a prescribed sequence and then satisfying that expectation— which entitles a form of fourteen verses to be called a sonnet.

Hence the so-called irregular sonnets of S. T. Coleridge, which lead the ear of the reader to expect the pleasure of a prescribed arrangement when what they have to offer is a pleasure of an exactly opposite kind—the pleasure of an absolute freedom from prescribed arrangement—are unsatisfactory, while (as the present writer has often pointed out) the same poet’s fourteen-line poem, “ Work without Hope," in which the reader expects and gets freedom from prescription, is entirely satisfactory. This same little poem of Coleridge’s also affords an excellent illustration of another point in connexion with the sonnet. If we trace the history and the development of the sonnet from Pier delle Vigne to D. G. Rossetti we shall find that the poet’s quest from the very first has been to write a poem in fourteen verses so arranged that they should, better than any other number and arrangement of verses, produce a certain melodic effect upon the ear, and an effect, moreover, that should bear iteration and reiteration in other poems similarly constructed. Now if we ask ourselves whether, beautiful as is this poem, “ Work without Hope,” taken as a single and original metrical arrangement, we should get out of a series of poems modelled line for line upon it that pleasure of iteration which we get out of a series of Petrarchan sonnets, we shall easily see why the regular sonnet of octave and sestet on the one hand, and what is called the Shakespearean sonnet on the other, have survived all other competing forms.

In modern Europe the sonnet has always had a peculiar fascination for poets of the first class—poèts, that is, in whom poetic energy and plastic power are equally combined. It would seem that the very fact that the sonnet is a recognized structure suggestive of mere art—suggestive in some measure, indeed, of what Schiller would call “ sport ” in art—has drawn some of the most passionate poets in the world to the sonnet as the medium of their sincerest utterances. Without being coldly artificial, like the rondeau, the sestina, the *ballade,* the *villanelle,* &c., the sonnet is yet so artistic in structure, its form is so universally known, recognized, and adopted as being artistic, that the too fervid spontaneity and reality of the poet’s emotion may be in a certain degree veiled, and the poet can whisper, as from behind a mask, those deepest secrets of the heart which could otherwise only find expression in purely dramatic forms.

That the sonnet was invented, not in Provence, as French critics pretend, but in Italy in the 13th century, is pretty clear, but by whom is still perhaps an open question. S. Waddington and several other critics have attributed to Fra Guittone the honour of having invented the form. But J. A. Symonds has reminded us that the sonnet beginning *Però ch’ amore,* attributed to Pier delle Vigne, secretary of state in the Sicilian court of Frederick, has claims which no student of early Italian poetry can ignore.

As regards English sonnets, whether the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean are really the best of all possible forms we need not inquire. But, inasmuch as they have become so vital and so dominant over other sonnet forms that whenever we begin to read the first verse of an English sonnet we expect to find one or other of these recognized rhyme-arrangements, any departure from these two arrangements, even though the result be such a magnificent poem as Shelley’s "Ozymandias,” disappoints the expectation, baffles the ear, and brings with it that sense of the fragmentary and the inchoate to which we have before alluded. If, however, some writer should arise with sufficient originality of metrical endowment and sufficient poetic power to do what Keats, in a famous experiment of his, tried to do and failed—impress the public ear with a new sonnet structure, impress the public ear so powerfully that a new kind of expectance is created the moment the first verse of a sonnet is recited—then there will be three kinds of English sonnets instead of two.

With regard to the Petrarchan sonnet, all critics are perhaps now agreed that, while the form of the octave is invariable, the form of the sestet is absolutely free, save that the emotions should govern the arrangement of the verses. But as regards the division between octave and sestet, Mark Pattison says, with great boldness, but perhaps with truth, that by blending octave with sestet Milton missed the very object and end of the Petrarchan scheme. Another critic, however, Hall Caine, contends that by making “ octave flow into sestet without break of music or thought ” Milton consciously or unconsciously in­vented a new form of sonnet; that is to say, Milton, in his use of the Petrarchan octave and sestet for the embodiment of intellectual substance incapable of that partial disintegration which Petrarch himself always or mostly sought, invented a Species of sonnet which is English in impetus, but Italian, or partially Italian, in structure. Hence this critic, like William Sharp, divides all English sonnets into four groups: (1) sonnets of Shakespearean structure; (2) sonnets of octave and sestet of Miltonic structure; (3) sonnets of contemporary structure, *i.e.* all sonnets on the Petrarchan model in which the metrical and intellectual “ wave of flow and ebb ” (as originally formulated by the present writer in a sonnet on the sonnet, which has appeared in most of the recent anthologies) is strictly observed, and in which, while the rhyme-arrangement of the octave is invariable, that of the sestet is free; (4) sonnets of miscellaneous structure.

With regard to what is called the contemporary form—a Petrarchan arrangement with the sestet divided very sharply from the octave—the crowning difficulty and the crowning triumph of the sonnet writer has always been to so handle the rhythm of the prescribed structure as to make it seem in each individual sonnet the inevitable and natural rhythm demanded by the emotion which gives the individual sonnet birth, and this can perhaps only be achieved when the richness and apparent complexity of the rhyme-arrangement is balanced by that perfect lucidity and simplicity of syntax which is the special quest of the "sonnet of flow and ebb.”

The wave theory has found acceptance with such students of the sonnet as Rossetti and Mark Pattison, J. A. Symonds, Hall Caine, and William Sharp. Symonds, indeed, seems to hint that the very name given by the Italians to the two tercets, the volta or turn, indicates the metrical meaning of the form. “ The striking metaphorical symbol,” says he, “ drawn from the observation of the swelling and declining wave can even in some examples be applied to sonnets on the Shakespearean model; for, as a wave may fall gradually or abruptly, so the sonnet may sink with stately volume or with precipitate subsidence to its close. Rossetti furnishes incomparable examples of the former and more desirable conclusion; Sydney Dobell, in 'Home in War Time,’ yields an extreme specimen of the latter.”

And now as to the Shakespearean sonnet. Some very acute critics have spoken as if this form were merely a lawless succes­sion of three quatrains clinched by a couplet, and as if the number of the quatrains might just as well have been two or four as the present prescribed number of three. If this were so, it would unquestionably be a serious impeachment of the Shakespearean sonnet, for, save in the poetry of ingenuity, no metric arrangement is otherwise than bad unless it be the result of a deep metrical necessity.

If the prescriptive arrangement of *three* quatrains clinched by a couplet is not a metrical necessity, if it is not demanded in order to prevent the couplet from losing its power, such an arrangement is idle and worse than idle; just as in the case of the Petrarchan sonnet, if it can be shown that the solid unity of the outflowing wave can be maintained as completely upon three rhymes as upon two, then the restriction of the octave to two rhymes is simple pedantry. But he who would test the metrical necessity of the arrangement in the Shakespearean sonnet has only to make the experiment of writing a poem of two quatrains with a couplet, and then another poem of four quatrains with a couplet, in order to see how inevitable is the metrical necessity of the Shakespearean number and arrange­ment for the achievement of the metrical effect which Shakespeare, Drayton and others sought. While in the poem of two quat­rains the expected couplet has the sharp epigrammatic effect of the couplet in ordinary stanzas (such as that of *ottava rima,*