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ARTICLE III.

THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF RECENT
ENGLISH VERSE. ✓

BY EDWARD MORTIMER CHAPMAN.

"A still small voice spake unto me:
'Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?'"

"The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man;
And the man said, 'Am I your debtor?'
And the Lord,—'Not yet: but make it as clean as you can,
And then I will let you a better,'"

THE late Principal Shairp defined the province of poetry as follows: ". . . the whole range of existence, or any part of it, when imaginatively apprehended, seized on the side of its human interest, may be transfigured into poetry. There is nothing that exists except things ignoble and mean, in which the true poet may not find himself at home." It was an attempt at definition which Mr. R. H. Hutton has very properly criticized because of its too radical exclusion of the ignoble and the mean. The poet, like the preacher, must recognize the cogency of the old dictum, *Humani nihil alienum*.

"And the shamed listeners knew the spell
That still enchants the years,
When the world's commonplaces fell
In music on their ears."

It has been so from the beginning. It will be so until the end. And it is unfortunately true that the ignoble and the mean form a part of life's commonplace. When Wordsworth sang of "the still sad music of humanity," he recog-

nized the fact that the poet must take account of the ignoble and the mean if he would interpret life, and for that very reason he must write much of his music in a minor key.

But it is one thing to take account of the commonplace with especial reference, if you please, to the ignoble and the mean, and it is a very different thing to deal with it exclusively, or to treat it as though it were out of all real relation to the ideal. Such a course, if consistently pursued, is likely to keep a man in the category of the minor poets all his days, in spite of the fact that his art may reach a high stage of development. The world demands that the poet, like the preacher, shall reflect life, including life's commonplace; but it will withhold the meed of greatness from both unless they are able to show how this commonplace may be brought into harmonious relation to the ideal. It knows instinctively that neither poet nor preacher can be great except he be something of a prophet.

It was the lack of this prophetic spirit among English poets that Jowett used to lament, not without some exaggeration. "They have," he somewhere wrote, "art and sentiment and imagination, but no moral force. Our dear friend Clough had a touch of something that might have been great had he been in other circumstances." These words suggest the distinction which will be recognized in this article between the major and the minor poet. Granted for the moment that both are equal in the technique of their art, the latter generally poses as the creature of his time, admitting the supremacy of the *Zeitgeist*, while the former justifies his claim to preëminent place and power by his evident mastery of circumstance and his ability to make the *Zeitgeist* do his bidding. In the development of my subject I shall confine myself mainly to the minor English poets of the last five and thirty years, partly because the distinction to which I have just referred is more clearly marked in recent English poetry than elsewhere, and part-

ly because the space at my disposal permits the cultivation of but a little corner of a boundless field.

About a generation has elapsed since the world of would-be pessimists consented to lay Byron and Heine on the shelf for a time, and to recognize in Leopardi a leader after its own heart. There was always a suggestion of the "shilling-shocker" about Byron. No man ever loved to bait Mrs. Grundy better. And there was, too, something sensual about the man's personality, that wrought itself into his work, tainting much of it with an odor of lubricity that is not altogether agreeable to civilized nostrils. Heine, on the other hand, was a hybrid as respects both nationality and intellectual character, possessing not a little of the hybrid's unnatural and occasionally unearthly beauty, and something, too, of the hybrid's lack of fiber and inability to perpetuate himself.

But in Leopardi the age found a mocker to its mind. He, better than any of his predecessors, voiced the utter weariness of a human heart fed upon the promises of material progress. It is difficult to quote Leopardi, but the following lines from the "Palinodia," as translated by Mr. Townsend, will illustrate my meaning. He has been speaking of the boasted prosperity of the future, and assures his friend Gino Capponi:—

"Insolence

And fraud with mediocrity combined,
Will to the surface ever rise, and reign.
Authority and strength, howe'er diffused,
However concentrated, will be still
Abused, beneath whatever name concealed
By him who wields them; this the law by Fate
And nature written first in adamant:
Nor can a Volta with his lightnings, nor
A Davy cancel it, nor England with
Her vast machinery, nor this our age
With all its floods of Leading Articles.
The good man ever will be sad, the wretch
Will keep perpetual holiday."

Such outbursts remind us of Mr. Cotter Morison's lament, that "Nothing is gained by disguising the fact that there is no remedy for a bad heart."

Leopardi died in 1837, at the comparatively early age of thirty-nine. He saw but the beginnings of the material and philosophical revolution of the century. But when his greatest English disciple wrote his greatest poem, the century was nearly three-quarters done, and had pretty effectually declared its character. In the world of material progress men had yoked electricity to the steam of Leopardi's day, and in the realms of science and philosophy Evolution had become a name to conjure with. But neither material progress, nor unexampled advance in scientific attainment, nor a new factor in philosophy, sufficed to bring any ray of hope to the profound melancholy of James Thomson. He was a friend of the late Mr. Bradlaugh, who had begun life as a regimental schoolmaster, and who sustained it by means of more or less fitful employment in journalism and business. Opium, alcohol, and insomnia played their sorry parts in it, and the end came in University College Hospital in 1882, while Thomson was in his forty-eighth year. His "City of Dreadful Night" was published in 1874, and was so little known, or else so speedily forgotten, that when an enterprising publisher attempted the other day to reprint some of Mr. Kipling's fugitive newspaper articles relating to Calcutta, he chose this same title, apparently unaware that it had been appropriated. It is a significant comment upon the world's willingness to let that which has a manifest savor of death in it go to its own place, however brilliant the conception and execution may be.

The City of Dreadful Night is the abode of Melancholia—a city vast and somber, lying beside a tideless sea, nobly built, well inhabited, but upon which no sun ever rises. Its life, Prometheus-like, is ever renewed, and ever eaten

out by quenchless sorrow. The story of it is dedicated, properly enough, to Leopardi, and in his Proem the poet utters its Apologia.

“ Why break the seals of mute despair unbidden,
And wail life's discords into careless ears ?

“ Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter, old, and wrinkled truth
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth;
Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless impotence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.”

The traveler enters the City, and passes up and down its streets, following one who seems intent on some sad errand. This proves to be a pilgrimage to the ruined shrines of Faith, Love, and Hope. Here Faith was poisoned, there Love died by violence, and yonder Hope starved. The seeming despair of his guide moves him to question:—

“ When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,
Can Life still live? By what doth it proceed ?

“ As whom his one intense thought overpowers,
He answered coldly, Take a watch, erase
The signs and figures of the circling hours,
Detach the hands, remove the dial-face;
The works proceed until run down; although
Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

“ He circled thus forever tracing out
The series of the fraction left of life;
Perpetual recurrence in the scope
Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, dead Hope.”

This last reference is, of course, to the fantastic mathematical formula of pessimism, obtained by dividing threescore and ten by the persistently recurring Three; that is by 33.3, representing the years of a generation, or by 333, representing, as in the poem, dead Faith, Hope, and Love, the quotient in either case resulting in an infinitely repeating series of the figures 2, 1, 0.

The City lays its charm upon its visitor:—

"Poor wretch! who once hath paced that dolent city
 Shall pace it often doomed beyond all pity,
 With horror ever deepening from the first."

All this, however, is but the outward seeming of the City's life. The visitor soon becomes aware of a throng in the streets pressing toward what appears to be a cathedral. And there he hears its philosophy expounded. The great church is a splendid habitation of gloom, wherein a vast multitude hang wistfully upon an earnest preacher's lips, if haply he will show them any good. This is his introduction:—

"O melancholy Brothers, dark, dark, dark.
 O battling in black floods without an ark!
 O spectral wanderers of unholy Night!
 My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
 With bitter blood-drops running down like tears;
 O dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light."

Then follows the doctrine:—

"And now at last authentic word I bring,
 Witnessed by every dead and living thing;
 Good tidings of great joy for you, for all:
 There is no God; no fiend with names divine
 Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
 It is to satiate no Being's gall.

"I find no hint throughout the universe
 Of good or ill, of blessings or of curse;
 I find alone Necessity supreme;
 With infinite mystery, abysmal, dark,
 Unlighted ever by the faintest spark
 For us the fitting shadows of a dream."

And here is his application:—

"O Brothers of sad lives! they are so brief;
 A few short years must bring us all relief;
 Can we not bear these years of laboring breath?
 But if you would not this poor life fulfill,
 Lo you are free to end it when you will,
 Without the fear of waking after death."

I wish that space sufficed to tell how a lamentable voice was raised from among the congregation in confirmation of the preacher's message, although between the words of

every sentence of it there sounded the inappassable human desire for comfort. It closes thus :—

“ Speak not of comfort where no comfort is,
 Speak not at all: can words make foul things fair?
 Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss:
 Hush and be mute, envisaging despair.”

And this the preacher in his turn reaffirms :—

“ My Brothers, my poor Brothers, it is thus:
 This life holds nothing good for us,
 But it ends soon and nevermore can be;
 And we knew nothing of it ere our birth
 And shall know nothing when consigned to earth:
 I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.”

This is the philosophy of the City of Dreadful Night, and the poem leaves us without the city gates, beside the giant statue of its genius, Melancholia.

“ The moving sun and stars from east to west
 Circle before her in the sea of air;
 Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
 Her subjects often gaze upon her there:
 The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
 The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
 And confirmation of the old despair.”

Perhaps we may be permitted to set beside this Apocalypse of the nineteenth-century seer, the highly poetic picture of another city, drawn from quite a different source.

“ And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Before we leave Thomson, it is worth while to notice the resultant attitude of his philosophy toward Nature. One

passage in the poem called "Vane's Story" will illustrate my meaning, although due allowance must be made for its jocose bitterness. Vane speaks:—

"For I am infinitely tired
 With this old sphere we once admired,
 With this old earth we loved too well,
 And would not mind a change of Hell.
 The same old stolid hills and leas,
 The same old stupid, patient trees,
 The same old ocean blue and green,
 The same sky, cloudy or serene;
 The old two-dozen hours to run
 Between the settings of the sun,
 The same three hundred sixty-five
 Dull days to every year alive;
 Old stingy measure, weight, and rule,
 No margin left to play the fool;
 The same old way of getting born
 Into it, naked and forlorn;
 The same old way of creeping out
 Through death's low dobr, for lean and stout."

I have felt justified in giving this important place to Thomson, because scarce any one else has so eloquently expressed the philosophical conclusion of a pure Necessitarianism, when once its debilitating influences have oozed down into the stratum of life's commonplace.

An interesting variant of the same general type is to be found in John Davidson's recent "Ballad in Blank Verse," which portrays the experience of a rather sensual young Scotsman whose parents are deeply concerned for his spiritual welfare, and who plead with him. His father speaks:—

"My son, reject not Christ; he pleads through me;
 The Holy Spirit uses my poor words.
 How would it fill your mother's heart and mine
 And God's great heart with joy unspeakable,
 Were you, a helpless sinner, now to cry,
 'Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief.'"

But the boy, whose blood

"fulfilled
 Of brine, of sunset, and his dreams, exhaled
 A vision,"

would not hear. He broke his mother's heart, and then, to please his father, and if possible to atone for the past, professed conversion and came to the Lord's Table with him. We cannot follow the tragedy in detail. He finds

"like husks of corn
The bread, like vitriol the sip of wine!
I eat and drink damnation to myself
To give my father's troubled spirit peace."

Of course he ends by renouncing all that he has confessed, shouting forth in one breath his determination to have no creed, and in the next his acceptance of a creed compact of pantheism and positivism, and concludes with the determination to be a poet, finding comfort and inspiration in Nature.

"No creed for me! I am a man apart:
A mouthpiece for the creeds of all the world.
A soulless life that angels may possess
Or demons haunt, wherein the foulest things
May loll at ease beside the loveliest;
A martyr for all mundane moods to tear;
The slave of every passion."

This "Ballad in Blank Verse" is less logically complete than the "City of Dreadful Night." It states the premises, but forbears to draw Thomson's bitter conclusion. One feels in reading it, however, that hopelessness waits at the end of the story, even though the concluding chapters be yet unwritten.

The literature of the last half-century is filled with intimations of the fact that it takes time for a philosophy to work out its legitimate conclusions among the mass of men. We have good reason to believe, for instance, that the back of pessimism as a philosophy of life is pretty effectually broken. That was a foregone conclusion when it appeared that there was, if possible, a larger place for teleology in an evolutionary than in a cataclysmic scheme of creation. But in spite of that fact, it is at least possible that the practical effects of a pessimistic scheme of thought

may be more manifest to-day than when the scheme itself was most in vogue among philosophers. To illustrate my meaning, it is only necessary to cite the contrast between Tennyson's treatment of an interesting philosophical problem in his youthful poem of the "Two Voices," and his grappling with a dreadful fact of life in his far later poem, "Despair." The former deals with the problem of existence almost as calmly as Hamlet did. To be or not to be, is a question, and a rather entertaining one. But in the latter, a plain man and his wife who have lost all grip on any hopeful reality, go out to drown themselves. One succeeds. The other is dragged back to life and consciousness to tell his rescuer how the heavens looked to the couple as they started out upon their miserable errand:—

"And the suns of the limitless universe sparkled and shone in the sky,
Flashing with fires as of God, but we knew that their light was a lie;
Bright as with deathless hope, but however they sparkled and shone,
The dark little worlds running round them were worlds of woe like our own.

No soul in the heaven above, no soul in the earth below,
A fiery scroll written over with lamentation and woe."

Tennyson lies so far beyond the scope of this article that I should apologize for introducing him thus, were it not that "Despair" so well illustrates what has been already said, and paves the way for the next stage of the discussion. Had the world turned its smooth side toward the man and woman in the poem, their hopeless philosophy might never have driven them to desperation. But they were literally between the devil and the deep sea. Their faith was gone, and life was crowding them terribly. To adapt the old Stoic figure, the house was smoking in its every room; there was none other to flee to; so they must needs out into the open.

It was to be expected, therefore, that the social problem in its varied ramifications would prove a fruitful theme for the more serious of the minor poets. Crabbe and Gold-

smith gave the last century some little foretaste of it. Hood grew sentimental over it. Kingsley shocked his comfortable age into at least thinking of it between whiles. But about all these there was at least a little suggestion of the reformer. There was something didactic, not to say homiletic, in their manner. It remained for the minor poets of a later generation to state the bald factors of the question with a bitterness of realism that sometimes scoffs at the problem as a whole, and treats the reflection of its painful elements as an end of art in itself. It is not the tragedy of life as a soul-stirring thing that moves them. It is rather the dullness, the pallor, the sorrow, and the bitter monotony of it from which some of the truest artists seem to have drawn their inspiration. Take, for instance, John Davidson's

A NORTHERN SUBURB.

Roused by the fee'd policeman's knock,
 And sad that day should come again,
 Under the stars the workmen flock
 In haste to reach the morning train.
 For here dwell those who must fulfill
 Dull tasks in uncongenial spheres,
 Who toil through dread of coming ill,
 And not with hope of happier years.
 The lowly folk who scarcely dare
 Conceive themselves perhaps misplaced,
 Whose prize for unremitting care
 Is only not to be disgraced.

The same theme is dealt with by A. Mary F. Robinson, Madame Darmestetter, in her "New Arcadia," but with a distinct recognition of its ethical implications.

"Others shall learn and shudder and sorrow and know
 What shame is in the world they will not see.
 They cover it up with leaves, they make a show
 Of Maypole garlands over, but there shall be
 A wind to scatter their gauds, and a wind to blow
 And purify the hidden, dreaded thing
 Festering underneath; and so I sing."

Yet she is far from disregarding the extremely complicated

nature of the problem, as is shown in the "Scapegoat," where she tells the story of a beautiful child who grew up in wretched surroundings to develop a miserable life.

"Yet now when I watch her pass with a heavy reel,
Shouting her villainous song,
Is it only pity or shame, do you think that I feel
For the infinite sorrow and wrong?

"With a sick, strange wonder I ask, Who shall answer the sin,
Thou, lover, brothers of thine?
Or he who left standing the hovel to perish in?
Or I; who gave no sign?"

All things considered, however, I am inclined to think that John Davidson has given at once the grimmest and most searching exposition of one phase of the ever-present social problem in his poem entitled "Thirty Bob a Week," in which a London clerk opens his heart concerning his struggle to live upon his weekly wage of thirty shillings, and expounds something of the philosophy to which that struggle has led him. The Clerk says:—

"I face the music, sir; you bet I ain't a cur;
Strike me lucky if I don't believe I'm lost!

"For like a mole I journey in the dark,
A-traveling along the underground
From my Pillar'd Halls and broad Suburban Park,
To come the daily, dull, official round;
And home again at night with my pipe all alight,
A-scheming how to count ten bob a pound.

"And it's often very cold and very wet,
And my misses stitches towels for a hunks;
And the Pillar'd Halls is half of it to let—
Three rooms about the size of traveling trunks.
And we cough, my wife and I, to dislocate a sigh,
When the noisy little kids are in their bunks."

He then goes on to say:—

"So p'r'aps we are in Hell, for all that I can tell,
And lost and damn'd and served up hot to God.

" I ain't blaspheming, Mr. Silver-tongue;
 I'm saying things a bit beyond your art:
 Of all the rummy starts you ever sprung,
 Thirty bob a week's the rummiest start!
 With your science and your books,
 And your theories about spooks,
 Did you ever think of looking in your heart?

" I didn't mean your pocket, Mr., no:
 I mean that having children and a wife,
 With thirty bob on which to come and go,
 Isn't dancing to the tabor and the fife:
 When it doesn't make you drink,
 By Heaven! it makes you think,
 And notice curious items about life."

He then expounds his theory of Determinism:—

" I give it at a glance when I say there ain't no chance
 Nor nothing of the lucky, lottery kind."

This proves to be a singular variety of Pantheism:—

" A little sleeping seed, I woke—I did indeed—
 A million years before the blooming sun.
 " I was the love that chose my mother out;
 I joined two lives and from the union burst;
 My weakness and my strength without a doubt
 Are mine alone forever from the first:
 It's just the very same with a difference in the name
 As 'Thy will be done.' You say it if you durst.
 " They say it daily up and down the land,
 As easy as you take a drink it's true;
 But the difficultest go to understand,
 And the difficultest job a man can do,
 Is to come it brave and meek with thirty bob a week,
 And feel that that's the proper thing for you.
 " It's a naked child against a hungry wolf;
 It's playing bowls upon a splitting wreck;
 It's walking on a string across a gulf
 With mill-stones fore-and-aft about your neck;
 But the thing is daily done by many and many a one,
 And we fall, face forward, fighting, on the deck."

It is doubtful if the bitter monotonies of life, its grim realities of poverty, anxiety, and suffering, its sordid necessities even, ever before found so large place in the material which is wrought over by the highest art into poetry. It

seems as though the age had awakened to a new sense of the influence of environment upon philosophy, and there is a note of insistent pertinacity in the "Why?" which the world of toiling poor is ever uttering, that meets quick response from the poet.

It is a question worth raising, whether this constant contemplation of life's sordidness may not account in some degree for the growing love of the cynical and the grim which has been so manifest during the last score of years. Poetry has gone out of its way to collect and interpret the nightmares of folk-lore and folk-song. A typical instance of this endeavor is to be found in Alma Strettel and Carmen Sylva's "Bard of the Dimbo-Vitza." It is an anthology of Roumanian folk-songs of which the little poem called "The Comforters" is as typical and familiar as any.

"My father is dead and his cap is mine,
 His cap of fur and his leathern belt—
 Mine, too, his knives.
 When I fall asleep, when I slumbering lie,
 Then the knives spring forth, from their sheaths they fly
 And roam the fields.
 I know not whither the knives have strayed,
 But when morning dawns, at my window-pane
 I hear a tapping—I fling it wide,
 And there are my knives come home again.
 'Where have ye been?' I ask them then,
 And they make reply: 'In the hearts of men!
 There was one so sick for love and torn—
 We healed its wound;
 And another was weary and travel worn—
 We gave it rest.
 For dear to us are the hearts of men,
 And dear their blood;
 We drink it as furrows drink the rain,
 Then tapping come to thy window-pane:
 Make way for thy knives, they have done their work;
 Now wipe the blood with thy sleeve away—
 Thy sleeve with the dusk-red broidered flowers—
 And wash the sleeve in the river clean,
 Then thrust us once more our sheaths between,
 The sheaths on the leathern belt.'"

We should make a sad mistake, however, in supposing that the truest poetry of the recent generation has been actuated either by a philosophical pessimism, or by the bitterness of realism that comes from an unrelieved study of the seamy side of life. Much of it which has most truly reflected the spirit of the age has been animated by a sense of man's inadequacy to the problems which life sets before him. It makes no attempt to suggest a comprehensive philosophy for man's satisfaction. It rather illustrates life's present moods in a day when religious and ethical convictions are in a state of flux.

Of course Matthew Arnold is the hierophant of this great company of minor poets, whether he himself is to be included in that category or not. To quote Mr. Hutton, "No one has expressed more powerfully and poetically its [i.e. this generation's] spiritual weaknesses, its craving for a passion that it cannot feel, its admiration for a self-mastery that it cannot achieve, its desire for a creed that it fails to accept, its sympathy with a faith that it will not share, its aspiration for a peace that it does not know." It is characteristic of this school as a whole that they never strive nor cry, but mourn genteelly and in excellently balanced numbers. The loss of faith, and the lack of any large inspiration for life, is a theme admirably adapted to gentle verse, and gentle verse has flowed superabundantly about it.

What, for instance, could be more graceful than Mr. Swinburne's

"And love grown faint and fretful,
With lips but half regretful,
Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
Weeps that no loves endure"?

Or what could more musically set forth the aspiration of a multitude of would-be unbelievers than the same poet's "Pilgrims"?

"We have drunken of Lethe at last, we have eaten of Lotus;
 What hurts it us here that sorrows are born and die?
 We have said to the dream that caressed and the dread that smote us,
 Good-night and good-bye."

Of course the problem of the uninspired life reaches what may be called its acutest stage in face of death. Such a life manages fairly well in summer and good weather, but it has its winters of discontent. Mr. Lecky, the historian, appears to have seen an end of all perfection, and sums up life's tragedy in the apostrophe,

"How hard to die, how blessed to be dead!"

Mr. Rolleston of the Rhymers' Club sighs for Nirvana,

"When the time comes for me to die,
 To-morrow or some other day,
 If God should bid me make reply,
 'What wouldst thou?' I shall say,
 "'O God, Thy world was great and fair;
 Yet give me to forget it clean!
 Vex me no more with things that were,
 Or things that might have been.

"For others, Lord, Thy purging fires,
 The loves reknit, the crown, the palm.
 For me the death of all desires
 In deep, eternal calm."

A similar lack of any hope or expectation in death is echoed in the exquisite threnody of Alice Meynall entitled "To the Beloved Dead." It begins:—

"Beloved, thou art like a tune that idle fingers
 Play on a window-pane.
 The time is there, the form of music lingers;
 But O, thou sweetest strain,
 Where is thy soul? Thou liest i' the wind and rain."

There is a savor of the Old Testament thought of death in this, and in the same author's famous "Letter from a Girl to her Own Old Age" the suggestion is distinctly heightened.

On the other hand, this curiosity about life and death is

shot through with a glimmering of philosophical hope in Francis Thompson's lines,

"Life is a coquetry
Of Death, which wears me,
Too sure
Of the amour.

"A tiring-room where I
Death's divers garments try
Till fit
Some fashion sit.

"It seemeth me too much
I do rehearse for such
A mean
And single scene."

Of course the characteristic tone of this whole school of poets is plaintive, but it does not lack here and there a voice that pushes the question to the ultimate conclusion of Omar Khayyam:—

"Drink! for you know not whence you came nor why:
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where."

Such, for instance, is Mr. W. E. Henley's perverse Rondeau beginning:—

"Let us be drunk, and for a while forget,
Forget, and ceasing even from regret,
Live without reason and in spite of rhyme. . ."

But this is the exception rather than the rule. The minor poetry of the passing generation has more often emphasized anew the need of an ethical sanction, and the worth of high ethical ideals, even though, in the lack of such a sanction, they seem essentially unreasonable. There is profound religious suggestion in such verse as Mr. G. A. Greene's

"They have taken away my Lord;
They have shattered the one great Hope,
They have left us alone to cope
With our terrible selves: the sword
They broke which the world restored;
They have cast down the King from on high;
Their derision has scaled the sky;
They have taken away my Lord.

"The strength of immortal Love;
 The comfort of millions that weep;
 Prayer and the Cross we adored—
 All is lost! there is no one above:
 We are left like the beasts that creep:
 They have taken away our Lord."

If this were all that could be said of the suggestion of recent verse, I doubt if any sane man could quite bring himself to write of it. But it is not all. Side by side with the philosophical despair of Thomson, the bitter realism of Davidson, and the plaintive resignation of Matthew Arnold and his school, there has grown up a new realization of the place of man as a self-directive factor in the world. The poet has instinctively discerned that Cause is ultimately of the nature of Will. Men cannot be convinced for very long that,

"We are no other than a moving row
 Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
 Round with the Sun-illuminated Lantern held
 In Midnight by the Master of the Show."

They know that they are something more than this; and, do what they will, they never can quite convince themselves that there is not a greater Reason, which their own reason feebly reflects, and a profound Ground for Causation of whose Nature their own ability to originate causes partakes. There have been those who find the now famous lines of Henley "To R. T. H. B." redolent of blasphemy. But they seem to me rather a very ill-mannered response to such a command as came to St. Paul by Damascus bidding him to stand upon his feet.

"Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
 I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

"In the fell clutch of circumstance
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.
 Under the bludgeonings of chance
 My head is bloody but unbowed."

There speaks the man in sore need of being brought into right relations with a Heavenly Father, if indeed there be a Heavenly Father anywhere, but a man who is abundantly worth bringing because he is very conscious of his manhood's prerogatives and has no notion whatever of trading them for the first convenient mess of pottage that may be offered him. It is not a normal assertion of manhood. It is rather a rude, perverse, and half-boorish blurting-out of a badly hypertrophied egotism. But still there is man-stuff there. The raw material of an apostle of Faith, Hope, and Love is at hand, only waiting to be wrought over and directed toward some gracious end.

We approach a little nearer to a sane and hopeful view of life in some of the later verses of Robert Louis Stevenson. He loves to sing of men who look out with clear and discerning eyes upon the change and chance of human experience.

“The evil wi’ the guid they tak;
They ca’ a gray thing gray, no black;
To a steigh brae, a stubborn back
Addressin’ daily;
An’ up the rude, unbiely track
O’ life, gang gaily.”

He assures the confirmed pessimist

“Ye’ve fund the very thing to do—
That’s to drink speerit;
An’ shune we’ll hear the last o’ you—
An’ blithe to hear it!”

and closes the whole discussion with this rather telling figure:—

“As whan a glum an’ fractious wean
Has sat an’ sullened by his lane
Till wi’ a roustin’ skelp he’s ta’en
An’ shoo’d to bed—
The ither bairns a’ fa’ to play’n’,
As gleg’s a gled.”

There is a healthy tone about this. It savors of utter antagonism to that worst of heresies which would reduce

religion to a mere speculation, faith to ability to repeat a set creed, love to a weak good-humor, and hope to a clever betting on the future's chances. A hearty welcome should be extended to the robust, even if ill-defined, faith of Stevenson and Kipling. They, and rather against my will I am compelled to admit Walt Whitman to their company, are men whose blood has been decently oxygenated, just as all religious teaching must be, if it is ever to come to anything. Hear Stevenson again:—

“For still the Lord is Lord of might;
In deeds, in deeds, He takes delight;
The plough, the spear, the laden barks,
The field, the founded city marks;
He marks the smiler of the streets,
The singer upon garden seats;
He sees the climber in the rocks;
To Him the shepherd folds his flocks.
For those He loves that underprop
With daily virtues Heaven's top,
And bear the falling sky with ease,
Unfrowning caryatides.”

Or, if you will, let Mr. Kipling's McAndrew take up his parable of the marine engine showing forth God's will for men.

“Fra skylight-lift to furnace-bars, backed, bolted, braced an' stayed,
An' singin' like the Mornin' Stars for joy that they are made;
While, out o' touch o' vanity, the sweatin' thrust-block says:
'Not unto us the praise, or man—not unto us the praise!'
Now, a' together, hear them lift their lesson—theirs and mine:
'Law, Order, Duty an' Restraint, Obedience, Discipline!'"

But there is more than the clear sounding of a healthy ethical note in much of recent minor poetry. One need not seek far before finding distinct reiteration of the Psalmist's "Though I take the wings of the morning," and St. Augustine's "Fecisti nos ad Te." So Francis Thompson sings:—

“I fled Him down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him down the arches of the years;
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways

Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
 I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
 Up vistaed hopes I sped;
 And shot precipitated
 Adown Titanic glooms of chasamed fears,
 From those strong feet that followed, followed after.
 But with unhurrying chase,
 And unperturbed pace,
 Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
 They beat—and a Voice beat
 More instant than the Feet—
 ‘All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’”

Nor is there any lack of evidence, in prose and poetry both, of a certain ineradicable hunger of the soul for Faith, which no substitute can either pacify or satisfy. The cry of it runs like an undertone through the Autobiography of John Stuart Mill; it breaks out here and there in Clifford's musical prose, despite that brilliant dogmatist's unwillingness; it finds petulant and sometimes quite unworthy utterance in the fretful pessimism of James Anthony Froude. It has notably inspired the muse of Symonds, especially in the sonnets called "Figura Animi." But it has found its most candid as well as most beautiful expression in a sonnet of the late George Romanes, composed at a time when its author saw no hope that any genuine and comforting faith would ever come back to him.

“I ask not for Thy love, O Lord: the days
 Can never come when anguish shall atone.
 Enough for me were but Thy pity shown,
 To me as to the stricken sheep that strays,
 With ceaseless cry for unforgotten ways—
 O lead me back to pastures I have known,
 Or find me in the wilderness alone,
 And slay me as the hand of mercy slays.

“I ask not for Thy love; nor e'en so much
 As for a hope on Thy dear breast to lie;
 But be Thou still my shepherd—still with such
 Compassion as may melt to such a cry;
 That so I hear Thy feet, and feel Thy touch,
 And dimly see Thy face ere yet I die.”

We should scarcely expect to look to the poet for any formal religious apologetic, simply because argument of this high and sustained character lies beyond his province. But still there is a suggestion concerning the Method of Faith in eight brief lines by Mr. R. W. Gilder which ought not to be overlooked.

“If Jesus Christ is a man—
And only a man,—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to him,
And to him will I cleave alway.

“If Jesus Christ is a God—
And the only God,—I swear
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air.”

Thus I have attempted some suggestion of the thought of the day as it has found expression through the medium of that poetry which is distinctively interpretive rather than creative. I shall make no attempt to sum up an argument, because the presentation of a perfectly articulated argument is beside the purpose of this article. But the religious significance of the discussion may very properly be comprehended in these words of Mr. A. H. Crauford in his “Enigmas of the Spiritual Life.”

“Poetry is as music come to itself, rallying from its divine trance, and vainly endeavoring to portray those sacred and awful things which it is not lawful for a man to utter. The very root or spring of poetry is an abiding discontent with the actual and a quenchless longing for the Ideal. . . . Revolt against what is thought to be religion may inspire a great poem, as it inspired Lucretius and Shelley; but acquiescence in the vanishing of religion is fatally depressing to poets. Gods are needed if only to be defied. The Sublime may live in apparent antagonism to the Infinite; but it cannot live in the absence of the Infinite. Poetry must invent a God if none really exists.”

And so must Life.