

Utilitarian view of worship. Every simple utterance of a deep affection, not poured out with an aim, but merely overflowing, is poetry in its essence, whatever be its form; and on the other hand no expression of thought or feeling which has an ulterior purpose, of instruction, exposition, persuasion, impression, can have the spirit of poetry, though it may receive the usual diction and rhythm of verse. There may be truth, beauty, eloquence, but not poetry. And if this be so, it is evident that all natural devotion is but a mode of poetry, while no rationalistic devotion can ever reach it. The spontaneous effusion of the former has only to fall into regular and musical shape and it becomes a hymn. The deliberate productions of the other, in subordination to a purpose beyond themselves, must always miss the true lyrical character; and must furnish us only with rhymed theology, versified precepts, or biblical descriptions capable of being sung, with more or less of skill in concealing the didactic spirit, and imitating the poetical style. By those who have overlooked this principle, it seems to have been supposed, that there are certain ideas which, considered as the subject matter of composition, are in themselves religious and poetical, and constitute a stock of materials capable, when constructed into verse, of passing into a devotional ode; whereas it is neither the matter nor the form of thought that makes religion or poetry; but the state of mind and affection in the author producing them, which may impress a sacred and an ideal character on an indefinite variety of materials and modes of sentiment and language.