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POETRY AND THE  
DRAMA; PALGRAVE'S  
GOLDEN TREASURY**

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Everyman's Library; Poetry and the Drama; Palgrave's Golden Treasury by Francis Turner  
Palgrave & Ernest Rhys

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**FRANCIS TURNER PALGRAVE & ERNEST RHYS**

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EDITED BY ERNEST RHYS

POETRY AND  
THE DRAMA

THE GOLDEN TREASURY  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY EDWARD HUTTON

PALGRAVE'S  
GOLDEN   
TREASURY



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## INTRODUCTION

"THE future of poetry," says Matthew Arnold in that essay on the study of poetry which he wrote for Mr. T. H. Ward's "English Poets"—"the future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a work of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea *is* the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry."

Well, is not that a curiously elaborate way of saying—with something of the insistence of the school-master, too, his eagerness to explain himself—just what Aristotle has said perfectly once for all, for "there is more truth in Poetry than in History"? And if this be so, as indeed we cannot doubt, truth, as Aristotle conceived it, including all real things, as joy and sorrow and beauty, such a book as "The Golden Treasury of English Lyric Poetry" should be really one of the most precious books in the world. Rather than any other anthology of English verse, it has been accepted for what it is, a sort of canon as it were of English poetry within which nothing of doubtful quality or achievement is to be found, a perfect chaplet of beautiful verses.

Amended here and there, added to and considered again and again as it has been from time to time, its perfection was implicit in the first edition, published strangely enough

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in the middle of the Victorian period, when any such choice might seem to have been particularly unfortunate, and indeed some of the fairest flowers of that chaplet have only been found since 1861, when the "Golden Treasury" was first published--the songs of Campion for instance, and his more or less anonymous contemporaries, whose verses Mr. Bullen was the first to offer us from the old Elizabethan song-books. But for the most part this anthology was almost perfect in its catholicism as in its selection from the first, so that when such a discovery as that of Mr. Bullen was made it was easy to put the best of those verses into the place that seems to have been waiting for them.

How much we owe to the knowledge and taste of Tennyson in the making of this English anthology we shall never know for certain, but in his dedication to the late poet laureate, and in his introduction too, Mr. Palgrave has told us with a fine sincerity how deeply he was indebted to Tennyson for his "advice and assistance;" and in his "Personal Recollections" added to the present Lord Tennyson's "Life" of his father, he tells us more particularly what this assistance was: "I had put the scheme of my 'Golden Treasury' before him," he writes, "during a walk near the Land's End in the late summer of 1860, and he had encouraged me to proceed, barring only any poems by himself from insertion in an anthology whose title claimed excellence for its contents. And at Christmastide following, the gathered materials, already submitted to the judgment of two friends of taste (one, the very able sculptor, T. Woolner, lately taken from us), were laid before Tennyson for final judgment. This judgment, in some very few cases then not followed, has been now (1891) carried out by omission of Constable's 'Diaphenia' (XV.), Sewell's 'Damon' (CLXIII.), and Shelley's 'Life of Life . . .,' about which Tennyson remarked, that it was one of those flights in which the poet 'seemed to go up, and burst.' Between Shakespeare's

sonnets he hardly liked to decide, all were so powerful. With most by far of the pieces submitted he was already acquainted; but I seem to remember more or less special praise of Lodge's 'Rosaline,' of 'My Love in Her Attire . . .,' and the 'Emigrant's Song,' by Marvell. . . . After reading Cowper's 'Poplar Field' (CXLIII.), (Tennyson said), 'People now-a-days, I believe, hold this style and metre light; I wish there were any who could put words together with such exquisite flow and evenness.' Presently we reached the same poet's stanzas, 'To Mary Unwin' (CLXII.). He read them, yet could barely read them, so deeply touched was he by their tender, their almost agonizing pathos. And once when I asked him for the 'Lines on my Mother's Portrait,' his voice faltered as he said he would, if I wished it; but he knew he should break down. . . . Resuming Tennyson's 'Golden Treasury' comments, . . . another little poem greatly moved him—perhaps he was not very familiar with it—Scott's 'Maid of Neidpath' (CXCVI.). This also he read, adding after the last stanza, 'almost more pathetic than a man has the right to be. . . .' Tennyson was much struck by the plain force of Byron's 'Elegy on Thyrza,' and Moore's 'Light of other Days' (CCXXV.), saying of the last, '*O si sic omnia!*' In Wolfe's noble 'Burial of Sir John Moore' (CCXVIII.), he wished the last line but two could be changed; at the close of Hood's 'Bridge of Sighs' (CCXXXI.), 'Her evil *behaviour*' was a slight defect in that masterpiece. And the infelicitous 'mermaid's song *condoles*' of the 'Battle of the Baltic,' tempted him to a 'How easily could a little blot like this be cured, if we had but Tom Campbell in the room to point it out to him!' adding, however, a tale how Rogers had done the same office for another poem, and how Campbell had bounced out of the room with a 'Hang it! I should like to see the man who would dare to correct me!'"

In turning the pages of the "Golden Treasury" over and

over in many lands, to make beautiful a weary stretch of the road or "when the small rain down doth rain," in the inn parlour, or by the fireside in the winter evenings, or best of all in the summer fields among the summer flowers, we come at last to consider what there is after all that is omitted here which should certainly have a place. How little it is we scarcely realize, till we have reasoned why such and such a beautiful verse has been passed by ; so that it is easier to say, "this should have been left out perhaps," than to say, "this certainly should have been admitted." And yet we miss at the very beginning the sweet naïve voice of Chaucer, full of "feeling" certainly and passionate too, in such a poem as this—

Hide, Absolon, thy giltē tresses clere ;  
 Ester, lay thou thy meekness all a-doun ;  
 Hide, Ionathas, all thy friendly manére ;  
 Penelopee and Mercia catoun,  
 Make of your wife-hood no comparisoun ;  
 Hide ye your beauties, Isoude and Eleyne :  
 My lady cometh, that all this may disteyne !

Thy fairē body, let it not appere  
 Lavyne ; and thou, Lucrece of Romē toun,  
 And Polixene, that boughten love so dere,  
 And Cleopatre, with all thy passiou,ne,  
 Hide ye your trouthe of love and your renoun ;  
 And thou, Tisbe, that hast of love such peyne :  
 My lady cometh, that all this may disteyne !

Herró, Didó, Laudomia, all y-fere  
 And Phy-lis, hanging for thy Demophoun,  
 And Canacé espied by thy chere,  
 Ysiphilé, betrayséd with Iasoun  
 Maketh of your trouthe neither boast nor soun  
 Nor Ypermistre or Adriane, ye tweyne :  
 My lady cometh, that all this may disteyne !

Nor do I find that so difficult to understand as "To a Field-Mouse" (CXLIV.) or "Duncan Gray" (CLIII.) ; it is hard to understand why it was passed over, so that there