

**THE POETRY OF
LIFE. IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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The Poetry of Life. In Two Volumes. Vol. I by Sarah Stickney

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SARAH STICKNEY

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PREFACE.

IN offering to the attention of the public, two volumes on the poetry of life, some apology seems necessary for prefixing to my book a title of such indefinite signification. If poetry be understood to mean mere versification, and life mere vitality, it would be difficult indeed to establish their connexion with each other. The design of the present work is to treat of poetic feeling, rather than poetry; and this feeling I have endeavoured to describe as the great connecting link between our intellects and our affections; while the customs of society, as well as the license of modern literature, afford me sufficient authority for the use of the word life in its widely extended sense, as comprehending all the functions, attributes, and capabilities peculiar to sentient beings.

Whatever may be the opinion of the public respecting the manner in which my task has been exe-

cuted, the enjoyment it has afforded to the writer, in being the means of a renewed acquaintance with the principles of intellectual happiness, is already in possession; and I have only to wish that the reader may be induced to seek the same enjoyment, in a more spiritual intercourse with nature, and a more profound admiration of the beauty and harmony of the creation.

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THE
POETRY OF LIFE.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POETRY.

THAT the quality of modern Poetry is a subject of general complaint with those who would purchase—that the price affixed to it by the judgment of the public is equally complained of by those who would sell—in short, that Poetry is at present “a drug in the market,” is a phrase too hackneyed, too vulgar, and too frequently assented to, to need repetition here; except as an established fact, the nature, cause, and consequence of which, I propose endeavouring to point out in the following pages.

Wherever a taste for Poetry exists, there will be a desire to read as well as to write; to receive as well as to impart that enjoyment which poetic feeling affords. In other cases of marketable produce, the supply is found to keep pace with the demand, except when physical causes operate against it. If the poets of the present day have “written themselves out,” as the common and unmeaning expression is, what, with a rapidly increasing population, should hinder the springing up of fresh poets to delight the

world? The fact is, that most of the living poets have betaken themselves to Prose as a more lucrative employment, thus proving, that the taste for Poetry is lamentably decreasing in the public mind; and while on one hand, genius is weeping over her harvest "whitening in the sun," without hope of profit to repay the toil of gathering in the golden store; on the other, criticism is in arms against less sordid adventurers, and calls in no measured terms upon the mighty minstrels of past ages to avenge Parnassus of her wrongs.

Three different motives operate in stimulating men to write Poetry: the love of fame, the want of money, and an internal restlessness of feeling, which is too indiscriminately called genius. The first of these ceases with the second, for without the means of circulation, there can be no hope of fame. The third alone operates in the present day, and small, indeed, is the recompense bestowed in these ungrateful times upon the poets who write because they cannot help it. Yet after all, is not this the true and legitimate method by which the genuine coin of genius is moulded? The love of fame is a high and soul-stirring principle, but still it is degraded with the stigma of selfish aggrandizement, and who does not feel that a shade is cast upon those expressions of noble sentiment, which bear the impress of having been prepared and set forth solely for public approbation. The want of money is, indeed, a potent stimulus. How potent let the midnight labours of the starving poet testify. The want of money may, it is true, urge onward towards the same goal as the love of fame, but the one operates, as it were, from behind, by the painful application of a goad; while the other attracts, and fascinates by the brightness of some object before, which too often proves to be an ignis fatuus in the distance. But there is within the human mind an active and powerful principle, that awakens the dormant faculties,