

## THE INFLUENCE OF POETRY.

Perhaps there is no other subject about which so much has been written as Poetry. Many and varied are its definitions, each perhaps, although not entirely covering the ground, giving the writer's view and adding materially to the idea held before in regard to it. Too much, however, can hardly be included in a definition of a subject which appears so different to different minds; and thus in the following paragraphs, poetry will be considered in a very broad sense, including all things in nature and art, in science and books, which appeal to the imagination and to the intellect through the emotions.

Poetry is as old as man himself,—yes, older, for before man was the world stood out of the waters, and ages before the beginning of all created things God is, even from all eternity. Surely none other than a poet's hand could have constructed this world, so beautiful in all its parts, so consistent in its minutest details, combining into a whole so stupendous and grand and stable. Why do those whom we call poets delight in descriptions of nature, seen in its varied forms, sun, moon, stars, wood, tree and stream? Does the poet bring to life that which has never before existed: or do its varied forms, so nicely blending with one another, cause him to think and dream, and at last break forth in pleasing strains, only expressing what before existed in the twig and leaf, what before was heard in the roar of the thunder and in the drop of the rain, what he alone saw in the flash of the lightning and in the glare of the meteor? Is not the latter the better way to look at it? Nature speaks loudly at times, always plainly; and if, indeed, the poet is the only one hears and expresses her words in verse, it is because there is more of nature in him, and because he above all others can feel the rythmical beat of her great heart as his fancy reclines on her breast.

But what has this to do with the influence of Poetry? Much. Regarding the words right and wrong in a broader sense than we commonly employ them; calling that right which lifts a man, ennobles his feelings, and directs his thoughts upward to God, and calling that wrong which has an opposite tendency, we say that Poetry has a wonderful influence for right and wrong.

A man living by the ocean's shore, day by day, watching the huge waves lifting themselves in their

power, and falling with thunderous roar, seeking to overwhelm the land, now changed to the smallest ripple, and leaving on the smooth and glittering sand only the tiniest ripple-mark; and again, gazing out o'er the placid bosom of the water, watching the sky sink into the sea, the sea lift itself to the sky, seeing the two blending in the faintest line, cannot but be filled with grand and noble thoughts. True, by constant nearness to the ocean's grandeur, he may have become so familiar with it, that it fails to cause him to think. But this, surely, seldom occurs, and the average man, having only a little of poetry in soul, must experience feelings which the great writers have always loved to express. Such feelings as these never degrade a man. They do not, they cannot. The thinking man must think and ask, Whence this arching vault of blue, these mighty winds which lash the sea into foam, and furrow it as with a plough? And striving to answer these questions, looking back of nature, he sees the power which created nature and established those laws which regulate her every motion. If there be poetry in nature, if the varied forms of the world around us, by reason of the poetry they possess, appeal so strongly to the poetic instinct of man, and thus lift his thoughts upward, is it not a wondrous power for good?

But the question may be asked: Is not this power limited? Byron communed with nature, and delighted in all her manifestations, and he was not a good man. Will it too be said by the questioner, that the contemplation of nature aroused within him those terrible passions, which made his life so miserable? His surroundings in the world, his early training, his passionate and ungovernable desires, all tended to make him what he was. But, it might with considerable truth be also stated, that if the voice of poetry in nature had awakened no answering chord in his own heart, he would have been far worse than he was. Many instances might be adduced of poets who lived and delighted in natural beauty, whose works show that their minds were not degraded, but that their moral sense was rendered stronger and keener.

It was before said that the poets only express for us what we *all* experience. If then by constant relation to the poetry of natural scenery and grandeur, our minds are drawn upward, surely they will be drawn in no other direction by those beautifully descriptive and expressive poems which such writers as Virgil and Cowper have given us. By reading such