

Poetry:
Its Nature and Use

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Poetry; Its Nature and Use.

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How grand to have the thoughts of others to read and wonder over when loneliness besets us on our way; how bliss to have the gift of speech; to think and talk and hear our loved ones talk, to know their thoughts. We travel miles to see our friends, and think nothing of the journey. But another great pleasure has presented itself to us; not only are we able to talk with our friends when they are in our presence, and thus enjoy one another's thoughts, but we can write our thoughts upon paper and thus we may send it miles away thus we may converse with friends even across the ocean. And not only that but we have the writings of those long since departed. Babylonian archeologists find inscriptions that declare the existence of cities over seven thousand years before Christ. Thus records are found of very early efforts in writing; and how we long to have them all deciphered as some of them have been, to know what they mean.

And yet how slow we are to grasp, how little we appreciate, this wonderful gift. We seldom think of it as a gift until we meet a friend who is unable to speak, and then how we pity him, never thinking how we abuse our privilege and grieve

in darkness and idleness.

As man has been busying himself for centuries past in recording his deeds upon tablets and stones, so God has been for ages and ages past writing his epistles to degraded man; he has written upon the trees and upon the rocks, has strung songs in the murmuring brook, has hidden sonnets in the shady glen; has dropped them by the wayside: the landscape whispers, and we must pause to hear the still small voice.

Is this world a wilderness of war, purposed for man's cruel sorrow? The rose that tips to let the heavy dew drop fall, is it my enemy? Do the leaves dance to make me sick at heart? No, all nature sings for man's own sake. The brook sings in her never ending strains to make us glad; the bird's song echoes through the vale to give the weary plowman courage. Yes, nature speaks, and we call her voice poetry, and he, who hears her voice and writes her songs to man; is the poet; his realm is the realm of love, his work it is to cheer the gloomy home with nature's sweetest song or stir to action some fawning soul with God's own meditative verse.

But why speak so of poetry; is not prose the voice of nature as well? Yes, we receive all from

nature. Prose is meant for man's good as well as poetry. But prose is the plain language expressing simply the truth; it brings to us nothing but facts; while poetry is the song of nature intended to call us for a moment away from the busy cares of toil and pain, that we may enjoy the chanting of a higher power. Poetry cheers us up, inspires us with a zeal to push onward and upward. In prose the expression is the result of observation, judgment, or stern reasoning. while in poetry the expression is a song of praise, or the voice of a meditation soul speaking in measured accents. In poetry each thought falls upon the page as gently as the snowflake falls upon the ice, ready to be lifted and tossed about or packed down to be attached to the great shining sheet.

The poet should be acquainted with a great part of the vocabulary; he should know each synonym and the history of each word. It should be his practice to make smooth and easily remembered sentences. Also he should be familiar with the various forms of verse, as they add much to the beauty of the piece. It is a well known fact that many things will not very well adapt themselves to certain metre: for instance, could we read a piece expressive of deep sorrow and full ourselves dancing in a light happy manner? Would we full

light and jolly upon reading of the death of a friend? I fear not. Because of this fact we have a great number of different kinds of verse; the measures are different, that is, the meters or feet are different. There are five different kinds of feet, - anapest, dactyl, iambus, trochee and amphibranch. Also there are lines with different numbers of feet in them, or there may sometimes appear in the same line two or more different kinds of feet.

The study of poetry is not so pleasant as the first glance might suggest, but the beauty that attracts us on is in the end. The careful study of these various measures and lines must be carried on as it is this that gives beauty and strength to the expression, as well as taste to the writer.

Perhaps it would be well before going any farther into the discourse, to stop and find out how poetry has been defined, and of what it consists. Mr. E. C. Stedman says. "Poetry is the rhythmical, imaginative language, expressing the invention, taste, thought, passion, and insight of the human soul." Let us investigate this definition and notice its various parts. His first statement is that it is rhythmical language. In prose this is not permissible, but many novels and much fiction have dreamy language to a considerable extent. The definition might

will be divided into two parts; - the first part declaring the kind of language; and the second part, what this language expresses. It expresses invention, taste, thought, passion, and insight of the human soul. Directly opposed to the language of science.

Most authors agree that poetry depends very largely upon imagination, invention and taste for its strength. But even these are not its sole source of strength. It requires thought and insight of the human soul. A line from Tennyson's "In Memoriam," is a good illustration.

"Be near me when I fade away,
To point the term of human strife,
And on the low dark verge of life
The twilight of eternal day.

The power of a poem is its ability to appeal to the hearts of men. A poem may not use very fancy phrases and still every word may be as gold, controlling powerful meaning. A simple annal of a departed friend, how it thrills us with that heart aching, and we think of all the bright hours we spent with that one. What would be the feelings of a mother who is mourning the loss of her only child, and in her reading would find the following.

Sleep sweetly my darling, your mother soon comes

To join in your rest ye slumbering one
 Her locks are all snowy her face is so thin
 Sleep sweetly, she loves; your mother soon comes.

Or suppose some fond lover has arrived at the point where
 hearts beat fast and plans for proposing occupy
 the restless mind. Now if his love should sing him
 some sweet song; how soon it would take possession
 of his heart. He would hail each word. ~~He~~
 read an epitaph and at once think of the crumbling
 form beneath; we think of the great, strange future
 before us when our forms shall likewise mingle
 with the dust. When our souls shall join that
 unnumbered host in the spirit world, where reigns
 unmoved by time that source of life and peace. We
 bow the head and think and move away.

What is the use, we say, of laying so much
 stress upon the language of a piece what is it
 after we have it? What do we want with a shelf
 full of books of poetry; there is no value in them in
 stating facts, nothing but simply nice readings.
 What do we want with it? Well there is a saying
 "whatever satisfies man he ought to have." A better saying
 would be; - whatever does man good - he surely ought to
 have. Now poetry is good; it is desired by many, it

is read by the sorrowful and they find comfort;
 it is read by the gay and it sets them to thinking;
 it is read by the good and they are strengthened;
 it is read by the criminal and they tremble.

Poetry is the language of nature translated by
 the poet. We find in it the key to the sublime;
 we find finger boards pointing out nature to us.

Byron says in one of his poems,

"Even the green trees
 Partake the deep contentment; as they bend
 To the soft winds; the sun from the blue sky
 Looks in and sheds a blessing on the scene."

Our written language relies, in great part, upon
 the words and expressions for its power. We have
 words and phrases that have long since dropped from
 common use, but which still linger in full force in
 the realm of poetry; and we have the sacred language
 of our Bible which is used in elevated themes. For
 instance in what different language could the
 following be more appropriately expressed.

Thy word created all and doth create,

Thy splendor fills all space with rays divine
 Thou art and wast and shalt be glorious, great,
 Light-giving, life-sustaining potentate

Poems of nature and meditative poems have always been the treasures of the language for all those on whom we rely for thought, and to them we look for the beautiful, for pleasure and for satisfaction. Read "Locksley Hall" and "In Memoriam," both by Tennyson, also Bryant's nature poems or Shelley's "The Cloud." In these we can find good thoughts to occupy the mind.

But as we look over the multitudes of great poems we find that many of the most powerful are not written in rhyme but are simply blank verse. Very many of our deeper themes do not permit of rhyme. Among our most noted poems are "Thanatopsis," "Thunderstorm," and "Paradise Lost" and many others of similar style. but none of these are written in rhyme; strong words have been retained at the expense of rhyme. Gray's elegy is one of the few great rhymed poems, but the meter and the length of the line has been selected with great care.

"The Burial of Moses" an ode, shows how a well known story may be arranged in different style and told with fresh force. It is also a good example of imaginative poetry. Again take the "Blue and the Gray." here we find certain repetitions at

the close of each stanza, which in themselves add beauty and strength to the verse and excite our meditative nature, and we come to love the Gray as well as the blue for they slumber side by side.

Thus we see that power depends upon words, thoughts and style for its foundation.

What beauty there is in things that never find expression; - every tree, every shrub, every plant, is aglow with some sweet lay.

And not only are there nature poems to build our thoughts upon, but also religious and moral as well. See the many temperance verses that have been the means of saving men from total ruin; the many songs that have lead men into the better life. It takes a song to move the heart of man. Read the volumes of songs of sorrow and you would call them books of tears. Man, in his wicked violence, has been the theme of many touching lays. Read them; look the world squarely in the face. Why spend the day in honest toil and at evening withdraw in loneliness to some dark room, to waste the night in restless sleep where close air deals violence to all within. Go out and read and see the beauties of nature. See how every thing is glad to greet you. How can man do wrong when every thing gives him good encouragement.

An idle dream may cheer a thousand gloomy rooms,
 may give encouragement to multitudes of discouraged
 souls. Why is it that so many poets are considered
 as household friends? Why have won the hearts
 of the people, their sentiments have been heard,
 their lines have found an echo from a hungry world.
 It is the function of poetry to bring before the minds
 the seemingly insignificant and make them feel
 their worth. We find poetry touching every department
 of life, when the poet is present we are not alone;
 we can appreciate the sympathies of the writers long
 since gone, we love to speak their names, we
 love to read their thoughts. And as we walk
 out into the green fields and woods we exclaim
 with the poet:-

"O, the leaves, they dance upon the breeze
 And 'tis music to the eye."

The murmur of the babbling brook has a different
 sound to us. As we watch the silver leaf fall
 sluggishly to the earth, we can read the closing
 hours of man; as quietly as the dew drop falls
 they yield their strength, relax their hold and reluct-
 antly fall, quivering to the earth.

Let us harken to the voice of the poet as he
 speaks to us the words of nature; let us meditate

upon the lines that speak advice, and aid
in heralding the songs that cheer the darkened
hall or prison cell; let us do our part in making
pleasure for the cast down hearts. Let us read
for others and aid them in reading the beautiful
and sublime - of our written language. And
may our choice of literature be always upward
and "On Ever on to a Purpose" And then
when the reading, which shines through us, reaches
others, it will be a pure light to influence
others toward that better life toward which
the tide of human life so steadily moves.