

sometimes be, upon the common doctrine of chances and the very nature of things; right they may sometimes be, from the common physiognomy of the face; right they may still more frequently be, from the artful and sweeping amplitude of the reply which may be made to cover a variety of tempers or propensities at the same time; and necessarily and infallibly right they do not profess to be.

The whole, in truth, is founded on hypothesis: here it begins, and here it ends; hypothesis, too, unsettled and disputed, in many of its points, among themselves. And yet, planting their feet upon this tottering and unsteady ground, they are perpetually uttering the proud and lofty words, *science, proof, and demonstration*; than which a more palpable or grosser abuse of terms can never be employed or conceived.

In few words, how grossly imperfect must be the range and condition of that science, which, upon their own showing, is capable of deciphering to us, that this man is a good musician; that, a good painter; a third, a good linguist; a fourth, a good dramatist; a fifth, a good theologian; a sixth, a good murderer; and a seventh, a good thief; and that any or all these may at the same time be ambitious, or courageous, or conceited, or cunning: while, if you ask them whether they are good liars, good backbiters, or good swearers; whether they are inclined to gluttony or sensuality, to wisdom or folly, to sympathy or hypocrisy, to timidity or confidence, to mirth or to melancholy: characters the one or the other of which apply to every one you meet with, whether abroad or at home, they are compelled to acknowledge that their physiognomy or craniognomy does not extend to any one of these qualities, and that nature has either forgotten to put them into the catalogue with which the head is covered, or has marked them so bunglingly and obscurely, that they cannot read the writing.

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#### LECTURE XIV.

##### ON THE LANGUAGE OF THE PASSIONS.

In an early lecture in the present series I observed that the passions, when called forth and operating, discover themselves by a double influence upon the organs of the body, the *EXPRESSION OF THE FEATURES*, and the *CHARACTER OF THE LANGUAGE*. The first we have already noticed; let the second serve as a subject for the lecture before us.

That the presence and operation of the passions give a peculiar style and animation to the language must have been observed by every one who has paid the slightest attention either to his own feelings, or to those of the world around him. The man who is in a state of calm and tranquillity will always have his ideas flow in a calm and tranquil current, and express them in an easy and uniform tenor. But let him be roused by some sudden and violent insult, or by some unexpected stroke of overwhelming joy or sorrow, and the tempest of his soul will give a corresponding tempest to his utterance. His speech, instead of being mild and uniform, will be vehement, energetic, exclamatory, and abrupt; his judgment will be borne down, his imagination ascendant; the face of nature will, in consequence, assume a new aspect, presenting a distorted, an unduly bright, or an unduly saddened picture, according to the nature of the predominant emotion; and the phraseology will partake of the colouring, and become proportionably figurative and fanciful.

This is not a sketch of any particular age or country, but of all ages and all countries; it is a sketch of mankind at large; and we draw from it these two conclusions: first, that the natural language of the passions is strong, ardent, and abrupt; or broken into short sentences or versicles; full of figure

and imagination, and consequently possessing all the radical characters of poetry: and, secondly, that we may expect to meet with the boldest and most frequent use of this kind of language in those periods of every nation in which the passions have been most unrestrained and luxuriant, and therefore in their earliest and least cultivated state; for we have already seen, that in this state the most vehement and energetic passions are in perpetual play and activity.

Now, the whole history of the world will confirm us in these two general corollaries; and it has hence been said, and in a restricted sense said truly, that the language of poetry is older than that of prose. Its principles are founded in nature, and in nature in her simplest and most unsophisticated state: and it is to these principles mankind uniformly recur, whenever hurried by a violent shock of feeling from the polished tameness and monotony of colloquial speech. It is then we return to exclamations, interrogations, broken sentences, bold and daring comparisons; and, whether we be indifferent to the world or not, succeed in interesting it in our fate and condition.

Where, among uncultivated tribes, the passions chiefly called into exercise have been of the pleasurable and sprightly kind, such as we have already seen are the natural result of warmth and beneficence of climate, of tranquil scenery, and an atmosphere perfumed by the rival odours of spontaneous blossoms and balsams, the rude burst of delight has assumed a more regular or measured character, and been uttered in the form of chant or brisk melody, with such corresponding attitudes or movements of the body as might best co-operate in proving the exuberant gayety of the heart. And hence music and dancing are nearly of as early origin as poetry: they were prompted by the same impulse, and had a direct tendency to heighten each other's power; while ingenuity soon taught the more dexterous of the tribes to imitate musical sounds by the invention of the simple instruments of pipes and rebecks. The Greek philosophers ingeniously and perhaps correctly ascribed the first carols of the human voice to an imitation of the wild notes of the birds; and the first idea of musical instruments to the occasional whispers of the breeze among beds of hollow reeds. Lucretius has expressed himself upon this subject with so much sweetness, that I lament the constraint I feel under of quoting him before a popular audience rather in a translation than in his native beauty and elegance; yet the following verses will, I presume, give a faint idea of the high merit of the original:—

And from the liquid warblings of the birds  
Learn'd they their first rude notes, ere music yet  
To the rapt ear had tuned the measured verse;  
And Zephyr, whispering through the hollow reeds,  
Taught the first swains the hollow reeds to sound;  
Whence woke they soon those tender-trembling tones  
Which the sweet pipe, when by the fingers press'd,  
Pours o'er the hills, the vales, the woodlands wild,  
Haunts of lone shepherds and the rural gods.  
Thus soothed they every care, with music thus  
Closed every meal, for rests the bosom then.  
And oft they threw them on the velvet grass,  
Near gliding streams, by shadowy trees o'erarch'd,  
And, though no gold was theirs, found still the means  
To gladden life. But chief when genial Spring  
Led forth her laughing train, and the young year  
Painted the meads with roseate flowers profuse,—  
Then mirth, and wit, and wiles, and frolic, chief  
Flow'd from the heart; for then the rustic Muse  
Warmest inspired them; then convivial sport  
Around their heads, their shoulders, taught to twine  
Foliage, and flowers, and garlands, richly dight;  
To loose, innumerable time their limbs to move,  
And beat with sturdy foot maternal earth;  
While many a smile and many a laughter loud  
Told all was new, and wondrous much esteem'd.  
Thus wakeful lived they; cheating of its rest  
The drowsy midnight; with the jocund dance  
Mixing gay converse, madrigals, and strains,  
Run o'er the reeds with broad recumbent lip:  
As, wakeful still, our revellers through night

Lead on their defter dance to time precise,  
Yet cull not costlier sweets, with all their art,  
Than the rude offspring earth in woodlands bore.

Nature is ever the same; and hence music, and dancing, and poetry, and impassioned language are to be found at this moment, in all their energy and irregular wildness, among the barbarians of North America, those of the Polynesian islands, and even the negro tribes of Africa: while not unfrequently we hear an equally daring and figurative diction, though of a very different kind, vented by the last in a state of Mexican or West Indian slavery, alternately intermixed with terrible execrations on the heads of their cruel taskmasters, and with the most piteous longings for freedom and their native land.

In like manner it existed, and was even cultivated with systematic attention, among the earliest savages of the hyperboreal snows, the Goths, Scythians, or Scandinavians; nor less so among the Celtic tribes of Gaul, Britain, and Ireland. The scalds of the former, and the bards or druids of the latter, were always held in the highest dignity and admiration; their persons were esteemed sacred; their rhapsodies were in measured flow, and had an enthusiastic effect in rousing their fellow-countrymen to arms, to religious rites, or funeral lamentations; in rehearsing the dangers they had encountered, and the victories they had gained; and in stimulating them to a contempt of torment and death under every shape, in the high career of heroic exploits, and the glory of living in the national hymns of future ages.

Such was the death-song of Regner Lodbrok, a Danish prince of the eighth century, and one of the most celebrated scalds of his day. It mischanced the warrior to fall into the hands of his enemies, by whom he was thrown into prison, and condemned to be destroyed by serpents. In this situation he solaced himself with rehearsing all the exploits of his life; and the following is a part of the ferocious verses he composed in the immediate prospect of the fate reserved for him, translated word for word by Olaus Wormius from the Runic original: "He only regrets this life who has never known distress: he who aspires to the love of virgins, ought always to be foremost in the roar of arms. In the halls of our father Balder (or Odin) I know there are seats prepared, where in a short time we shall drink ale out of the hollow skulls of our enemies. In the house of the mighty Odin no brave man laments death. I come not with the voice of despair to Odin's hall." Mr. Gray has been peculiarly happy in inspiriting the old patriotic bard of Cambria with a similar contempt of death. The entire description is well known to every one; but it cannot be too often repeated, and ought not to be neglected on the present occasion. The picture of his standing on the battlements of Conway Castle, and terrifying the English conqueror with his dying prophecy, as the latter was descending the shaggy steep of Snowdon, is exquisite and imitable.

On a rock, whose haughty brow  
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,  
Robed in the sable garb of wo,  
With haggard eyes the poet stood  
(Loose his beard and hoary hair  
Stream'd, like a meteor to the troubled air,  
And with a master's hand and prophet's ire  
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.

The detail of the prophecy is too long for quotation; but the following fragments, which form its opening and ending, ought by no means to be omitted.

Ruin seize thee, ruthless king!  
Confusion on thy banners wait!  
Though, fann'd by Conquest's crimson wing,  
They mock the air with idle state!

\* At liquidas avium voces imitariæ ora  
Ante fuit multo, quam lævia carmina cantu, &c.  
Lib. v. 1378.

Helm, nor hawkberk's twisted mail,  
Nor e'en thy virtues, tyrant! shall avail  
To save thy secret soul from nightly fears—  
From Cambria's curse, from Cambria's tears!—  
Fond, impious man! think'st thou you sanguine cloud  
Raised by thy breath, has quencl'd the orb of day?  
To-morrow he repairs the golden flood,  
And warms the nations with redoubled ray.  
Enough for me!—with joy I see  
The different doom our fates assign.  
Be thine despair, and sceptred care—  
To triumph and to die are mine.—  
He spoke: and headlong from the mountain's height  
Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night.

The first of these descriptions is derived from a people of Gothic or Scythian origin, whose ferocity of manners I have formerly pointed out, and endeavoured to account for: the second refers to a race of Celts or Cymbrians, for the most part of milder affections, and some tribes of which appear at a very early era of their history, and even in the infancy of civilization, to have evinced a tenderness of sentiment, a fecundity of imagery, and a cultivation of style, that are truly wonderful, and have never been satisfactorily accounted for. And I now particularly allude to the traditional poems of the Highlands and the adjoining isles, so well known from Mr. Macpherson's translation, and occasional interweavings. Such is the elegance and delicacy of taste, as well as sublime genius and national enthusiasm, of these singular productions, that Dr. Johnson, as many of us may perhaps recollect, was to the last an infidel as to their genuineness. The first, however, has been sufficiently ascertained of late by the indefatigable and valuable exertions of the Highland Society, formed for the express purpose of inquiring into the nature and authenticity of the poems of Ossian, the Homer of the Highlands; whose report has been published by Mr. Mackenzie, their liberal and enlightened chairman. They have sufficiently established the important fact, that Ossian is not an imaginary being; that his name and general history are at this moment preserved by tradition over the whole of the Highlands and the Hebrides; and that several of his poems, to an extent of many hundred lines, as literally rendered by Macpherson, still live in the memory of many of the oldest inhabitants, of the simplest manners, and who are incapable either of writing or reading, having been taught them by their fathers in early life, as their fathers had in like manner received them from a long line of progenitors through an immemorial period. These poems, or fragments of poems, have in various instances been taken down in the original Gaelic, from the mouths of the venerable reciters by persons of the greatest respectability, many of them appointed for this purpose by the Society I am now speaking of; and on being compared with each other, and with Macpherson's version, have been found to possess a close and literal agreement, in many instances through a range of some hundreds of lines, particularly in the important poems of Caricthura and Fingal. While, to enable the public to form a fuller judgment upon the subject, and to free themselves from every charge of prejudice, the committee, in their very excellent report, have not only given an unmutated copy of their correspondence, but extensive specimens of the original Gaelic itself, together with a new and verbal translation as well as Mr. Macpherson's version.

Against such evidence it is impossible to shut our eyes; and admitting it, we must conclude with the committee, that, though Mr. Macpherson may have taken occasional liberties with the text from which he translated, omitted some passages, and supplied others that were perhaps lost, yet that the poetry called Ossianic is genuine; that it was common, and in great abundance; that it was peculiarly striking and impressive, and in a high degree eloquent, tender, and sublime. Of the epoch in which Ossian flourished we can form a tolerable guess: for, with occasional references to several of the earlier Roman emperors, and especially to Caracalla, the son of Severus, who by Ossian is called Caracal, we find through the whole of his accredited poems a total unacquaintance with the Christian religion; and hence he can scarcely

be allowed to have lived earlier than in the second, or later than in the third or fourth century of the Christian era. So that the poems of Ossian must be of an antiquity not less by three or four centuries than the descent of Cæsar upon the British coast. And consequently we have at this moment a living proof of the existence of traditionary poems of the highest pretensions to genius, sublimity, and regularity of structure, that have been kept afloat in the memories of different generations for upwards of a thousand years, and some of them with but few variations, or loss of their original integrity.

To account, in some degree, for this striking and isolated fact, we must, in the first place, recollect, that these poems are strictly national; and, by a perpetual appeal to national passions and feelings, must have deeply interested every one who heard them in their preservation. Secondly, we know from the writings of Julius Cæsar, that the British druids, and, consequently, the British bards, on his landing were imbodied into distinct colleges, subject to a discipline of rigid study, and compelled to commit to memory so great an extent of verses, that many of them required not less than twenty years to complete this part of their education; it being held impious to record sacred poems in written characters, or to transmit them in any other way than by tradition from race to race. And, lastly, it should not be forgotten that poetry constituted the noblest science of these early times, and that the highest honour a hero could receive was to be celebrated in deathless verse. To die unlamented by a bard was deemed, indeed, so great a misfortune as even to disturb the ghosts of the deceased in another state. "They wander," says the son of Fingal, "in thick mists beside the reedy lake; but never shall they rise without song to the dwelling of the winds."

Ossian seems to have been wonderfully skilled in the language of all the passions. Equally vehement, gentle, and sublime, he could rouse at his will the fury of the brave, or melt him to tears of tenderness. The following passage, being part of the address of Fingal to his grandson Oscar, is full of heroism and fine feeling; and I give it from the version of Dr. Donald Smith rather than from that of Mr. Macpherson, as being not only more literal, but more beautiful:—

Son of my son! said the king,  
O Oscar, pride of the generous youth!  
I saw the gleaming of thy sword,  
And I gloried to behold thee victorious in the battle:  
Tread close on the fame of thy fathers,  
And cease not to be what they have been.  
When Trenmor lived, of glorious deeds,  
And Trathal, the father of heroes,  
They fought every battle with success,—  
Oscar! bend thou the strong in arms;  
Protect the weak of hand, and the needy.  
Be as a spring-tide stream in winter  
To resist the foes of the people of Fingal;  
But like the soft and gentle breeze of summer  
To those who ask thine aid.  
So lived the conquering Trenmor;  
Such after him was Trathal, of victorious prowess,  
And Fingal—the support of the feeble.  
On a day when Fingal had but few in his train,  
By the fall of the soft murmuring Rova,  
There was seen to sail in the midst of the ocean  
A boat that conveyed a lovely woman.  
It neither halted nor slackened  
Till it reached the river-fall:  
When out of it rose the beauty of female form.  
She shone as a beam of the sun;  
Her look exceeded her figure.  
"Branch of beauty! covered with the dew of grief,"  
Thus calmly I said,  
"If blue [naked] swords can defend thee,  
Our dauntless hearts will second them."  
"Thy protection I claim, for thou art Fingal!"  
Replied the daughter of youth:  
"By the excellence of thy might, and by thine eloquence,  
I claim speedy and opportune protection.  
Thy countenance is a sun to the forlorn,  
Thy shield is the dwelling-place of mercy,

I am pursued over the sea:  
A hero of heavy wrath is following my track;  
The son of Sora's king pursues me:  
The mighty chief—whose name is Mayro Borb,  
"Rest thou here under my protection,  
Beautiful form of the fairest hue!  
And, in defiance of Mayro Borb,  
Thou shalt find safety under the shade of my shield."

Perhaps the two sublimest passages in the poems of Ossian are, his Address to the Sun in his Carthon, and his description of the Spirit of Loda in his Caricthura, the genuineness of both which is ascertained beyond the power of suspicion. The first evinces sublimity combined with exquisite tenderness; and has a near resemblance to Milton's admirable address of the same kind. The second evinces sublimity combined with majestic terror, and has as near a resemblance to the mighty Spirit of the Cape in Camoens's Lusiad, though it is greatly superior. We have not time for quoting both these passages, and I shall confine myself, therefore, to the latter. I shall quote from Mr. Macpherson's version, which is sufficiently true to the original.

"The wan cold moon rose in the east. Sleep descended on the youths. Their blue helmets glitter to the beam. But sleep did not rest on the king. He rose in the midst of his arms, and slowly ascended the hill, to behold the flame of Sarno's tower.—The flame was dim and distant; the moon hid her red face in the east. A blast came from the mountain: on its wings was the spirit of Loda. He came to his place in his terrors, and shook his dusky spear. His eyes appear like flames in his dark face: his voice is like distant thunder. Fingal advanced his spear in night, and raised his voice on high. 'Son of night, retire: call thy winds, and fly! Why dost thou come to my presence with thy shadowy arms? Do I fear thy gloomy form, spirit of dismal Loda? Weak is thy shield of clouds; feeble is that meteor thy sword! The blast rolls them together: and thou thyself art lost. Fly from my presence, son of night! call thy winds and fly!"

"Dost thou force me from my place?" replied the hollow voice. "I turn the battle in the field of the brave. I look on the nations, and they vanish: my nostrils pour the blast of death. I come abroad on the winds: the tempests are before my face. But my dwelling is calm above the clouds; pleasant are the fields of my rest."

"Dwell in thy pleasant fields," said the king. "Let Comhal's son be forgotten. Do my steps ascend from my hills into thy peaceful plains? Do I meet thee with a spear on thy cloud, spirit of dismal Loda? Why then dost thou frown on me? Why shake thine airy spear? Thou frownest in vain: I never fled from the mighty in war; and shall the sons of the wind frighten the king of Morven? No—he knows the weakness of their arms."

"Fly to thy land," replied the form, "take to the wind, and fly! The blasts are in the hollow of my hand: the course of the storm is mine. The king of Sora (the enemy of Fingal) is my son; he bends at the stone of my power. His battle is around Caricthura; and he will prevail! Fly to thy land, son of Comhal, or feel my flaming wrath!"

"He lifted high his shadowy spear! he bent forward his dreadful height. Fingal, advancing, drew his sword, the blade of dark-brown Luno. The gleaming path of the steel winds through the gloomy ghost. The form fell shapeless into air."

Ullin, Orran, and other ancient Gaelic bards, seem to have been almost as celebrated as Ossian; and even of Ossian's poetry Mr. Macpherson has not, perhaps, after all, selected the most beautiful. The "Death of Gaul," published in 1780, by Dr. Smith of Campbelton, in Argyleshire, and accompanied with the original, as taken down from the memory of different Highland families, is one of the sweetest and tenderest, and, at the same time, one of the most regular pieces that has ever been composed in any language. Gaul was the bosom friend of Oscar, the son of Ossian, and the grandson of Fingal. The story, in few words, is as follows. Fingal summoned his heroes for an expedition to the isle of Ifrona. A flood in the river Strumon prevented Gaul

from joining them in time; but he put forth in his bark alone on the ensuing day. On his voyage he passed his friends, who were returning victorious, without his perceiving them, and landed singly on the hostile shore. Consistently with the chivalrous honour of the times, he would not fly; but struck his shield as a token of defiance to the islanders, against whom he maintained, singly, a desperate conflict, and kept the enemy at a distance; till at length a stone, rolled from above, disabled him from moving or fighting any longer; in which situation he was left by the dastardly enemy to pine and die without succour. His wife Evirchoma, anxious for his fate, embarked, with her infant son Ogall at her breast, in quest of her lord, whom she found in this pitiable condition; when, rousing all her might to assist him, she just succeeded in dragging him to the boat, and then fainted away over his body; in which state, speechless and in the act of dying, they were both discovered the next morning by Ossian, who had sailed in quest of them, and who was only able to save the child. From the poem thus introduced, and which is not generally known in this part of the island, I must beg leave to offer an extract or two. The following is Ossian's description of Evirchoma, as she witnessed the mournful departure of her husband:—

In the light ship of rough waves  
The hero followed us on the second morning.  
But who is she, on the rock, like mist,  
Looking, through tears, on Gaul?  
Her dark hair wanders on the wind,  
And her soft hand, white as foam, surrounds her forelock.—  
Young is the boy on her bosom,  
Sweet is the lullaby in his ear.  
But a sigh has wafted away the song:—  
On Gaul are thy thoughts fixed, Evirchoma.

The following is an exquisite picture of mingled and overwhelming passions—courage, heroism, and tenderness. Having chivalrously planted his standard, and singly defied all the enemy, a rushing thought of his wife and his child, of Evirchoma and Ogall, damps his resolution for a moment; but he is instantly recalled to himself by the idea of the spirit of his heroic father hovering over him:—

Morni! behold me from the mountain.  
Thy own soul was an impetuous current,  
Foaming white within a rocky strait:  
Such is the soul of thy son.—  
Evirchoma!—Ogall!  
But mild beams belong not to the storm:  
The soul of Gaul is in the roar of battle.

The conflict of passions in the breast of Evirchoma, on reaching the hostile shore, is described with equal force—her desire to proceed in quest of her husband, and her fear of leaving her babe behind her in the boat. It was now late in the evening:—

She glanced by the scanty beam  
On the beautiful face of her son,  
When about to leave him in her narrow skiff:  
"Babe of my love! be here unobserved!"  
As a dove on the rock of Ulacha,  
When gathering berries for her tender brood,  
Returns often without tasting them,  
While the hawk rises in her thoughts:—  
So returned three times Evirchoma:  
Her soul, as a wave that is passed  
From breaker to breaker, when the tempest blows,  
Till she heard a mournful voice from the tree of the shore.

I have said that the generous Ossian pursued them in another boat, and found them both in the act of dying. The following is his own inimitable description: it is strikingly impressive, and especially the manner in which the faint and dying mother commends her son to his care; and calls forth a sigh from his heart that his own wife Evirallin is no more.

I lifted his helmet: I saw his locks  
Disordered, uneven, in sweat.  
My cry arose—  
And he raised with difficulty his eye.  
Death came, like a cloud on the sun:—  
No more shalt thou see thy Oscar.—  
The beauty of Evirchoma is darkened.  
Her son, unconscious, holds the end of a spear:  
Feeble was her voice, and few her words.  
I raised her up with my hand,  
But she laid my palm on the head of her son,  
While her sigh rose frequent.—  
Dear child! vain is thy fondling;  
Thy mother no more shall arise:  
I will, myself, be a father to thee:—  
But Evirallin is no more.

Yet the poem must not be closed without giving you its conclusion; its exquisite moral, and its sublime epitaph.

What is the strength of the warrior,  
Though he scatter the battle as withered leaves?  
To-day though he may be valiant in the field,  
To-morrow the beetle will triumph over him.  
Prepare, ye children of musical strings,  
The bed of Gaul and his sunbeam [standard] by him:  
Let his resting-place be seen from afar,  
By high branches overshadowed;  
Under the wing of the oak of greenest foliage,  
Of quickest growth, and most durable form,  
Shooting forth its leaves to the breeze of the shower,  
When the heath around is still withered.  
Its leaves, from the extremity of the land,  
Shall be seen by the birds of the summer;  
And each bird shall perch, as it arrives,  
On a sprig of its verdant branches.  
Gaul, in his mist, shall hear their cheerful note,  
While the virgins are singing of Evirchoma.  
Until all of these shall perish,  
Never shall your memory be disanted.  
Until the stone shall crumble into dust,  
And the oak-tree decay with age;  
Until streams shall cease to flow,  
And the mountain-waters be dried up at their source;  
Until there be lost, in the flood of age,  
Each bard, and song, and subject of story,  
The stranger shall not ask, "Who was Morni's son?"  
Or, "Where was the dwelling of the king of Strumon?"

The voice of the passions, then, whether of joy or sorrow, of rage or tenderness, is the voice of poetry; and the voice of poetry is, in consequence, the voice of the passions. It is hence the earliest language of every nation; and it is not, therefore, to be wondered at that it should have been employed from a very remote period as the medium of national history, national mythology, and moral precepts; its glowing and animated style being peculiarly calculated to captivate the attention, and the recurrent measure or versification which, under some shape or other, it has assumed, and could not fail to assume, in every part of the world, being admirably adapted to assist the memory.

Hence, in the first ages of Greece, as well as of every other nation, priests, philosophers, and statesmen, all delivered their instructions in poetry. Apollo, Orpheus, and Amphion, the earliest bards of the Grecian states, are represented as the first tamers of mankind, the first founders of order and civilization. Minos and Thales sung to the lyre the laws which they composed; and till the age immediately preceding that of Herodotus, history appeared in no other form than that of poetical tales. At this time, however, science began to rear her head through the regions of Arcadia; the judgment acquired daily strength; and, while a soberer style was found to be befitting the severer studies, and the simple narrative of national or biographical events, the dialect of the passions was limited to those branches of speech or writing which require ornament, attraction, or an excitement of the passions themselves: and by such a change verbal composition soon rose to the rank of a very extensive and complicated science; the value of every word became

weighed in its root, combinations, and inflections; in its strict and figurative senses; in its proper enunciation and accent. And hence the origin of the elementary studies of etymology, grammar, prosody, and criticism; while the general mint of language, thus prepared and struck off, was still subject to the inquisitorial powers of logic and rhetoric; the art of reasoning or assigning determinate ideas to determinate words; and the art of polishing or adorning the dry skeleton of naked sense with the gay and ornamental dress of trope, figure, and elegant collocation.

Rhetoric, therefore, is nothing more than the natural language of the passions, or the imagination which so closely associates with them, reduced to the rules of art. It is the study of those peculiar modes of expression, warm, exclamatory, abrupt, interjective, full of energy, image, and personification, by which the passions characterize themselves when called into action; and which, as the natural symbols of the passions, have the wonderful power, not only during recitation, but on paper alone, when read by ourselves in the privacy of the closet, of enkindling in the mind of the reader or hearer the very feelings of which they are the representatives.

Hence the soothing tranquillity produced by pastoral poetry; the melting sympathy with which we yield to metrical tales of distress and misery; the rousing, dithyrambic effect of national songs; the sublime enthusiasm of devotional lyrics. Hence the well-planned fictions of the epic Muse excite all the interest of real life; the popular orator, laying hold of the same weapons, subdues every heart to his own purposes; but, above all, hence the magic spell of the drama, that, by personating the characters and scenery of the subject it selects, transports us to the time, place, and circumstance of the representation, and makes us parties to its own story.

The drama, above every thing else, is the language of the passions carried into real life, and enlisted on the side of virtue. I say on the side of virtue, because such power has virtue over the human mind, by the wise and gracious constitution of our nature, that neither epic poetry can excite admiration, nor tragic poetry emotion, unless virtuous feelings be awakened within us. Every poet finds it impossible to interest an audience in a character without representing that character as worthy and honourable, though it may not be perfect; and he is equally aware that the great secret for raising indignation, is to paint the person who is to be the object of it in the colours of vice and depravity. And hence Aristotle speaks with his usual correctness, when he tells us, that the design of tragedy (and it is to the tragic drama I am now limiting my attention) is to purify our corrupt tendencies by means of pity and terror. Such was the direct scope of the simple tragedy of the Greeks; the uniform object of *Aeschylus* who founded it; of *Euripides*, who improved, and of *Sophocles*, who perfected it; and all within the short space of little more than twenty years.

And such is equally the object of the more operose and complicated tragedy of modern times, whether French or English; whether turning, as in the former case, upon a series of artful and refined conversations, connected, indeed, with interesting attractions, but carried on with little action and vehemence, though with much poetical beauty, and the strictest propriety and decorum; or whether, as in the latter instance, made to hinge on a combat of strong passions, set before us in all their violence, producing deep disasters; often irregularly conducted, abounding in action, and filling the spectators with grief. It is, indeed, peculiarly worthy of remark, that three of the greatest, if not the three greatest, masterpieces of the French tragic theatre turn wholly upon religious subjects: the *Athalie* of *Racine*, the *Polyeucte* of *Corneille*, and the *Zaire* of *Voltaire*. The first is founded upon an historical passage of the Old Testament: while, in the other two, the distress arises from the zeal and attachment of the principal personages to the Christian faith. So powerfully has each of these writers felt, whatever may have been his private creed, the majesty which may be derived from religious ideas, and the deep impression they are calculated to produce on the human heart.

To select such topics, however, for such a purpose, demands a very deli-

cate judgment; and no serious mind would readily consent, I apprehend, that they should be resorted to and promulgated as sources of entertainment in the theatres of our own country. I mention the fact with the mere view of contrasting it with what has of late years been the predominant and licentious taste of the French metropolis; and to show the readiness with which this polite and elegant, but gay and giddy, people rush from one extreme to the other of that sober medium which will, I trust, ever limit and characterize our own national feelings and conduct.\*

It is well known to have been the opinion of *Dr. Johnson*, that religious subjects are but little calculated for poetry of any kind; that the fire of the Muses will not cordially blend with the flame of devotion. From this opinion, however, I must beg leave altogether to dissent.

There is no topic so well qualified for enkindling and enlisting into its service all the best and purest passions of the heart; and none, therefore, to which the language of the passions, subject, indeed, to the discipline of a nice judgment, is better adapted, or can be more laudably consecrated. And on turning accidentally to *Sir William Jones's* "Essay on the Arts commonly called Imitative," I find this opinion fortified; and the general survey of the subject now offered supported by the authority of this great scholar, whose name and judgment I may fairly put into the scale against those of our celebrated lexicographer.

"It seems probable, that poetry was originally no more than a strong and animated expression of the human passions, of joy and grief, love and hatred, admiration and anger, sometimes pure and unmixed, sometimes variously modified and combined; for, if we observe the voice and accents of a person affected by any of the violent passions, we shall perceive a something in them very nearly approaching to cadence and measure; which is remarkably the case in the language of a vehement orator, whose talent is chiefly conversant about praise or censure; and we may collect from several passages in *Tully*, that the fine-speakers of old Greece and Rome had a sort of rhythm in their sentences, less regular, but not less melodious, than that of the poets.

"If this idea be just, one would suppose that the most ancient sort of poetry consisted in PRAISING THE DEITY: for if we conceive a being created with all his faculties and senses, endued with speech and reason, to open his eyes in a most delightful plain; to view for the first time the serenity of the sky, the splendour of the sun, the verdure of the fields and woods, the glowing colours of the flowers; we can hardly believe it possible, that he should refrain from bursting into an ecstasy of joy, and pouring his praises to the Creator of those wonders, and the Author of his happiness. This kind of poetry is used in all nations; but as it is the sublimest of all, when it is applied to its true object, so it has often been perverted to impious purposes by pagans and idolaters."†

It is true the devotional poetry of our own country that can pretend to any high degree of merit is but very sparing, when compared with what we may reasonably boast on most other subjects. Not, however, that we are without writers of high and deserved reputation, or specimens of admirable excellence and sublimity. Yet we must not judge, as *Dr. Johnson* appears to have done, from our own country alone; since, perhaps, no people celebrated for great refinement in taste and language have so little cultivated this branch of the poetic art. It is a remarkable fact, that the metrical psalmody of our established church, which ought to be the best, is the worst of all English poetry in its old version, and not always improved as one could wish in its new, though several of the psalms in this later version are exquisitely turned.

And here it is obvious, that the fault does not lie with the subject, for the original Hebrew is full of excellences of every kind. Our poets of the highest reputation, whether epic, dramatic, or lyric, have seldom ventured upon sacred themes; and in the few instances in which they have made such

\* It should be recollected that this lecture was composed and delivered during the reign of Buonaparte.  
† Essay on the Arts commonly called Imitative Works, iv. 550, 4to.

an attempt, they have too frequently proved themselves to be equally unacquainted with the style and character of devotion; which, like those of every other science (for I am now only speaking of it in its subordinate and exterior attributes), can only be acquired by a peculiar genius for the task, and a long course of study in it. Let any one examine critically the *Universal Prayer of Pope*, or the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, or *Te Deum*, of Dryden, and I have little doubt that he will accede to the correctness of this remark. There is a constraint in these productions, which belongs to the writers nowhere else; an elegant exterior, but without a vivifying spirit; a total want of that happy union of bosom ease, and ardour, and raciness, which the French theologians call *unction*, that prove a man to be at home upon his subject, to have drunk deeply of the inspiring stream, and that it circulates freely through his heart; that which renders Addison as much superior to both these poets upon this point as he was inferior to them upon every other; which is deeply impressive in Cowper's devotional pieces; which peculiarly characterizes, not only the more lofty and ornamental, but even the mere doctrinal hymns of Dr. Watts, which admit of but little embellishment; and which we sometimes behold in the congregational contributions of persons possessing few pretensions to learning and genius, and who, perhaps, make a boast of their deficiency.

Let it be remembered, that elegance alone will not answer, nor will ease alone answer, nor will general descriptions alone answer; whether of the perfections of the Deity, the beauty of creation, the penitence of the soul, or its ardent longing for the happiness of heaven, or for communion with God on earth. We have at times seen attempts of this kind (and many of us, as I trust, with real grief of heart) by lyrical writers of the first attainments as poets, but the lowest attainments as Christians, in our own day; and whose direct object has been to furnish words to what has been vended along with them under the name of SACRED MUSIC; to cheat the sacred hours of the Sunday, and of those who hail the return of the Sunday, by a show of Sunday-aliment and occupation. Such attempts have had their day, but have never been able to support themselves. In the midst of all their external glitter and polished rhapsody, they have been found vapid and unsatisfactory; an airy, flatulent food, that the soul could never feed or fatten upon. And, on analyzing several of these attempts, with a friend of the nicest judgment, and who was, at first, strangely captivated by their pretensions, we found, that by a change in a very few of the terms, chiefly, indeed, by a mere substitution of human names for divine, they were reduced, with great advantage to themselves, to their proper and natural level of love-ditties and ballads, from which alone they seemed to have been raised, by an irreverent adoption of mere misnomers, for the base purpose of finding them a market in what is called the religious world.

On every account, however, I am much afraid that we must yield the palm of devotional poetry to some of the nations on the Continent. The best French writers upon this subject are Racine the younger, son of the celebrated dramatist of the same name, John Baptiste Rousseau, and Pompignan; all contemporaries, and the last of whom had the honour of being ridiculed by Voltaire, Helvetius, and their associates, for having had the boldness to deliver before the French Academy, in 1760, a discourse in favour of Christianity. And when to these I add the name of my late venerable friend the Abbé Delille, I fear it will be difficult to muster an equal group, possessing like power, in our own country. Spain, however, in this respect, at least rivals, if it does not surpass the master-poets of France; as I believe every one must allow, who is acquainted with the sacred poetry of Melendez, Miguel Sanchez, and the Conde de Noroña. Germany has also a few poets of the same kind of great merit, but it is to Italy we must turn for the best specimens of devotional lyrics in modern times;—Italy, where, almost from the revival of literature, the devotional muse, though surrounded by corruption, has been courted and warmly caressed by many of her best scholars, her best poets, and her best men. Her sacred verse was at first, indeed, too much

interwoven with the mystic sublimity of Platonism, which pervades more especially the spirited and lofty verses of Lorenzo de' Medici. It next allied itself equally with classical mythology, generalizing the "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord," as Mr. Pope has it, of Christians and Heathens; under which system every Pagan deity had his name continued, and was regarded as nothing more than a separate attribute of the true God. Sannazaro and Pontano, like the Portuguese epic poet Camoens, are full of this absurd amalgamation; but from the time of Vida to the present day the devotional effusions of the Tuscan muse have been purged from foreign dross, and in subject as well as in style, while highly impassioned, are equally pure, pious, and erudite. Were I to be called upon to point out the two best sacred poets of modern times, I should instantly name Filicaja and Klopstock; both men of exemplary goodness, whose lives were dedicated to religion, and who, while they wrote from the heart, adorned their compositions with every classical excellence. Bion has nothing sweeter or more touching than Klopstock; Pindar nothing more ardent or sublime than Filicaja.

Yet, to determine the question fairly, whether religious subjects can afford a proper ground for poetry, or the language of the passions, it is necessary to look back to nations of a very remote antiquity, and who cultivated such attempts as a national pursuit. Surely, if the erroneous and extravagant mythologies and superstitions of ancient Greece possessed interest enough to concentrate equally the fond attention of the poets and the people, and to be laid hold of as the standard theme of odes, dramas, and epopees; if the sacred fictions of Isis and Osiris, of Ormuzd and Ahriman, of Brahma and Praeriti, were deemed the noblest subject for song in Egypt, Persia, and Hindostan; and song, too, composed by the most learned hierophants and the most celebrated bards of their day, in colleges expressly founded for the occasion; what ought we not to look for in countries of coeval antiquity, preternaturally illuminated with the principles of genuine religion, and where colleges also were founded of the same mixed kind for the same lofty purpose? What ought we not to expect from the rapt patriarchs of Idumæa, or the inspired prophets of Salem; from the magnificent schools of Dedan and Theman, or those of Naioth and Mount Zion? From the two latter, more especially, since one of their chief, and certainly one of their most pleasing, duties was to compose a regular series of sacred odes and other canticles to the praise of the great Creator, and to sing them daily to the skilful sound of psaltery, tabret, and harp, in sweet, alternate concert; and accompanied with the symphonious movements of solemn attitudes and sacred dance. We have not time for examples, pleasant as the task would be to introduce them; but the question seems to be unanswerably settled, by the general and well-known history of these countries, and the exquisite specimens of their sacred lyrics which have descended to our own day; and which prove unequivocally that the language of the passions, of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, of compunction and triumph, are directly fitted to become the language of devotion; and that the purest and sublimest religion is capable of giving rise to the purest and sublimest poetry. The Bible, indeed, which is the first book we should prize and the last we should part with, is as much superior to all other books, whether of ancient or modern times, in its figurative and attractive dress, as it is in its weighty and oracular doctrines; in the hopes it enkindles and the fears it arrays. In its exterior as in its interior, in its little as in its great, it displays alike its divine original.