

like the last echoes of its forsaken lute—a voice of weeping, but tender and subdued, like the pleasant tears shed over some woeful romance of the olden time, telling some mournful chance of the young knight falling in his first battle, or of a maiden pale and perishing with ill-requited love. Onward passes that complaining wind through the quiet glades, like the angel of death mourning over the beauty it is commissioned to destroy. At every sweep, down falls a shower of sapless leaves—ghosts of the spring—with a dry sorrowful rustle; and every day the eye misses some bright color of yesterday, or marks some bough left entirely bare and sear.

ON THE POETRY AND POETS OF THE AGE.

It is of a truth no easy task to set up a standard whereby we may judge of poetry and poets. If this were ever a difficulty in time past, how much greater has it become in these days, when opinion differs so widely as to the merits of various writers, and when every rhymester arrogates to himself a niche in the temple of the Muses. It is impossible, in an article circumscribed as this must necessarily be, to enter fully into the niceties of such a question; but as the mariner voyaging over strange seas is enabled to estimate differences, and to tell by certain signs and tokens how far off he is from land, so, in a few brief remarks, the qualities that belong to this divine art may be enumerated, and allusion made to its most successful followers now living and speaking amongst us.

Never was there made a more barefaced attempt to foist a fallacy on the public mind, than in giving out that because a man could string together a quantity of words which should jingle harmoniously, he was worthy to be elevated to the rank of a poet. Facility of versification, and richness of invention, may be, and are, inherent in the true poet, but they do not of themselves constitute a title to that distinguished appellation.

There is something of a far higher origin wanting to complete the proper characteristic which distinguishes the man of genius from the mere maker of couplets. To this something it is almost impossible to give a name, and assuredly no easy task to afford the reader a correct idea of the literal meaning and intrinsic value. It speaks for itself in the verse of the poet; it is the reflex of the noble thoughts that have been engendered in his brain, and are revealed in glowing words, which shine upon man's spirit with the lustre shed from the bright halo of inspiration that glitters on the brow of truth—truth one and immutable—the same in every age and in every clime. We must recognise in the works of the real poet, a thinking and an aspiring mind, and be able to trace his aspirations to the domains of the beautiful and true. Poetry of the simple fictitious order, and which serves no useful end, is, in our opinion, scarcely deserving of the name, and may be laid aside with the ephemera of its day. That the decline and fall of this species of versification is near at hand may be confidently predicted, and indeed is a consummation most devoutly to be wished. If it is an art which is to serve no purpose, let poetry at once be suffered to become obsolete and unknown, save in the fanciful imagery of some plaintive love-song. But poetry, beyond all other species of literature and the fine arts, has a natural tendency to elevate and exalt the sphere of man's usefulness, and to free him from the debasing influences of worldly pursuits. Poetry embodies the art of elevating the objects around and about us—of discovering and rendering apparent the beautiful in the familiar scenes of every-day life—of idealising reality, so to speak: yet to be what it professes, it must ever speak of, and answer to the truth. It is not confined to mere utterings;

it is seen and felt in a thousand objects of nature, which to the eye of a prosaic, common-place mind, are mere rivers, woods, or fields, and nothing more. It is a fact that there are a great many poets among the mass of human beings, who are altogether unconscious of possessing one spark of this divine faculty. They see a beauty, and hear a music, to which they can give no name; they abandon themselves to a sense of pleasure in their admiration of things beautiful, but cannot tell whence it arises. There may be no expression in these men—they may make use of no symbols and no types—but for all that poetry lives and moves within them.

Imagination is necessary for the poet to clothe his thoughts in words, and this is a gift of nature's own bestowing, which no study can attain. Hence the poet is distinguished from the man in whom poetry lives; and thence it follows, that this art may be defined as liberating one of the highest faculties of the intellect; not cabined or confined, but speaking very intelligible language that shall vibrate through many hearts, and be listened to in all seasons and in all ages. For the real poet lives forever; like our own immortal Shakespeare. "He is not for an age, but for all time." He receives from nature an exquisite perception of the beautiful; and following out the just and unerring laws of compensation, this same nature gave him a voice by which he shall benefit his fellow-workers in the path of life—and this voice is expression, or, going further, we may say, *is poetry*. Of all the requirements which are specially needful for such a man, two must never be lost sight of—earnestness and truthfulness; for without these, poetry were a mere wanton idleness, a soft delusion. Nothing contributes more to the rapture with which we hang upon the pages of Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Dante, Homer and Burns, than the certain conviction we possess, that these men, each in his degree, were in earnest and spoke the truth.

Of the poetry and poets of the present day, it is confessedly an ungracious office to speak; for opinions are still strangely divided as to the merits of our very cleverest writers. It would seem that an entirely new school has sprung up within the last few years—a school of a very different order to any that has preceded it. Its merits appear to consist in the elaboration of intense thought, and the power of clothing with a beauty all their own things of every-day life. To this may be added a high sense of the loveliness of external nature. Its chief defects consist of a too great disregard of the conventionalities of the world, an occasional looseness of construction, and in many places considerable obscurity. Wordsworth, who was never more read than he is at the present time, may be called the high priest of this new fraternity. Of his longer poems we will not now speak; but upon the shorter pieces, particularly the sonnets, we must bestow our warmest eulogium. In this class of composition, he stands without a rival; in it he displays all the pathos and energy of a man of feeling, and of the most refined mind. We open the volume at random, and take the first verses that present themselves:—

SONNET,

On Sir Walter Scott's quitting Abbotsford for Naples.

"A trouble not of clouds, or weeping rain,
Nor of the setting sun's pathetic light,
Engendered, hangs o'er Eildon's triple height;
Spirits of Power assembled there complain
For kindred power departing from their sight;
While Tweed, best pleased in chanting a blithe strain,
Saddens his voice again and yet again:

Lift up your hearts, ye Mourners! for the might
Of the whole world's good wishes with him goes;
Blessings and prayers, in nobler retinue
Than sceptred king or laurelled conqueror knows,
Follow this wondrous Potentate. Be true,
Ye winds of ocean, and the midland sea,
Wafting your charge to soft Parthenope."