

"THE PROVINCE OF POETRY."

"Truth I pursued as fancy sketched the way,
And wiser men than I went worse astray."

(Concluded)

Poetry indeed addresses itself directly to the passions; but since the opinions and conduct of men are greatly dependent upon the state of their hearts, its decisive influence upon character either for good or evil is obvious. Hence the desolating success with which its power has been marked when subverted to the purposes of concealing the enormities and embellishing the attractions of vice.

The songs and dramatic pieces of licentious writers have been lamentably successful even among the refined, in giving to mere animal nature a fatal triumph over reason and conscience. Nor are the strains of those whose souls have felt the loveliness of truth and virtue less efficient for ennobling our intellectual natures and asserting the supremacy of conscience. The productions of Cowper, Wordsworth and Hemans; and the less finished sketches of Pollock, will, each continue to stamp their noble image upon many a soul to the end of time. Nay, more, we believe that some of their effusions in which their lives and breathes a holy ardor, will be the means of so affecting some minds as to enhance their joys in Heaven forever. The recognition by mankind of this close connection between poetry and religion, and the consequent bearing of the former upon human welfare, explains the veneration with which they have ever regarded poetry, and the abhorrence eventually manifested towards those who have used this great talisman which genius has placed in their hand, to lower and depress, not to elevate and ennoble their fellow men.

History presents no example of a great work of art essentially vulgar or low surviving the lapse of time. Salvator Rosa has given us a Prometheus bound with such startling truthfulness that every one turns away from the picture with a shudder; and Byron has given us fearful and disgusting pictures of human life; but these will shortly be forgotten and their authors too; unless remembered for other and purer creations of beauty. The great end of poetry then is to please and to please by arousing the passions. But to give us a perfect and fundamental pleasure it ought not to excite any but those which it is of consequence to keep in motion, and never such as are contrary to wisdom and virtue.

Detestation of wickedness which is attended by shame, fear and repentance; compassion for the unhappy which has almost as extended an utility as humanity itself; admiration of great examples which leaves in the heart a spur to virtue; these are the passions which poetry ought to arouse. Poetry was never designed to excite the destructive passions in corrupt hearts, but to give the most exquisite delight to virtuous souls. Virtue placed in certain lights will always be an interesting object. There is naturally, even in minds of the most corrupted cast, a voice which is always pleading in her behalf, and to which good men hear ken with so much the greater satisfaction for finding in it a proof of their own perfection. The great poets never intended their works, which were the fruit of so much pain and labor, merely as amusement for a light and frothy wit, or to rouse the drowsiness of an idle Midas. The tragic and comic poetry of the Ancients was filled with examples of the dreadful vengeance of the Gods or the just correction of men, and inculcated this necessary lesson to the spectators to avoid both the one and the other; it was not sufficient to be good in appearance only, but in reality. The works of Homer and Virgil are not vain romances, where the mind is led away at the will of an idle imagination; on the contrary we should regard them as so many noble bodies of doctrine, as banks of a nation containing the history of the state, the spirit of the government, the fundamental principles of morality, the dogmas of religion, and every duty essential to society, and all this, clothed with every rich and grand expression, all the bold and enchanting imagery that could be conceived by genius almost divine.

The Iliad and the Æneid are as much the pictures of the Greek and Roman nations as the Miser, in Moliere, is that of avarice; and as the fable of this comedy is only the canvas prepared to receive in a certain order a number of true strokes taken from society; so, also, the wrath of Achilles and the establishment of Æneas, in Italy, ought to be considered only as the canvas of a noble and magnificent picture on which the artist had the great

dexterity to paint manners, customs, laws and councils; disguised sometimes in allegories, sometimes in prediction, and sometimes openly exposed; now and then varying a circumstance, as that of time, place or actor, which not only raises and enlivens the subject, but gives the reader the pleasure of studying and consequently of believing that his instructions is owing to his own care and reflection, which never fails of flattering his self-love.

Anacreon, so well skilled in the art of pleasing, and, who indeed, seems never to have had any other end in view, was sufficiently apprized of the great importance of blending the useful with the agreeable; other poets strew the roses of poetry over their precepts, in order to conceal their harshness,—but he by a happy refinement of delicacy, scattered instruction in the midst of roses,—he knew that the most delightful images when they teach us nothing, have a certain insipidity which never fails to leave behind it a disgust for the things themselves, he knew that there must be something substantial, to give them that force, that energy, which penetrates, and that if wisdom has sometimes occasion to be enlivened by a little folly, folly in its turn ought to be invigorated by a little wisdom.

Read Cupid, stung by a bee; Mars, wounded by the arrow of love; Cupid, chained by the Muses, and we shall easily perceive the poet has not formed these beautiful images to instruct, but has placed instruction in the midst of them to render it the more pleasing. Virgil is certainly a greater poet than Horace, his paintings are more rich and beautiful, his roll of numbers admirable; but Horace is more generally read because he has at this time the merit of being more instructive to us than Virgil, who, perhaps, was more so to the Romans.

But we are not to imagine from what has been said that poetry may not sometimes clothe itself with sportive mirth, the muses are cheerful, and will always be friends with the graces, but little poems are rather sports and relaxations than work. They owe their services to mankind, whose life is not to be spent in a perpetual round of amusements, and the example of nature which they propose for a model, warns them to do nothing considerable without a wise design, which may tend to the improvement, elevation and lasting good of those for whom they labor. So that as they imitate nature in her principles, her tastes, and her emotions, they ought also to imitate her in the views and ends she purposes herself in her works.

But what are the results directly effected in the social economy of poetry? Poetry springs from the people, and is for the people, for the great brotherhood of mankind. Engaged in the busy pursuits of life with all its cares and sorrows, striving for wealth and power, fighting against adverse fate, endeavoring to climb the steep where fame's proud temple shines afar, or fighting against poverty's unconquerable bar; and seeing nothing but selfishness reflected on every side, it would be hard with man in disaster and calamity, perhaps more so in prosperity "if some resource were not provided which would prove a balm in one case and an antidote in the other."

Poetry written in every age of the world, and under every circumstance and condition of life, representing every possible state of human feeling—for human feelings are the same in all ages, although in every age modified by the features of the then existing civilization—furnishes this resource. Poetry has given to the external universe a charm which had never else, exclusively been shed over it.

The glorious objects of Creation without depriving them of their own reality, it has imbued with life which makes them objects of affection and reverence. It enables us at once to enjoy the contemplation of their colors and forms and to love them as human friends. It consecrates earth by the mere influence of sentiment and thought, and renders its scenes as enchanted as though it had filled them with oriental wonders.

Touched by it, the hills, the rocks, the hedge-row and the humblest flowers, shine with a magic lustre "which never was by sea or land," and which is yet strangely familiar with our hearts.

These are not hallowed by it with angels' visits, nor by the presence of fair and immortal shapes, but by the remembrances of early joy, by lingering gleams of a brightness which has passed away, and dawning of a glory to be revealed in the fulness of time.

Thus poetry, by holding before us forms

of unfading beauty and unsullied worth, bears our minds away from the absorbing cares and sorrows of every-day life, and ennobles and exalts the human species, for whatever "withdraws us from the power of the senses, whatever makes the past, the distant, and the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of human beings."

Poetry, also, unites men together by dealing with those feelings we all have, in common, as men.

The greatest poets have not pleaded for any section or decision of men. Byron, although noble, and born of noble lineage, was not an advocate of caste, but a bold and fearless champion of universal liberty and justice, a hater of tyranny in all its forms. Who can calculate the importance of Wadsworth's "Cumberland Beggar," in writing the sympathies and hopes of mankind? The poet here takes almost the lowliest of his species, an aged mendicant, one of the last of that class who made regular circuits amidst the cottages of the north of England,—and after a vivid picture of his frame, bent with years, of his slow motion and decayed senses, he asserts them not divorced from good, traces out the links which bind him to his fellows—and shows the benefit which even he can diffuse in his rounds, while he serves as a record to bind together past deeds and offices of charity,—compels to acts of love by "the mild necessity of use" those whose hearts would otherwise harden—gives to the young "the first mild touch of sympathy and thought, in which they find their kindred with a world where want and sorrow are," and enables even the poor to taste the joy of bestowing. How finely this last is illustrated

"Man is dear to man; the poorest poor
Ling'ring for some moments in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they
Have been
Themselves, the fathers and the dealers out
Of some small blessings; have been kind
To such
As needed kindness, for this single cause
That we have, all of us, one human heart."

But poetry unites mankind directly by discovering what Shakespeare calls the "Soul of goodness in things evil." It is the poet's high privilege to rivet the attention on what is virtuous and lovable, rather than what is evil.

A poor girl some years ago threw herself from London Bridge and was drowned; to the common eye this was but a subject of disgust; but the poet catches a clearer and brighter view, discusses something beyond, and bids you

"Touch her not scornfully,
Think of her mournfully,
Gently and humanly;
Not of the stains of her,
All that remains of her
Now is pure womanly;
Make no deep scrutiny;
Lest to the matins,
Rash and unadvised,
Pass all dishonor,
Death has left on her
Only the beautiful."

And poetry refines, for beneath its magic touch selfishness becomes honor; passions, love—and the profession of arms, chivalry. It is then the "Province of Poetry" to embody the pure and the beautiful and to present the most august moralities in "clear dream and solemn vision to cherish the good with the "Love of love," and assail with the "Scorn of scorn" tyranny and error" to "imbred and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of pious nations doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ, to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship.

Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime in virtue, amiable and grave; whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all changes of that which is called fortune from without and the evil subtleties and reflexes of man's thoughts from within: all these things with a solid and treatable smoothness to point out and describe."

But we must not regard poetry as a "trophy of human genius"—as a voice from nature to soothe its votaries, but as the heaven ordained companion of virtue and goodness. For

"Poetry is itself a thing of God;
He made his Prophets poets; and the more
We feel of poetic do we become
Like God in love and power,—under-makers
All great lays equals to the minds of men,
Deal more or less with the D divine, and have
For end, some good of mind or soul of man.
The mind is this world's, but the soul is
God's;
The wise man joins them here all in his
power.
The high and holy works, amid lesser lays,
Stand up like churches among village cots;
And it is joy to think that in every age
However much the world was wrong therein
The greatest works of mind or hand have
been
Done unto God. So may they ever be!
It shows the strength of wish we have to be
great
And the sublime humility of might.
True fiction hath in it a higher end
Than fact; it is the possible compared
With what is merely positive, and gives
To the conceptive soul an inner world,
A higher ampler Heaven than that wherein
The nations can themselves."

THE STRONG POINTS supporting the use of Fellows' Compound of Hypophosphites are, that while it takes immediate hold upon the system, in stimulating the Liver, regulating and strengthening the muscles of the Heart, Stomach, Lungs, &c., it has no debilitating effect under any circumstances; and while its continued use is marked by the general toning of the system, without producing constipating effects, it may be stopped at any time without the usual disagreeable effect following the discontinuance of some otherwise valuable tonic.

These characteristics are particularly valuable to consumptives and other debilitated invalids, and are peculiar to this preparation.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

THOUGHTS ON DEATH.

Death! What a volume of meaning in the word! It suggests to the human mind many painful thoughts, but, thanks to the religion of Jesus, many pleasing ones. The cessation of all labor, pain and combat with sin, of all communication with this earth so far as has with certainty been revealed to us, the opening of the unknown realities of eternity, with an "exceeding weight of glory" for those who have an interest in the Saviour's death, and untold miseries for those who have not, all—and more than these—are suggested to us by the word Death.

The stern messenger comes very often without warning of his approach. In the midst of gaiety and health, when the heart beats high with happiness, he may steal along as surely and silently, as when sickness has laid low the once healthful form, robbed the eye of its lustre and rendered the mind dull and inactive.

How much deeper and more startling is the effect produced on the mind, when gay and happy, by hearing of the death of friends, than if the intelligence should reach us when we were already mourning for some earthly object taken from us. The sudden change from joy to mourning renders the sorrow more severe, and yet it is not without blessed effects on our hearts and lives.

Towards the close of a warm summer day, a group of young persons are gathered together to spend in innocent recreation the close of a public holiday. Cheerful voices and merry laughter ring out from amongst them as they merrily swing to and fro through the evening air. Could three of their number have gazed in upon a scene then being enacted in their distant homes, the striking contrast would have sickened their hearts, and suddenly their mirth would have been changed to mourning.

Around the death-bed of an only surviving parent, a father, are gathered, at the same hour, sympathizing friends and relatives, endeavoring, as far as lies in their power, to alleviate the extreme sufferings of one whose stay on earth will be short, for he is nearing the dark valley of the shadow of death, trusting his future happiness to the finished work of the Redeemer of the world. Though in the depth of physical suffering his thoughts, in that last hour, are not for himself, but for the younger members of his family who will very soon be without a father, as well as without a mother, in a cold world,—and often he speaks of one child, older and more experienced, away in a distant land, whom he longs to see ere his eyes close in death, and to whose protecting care he wishes to commend those younger ones who, as yet, realize but little of the trials of life. He wishes for her presence in vain. The relentless messenger lingers not, and ere the message that requests her presence, in the chamber of death, has flashed over the electric wires, the soul of her only remaining parent has departed to the spirit world.

Another member of the family, the eldest, loved by all for his generous nature, is numbered among "those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters." Far away on the distant ocean with weighty responsibilities resting upon his mind has no intimation conveyed to him of the life suddenly stilled in his home? Not in any tangible manner, by mail or telegraph does the message reach him, for thousands of miles of ocean roll between him and his native land—but may he not have been apprized of the sad event by the

workings of some mysterious law which governs mind, unknown as yet to us, or by the severing of the sympathetic cords that bind human hearts together; or, perchance, as he may have paced the deck of his ship in the evening hour, that good spirit which operates graciously on the hearts of men may have whispered to him that a solemn event had taken place in his home and warned him to be also ready.

Oh, the sweet influence of the religion of Jesus in such an hour as this,—how it softens the heart—when we remember that through its great Author, and Him alone, not through any merits of our own, we may all be rescued from the thralldom of sin, and have eternal happiness as a free gift from our blessed Master. All that is implied in "eternal happiness" we are now incapable of understanding, for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive of the glories of a future state. How we cling to the hand of our best Friend too-often forgotten in the hour of prosperity; and therefore, He sends affliction to draw us nearer to Himself. How the things of this world sink to their proper place in our estimation, when, by the death of friends, we have been led to the contemplation of the things of eternity.

The day arrives for the last sad offices to be performed for the departed. The young minister, who officiates, utters a prayer from a heart overflowing with christian sympathy for those bereaved, absent ones, as well as those present, which is echoed from the depths of many a heart, and which, from its earnestness and sincerity, must have reached the ear of our loving Father. We humbly trust that to all, present as well as absent, the answer to that prayer may come, if it has not already. Perchance at the same moment sacred influences may have stirred within the breasts of the absent ones, emotions in sympathy with those who thus pleaded with God on their behalf, while they were unconscious whence came the moving power.

May we all be enabled at the close of life to meet joyfully the last enemy and to say, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

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For the Christian Messenger.

MOUNG THAH MOUNG.

DEAR BROTHER,—

The subjoined report reached us by last mail, under cover from Brother Crawley. MOODONG, 18 miles from Maulmain City, 21st March, 1872.

"To the School studying the Scripture of truth on the Sabbath day.
"Friends and Brethren all:

"In order that you may know, I write, setting forth some account of myself.

"First. According to the flesh I am the son of christian parents. By this favor of God I have never once bowed my head to images and idols—false gods—after the manner of my countrymen. My parents were among the first-fruits of the gospel in Burmah.

"For a long time after becoming a disciple I had no desire to preach, but followed my own will. After this, because of the striving of the Lord God with me, and constraining my mind, I was made to feel it was not fit that I should live and not preach. My disposition was changed in this respect more and more daily. (This was about ten years ago). So it is that by the encouragement and help of the brethren that I am now settled in Moodong, letting the light of the gospel shine among my countrymen. The children of the Sunday School have done me an exceeding favor in helping to support me here. I am now about forty-seven years of age. I have a wife and six children. My two oldest daughters are in Miss Haswell's Boarding School, at Maulmain.

"Second. I have now been labouring about one year in Moodong, and neighbouring villages, going about from house to house, and road to road, preaching the Word to all I meet, and distributing tracts. Those who dispute and ridicule are few. Many admit there is only one God, who is Creator of all things and sole law-giver. Besides this, I find some whose ears bear to hear the name of Jesus Christ more readily than in former times. These things being so, we labour in hope that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

"Pray for me, that I may carry on well the business of God in this region. I also, remembering you, will pray.

"Your Servant in the Gospel,
MOUNG THAH MOUNG."

I cannot ascertain by what Sunday