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SHORT MEMOIRS OF EMINENT MEN.

No. 1. HOMER.

Poetry is of a very remote origin. The solemn offices of piety, the first lessons of wisdom with which mankind were acquainted, the earliest annals of history, and even the laws of nations in their infancy, were presented to the world in a poetic dress. But it is as devoted to the service of religion, that it seems arrayed in all its native splendor and charms. "Certainly," to use the language of Bishop Lowth, "nothing can be conceived by the human mind as more elevated, more beautiful, or more elegant, than the poetry which is to be found in the sacred writings; in which the almost ineffable sublimity of the subject is fully equalled by the energy of the language, and the dignity of the style.* And it is worthy of observation, that, as some of these writings exceed in antiquity the fabulous ages of Greece; in sublimity they are superior to the most finished productions of that polished people. It would not be easy, indeed, to assign a reason, why the writings of Homer, of Pindar, and of Horace, should engross our attention, and monopolize our praise, while those of Moses, of David, and Isaiah, pass totally disregarded.†

To the same purpose, Mr. Addison remarks, "There is a certain coldness and indifference in the phrases of our European languages when they are compared with the oriental forms of speech; and it

* See Job, chap. xl., from the beginning.
† Lowth's Prefect.

happens very luckily that the Hebrew idioms run into the English tongue with a particular grace and beauty. Our language has received innumerable elegancies and improvements, from that infusion of Hebraisms, which are derived to it out of the poetical passages in holy writ. They give a force and energy to our expression, warm and animate our language, and convey our thoughts in more ardent and intense phrases than any that are to be met with in our tongue. There is something so pathetic in this kind of diction, that it often sets the mind in a flame, and makes our heart burn within us.

"If any one would judge of the beauties of poetry that are to be met with in the divine writings, and examine how kindly the Hebrew manners of speech mix and incorporate with the English language; after having perused the book of Psalms, let him read a literal translation of Horace or Pindar. He will find in these two last such an absurdity and confusion of style, with such a comparative poverty of imagination, as will make him very sensible of the truth of these remarks."

Though it is not intended to examine and narrate the lives of the sacred poets and their incomparable productions, yet we shall present our youthful readers with a single specimen of divine poetry; we need not say, that it is a performance at once perfect and beautiful, since it is Mr. Addison's paraphrase on part of the 19th Psalm.

"The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim:
Th' unwearied sun, from day to day,
Does his Creator's pow'r display;
And publishes to every land,
The work of an Almighty hand.

"Soon as the evening shades prevail,
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the list'ning earth,
Repeats the story of her birth;
While all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm their tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.

"What tho' in solemn silence, all
Move round this dark terrestrial ball;
What tho' no real voice, nor sound,
Amidst their radiant orbs be found;
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice;
For ever singing as they shine,
'The hand that made us is divine.'"

Of all the ancient poets, the first name that will occur to any mind is that of Homer. From an inscription on one of the celebrated marbles presented to the University of Oxford by the Earl of Arundel, there is reason to conclude, that he lived about nine hundred and seven years before the Christian era. His writings are unquestionably of very high antiquity. The honour of having given birth to this great poet, has been claimed by no less than seven of