

**EUTHANASIA: A POEM IN FOUR
CANTOS OF SPENSERIAN METRE
ON THE DISCOVERY OF THE
NORTH-WEST PASSAGE BY SIR
JOHN FRANKLIN, KNIGHT**

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Euthanasia: A Poem in Four Cantos of Spenserian Metre on the Discovery of the North-West Passage by Sir John Franklin, Knight by Erasmus H. Brodie

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ERASMUS H. BRODIE

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EUTHANASIA:

CANTO THE FIRST.

WITH A CHRISTMAS SONG.

LONDON
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NEW-STREET SQUARE

EUTHANASIA:

A POEM IN FOUR CANTOS OF SPENSERIAN METRE

ON

THE DISCOVERY OF THE NORTH-WEST PASSAGE

BY SIR JOHN FRANKLIN, KNIGHT,

'the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea' (*Coleridge*).

BY

ERASMUS H. BRODIE

ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORS OF SCHOOLS.

LONDON:

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1866.

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P R E F A C E.

HERE are two, I scarcely know what to call them, notions or prejudices, which the writer of a poem of any length and pretensions in these days may expect to hear quoted. The first of these is that somewhat vague and general assertion that our age is not a poetic age, that rather it is a great epoch for practical efforts and results of every sort, a hard-working utilitarian time, devoted to manufacturing, engineering, trade, commerce, and political economy, but alien in its instincts and tendencies from poetry, with neither leisure to cultivate it nor inclination to attend to it. No very logical and precise answer can be here attempted to such a statement. 'Solvitur ambulando.' For my own part (let others answer the objection as they think best), so far as I claim to be a poet, and may therefore feel an interest in the truth of this matter, I will plead my belief that, even if all this be granted, still Poetry 'is not dead, but sleepeth;' that, so long as our human nature and instincts remain

the same, so long as the world continues to be, what, in one form or another, it always has been, a great stage of acting and suffering, of sublime endurance, lofty resolution, passionate endeavour and perpetual struggle, so long will true poetry, which is the verbal incarnation of these deeds and thoughts and scenes, command attention, and awake a faithful echo in man's heart. But the poetry must be good in its quality, true and human, and not merely beautiful, but, as Horace says, sweet also with a certain winning charm and grace, such as lovely flowers seem to have, independently of their beauty of form and colour.

So I have wished, nay so I have striven, to write; with what success let others judge.

The second notion, alluded to above, is more specific and precise, and cannot be so easily dismissed. This does not object to poetry, but to the poem, as regards the subject chosen, and asserts that no poem of any length, that is of the epic nature, can be really great or interesting, unless the event of which it treats be distant and remote, in time at least, if not also in place.

Since all the greatest epic poets, to say nothing of the great dramatic poets of Greece, favour this belief by the example of their practice, selecting for their subjects events either much anterior to their own times or altogether removed from the terrestrial sphere—while Spenser, who really described the moving panorama of his own age or of that immediately previous and passing away, transported his scene to Fairy Land, and wrapped his characters in allegory, thus obtaining the same effect—no one can deny that the notion which I have referred

to must be based mainly on truth. Doubtless, to quote the well-known line, in this case, as in many others,

'Distance lends enchantment to the view.'

The exalted imagination sees with very different eyes the common occurrences of every-day life, so seemingly dull and trivial, so seemingly insipid and tasteless (though even from these our best novelists can paint charming pictures and construct tales of exciting interest), and those great events of historic import 'Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past,' which have long found their recognised place of honour in the vast drama of the ages. Doubtless, looking up from the hum and buzz of the world around him, and fixing his gaze on some memorable exploit of the mighty dead—'The Crusades,' 'The Discovery of America,' 'The Death of Montezuma,' or 'The Fall of Wallenstein'—the poet feels himself free from shackles and fetters, nay even from certain technical difficulties and obvious hindrances, which might hamper and impede him in treating of the present, especially when at once so well-informed and so minutely critical as is ours to-day.

The boundless expanse of the infinite, the Alpine elevation, the larger atmosphere and region of grandeur and sublimity, to which the poet, bent to raise, enlarge, inform, purify the souls of others, must constantly ascend and re-ascend, can doubtless be more easily reached from a starting-post selected on account of its very nearness to those spheres, than from one surrounded by living voices, and, as it were, in the heart of modern London. Yet poems have been written, and far from unsuccessful