To Mr. Alfred Austine, Poet Laureate.

My Dear Sir,—I had almost begun to forget your existence, and now, with unexpectedly Gilbertian humour, you claim my attention with a piece of prose. Here, to my great content, as old Pepys used to say, is "The Autobiography of Alfred Austin," in two volumes, almost given away at the price of 24s. nett. Hitherto you had not done very much to arouse my admiration, but I confess that I am now struck dumb with amazement. That you should have been able to find enough material about yourself to fill two fat tomes. I learn, however, that you have not only been an unread poet, but actually a Parliamentary candidate; indeed, you tell us that you found it very difficult to decide whether you would devote your genius to politics or to the Muses. As you do not reveal what your choice eventually was, I can only conclude that your hesitation lost you to both. I am sure, however, that you were quite fitted—who indeed is not?—to shine as a party politician, but as the electors thought otherwise, you doubtless found consolation in the domain of literature, where there are no definite laws or rules, and everyone can persuade himself of his own perfections. In ordinary professions there are certain standards of success like the accumulation of money or the growth of notoriety, but letters are so entirely a matter of conscience or superstition that it is sufficient to capture the laurels of self-satisfaction, and there is always the chance of recognition by the whims of posterity. The turgid productions of Milton only provoked the sneers of his contemporaries, but nowadays we all sing his praises—although, I fear we do not all read him. Who knows, perhaps Macaulay's New Zealander will erect statues to you near the ruins of London Bridge on the same terms? Meanwhile, as you have had some experience of laureateship, I wish you tell me, if the request is not too invidious, who is destined to be your successor—Kipling, or Crowley, or Alfred Douglas or Newbolt?