enables us to understand how the whole course of the son's career had been mapped out for him beforehand. In this letter the novelist said that, as he desired that his son Robert should enter the field of diplomacy, it was necessary that the young man should learn to speak and write French not only well but exactly like a Frenchman. And Robert Bulwer-Lytton was thoroughly educated in the diplomatic service in just the manner that the father desired. The influence of his French education is distinctly visible in the best of his work. It gives you an impression at times of the exquisite and matchless quality of Theophile Gautier — not that he was really able to compare with Gautier to the extent of a single stanza, but the sense of Gautier is there—the sense of form and the sense of melody without the splendid colour and without that incomparable delicacy of choice of words which cannot be repeated in any other modern language. The diplomatic service, besides, was not a service leaving a man much leisure time for the development of poetic talent. Robert Bulwer-Lytton's very aptitude for diplomacy evidences qualities of mind at variance with the true poetic spirit. He began as a diplomatic attaché at Washington*; then he went in a higher capacity to Paris; then to Berlin; then to Rome; subsequently to every capital in Europe. In the English civil service a man who has fair talent has a chance of seeing the whole world, and Owen Meredith saw a great deal of it. He was made Viceroy of India in 1876 — the highest post, perhaps, in the gift of the English government. He died in 1891.

It was in 1850 that he entered the diplomatic service, and his successive appointments were: as second secretary — Florence, Paris, The Hague, and Vienna; as first secretary or secretary of legation — Copenhagen, Athens, Lisbon, Madrid, Vienna, and Paris; as minister—Lisbon; and, 1887-1891, as ambassador at Paris.

You can easily imagine that he had little time for poetry, and the most generous way of considering his work is to remember that it is rather wonderful considering the circumstances. The best of it is, I think, to be found in the fourth division of his collected works, under the title of "Exile," by which we are to understand poems written in strange lands far away from home. The best of these again include little more than half a dozen pieces in quatrain. I should select the pieces entitled "Resurrection," "The Portrait," "Blue-Beard," "The Castle of King Macbeth," and perhaps "Two out of the Crowd" (a subject, by the way, which has been infinitely better treated by Robert Browning). Now it is just in this work that the French influence before referred to is manifested. The whole feeling, the whole tone, is not English; it is not even in the largest meaning of the word French — it is Parisian. There is a cynical mockery, a refined sensuousness and an ethical insincerity about it which is exactly in the manner of the conversations uttered by the most unpleasant characters in Balzac. There is nothing noble, nothing great, but there is very much of what is false, and very much of what we call *blasê*. It is the poetry also of a purely artificial world — the world of fashion and convention, not by sunlight but by lamplight, gaslight or electric light. The beauty of the thing is that it reflects quite well the character of that life and its impression upon even an English mind. Take the poem, for example, called "Resurrection." It is nothing more than the morbid fancy of a gentleman in a theatre. But the whole impression of an opera-night is wonderfully given, and some of the stanzas have become famous the world over.

> Of all the operas that Verdi wrote,
> The best, to my taste, is the Trovatore;
> And Mario can soothe with a tenor note
> The souls in Purgatory.

As he stands in the theatre he thinks with regret of a

woman to whom he has been engaged to be married, but who died the year before. He thinks of her grace. He sees her again in memory, fair and young, as in life, wearing upon her breast a jasmine blossom, and suddenly he smells the scent of a jasmine blossom in the theatre.

> It smelt so faint, and it smelt so sweet,
> It made me creep, and it made me cold!
> Like the scent that steals from the crumbling sheet
> Where a mummy is half unroll'd.

Because it is a ghostly flower that he smells, not a real one, perhaps. But looking across the theatre he finds that his longing has made it a real one. His dead love has returned from the grave; she is sitting there in the theatre waiting for him to speak to her. Now of course this incident is impossible — touches upon the absurd; but remark that the author does not intend otherwise. It is a romantic irony, as much as to say to the reader, "This is what you would like, is it not?" It is the ironical insincerity of the poem that gives it a peculiar, bitter charm.

A more striking example of this queer power — indeed, the most representative of all the writer's work — is "The Portrait," a poem learned by heart and often recited at literary gatherings, in different parts of the English-speaking world. It is the best known of all Owen Meredith's compositions, and it is most typical of the influences that shaped his style and of the cynical spirit that informs his very best work.

> Midnight past! Not a sound of aught
> Thro' the silent house, but the wind at his prayers.
> I sat by the dying fire, and thought
> Of the dear dead woman upstairs.
>
> A night of tears! for the gusty rain
> Had ceased, but the eaves were dripping yet;
> And the moon look'd forth as thro' in pain,
> With her face all white and wet:

Nobody with me, my watch to keep,
  But the friend of my bosom, the man I love:
And grief had sent him fast to sleep
  In the chamber up above.

Nobody else, in the country place
  All round, that knew of my loss beside,
But the good young priest with the Raphael-face
  Who confess'd her when she died.

That good young Priest is of gentle nerve,
  And my grief had moved him beyond controul
For his lip grew white, as I could observe,
  When he speeded her parting soul.

I sat by the dreary hearth alone:
  I thought of the pleasant days of yore:
I said "the staff of my life is gone:
  The woman I love is no more.

"Gem-clasp'd, on her bosom my portrait lies,
  Which next to her heart she used to wear—
It is steep'd in the light of her loving eyes,
  And the sweets of her bosom and hair."

And I said—"the thing is precious to me:
  They will bury her soon in the churchyard clay;
It lies on her heart, and lost must be,
  If I do not take it away."

I lighted my lamp at the dying flame,
  And crept up the stairs that creak'd for fright,
Till into the chamber of death I came,
  Where she lay all in white.

The moon shone over her windingsheet.
  There, stark she lay on her carven bed:
Seven burning tapers about her feet,
  And seven about her head.

As I stretch'd my hand, I held my breath;
  I turn'd, as I drew the curtains apart:
I dared not look on the face of death:
  I knew where to find her heart.

I thought, at first, as my touch fell there,
  It had warm'd that heart to life, with love;
For the thing I touch'd was warm, I swear,
  And I could feel it move.

'Twas the hand of a man, that was moving slow
  O'er the heart of the dead,—from the other side:
And at once the sweat broke over my brow,
"Who is robbing the corpse?" I cried.

Opposite me, by the tapers' light,
  The friend of my bosom, the man I loved,
Stood over the corpse, and all as white,
  And neither of us moved.

"What do you here, my friend?"...The man
  Look'd first at me, and then at the dead.
"There is a portrait here ..." he began;
  "There is. It is mine," I said.

Said the friend of my bosom, "yours, no doubt,
  The portrait was, till a month ago,
When this suffering angel took that out,
  And placed mine there, I know."

"This woman, she loved me well," said I.
  "A month ago," said my friend to me:
"And in your throat," I groan'd, "you lie!"
  He answer'd... "let us see."

"Enough!" I return'd, "let the dead decide:
  And whose soever the portrait prove,
His shall it be, when the cause is tried,
  Where Death is arraign'd by Love."

We found the portrait there, in its place:
  We open'd it by the tapers' shine:
The gems were all unchanged: the face
  Was—neither his nor mine.

"One nail drives out another, at least!
  The portrait is not ours," I cried,

"But our friend's, the Raphael-faced young Priest,
Who confess'd her when she died."

Here we have a really terrible piece of irony, of mockery, which cannot be called in the least exaggerated if we consider that the facts related are no more strange to real life than thousands of incidents which form a part of ordinary French fiction. The story is French in character, the whole management of the poem is foreign — and perhaps for that very reason it is a rare and wonderful composition. But it is certainly of the most morbid class. As a satire upon friendship, upon love, and upon religion, it would be scarcely possible to point out in English literature anything of equal dimensions to be compared with it. What is absolutely real about it is its artificially *blasé* tone. When we say that a man or a composition is *blasé*, we mean in the case of a man that he is no longer capable of innocent or honest pleasure, because he is exhausted by vicious pleasures, and that he has no more faith in human nature because he has had bitter experiences in the society to which he belonged; while, as for the composition, we mean that it reflects the cynicism and scepticism of the *blasé* mind. It would not be just to call the author of this poem personally *blasé*, but a great deal of his work betrays certain tendencies in this direction, certain sympathies and comprehensions of a decidedly pessimistic kind. Besides, it is just in such things that he is really at his best. When he attempts philosophical or narrative poems, he is never quite himself, and never much above mediocrity. Another reason why I should classify him with the pessimistic poets is his decided partiality for tragic and horrible subjects, which he treats apparently with a certain pleasure of detail, and an utter absence of moral feeling. The other Meredith, of whom I have spoken, does indeed treat of many very horrible tragedies; but he only does so to point a moral, and that with a skill and a wisdom in which he has no rival. You need not look for any moral teaching worthy of the name in the work of Owen Meredith.

I have given only one strong example of his power; but I must mention that the volume of his work is very large. What will be preserved of it in future English literature will just as certainly be very small. All that it contains, really precious, might be condensed into a selection of perhaps two hundred pages at most. Yet there are few kinds of poetical composition which he did not attempt. He imitated Greek tragedies, composed dramas, successfully copied various French forms, wrote novels in verse, imitated the manner of nearly all Victorian masters, especially Tennyson, and even allowed himself to be fascinated by Oriental romance. However, I can find but one other poem out of the classes already referred to which I could call remarkable, an Oriental fable adapted from the Persian, and entitled "The Apple of Life." Yet even in this poem, there are traces of the same spirit which "The Portrait" illustrates. Altogether, Owen Meredith is far less successful in his treatment of Oriental subjects than Sir Edwin Arnold. Arnold cannot be classed as a poet of the highest rank; but he has a wealth of human sympathy, generous enthusiasm, and a particular skill in the expression of tenderness, which Owen Meredith never had. Indeed, in regard to Oriental subjects, I doubt whether nineteenth century English literature has anything really wonderful to show except Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubâiyât of Omar Khayyâm. This magnificent verse has already become an English classic.

James Thomson, the second poet of this name in English literature, I shall next invite your attention to — as the most typical of all the pessimistic group. In the other poets of this company you will find many lights among the shadows; but there is no ray of light in the sinister poetry of Thomson. Many lecturers on English literature would at this day refuse to consider him in a university lecture; but he has fairly forced his way in the face of all obstacles to a very high place among the minor poets. His merits have been fairly acknowledged by our highest judges; his name is already inscribed in the history of the Victorian

period; and I do not see any reason to be silent about him merely because he represents the blackest quality of despair. The province of poetry is the reflection of all human forms of thought and feeling, the dark as well as the bright; and the dark is certainly not without moral value as well as intrinsic interest. We must attempt to draw the proper lesson which such poetry as Thomson's must suggest to the student of ethics.

The history of this man is very strange and very unhappy. He was the son of a sailor, and was born in 1834. His father and family were of course very poor, and their poverty was increased by the father's tendency to drink. The boy James proved to be naturally clever, and he was admitted, at the recommendation of some charitable person, into a Scotch charity school, where the sons of soldiers and sailors are educated at the public expense. There he received a common matter-of-fact education, and after leaving the school he was allowed to enter the army as an army schoolmaster. His poetical education was made entirely by his own reading and study; and he disliked the work of teaching soldiers largely because it allowed of little opportunity for self-culture. While he was serving in the army, he made an acquaintance which was destined to have a great influence upon his life. This acquaintance was Charles Bradlaugh, afterwards a member of Parliament, a radical leader, and a professed atheist. You may remember that Bradlaugh refused to take the oath which all members of Parliament were expected to take, with the exception of Quakers, and that he wasted much splendid talent and courage and eloquence in vainly endeavouring to break down the barriers of English conservatism in social and religious matters. Charles Bradlaugh was serving as a soldier in the same region where Thomson was working as schoolmaster. The two became great friends, and Thomson was soon converted to many of Bradlaugh's radical opinions. In 1862 Thomson was dismissed from the army for breaking the rules regarding swimming in a certain lake, or at least for refus-

ing to answer questions put to him in regard to his conduct. He had no money, and no friend except Bradlaugh, who had left the army and had begun his career as a politician. Bradlaugh was generous to Thomson, took him to his own house, obtained several situations for him and helped him as long as he lived. But Thomson was not destined to profit much by anybody's help. He became a prey like his father to drink. The last years of his life were devoted chiefly to journalistic work; but his habits rendered it impossible for him to obtain any great position even in the newspaper world. Yet by his poems he made friends who would have been only too happy to help him had it been possible. The great novelist and poet Charles Kingsley, the historian Froude, the great novelist George Eliot, the poet Marston, and William Rossetti, brother of Dante Rossetti, all extended to him their sympathy and offers of good will. But there was no hope for Thomson. He burst a blood vessel at last after a drinking spell, and died in a public hospital in 1882.

You can readily see that Thomson's experience of life was not such as to give him cheerful ideas; and his acquaintance with Bradlaugh was not in all respects fortunate for him. We have here the case of a young man of extraordinary talent, feeling his own intellectual superiority to the people whom he was obliged to serve and obey, and refusing all opportunity to better himself, merely because of the conditions into which he had been born. Intellectual men in such a state are apt to be dangerous both to themselves and to society. A man in this position has two roads open to him — only two roads, and he must quickly choose between them. The first road to success is to be gained by bravely defying society and fighting one's way through to the top. But it requires both immense talent and immense moral strength to do this; and even Bradlaugh, a much more gifted man than Thomson, died in attempting it. Byron and Shelley were examples of poets who tried it and failed. The other road to success requires a very special form of diplomatic character. The man who understands

exactly the range of his own power and the machinery of society, may rise by throwing all his strength upon the side of the very prejudices that crush him. Once at the top he may assert his independence, and society will forgive him for his cleverness in having at once deceived and beguiled it; but this type of man seldom belongs to the emotional world of the poets. The man of this kind generally wins his way through politics or some kindred field of competition. In the case of Thomson it must also be remembered that he did many things which he was not strong enough to do. The man who attacks the religious ideas of his time may be quite right from his own standpoint, but he is undertaking a dangerous business if he is poor and friendless. Society then unites her powers for the simple purpose of starving him to death. Nobody will employ him; no publisher will print him; no genteel association will admit him. He becomes an outcast. In the case of a man like Professor Huxley, the situation becomes different. Society is broken down by the enormous force of the intellect she tries in vain to crush; and then recognizing that the fight is too much for her, society accepts him and makes him her friend and perhaps buries him at last in Westminster Abbey. But only a giant can win the victory; and society only forgives giants. It does not forgive Thomson.

I have spoken thus at length about Thomson's circumstances in order that we may better understand his manner of regarding life. He was unfortunate, first in the position which his poverty obliged him to accept; secondly in his lack of higher education; thirdly in his antagonism to social conventions; and last, as well as worst, in his inherited passion for drink. Understanding these facts, we can understand the rest.

It was by small pieces of verse, showing great talent, that Thomson at first attracted the attention of Froude and of Kingsley; but it was not by these that he will live in literature. Only one of his compositions can be termed really great; but it is very great, the greatest thing of the

kind in English verse. I mean his long poem entitled "The City of Dreadful Night." There is also a remarkable and very horrible poem called "Insomnia," which emotionally and imaginatively surpasses a poem by Coleridge upon the same subject, though perhaps considerably inferior to the work of Coleridge as to certain excellences of form. "Insomnia" is a wonderfully hideous thing, but I do not think that it could be called great. "The City of Dreadful Night," however, is very great; and the surprise of the work is that a man who never had any real literary training could have composed it. Some of its stanzas are absolutely grand, and the whole composition is masterly. There is a gloomy beauty and a strange preciousness about it, which makes you think of some solid and ponderous object of polished ebony.

"The City of Dreadful Night" represents what? An imaginary city, in one respect; a real city in another—Life, as Thomson may have felt it, without money and without friends, in the awful and roaring solitude of London. London is a terrible place for the unfortunate, perhaps the most terrible in the world, and even for the fortunate it is the gloomiest of all modern cities. Sometimes for months together the sun is never seen; sometimes for days and weeks together there is not even daylight; at noon the electric lamps and the gas lamps alone give light to the streets; a dense and evil smelling fog darkens all distances; traffic moves slowly and cautiously; everything appears infernal, gloomy, like a bad dream. We all know what London calls "pea-soup fog." Probably this London fog may have suggested to Thomson his first idea of the poem, the idea of a city of toil and misery and despair upon which the sun never shines. But as it now stands, the poem represents much more than a city; it is a picture of humanity in the condition of absolute despair—humanity in a world circling blindly round a burnt out sun, living without hope and without faith. And in another sense we must take the poem as presenting us with a picture of the poet's own soul.

"The City of Dreadful Night" is far away from all other places; it is surrounded on three sides by horrible deserts, and on the fourth side is the sea, a black sea over which no ship ever comes. Nobody wants to live in that horrible place, but no one can leave it, except by committing suicide; and nobody knows why he is there or how he came there. It is scarcely necessary to tell you that Life is what the poet refers to in these lines:

> How he arrives there none can clearly know;
> Athwart the mountains and immense wild tracts,
> Or flung a waif upon the vast sea-flow,
> Or down the river's boiling cataracts:
> To reach it is as dying fever-stricken;
> To leave it, slow faint birth intense pangs quicken;
> And the memory swoons in both the tragic acts.*

There follows a number of terrible descriptions of the different varieties of despair in the City of Dreadful Night —the loss of hope, love, and faith. So horrible is existence, that the great fear from which all the people suffer is not the fear of pain or of dying, but the fear that after death there might be another life. Being disgusted with life, all men desire nothing better than annihilation. To the cathedral sometimes the people go to hear a preacher; but the preacher has no word of joy or comfort for them. He tells them that there is no God, no soul, no future life, and that whoever wishes to have no more pain or trouble, can get his wish by suicide. I give a verse or two from the words of the preacher—

> This little life is all we must endure,
> The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
> We fall asleep and never awake again;
> Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
> Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
> In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.†

There is, however, a very great splendour in this despair

* *The City of Dreadful Night*, v. † *Ibid.*, xiv.

—splendour of imagination and of style. The grandest parts of the poem are perhaps the last stanzas, in which the goddess of the city, Melancholy herself, is described. The imagery here becomes colossal, and no one could deny its magnificence.

As Thomson wrote but one poem of remarkable importance, we have given him rather more attention than the proportion to be observed in this lecture would allow, were it not that he represents a certain phase of the free-thought movement in poetry to which we shall have again to refer more than once. I shall now speak of John Addington Symonds, who must certainly be reckoned as one of the pessimistic poets. Indeed, I judge him to be scarcely less of a pessimist than Thomson, although his pessimism was of a different kind and was due to a very different circumstance. Symonds was the son of a celebrated physician of the city of Bristol, and was born in 1840. Inheriting considerable money, he never knew the struggles and hardships that commonly fall to the lot of literary men; he was educated at the best universities, and became a great scholar; he travelled extensively and successfully cultivated a natural taste for art. Young, rich, accomplished, a real man of learning, and *dilettante* of no common order, the future seemed to be very bright for him. But unfortunately he had inherited the seeds of consumption. In the prime of his life the disease took such a form that he was able to live only by making his home in the mountains of Switzerland, at a great elevation, where the air was extremely pure. To this mountain home he carried his books — books in all languages, collected at great expense, and representing a small fortune in themselves. The rest of his existence was altogether devoted to study and writing. He was a voluminous writer, and a critic of wide reputation. His greatest work, so far as bulk goes, is his "History of the Italian Renaissance;" but, although a work of great special value, it does not represent his best efforts. Those were put into such books as his "Studies of the Greek Poets," and his

"Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece." We have now to consider only his poetry. I mean his original poetry; for he was an extensive and very successful translator. Some of his translations from the Greek Anthology are really the best of their kind, and great praise must be also given to his charming little book "Wine, Women, and Song," a translation of the student songs of the Middle Ages. But his own poetry belongs to quite another category. There is not much of it, and the best is contained in a thin book called "Vagabunduli Libellus"—which means the little book of the little wanderer. No more dismal collection of poems than this exists perhaps in English literature. The contents are nearly all sonnets upon his own experiences, and the general tone of this introspective work gives one a very unpleasant feeling. The verse is polished, scholarly, brilliant; but the sentiment is morbid to a degree that even the sickness of the author can scarcely excuse. There are two disagreeable elements, both of them totally different from the honest despair and the amorous passions of Thomson. Here we have a great scholar, a man of wealth and high position, apparently relating to us personal experiences of passion which belong to the extremely unhealthy variety, or again expressing to us the perpetual horror of death which haunts him and fills him with a vastness of despair such as only the intellectual mind can feel. The sonnet called "Pessimism" well deserves its name. I may cite it simply as a unique production of this class.

There is a doubt drearier than any deep
Thought's plummet ever sounded, that our earth—
This earth where each man bears the load of birth,
The load of death, uncertain whether sleep
Shall round life with oblivion—may be worth
Less in the scale of being than a heap
Of mildewed ears the farmer scorns to reap,
Or garners in his barns with sorry mirth.
Of every million lives, how many a score
Are failures from their birth! If this be true

Of seeds, men, species, why not then of suns?
Our world perchance is worm-gnawn at the core!
Or in its dædal frame doth cancer brew
Venomous juice that blent with life-blood runs?

When a man has these imaginations regarding the universe; when he can seriously compare the bright sun and the beautiful world to rotten apples, and speak of all life as failure, we may expect him to have some extraordinary ideas about the soul. And so he has. Death would be a good thing if the soul also die—but he is afraid that it does not die!

The curse of this existence, whence it came,
We view not; only this we view, that naught
Shall free man from self's robe of sentient flame.
There is no cunningest way to murder thought.
Stab, poison, strangle; yea, the flesh hath died!
What further skill yields souls their suicide?*

One feels tempted to reply to such a question that the best way to destroy one's soul—I use the word soul in the meaning of the higher life of the human being—is to waste time in the composition of such verses. The indulgence of such morbid fancies on the part of a man in the position of Symonds cannot but seem to us infinitely worse than the pessimism of Thomson. The Self, the Ego, is a source of constant trouble to this poet; and his very best piece is upon the puzzle which torments him. At some time or other, as his poems confess, he was fascinated by some beautiful Italian, and the subject of the poem is the pain which he felt at his inability to obtain her inner as well as her outer self. This feeling regarding the mystery of another human life has been scarcely ever expressed in a morbid way by an English poet; but it has been a favourite theme with some Erench writers of the *decadence*, and the great story-teller Maupassant was haunted by it, as I said, shortly before he became mad.

At a certain time of life every man makes one im-

* *The Last Despair.*

portant discovery, that no being can ever perfectly know the whole character, the whole thought and the whole feeling of another being. There is no exception to this rule; even the son cannot know the whole soul of his father, nor the husband that of his wife. Now to the thinker of the Far East or of India, this mystery gives no trouble at all. The eastern philosophers know perfectly well that the inner life of every being reaches back into the infinite, is a part of the infinite; and that an attempt to measure it would be like an attempt to measure the abysses of space. Only in our own day certain western psychologists of note have been studying the Ego or Self as an infinitely complex fact, and, as I told you, have formulated, in accordance with evolutional science, the hypothesis of what is called Multiple Personality. Each person really represents, by heredity, and according to circumstances, an innumerable multitude of other personalities. But to the old western idea of the singleness of self, this discovery of changing personality, of alternating personality, of unfathomable personality, came like a shock, almost like a terror. It is this terror that is expressed in the best of all the sonnets of Symonds, which is number twenty-two in the collection called "Stella Maris." I shall quote only the last four lines:

> Self gives not self; and souls sequestered dwell
> In the dark fortalice of thought and sense,
> Where, though life's prisoners call from cell to cell,
> Each pines alone and may not issue thence.

To a joyous and healthy mind like that of George Meredith, the infinite mystery of self is a delight, a subject of happy wonder, and a constant assurance of the eternity of all that is good and beautiful in the highest life of the spirit. But to a morbid mind, the first shock of this fact brings only strange suspicions and strange despairs. There is not much chance that the poetry of Symonds will live as a whole. Its unhealthiness is not sufficiently counterbalanced by those qualities of deep thought and emotion which may

redeem even pessimistic poetry of the blackest description. But one or two pieces in the collection—such as have been already selected for anthologies — will probably take their place in English literature.

Arthur Hugh Clough must also be called a rather pessimistic poet; but he certainly deserves considerable attention both as a verse maker and as a personality. He was born in 1819, was educated in Oxford, where he obtained a fellowship, and later in life became an official of the Educational Department — a position which he kept until his death in 1861. It may be of some interest to add that his childhood was passed in America, and that his death occurred at Florence in Italy.

Clough appears to have been much affected by what was called the Oxford movement. I cannot tell you much about that movement in this relation; you will find the best account of it, perhaps, in Froude's "Short Studies on Great Subjects." Suffice it to say for the present that the Oxford movement was a religious movement in the direction exactly opposite to that which the great Protestant reformation had taken. It was a movement of such a kind as to excite the fancy that the Roman and English churches might again become one. Not a few of the clever students actually became Roman Catholics — such as Newman. This was the movement proper. But, like every extreme movement, it provoked a reaction in the university; and while one set of men were allowing themselves to fall into the current of religious enthusiasm, another set of men proclaimed, as far as they dared, absolute disbelief in all forms of religion. Between these extremes of scepticism and of zeal there grew up a small class which attempted to preserve a balance between the denial of one party and the dogmatism of the other. Clough was one of these. It has been said of him that he neither had courage to doubt nor faith to believe; but this seems to be an unjust observation. He was a doubter, and expressed his doubts in some of the boldest satirical verse of his time; but he was not so small a thinker

as to preach either despair or any purely materialistic doctrine. In many respects he was very much the same kind of man as Matthew Arnold — liberal in some things, small in certain matters, but never common and never undignified. Some years ago his poems obtained great circulation and reputation, probably through the influence of the author's friends with the universities. They were recommended as expressing the thought of the century—by which was really meant that they expressed the thought of a particular party related to the Oxford movement. So far as the thought of the century goes, they do not express anything worth speaking of; there is no more nineteenth century philosophy in them than there is in the poems of Matthew Arnold. But now that the feeling of the time which they once represented has passed away, Clough's poems run the danger of becoming forgotten even within the present generation. The interest in what they expressed is dead. Much larger thinkers than either Clough or Arnold are absorbing attention; but Clough was a scholar, a fair thinker, for the time in which he lived, and he wrote a great deal of verse, none of which is absolutely bad—some of which is very good indeed. It cannot be said that he wrote anything great; but some of his shorter and simpler pieces have a gentle merit that may enable them to survive. The pieces most commonly praised are his "Qua Cursum Ventus," "In the Great Metropolis," and "Say not the struggle nought availeth." All of these are short and simple, but he wrote many long poems, in hexameters and in other metres. Like Longfellow, he also made a collection of little stories in verse like the "Canterbury Tales" of Chaucer. His idea was to recount the different stories told to one another by passengers upon a steamship crossing the Atlantic, and he gave to this collection the title "Mari Magno, or Tales on Board." There are six of these little tales; and they seem to me to represent in their sincere simplicity his best work as a narrator. Many prefer his "Bothie of Toberna-Vuolich," which is written in hexameters, after the style

of Longfellow's "Evangeline," but quite different in tone. It is the story of a young Oxford student falling in love with a Highland girl, whom he marries at last and takes with him to New Zealand. It is a very clever production, but not one which I could recommend for you to study, as it swarms with curious idioms, largely borrowed from university life, besides containing many Highland expressions. Moreover it is not in the nature of serious art; it presents a strange mixture of the jesting and the romantic spirit. From Clough I shall quote one very short piece only, not because of its poetry but because of its witty satire, and because it has become famous, so that you are likely often to see it referred to. It mocks the professed morality of English society, bitterly expressing what the real worldly idea of morality is.

THE LATEST DECALOGUE

Thou shalt have one God only; who
Would be at the expense of two?
No graven images may be
Worshipped, except the currency:
Swear not at all; for, for thy curse
Thine enemy is none the worse:
At church on Sunday to attend
Will serve to keep the world thy friend:
Honour thy parents; that is, all
From whom advancement may befall;
Thou shalt not kill; but need'st not strive
Officiously to keep alive:
Do not adultery commit;
Advantage rarely comes of it:
Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat,
When it's so lucrative to cheat:
Bear not false witness; let the lie
Have time on its own wings to fly:
Thou shalt not covet, but tradition
Approves all forms of competition.

Matthew Arnold, the dear friend of Clough, was born in 1822. He was the eldest son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the famous head-master of Rugby School, immortalized in Hughes's book, "Tom Brown's School Days." The picture drawn in the book of Dr. Arnold is said to be absolutely true by those who knew this celebrated educator. Dr. Arnold was an independent thinker, — he broke away from old traditions, and established a new system of character training which proved tolerably successful. The independent spirit of the father seems to have been inherited by the son; but it took quite a different form in Matthew, who was not less gentle and sensitive than his father was stern and forceful. Matthew was educated at Oxford, and early distinguished himself in his studies. He won a prize for poetry with his poem on Cromwell, when he was only twenty-one years old. Between 1857 and 1867 he was Professor of poetry at Oxford. When nearing middle age he greatly distinguished himself by a series of essays on literary subjects, which won for him a great reputation as critic, and brought degrees from three different universities. As a critic he was certainly during his lifetime the first of his period. His poetry does not, however, give him a rank in verse equal to that which has been accorded him in prose.

Perhaps you have read his strange remarks about Tennyson—his complaint (published only since his death) that Tennyson was not a great thinker or a profound poet. Now this criticism can scarcely be applied to Tennyson, but it is eminently true of the man that made it. The mind of Arnold had been perturbed at an early day by the Oxford movement; he had drifted toward agnosticism without ever daring to make the full plunge, and he was never able during his life to take a really definite position on ultimate subjects. He felt and was tormented by the doubts of his time. He was sensitive, and suffered much from the pressure of life. He loved beauty and truth for their own sake, and found himself everywhere confronted by a narrow and vulgar conservatism that imposed restrictions upon thought,

and refused all privileges to opinions at variance with its own small and somewhat brutal dogmatism. Arnold fought against the spirit bravely, and succeeded in breaking a great deal of it down before his death. But he was able to do this very largely for the reason that he was not a great thinker. Had he been a great thinker, the world would not have listened to him so well, and his struggle would have been much more bitter. As it was, the melancholy of his life has given to most of his poetry a peculiar dark tinge, which borders upon pessimism without actually expressing it. His longer poems are his least great; his briefer lyrical pieces best represent his genius. For genius of a certain kind he really had; but the work of no other Victorian poet is so uneven. In this unevenness we are reminded of Wordsworth, with whom Arnold has many points in common.

It is curious how closely the minds of Clough and Arnold ran together. The subjects chosen by each were widely different, of course; but you will find the same forms of verse, the same attempts at innovation, the same efforts at classical imitation in both. You can feel that they were truly brother minds. But Arnold was far the greater. His longer poems do not suffer like those of Clough from any imperfect mastery of technique, but they suffer strangely from other causes. Comparison is one. Undoubtedly "Merope" is a fine imitation of Greek tragedy, but when this cold poem is compared with the fiery splendour and sonorous music of Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon," it suffers enormously. Had it been written in another age it would have had a better chance.

Again, Arnold was unfortunate even in his choice of subjects, when there was no comparison to be made. "Empedocles on Etna" is certainly a very remarkable poem, but how unfortunate is the choice of subject. Empedocles, you know, was a philosopher, who, tradition says, leaped into the crater of Etna that his memory might become immortal; and the volcano sometime after threw up one of his sandals as a proof of what had happened. Arnold makes

Empedocles commit suicide because of doubts and despondencies; he makes Empedocles a very interesting character, capable of making very wonderful verses upon the difficulty of understanding the universe and of bearing the pains of life. The long soliloquy of Empedocles is really the soliloquy of no Greek, but of Matthew Arnold himself. But Arnold had no sense of humour. The ridiculous side of the story never perhaps occurred to him, until George Meredith produced a savage little satire upon Empedocles with his heels in the air. Meredith had written a very beautiful and very healthy poem on nearly the same class of doubts as those which tormented Matthew Arnold, but which never tormented Meredith. Here is the difference between the mere doubter and the thinker, if we compare "Empedocles" with Meredith's study, "Earth and Man." The soliloquy of Empedocles is a very unhealthy poem indeed, and we cannot but concede Meredith's right to mock the philosopher who had so little faith in the universe that his doubts frightened him, head first, into the volcano. There is yet another reason why the best of Arnold's poems of the longer class are not likely ever to become really popular. His beautiful dirge on the death of his friend Clough, entitled "Thyrsis," by many thought almost equal to Milton's "Lycidas," appeals chiefly to the feelings of a class, not human feelings at large. It reflects personal remembrances, and it describes, very beautifully, the country in the neighbourhood of Oxford University; but it does not touch those deep common feelings which make poetry immortal. The same thing must be said of his "Scholar-Gipsy"—it is an Oxford poem, rather than an English poem. And finally, it may be said that Arnold never found out where his own poetical strength really lay, and wasted himself upon subjects that might have been left alone. One of these subjects was Norse mythology. "Balder Dead" is fine verse, but it will never move us like the strong grand prose of the Scandinavian Edda. "Sohrab and Rustum" is a very fine poem, but who would not prefer the

original of the same story in the great Firdusi's "Shāh-nāma," now translated into so many European tongues? It is in his briefer pieces alone that Arnold will live.

Among these briefer pieces some give the preference to "The Forsaken Merman." I should not care to express the same judgment; but certainly the ordinary selections from Arnold's short poems, many of which have been recently edited for school use, are all worthy of careful reading, and some will always haunt the memory — like that delicious little piece about hearing a thrush sing in Kensington Gardens. I shall only give such extracts as may serve to illustrate the beautiful melancholy of Arnold's alternate doubts and hopes. The finest of all his short poems in my personal opinion is that called "The Future," representing the flowing of the river of life, the flowing of the mind of man. After regretting the vanishing of faith, after expressing the sorrows and fears of the time, the poet asks whether man can ever hope to know and whether he can ever hope for peace. Then comes the beautiful gleam of thought closing the otherwise sombre composition.

Haply, the river of Time—
As it grows, as the towns on its marge
Fling their wavering lights
On a wider, statelier stream—
May acquire, if not the calm
Of its early mountainous shore,
Yet a solemn peace of its own.

And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the grey expanse where he floats,
Freshening its current and spotted with foam
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast—
As the pale waste widens around him,
As the banks fade dimmer away,
And the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.

But in most of the poems the note is very much lower, infinitely less hopeful, as in these lines—

> No! as the foaming swath
> Of torn-up water, on the main,
> Falls heavily away with long-drawn roar
> On either side the black deep-furrow'd path
> Cut by an onward-labouring vessel's prore,
> And never touches the ship-side again;
>
> Even so we leave behind,
> As, charter'd by some unknown Powers,
> We stem across the sea of life by night,
> The joys which were not for our use design'd;—
> The friends to whom we had no natural right,
> The homes that were not destined to be ours.

These verses from the beautiful piece entitled "Human Life" really represent the habitual feeling of the poet—doubt and sorrow. Perhaps this is why his poetry, or at least some of it, will long continue to appeal to the old rather than to the young—to the men who are disillusioned, who have known the same doubts, the same sorrows and the same unfulfilled aspirations. But I think the student ought to be warned against over-estimation of Arnold either as a poet or as a philosopher. The fact that he was able to do so much good, to break down the barriers of prejudice, to give new life to English criticism, is proof itself that he was not much in advance of his age as a thinker. Herbert Spencer has well said that the successful reformer is never the man who is very much in advance of his age, but the man who is only a very little in advance of it. To the man who is very much in advance of his time there is no prospect of success; during his life the public will not listen to him because they do not understand; he will be calumniated by those who differ from him, and even his best thoughts will be plagiarized and used by small minds against those very reforms which he gave his life to bring about. Matthew Arnold was more fortunate, because he

reflected the best of his own class of thought, not because he was at all in advance of his time.

Before closing this little series of notes, I may refer briefly to a female poet classed by Mr. Saintsbury and other critics among the poets of pessimism — I mean Constance Naden. I want to say a good word for Constance Naden, because it has become a fashion for conventional critics either to mention her with contempt or not mention her at all. The reason is that the girl professed agnosticism, gave lectures of an anti-Christian character, and made herself during her life rather objectionable to the religious. After death she was not more fortunate in her editors. Instead of publishing her poems merely as literature, which is how they ought to have been published, they rather foolishly put them forth as anti-Christian verses; while some of her enthusiastic but ill-advised friends established by way of honouring her memory a yearly prize-contest, of which the subject was to be an essay upon Hylo-Idealism,—that is, the hypothesis that mind depends altogether on matter, and does not exist without it. As a consequence Miss Naden has not received the attention she deserved. In reading her poems, I cannot find in them those extreme views attributed to her by her editors, and I very much doubt whether she really entertained them. She must have been a remarkable person, for she was a personal friend of Herbert Spencer, who spoke of her work and of her abilities in very high terms. She gave her whole life to such undertakings as the improvement of the social condition and education of women, writing at intervals very clever verses for the London magazines She visited India in the pursuit of her educational enterprise, and there contracted a fever, which resulted eventually in her early death. Much of her verse is philosophical, and is cast in difficult forms, such as the sonnet, which she mastered with great ease. I cannot quote any of these for you, because we have more important names to consider; but I must say that I believe some of the work to be of very high quality — such as the two sonnets en-

titled "Starlight." Besides composing original poems, she translated a number of beautiful things from other languages, and one of these I may quote for you, not only because it is very short, but because it is one of those by which she will long be remembered.

THE EYE

(From the German of Emil Rittershaus)

The Human Soul,—a world in little;
  The World,—a greater human soul;
The Eye of man,—a radiant mirror,
  That, clear and true, reflects the whole.

And, as in every eye thou meetest
  The mirrored image of thine own,
Each mortal sees his soul reflected,
  In all the world himself alone.