

RANDOM THOUGHTS.

No. II.

MUSIC.

I WANT to express to you some vague notions that lie crudely in my mind, on the subject of music. You need fear no technicalities; for of music, as a science, I know nothing. I merely intend to consider it in relation to our general humanity, and in relation to those impressions which it is its object to make on universal sensibility. Writing freely, as I do, I am not ambitious of unity or of order; and, therefore, whatever feelings or incidents, suggested by the present topic, come to my mind, shall also come to my pen.

Memory is the faculty with which music has the most endeared and the most inspiring connexion; for memory it is that revives experience, and experience it is feeds emotion. We soon begin to live in memory, either by discovery or delusion. What we have been is soon more pleasant to us than what we are likely to be; and ever and anon our transient thoughts retrace their ways, and feel the hours too short, that once had seemed too long. The slightest and most unexpected analogies call before us the scenes of other days: the finest thread of association has a strength to pull us back to the Eden or the wilderness of departed hours. The odor of a flower will make the field bloom with ethereal softness to our fancy, and in fancy we have in them again our childhood's gambols: the whistle of a bird will give us to the sunny groves, where we read and mused, where we slept and dreamed: a river, like one that flowed near the dwelling of our youth, in which we angled and in which we bathed, will annihilate half a century: it is the same bright sun that gilds its surface; it is the same clear sky that beams from its cloudless waters; and we are not awakened to reality until we catch the shadow of a wrinkled face winking at our fantasy. A countenance, passed rapidly in the street, by the force of affectionate remembrance, will cause us to forget that one we loved has long been formless in the dust. And so, the vapours of a summer's morning, hanging sleepily on meadow or on mountain, or the chase of brilliant clouds in the gorgeous heaven of an autumn evening, will reanimate the past within us, in musings that we cannot shape, and in recollections that we cannot define. I was about to compare their influence to that of music, but I am going to speak of music itself.

The music which touches our primitive emotions we feel at once: complicated and high-wrought harmony, we must hear often before we can appreciate. But harmony is not on this account the less exalted or the less excellent. A song which sweetly expressed a single sentiment would delight a thousand, and ten of the thousand would but faintly appreciate the choral verse of Dryden's "Alexander's Feast." A pathetic ballad can move a multitude, but few in this multitude would read the "Paradise Lost," and fewer still would enjoy it. And so in music; compared with those whom a pleasing melody can charm, the number is small whom the might of Handel, or the magic of Beethoven, can profoundly ingratiate; while those who have no sympathy with loftier music depreciate what they do not comprehend; as many also affect an admiration which they do not feel. From indiscreet enthusiasts, or from ignorant pretenders, a cant has begun to prevail in musical criticism, which, if not the most tormenting of all cants of criticism, is the most unintelligible. Men who thus rave, will talk to you, as if musical sounds had the definite significance which arbitrary usage gives to words. But it is not so; and, in the nature of things, cannot be. The direct relation of music is not to ideas, but emotions; suggestive; certainly it is, but suggestive to each mind; with an indefinite variety of association. Test this position. Take, for example, any given combination of sounds, and let the effect be startling and sublime; ask, then, two men, whose imaginations have been trained in different modes of life, each to offer an interpretation; each will explain it in his own way, and each, though contrary to the other, may not be inconsistent with the original. Suppose these two men to be a sailor and a soldier. The sailor will call it a thunder-storm, and the soldier will maintain it is a battle. By what peculiarity of sound can the specific difference be determined? By what rapid shrillness may a flash of lightning be implied, which will not, with as correct analogy, imply a flash of powder? and what heavy movement of deep bass will call to mind the rolling of thunder, that may not as naturally represent the rolling of cannon? If any zealot for the precision of musical expression, should tell me, that military airs could easily be so interspersed as to distinguish a battle from