

Her position as a poet is hard to define. Few will venture to question her rank as the first of Poetesses, but her right to be classed with the Great Masters of Song, will not so readily be conceded. As long ago as Aristotle, poets were divided into two classes: those who sang because it was their nature to sing, and they could not help it; and those who sang because it pleased and amused them, and their education and circumstances prompted it. Aristotle's division was into the "frenzied man" and the "accomplished man." Of living poets, Tennyson or Robert Browning would represent the one, Longfellow the other. Keble in his lectures as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, adopts very nearly the same classification and theory of poetry. In the list of those

"Who do but sing because they most,"

"And pipe but as the linnet pipe."

he places Homer, Shakspere, Dante; and in that of those who uttered a note that was brought out by favour of circumstances, Milton, Byron, Scott. If this were the only requisite, Mrs. Browning's name should be read in the list of honour; for, however much the form, and even the tone of her poems may have come from the circumstances of her life, yet no one can feel that she sings except "because of music in her heart." But that which to me distinguishes the first from the second order of poets, is not so much spontaneity as *repose*; the repose that broods over all scenes and operations of nature. It is only on the rocks by the shore that the tide breaks itself,—far out, it sweeps on in unmeasured grandeur. Even the rushing of the wind is noiseless, until something stands out to arrest it. And who has not been awed into silence by the stillness that comes down upon him from a sunset; and yet, all the while, the clouds are wreathing into new forms, and the waves are flickering with their red reflections, and the shadows are mounting higher upon the hills. And so when we read Shakspere, amid all the din of action and the clashing of shields, and the clangour of trumpets, under the melancholy of Hamlet, or the passion of Juliet, we can never for a moment forget that there is a back ground of eternity, and that above all this the everlasting stars are shining. We are made to feel that it is all a part of the great universe, and in organic sympathy with nature. And in the minor poets this has no place. They sing—not as the song of a bird—a component part of the universal nature, and which is necessary in order to make nature be what it is;—but rather as the sound of a musical instrument, played, it may be, with skill and sweetness, but still something external to nature, and added on, and giving nothing to its completeness. Applying then to Mrs. Browning's poems this test of the nature of the impression left on the mind by their perusal, we turn with reluctant hand from those of her admirers who stretch forth a claim to the Laurel of the Master Poet.

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