

"Poetry," he says further, "is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man." "Poetry," says Shelley, (not always, however, a trustworthy guide), "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar."

Originally, Poetry and what we now call Prose were identical. "See deeply enough," says Carlyle, "and you will see musically." He might have said "poetically," and would have expressed the same thought, for Music and Poetry are twin-sisters.

In olden days when History was just being evolved, men could see more deeply and with less difficulty than they do now; they were untrammelled by conventionality and traditional formalism. Within and without themselves they saw rhythmically; not with the mathematical straight-lacedness of our modern sense of rhythm, but with eyes "anointed of nature." Then it was that all nature spoke to them in the unmeasurable rhythm of the wind-furrowed grain, the slow-lapsing stream, the sun-kissed ripple, and what Wordsworth calls so elegantly:—

"The soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs."

So-called "Culture" had not hampered them with a scholarship run down to pedantry; and "Form," or what the Chinese call "Face," (this has no reference to the starching of collars and cuffs in which the Celestials are such adepts!) had not stifled emotion with an overweening desire to be superior to feeling. But the inevitable came at last (possibly with the advent of Crinolines or Mother Hubbard bonnets) and critics began to discuss the newly discovered monstrosity — Prose. Hence, instead of trying to discover what Poetry means, we should ask: What is Prose?

The oldest of literary monuments — the Bible — furnishes us most interesting material in the attempt to answer this question. Looking through its venerable pages with the embarrassments of modern spectacles, we are apt to furnish its poetry with a dress of the externals of Poetry as we have it now. Had the Hebrews rhythm, either accentual or quantitative? It is extremely doubtful. Had they rhyme or assonance? No; and yet without any of these external earmarks to guide us, how can we say that the Bible is poetic? Modern literary Philistines will perhaps say that it is not. But yet, the fact remains, that the Bible is the greatest poetic collection in existence. Byron regarded the "Book of Job" as the "sublimest poem ever written"; and a French critic (atheist though he was) says that the Canticles of Deborah and Barac are incomparable as Poetry.