

We know that there are many cases which would seem to justify this conclusion; but we cannot assent to its truth as a general proposition. Now and then an inspired one, like Burns, may burst the fetters circumstances have imposed upon him; and, in spite of poverty, neglect and ill-requited daily toil, may leave rich legacies of song to future admirers. But how many, not possessing the ardent temperament of Burns, in whose breasts the calmer and purer fires of poesy have slumbered, have never had those fires fanned into a living flame, but have rather had them quenched by the position they found allotted to them in the world, or by the spirit of the times in which they lived! Indeed, the general tendency of the thoughts and speculations which occupy men's minds in any era, must influence more or less the highest efforts of genius. In an age of chivalry and martial enterprise, the subjects which have constituted the common elements of the best epic and lyric poetry, occur in abundance, and readily impress poetic temperaments. In an age of trade and commerce, there is less to influence the imagination, and the poetry of the time will assume an entirely different character. And in such an age, it is not likely that many true poets will appear. It seems to be a law of nature, that poets and orators should seldom come singly, but almost always in groups;—that before "one bright, particular star," whose brilliancy had shone out suddenly upon the world, has paled its ray, another, and yet another should burst upon the view, and all continue for a time to shine on together, each with its own peculiar lustre. Certainly, it would be hardly right to infer from this that the spirit of the respective ages in which such constellations of genius have arisen, was the only force that called them into existence. Yet it would be just as fair to draw such an inference, as to assert that neither the circumstances surrounding the individual, nor the character of the times, has power to check the utterances of the poet.

Although there is a very general expectation entertained at present, that a great poet will shortly appear, the truth, in our humble judgment, is, that in spite of numberless assertions to the contrary, the spirit of the age in which we live, is hostile to the growth of poetry; and that the influence of that spirit is felt in an especial manner in America. By the spirit of our age, we mean that disposition or tendency which we usually call its *utilitarianism*. Every object of pursuit, nowadays,—every calling and profession, every enterprise, is estimated and followed with sole reference to its direct, palpable, demonstrable utility. The question, *cui bono?* What is the use of it? What good will come of it? What will be gained by it?—or something similar, is in every body's mouth; and unless you can answer that question satisfactorily, there is an end of the argument, and you may as well abandon your plan or theory at once.

"The advocates of utility," says Mr. Procter (Barry Cornwall), in his defence of poetry, "have long been in the habit of decrying