

ATHEISM INCOMPATIBLE WITH TRUE POETRY.



POETRY is defined the language of passion, or of enlivened imagination. The poet's primary object is to please and to move. True, he may, and in fact ought, to instruct and to reform, but this he does only indirectly. The source of pleasure in poetry is the beautiful. The beautiful is founded on the three great notions revealed to us in all things viz: Unity, truth and goodness. In poetry, then, as in every other art, the beautiful is identical with the good and the true, it is their higher union. Whence it follows that the first requisite of poetry is truth, that is the representation of life and of all things as they really are. It is understood of course, that this does not entirely exclude idealizing. The phenomena, which form the subject matter of poetic productions, are identical with the real phenomena of human life and the visible world. For that reason the same laws must be exhibited in the production of poetry which, in accordance with eternal wisdom, are manifested in the order of nature and of life.

But how can the atheist poet be true to nature? He may, indeed, give a life-like description of a brute animal, or paint in a masterly manner, a landscape, but when he attempts the delineation of human character, he oversteps his mark. For him man is nothing more or less than a bundle of fibres endowed with sensibility, a mere brute destined to sojourn for a few years in this world, and then pass away into nothingness. Right reason, on the contrary, teaches that man is composed of a body and a rational soul, is endowed with lofty aspirations and will, after having spent his allotted time on earth, live forever hereafter in a state of happiness or misery proportionate to his merits or demerits. Even the pagan poets had, at least, an indistinct knowledge of this much. The christian knows far more, he

is aware that man is a being of whom it is said, "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels," a being stamped with his Creator's image and so precious that for him an Omnipotent God suffered and died. The atheist's conception of man, is altogether false, consequently his delineation of human character necessarily lacks truth and beauty, and is incapable of affording the reader any real, lasting pleasure.

For the Godless poet, however sincere and moral he may be, life at best is aimless, empty, dreary and monotonous. He is without the first essential of a healthy, human existence viz. hope. On all sides of him are human sufferings, and human misery; he beholds the aged decrepit man begging bread from door to door, he hears the mournful cry of the fatherless child and the despairing moan of the fallen woman, and what consolation has he to offer to his fellow-creatures? What antidotes can he prescribe for sin, misery, sorrow and the weariness of life? He may, indeed, extol good fellowship, sentimental tenderness and the natural virtues, but, can he by so doing, set at rest a troubled, aching, human heart?

It is impossible for one who denies the existence of the Supernatural, to please by representing life as it is. His principles compel him to pursue one or the other of two courses equally opposed to the spirit of true poetry. He is either disheartened by the pains and woes of life, and, *ipso facto*, admits his inability to attain the real object of poetry, which is to please. Or he deals only with sentiments which are characterized by that sensualism and materialism, of which Zola is the most notorious exponent in modern times.

There have been poets of this latter type who have prided themselves on being true to the mission of poetry, and who were even favourably regarded by some critics of good report. Those who extol art, in which the spiritual, the ideal element finds no place, argue thus: The proper object of art is the beautiful, which is ever accom-