

LITERATURE.

THE SPIRIT OF THE SUMMER.

"Startle not my lonely gloom,
Shine not in my darkened room,
Spirit of the Summer!
Winter hoar and autumn sere
Shall from me have warmer cheer
Than thou, radiant comer!"

"Cold—with icicles for hair—
And Delay—who scarce can bear
Weight that inly presses—
Less do ye offend my sight
Than this vision of delight
With her false caresses!"

"Give me gold that will endure,
Or the grief that mocks at cure;
But no passing splendour—
Cruel mother of a bliss
Which when rising to her kiss
She doth so surrender!"

"Hence then, Summer! tho' thy breath
Woo with fragrance, and thy wreath
Ransack Nature's treasure,—
Though the enamoured zephyrs creep
Round thy robe until they sleep
Swooning with the pleasure!"

"Scarce dost thou attain thy prime,
Ere thine envious servant, Time,
Narrows daylight's glory:—
Flowery meshes that entwine
Thy feet, are hit too apt a sign
Of thy beauty's story."

Then, with voice that did exhale
Tenderness, She chid my wail:—
"Nought that's bright should perish!
Though my form desert thine eyes—
Know the beauty never dies
That the heart can cherish."

"Love me!—Though I quit thy side,
In thee shall my power abide;
And, my grace recalling,
Thou shalt loveliness perceive
In the October rose, and grieve
Gently for its falling."

"Friends that gather round thy hearth
When the snows envelope earth
Shall have greeting fonder,
If in summer twilights ye
Mutely strayed, and tenderly
In their hush did ponder."

"Angel faces Youth beholds
When the veil of Time unfolds,
Though so soon it closes,
Once beheld are known till death;
And on Memory's bosom Faith
Placidly reposes."

"Outward beauty thus awakes
Human love,—and but forsakes,
That the inward yearning,
By its passion may create
Glories rarer than await
Mortal sight's discerning."

"Bud of light! accept each ray
Would warm thee, though it flit away,
That thy bloom securing,
Whether come the sun or shower
Radiance thou around may'st pour
As thyself enduring!"

ELIZA COOK'S POETRY.

Her truest Portrait is in her lyric compositions; and while thousands are receiving with delight, and treasuring with care, the excellent engraving which makes her at home in their dwellings, I would stimulate them to make her at home also in their minds and memories, and to read her works not only for the enjoyment of particular songs and passages, but so as to realize the intellectual and moral companionship of the writer, and understand and appreciate her character.

This is, indeed, the noblest work of literature. It gives us, not only lessons of wisdom, but the friendship of the wise. No product of the mind is to be compared with the mind itself from which it flowed. The emanation is insignificant compared with its source; but it leads us towards that source. Even a solitary ray of light guides the gaze to the sun. The perception of individual character in a work is the best good we derive from the best work. It renders an isolated gratification of taste subservient to the wildest and noblest influences on the heart and life.

This philosophising, which almost every reader practices, in a greater or less degree; though often without being aware of it until the critic comes with his explanation, is our compensation for the change introduced by the Press—the one small evil in the vast ocean of

good created by that invention. A book is in itself a cold thing. To have Plato's Epilogues in print is poor work compared with gathering round the Sage in the groves of Academe, and catching from his lips the living accents. "I sing," says the modern Bard, speaking to the eye alone, by the help of type-founders, paper-makers, compositors, ink balls, folding, and stitching. Of old, the Bard struck no figurative lyre, nor chanted with fictitious voice; but his fingers drew forth real melody to the enchanted ear, and his inspired tones went thrilling to the heart. The song and the singer were one, as they have rarely been in later times. For the charm thus lost, we must make up, as we can, in other ways. The painter's and graver's art does something; the reader's mind must do the rest. It is to stimulate the minds of readers to such an operation that these criticisms are appended to the portrait bestowed upon our subscribers.

Eliza Cook is just the writer to be at home with, and to make at home with ourselves. The spirit of home pervades her compositions. Every household object has its song; from the kitchen to the garret, and every flower of the adjoining garden or of the field beyond. True, her imagination will sometimes soar with the lark above the clouds; or skim the ocean, in calm or storm, to bask in the golden light of oriental regions; but her heart untravelled, fondly turns to home; and like the lark, from the loftiest flight, she drops into her nest. Yes, there she is; in 'the Room of the Household'; you may see her by 'the Rushlight'; in the 'Old Arm Chair'; the 'Grandfather's Stick' is by, a sacred relic; she has been gathering 'Buttercups and Daisies,' or 'Blue Bells in the Shade,' or sporting with 'Old Pincher'; and the 'Murray Plaid' is thrown by, with the 'Old Straw Hat,' and she is musing on childish times, when she swung on the 'Farm Gate,' or wore 'Red Shoes,' and played at 'Tom Tiddler's Ground.' People send their cards with Mr. and Mrs. Such-an-one at home on such a night; but Eliza Cook is always at home, and every where with all who deserve it. The reader that has no relish for her Songs ought not to have a home, and has no proper conception of the meaning of the word. Her card or motto might be 'Poetry at Home.'

Perhaps it was one of the pieces whose subjects have just been enumerated that suggested to a critic in a splenetic mood the not very felicitous sarcasm of calling these lyrics 'Dunstable stuff.' And yet the application was better than its author intended. The straw hats of Dunstable are very serviceable for a long country ramble. On a warm summer's day they are pleasant and familiar things; and they wear well to the very last. If that is a sneer, what would be praise? False criticism, like the false prophet, unwittingly blesses where it meant to curse. The Poetess may sing defyingly,

And if one bay-leaf fall to me,
I'll stick it firm and fast in thee,
My Old Straw Hat.

There are vulgar smatterers who will think such themes 'shocking low,'—they can reciprocate no sentiment in a less costly attire than silks and satins. They feel neither Poetry nor pathos beneath the Peerage. The muse, as they suppose, only 'dwells in marble halls.' Every thing about her must be Eastern antique. They are in raptures with the bulbul, and scorn the skylark.—In the Cymar they make a shift see more than in English costume. They are profoundly classical in taste, and know the latin for three-cocked hat. Any weapon more modern than a spear is spurious in verse. In vain people are told, but it is the fact, nevertheless, that the wellspring of all poetry is in the common human heart. It may gush forth and overflow upon the most familiar articles of cottage furniture. All the great poets of classical antiquity were homely. Virgil poetized his farm-yard; with Homer we sit down to heroic cookery and feasting, which show that fingers were made before forks. Transfer this dandysim to the East (of the world, and not of temple-bar), and Orientalisms are no longer rich and rare. All subjects are elevated, on which Poetry alights, and leaves the radiant traces of its footsteps. A song upon jumpers may have higher inspiration than one on old Olympus. 'The Poet,' says Byron, 'can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.' And if it be asked, why select such topics, when there are many with dignified associations, the reply is ready. The choice is a championship of human nature, in its most frequent mode of existence. It ministers to the millions, and feeds them with Angels' food. The divine is brought to the cottage-door; and tarries there, like a celestial guest of old, in the Patriarch's tent. Put an Eliza Cook, by her portrait and her poems, in the homeliest abode, and you give new feelings, a new sense, to its inmates. They look around; they sing, they weep, they sympathize, and hope; and a glory unperceived before plays over all the familiar objects of their habitation. Monsieur Jourdain (in Moliere's celebrated comedy of the Bourgeois) was astonished that he had spoken prose all his life without knowing it. The millions find that they have breathed an atmosphere of poetry with like unconsciousness. The writer who works this wonder is a public benefactor. The multitude, harmonized by song, which comes home to their business and bosoms, realize the fable of Orpheus and the brutes.

The homeliest themes are not the least favourable, perhaps the most of all, to true delicacy and refinement of feeling. Miss Cook's published works may be confidently referred to, in proof of this fact; she is never mawkish, affected, or what is called sentimental. The

emotion she expresses or excites, is always sound and healthy. It has a clear tone, and rings like a bell. There is a sturdy morality in it, often made tender, but never weak, by susceptibility. Happily the tendency of her compositions is not matter of mere speculation. The transported convict, weeping over his tattered copy of 'Our Native Song,' supersedes or silences a thousand criticisms, and is a nobler trophy than warrior ever won. After that anecdote, (vide Preface to 'Melaia,') it may be said, as Dr. Johnson said of the 'Elegy in a Country Church-yard,' 'Had Gray written often thus, it had been vain to blame and useless to praise him.' Gray did not often write like the Elegy; Eliza Cook always writes like 'Our Native Song.'

How delicious is that cluster of reminiscences which makes poetry of an accumulation of ballad titles in the lines on 'Old Songs,'—

Old songs, what heaps I knew,
From "Chevy Chase" to "Black Eyed Sue,"
From "Flow thou regal purple stream,"
To "Rousseau's" melancholy "Dream."
I loved the pensive "Cabin Boy,"
With earnest truth and real joy;
My warmest feelings wander back,
To greet 'Tom Bowling' and 'Poor Jack';
And, Oh! 'Will Watch,' the 'Smuggler' bold,
My plighted troth thou'lt ever hold!

I doated on the 'Auld Scot's sonnet,'
As though I'd worn the plaid and bonnet;
I went abroad with 'Sandy's Ghost';
I stood with Bannockburn's brave host,
And proudly toss'd my curly head,
With 'Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled.'
I shouted 'Comin' thro' the Rye,'
With restless step and sparkling eye;
And chased away the passing frown
With 'Bonnie ran the Burnie down.'

Here was inspiration. The enjoyment was the prestige of power. Appreciation was the herald of production.

Old songs! old songs! ye fed, no doubt,
The flame that since has broken out;
For I would wonder far and lone,
And sit upon the moss-wrapt stone,
Conning 'old songs' till some strange power
Breathed a wild magic on the hour;
Sweeping the pulse chords of my soul,
As winds o'er sleeping waters roll.
'Twas done—the volume was unsealed—
The hallowed mission was revealed.
Old Songs called up a kindred tone;
An echo started—'twas my own.
Joy, pride, and riches swell'd my breast,
The 'lyre' was mine, and I was blest.

Rightly was the vocation construed; and its real worth and nobleness were justly understood.

Oh! who shall say the ballad line
That stirs the heart is not divine?
And where's the heart that would not dare
To place such song beside the prayer?

I have dwelt chiefly on the songs of Eliza Cook, because they are her most characteristic compositions; and those in which she renders the most peculiar and valuable service to our popular literature. England is not, like Scotland, or Ireland, a land of song. Our poverty, in this respect, has been obvious and deplorable.

Anterior to Barry Cornwall, the prince of English songsters, the name of Dibdin is the most conspicuous. And Dibdin profaned his powers to make himself a recruiting officer for the Navy. He varnished over the foul oppression and cruelties which at that time (the service is wonderfully improved since) made a sailor's life, to thousands, scarcely endurable, and rendered many a man-of-war 'a floating hell.' The cajolery of Dibdin co-operated with the violence of the press gang. If the discrepancy between the song and the ship be now much less than it was, we may thank the influence of such principles and feelings as are exhibited in the volumes before us. They have made the old sea songs come true at last. And if it have long been known that 'the earth hath bubbles as the water hath;' the songs of Eliza Cooke, by the side of those of Dibdin, show that the earth also hath poetry as the water hath; nor will the land service yield to the Marine in all that constitutes the loveliness and power of song.

Poetry began her work in the world by chanting oracles and laws, assuming to be the voice of God to man, dictating his politics and religion. And then she sang of savage wars, the shock of battle, and the slain dragged at the victor's chariot wheels. From scenes of blood she sought relief in the pastoral strain, piping to listening flocks the artless loves of shepherds. In minstrel guise, she entered baronial halls, reciting legends of the feats of feudal chiefs. Half turning from the banquet, she crowned the revellers with flowers, that wine and luxury might be restrained from excess by dainty phantasies. Her inspiring voice has ever and anon sounded the march of patriotism for the assertion of right. And now, thanks to such writers as the one whose likeness we contemplate, she sojourns in cottages and lowly homes, irradiating them by her presence, which, in its influences, makes them, though all the winds of heaven may whistle through their walls, fairer than fabled bowers, statelier than the palace, grander than the castle, and holier than the temple.