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THE POETRY OF THE BIBLE.

BY JOHN READE.

There are several considerations which might naturally deter one from speaking or writing of the poetry of the Bible. Among the most important of those which present themselves to me are first, the sentiment of veneration; second, the consciousness of inability; and third, the feeling of being *de trop* in any such work.

As to the first, I have, by inheritance and association, a loving awe for the Bible and all that it contains which makes me unwilling to regard its sacred pages from anything like a secular standpoint. It seems, as it is, the Holy of Holies among books—to be approached with as much care, with as great freedom from thoughts in any sense worldly, with as much of humility and reverence, as were required of the high priest when he entered the earthly dwelling place of the Divine Majesty; and it seems also not very unlike profanation to subject a Book or Books, written, as it were, in God's own handwriting, to any ordinary criticism. For the whole Bible, by whomsoever or whensoever its various parts may have been written, is the epistle—the great letter—the awful and loving response of God, in reply to man's yearning for a revelation fuller than aught that can be found in all the wonder and beauty of the mysterious world around him. It is, moreover, the “still, small voice” which replies to the silent craving of the inmost soul, comforting its sorrows and satisfying its longings; and when I recollect that the most comforting and sa-

tisfying portions of the Old Testament are also the most musical and poetic, I feel inclined to shrink back in shame and fear from the attempt to confound the comfort which cometh from above with even the most *inspired* of merely human productions. It is, still further, to me, what it is to millions in Protestant Christendom, emphatically a Book of the household; and even the most desolate wanderer to and fro upon the face of the earth may recall with shame and regret, not unmingled with a strange, unearthly pride and a something akin to hope, that once his name was entered in the “Family Bible”; that once on peaceful Sabbath afternoons, he was wont to read, with those who are now afar or gone to rest, in that good Book. Thus the Bible seems to be a part of the family circle, and as such to be entitled (quite distinctly from its great mission) to that tender reserve which guards those feelings—different in all and yet in all alike—which are connected with the first “Home, sweet Home” of childhood.

This veneration is not religion; yet it is not all “of the earth, earthy.” It was born and grew in dark and troublous days, when your ancestors and mine, reader, gathered together on lonely hillsides, on star-lit nights, beneath the temple of the sky, to read and hear the Law and the Prophets and the Gospel of peace, and to sing the songs of David. Perhaps it is growing rare in this age of free thought and enlightenment, when the Bible has