

poems we are influenced in almost as great a degree, as by the contemplation of the objects themselves. We cannot read Chaucer, Spenser, Tennyson, without appreciating more than ever before the beauties of nature, and thus our minds become enlarged, our feelings tenderer, and we are made in a sense at least better men and women. This turns our minds toward the statement, (so often made that it would be out of place to enlarge upon it), that poetry is a refining agent. To believe this we need only to try the experiment. Read the best and chastest works of the great poets, and remain, if you can, with your sensibilities as dull as they were before.

Let us look at the subject in another light. Poets have always taken delight in expressing the actions of real life, in what we call, a dramatic form, and the people at large have always enjoyed, not only the public representation of the plays thus produced, but also the quiet perusal of them in their homes. Thus the drama begun long, long ago with the Bacchic festivals, continuing down through Grecian history and passing into Roman, almost lost in the darkness of the Middle Ages, again renewed and brought to light in the miracle plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, at last in its English form at the hands of Shakespeare maturing into perfect manhood, has ever been of great power in the state.

If wrongs were to be righted, by means of their graphic representation in a play, showing them up to the public in all their absurdity and monstrosity, the people would be easily induced to banish them from their midst. Thus has its power been felt. Whether, however, the drama possesses the same power at the present day is a question by no means easy to answer. But if now, by the majority of right thinking men, the theatre be pronounced an evil, surely the blame will not be attached to the dramas represented, but rather to the necessary concomitants of such a representation. These accompanying circumstances may be immoral. If such be the case, the works of Shakespeare are still open to the student; and although he may lose the interpretation of a master like Irving, yet, the study of the works of the immortal bard are now pursued with such an interest, that he will find scholarly commentaries very plentiful, and in the personal search for beauty, when it is found, it appears far lovelier than when reflected from a mirror. Thus in the drama is poetry a power for good, for enlargement of the mind and elevation of

the whole nature of man. Impurities may be found in the drama. So are wild beasts found in the forest. It is necessary, however, to form no intimate acquaintance with either in order to determine their true character. Let him who reads solely that he may find a blemish, enjoy that alone. The beauties he cannot see, he will not admire. Who can follow Shakespeare, play by play, from his earliest to his latest, through sunshine and shadow, through wit and seriousness, through depth and sublimity, without having his imagination strengthened and his taste improved? Here too, we notice the refining power of the dramatic as well as descriptive poetry."

"The aim of poetry," says Blair, "is to please and to move, and therefore it is to the passions and the imagination it speaks." Poetry gliding along in smooth and rippling flow is pleasing, and here is a danger which ought to be noticed. Pope says:—

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
That to be hated needs but to be seen."

And so the poet, unintentionally or intentionally, may weave into the form of a beautiful narrative, incorporate into a drama, or even embody in a descriptive poem, statements which appearing openly, thus showing their "frightful mien," would be instantly rejected as false. The poet may thus mislead the unthinking and delighted mind of the reader and, before he is aware of it, he has received into his bosom a snake which quickly infix its poisoned fang; and although the result may not be so disastrous as to end in death, yet, even if recovery takes place, the scar is still there,—the man is not as strong as he was before. Is not poetry in this respect powerful for evil?

These are some of the instances in which power of poetry is most marked. In conclusion it would perhaps be well to note a few of the minor influences which it brings to bear upon us. The simple war songs are not much in themselves, but finding a counterpart in the heart of the soldier they strengthen and enoble his patriotism, and lead him on to acts of greatest daring. The tender, soft, and gliding verses of the poet serve as a soothing lullaby to quiet the restless surgings of the mind, torn and distracted by the problems of life and the thoughts of their solution. The immortal epics of Milton fill us with amazement, fear, pity, love, and through all these experiences it is hard to say how much better we are now that we have read them, than we were when we knew nothing of them except their names. As we cannot listen to the