

ruins, vast and magnificent though they be, are so strange and unlike any objects of their kind in other parts of the earth, that they render little aid to our efforts to spell out the story of the origin, the growth, and the decay of the race whose only memorials they are. The domestic utensils found among these ruins may reveal to us some faint glimpses of the domestic life of those who used them; they tell us no tale of their wars and their commerce, their eloquence, their music and their poetry.

The discovery of America, and the conquest by the Spaniards of the half-civilized nations of Mexico and Peru, are topics which might naturally be considered especially attractive to American poets in search of the groundwork for an epic. These subjects have been admirably handled in the historical pages of Prescott and Irving; but they have been prudently shunned by the poets. There was, indeed, an epic entitled "The Columbiad," written by Mr. Joel Barlow, nearly fifty years ago, which does not, however, appear to have survived the notice drawn down upon it by its faults. Of its merits,—never having been fortunate enough to meet with a copy of it,—we can say nothing.* But no American, we believe, since Mr. Barlow's day, has attempted to construct an elaborate epic out of the events and incidents of the voyages of Columbus. And the reason why this subject—at first view so promising—presents difficulties almost insuperable to a poet of the present time are very plain and intelligible. In a review of Rogers's Poems, written by Sir James Macintosh, we have met with a statement of these reasons so full and so clear, that we are induced to extract the passage containing it. Speaking of the poem or poems, entitled "Fragments of the Voyage of Columbus," he says:—"The poetical capabilities of an event bear no proportion to its historical importance. None of the consequences that do not strike the senses or the fancy can interest the poet. Whether the voyage of Columbus be destined to be for ever incapable of becoming the subject of an epic poem, is a question which we have scarcely the means of answering. The success of great writers has often so little corresponded with the promise of their subject, that we might be almost tempted to think the choice of a subject indifferent. The course of ages may produce the poetical genius, the historical materials, and the national feelings for an American epic poem. At some future period, when every part of the Continent has been the scene of memorable events, when the discovery and conquest have receded into that legendary dimness which allows fancy to mould them at her pleasure, the early history of America may afford scope for the genius of a thousand national poets; and while some may soften the cruelty which darkens the daring energy of Cortez

* No very great loss to our contributor, as the Poem in question—a tedious review in nine books, of all the course of American history, represented as appearing to Columbus in visions—would not repay the perusal. It was published at Hartford in 1787, and dedicated to Louis XVI., who must have been highly amused at this bit of republican homage.