

MUSIC AND POETRY

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Music and poetry by Sir Redmond Barry

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SIR REDMOND BARRY

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AND POETRY**

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AND

P O E T R Y.

BY SIR REDMOND BARRY.

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LECTURE
ON
MUSIC AND POETRY.

"For eloquence the soul, song charms the sense."

Par. Lost, II., 556.

"Give me some music—music, moody food
Of us that trade in love."

Antony and Cleopatra, Act II., S. 5.

"Music, Ho! music, such as charmeth sleep."

Midsommer Night's Dream, Act IV., S. 1.

"Preposterous ass! that never read so far
To know the cause why music was ordained.
Was it not to refresh the mind of man
After his studies or his usual pain?"

Taming the Shrew, Act III., S. 1.

"Vacue carmina mentis opus."

Ovid, Sappho to Phaon.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—Some time since I had the honour of addressing, to an audience assembled in this Hall, a Lecture on that department of the "Fine Arts" which embraces Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting. I now propose to offer for your consideration some remarks upon Music and Poetry, which will complete the introduction of the subject.

This distribution and separate examination may be considered not inappropriate, inasmuch as the ideas respecting the different branches presented for investigation are conveyed to the mind through distinct organs; and as the impressions forced upon us on beholding a stately edifice, an agreeable picture, or a life-like statue, are originally produced by the reflections on the retina of the eye, so the effects generated by the performance of a thrilling strain of enlivening music, or the luxurious melody of harmonious sounds, as

well as by the recitation of sonorous numbers, or of affecting verses, owe their origin to the pulsations on the tympanum of the ear.

In this I may be, perhaps, restricting too narrowly the channel of communication between the mind and this external sense, for though the accurate may insist that the impulses caused by hearing pleasing music and excellent poetry pass solely through the medium of the ear, we are all conscious of having experienced on such occasions a dilatation of the frame, a sympathetic vibration of the system, as if the body were an instrument drinking in the sounds at every pore, and we may be induced on reflection to admit that the poet uses no hyperbole when he exclaims—

"I was all ear,
And took in strains that might create a soul
Under the ribs of death."

As sight and hearing are produced by operations of the eye and ear less perceptible to feeling and less obvious than those which employ the other senses, and, as it were, without any palpable resistance by or pressure on those organs, and as they minister more extensively and effectually to the intellectual portion of man than the other external senses, they are well deserving of the poetic epithets and attributes by which they have been distinguished.

One has been appropriately designated "the window of the soul;"* and who can remain insensible to the lamentations of the illustrious Milton for his loss of sight, and his pathetic and eloquent mourning over a privation to him so severe?† or who is unaffected by the earnest pleading of Prince Arthur, to which the ruthless Hubert yields at last?‡

The other has been styled by Sophocles "the fountain of

* *Animi fenestras oculi et omnis improba cupiditas per oculos tanquam canales introit.*—*Salvianus, de Providentia*, Lib. 3. *Burk, McL.*, Part 3, S. 2., M. 3, Subd. 3.

† *Paradise Lost*, Bk. III. *Samson Agonistes*.

‡ *Shakspeare, King John*, Act IV., Sc. 1.

hearing.* Shakspeare, indeed, employs a somewhat homely expression when he causes Imogen to say to Pisanio, using a like figure of speech—

"Love's counsellor should fill the bores of hearing
To the smothering of the sense."

Cymbeline, Act III., 8. 2.

Yet who is there who is not touched by the purely poetical delicacy of the description of deafness, one of the most distressing afflictions of old age, when it is said by the Preacher—

"The daughters of music are brought low."

Eccles. xii. 4.†

Distinct senses being appealed to by the different branches of the Fine Arts, it is worthy of the subject to consider in what manner these respective arts affect the mind. It must be remembered that language, the vehicle for the communication of ideas, is twofold—natural and artificial. Every animal, in common with man, is endowed with the former, to enable it to express, in an intelligible manner to its own species, such wants, sensations, or desires as are necessary for its preservation or the continuance of its kind. It is both voluntary and involuntary, and not merely vocal, but consists also in assumed or spontaneous postures or gestures, as well as certain uncontrollable indications.

Thus Pity, while it sheds an air of benevolence on the countenance, fills the eye with a sympathetic humidity; ‡

* *Edip.*, *Tyr.*, 1387.

† For a still more remote allegorical expression see Hosea xiv. 2—"Take with you words and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously. So will we render the calves of our lips," i.e., sacrifice of thanksgiving. There is also a beautiful image of the same nature in Isaiah lvii. 19—"I create the fruit of the lips," i.e., speech.

‡ "Les Larmes sont le langage muet de la douleur."

VOLTAIRE, *PAÏL. Dic.*, in Voc. "Larmes."

"Speak, then, for speech is morning to the mind,
It spreads the beautiful images abroad,
Which else lie furled and clouded in the soul."

DRYDEN'S *Duke of Guise*, Act II., Sc. 1.

Mollissima corda

Humano generi dare se Natura fatetur,

[Qua

Tears betray the extremes between the most rapturous joy and the most poignant grief; while Appetite, arousing a sensual craving, overcasts the face with an animal glow, and supplies a redundant moisture to the lips. Fear strikes upon the features a hue of pallor—

“Nay, guiltiness will speak,
Though tongues were out of use.”

Othello, Act V., S. 1.

Modesty calls up a mantling blush upon the cheek—

“Heaven kindly gives our blood a moral flow,
Bids it ascend the glowing cheek, and there
Upbraid that little heart's inglorious aim
Which stoops to court a character from man.”

YOUNG, *Night VII.*

Shame suffuses it with a deeper and incarnate dye; by the restless movements and ever-changing positions, the quivering lip, the faltering tongue, the wandering and unsteady eye, guilt stands confessed in self-convicted deformity.

And as these natural signs form an universal language, which no diversity of speech or difference of race can confound, the humble or abject tone of supplication, and the acute accent of pain, the attitude or aspect assumed to inspire confidence or create distrust, to express humility or arrogance, to denote reverence or detestation, are as well

Quæ lacrymas dedit; hæc nostri pars optima sensus.
Plorare ergo jubet causam lugentis amici,
Squaloremque rei, pupillum ad jura vocantem
Circumscriptorem, cujus manantia, fletu.
Ora puellares faciunt incerta capilli.

Nature imperio gemimus, cum funus adultæ
Virginis occurrit, vel terra clauditur infans,
Et minor igne rogi.

Juv. Sat. V., 131.

Omnis enim notus animi suum quemdam a natura habet vultum et sonum et gestum, totumque corpus hominis et ejus omnis vultus omnesque voces, ut nervi in fidibus, ita sonant, ut a motu animi quoque sunt pulsæ. Nam voces ut chordæ sunt intentæ, quæ ad quemque tactum respondeant, acuta, gravis, cita, tarda, magna, parva; quæ tamen inter omnes est suo quoque in genere mediocritas. Atque etiam illa sunt ab his delapsa plura genera, lenis, asperum, contractum, diffusum; continenti spiritui, intermisso, fractum, scissum; flexo sono attenuatum, inflatum. Nullum est enim horum simillimum generum, quod non arte ac moderatione tractetur.—
Cicero, de Orat., III. 57.

understood by the savage of the wilderness as by the most accomplished courtier.

The latter, artificial language, is peculiar to man, and notwithstanding the force of the learned arguments advanced in the debates between the ancient Stoic and Platonic philosophers—

“Utrum nomina rerum sint natura an impositione”—

“Whether words be assigned by some inherent principle of our nature or determined by mutual agreement,”—it is now generally received that as a system it is purely conventional. It springs from a particular compact by which it is resolved that a certain symbol shall be recognised as the representative of an idea.

Now, it is clear that the natural language is confined to the passions or sufferings in the abstract; it admits of but a limited vocabulary; it cannot enter into nor express the multifarious refinements of ideas which the gradually progressive advancement of mankind from a state of nature to a high state of civilisation has called into being. It must, therefore, hold a rank inferior to that which is the offspring of the human mind, advanced by the most assiduous cultivation.

But these arts may, without injustice, be classified as adopting these different modes of addressing the intellectual faculties through the external senses.

Architecture, an original science though it be, and without a prototype in nature, raises in us ideas of magnitude, grandeur, solidity, durability, proportion, lightness, convenience, or the reverse.

Sculpture, an imitative art, which owes its chief excellence to veracity, and in which one solid substance is made to represent another, in consequence of the nature of the materials in use and the severity and simplicity of its style, is restricted as to subjects within a limited range, which it may not transgress without not only violating its own prescribed rules, but displeasing or shocking the beholder. In its enchanting works, it is true, we are presented with the most perfect models of the human frame in the most