

**POWHATAN: A
METRICAL ROMANCE,
IN SEVEN CANTOS**

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Powhatan: a metrical romance, in seven cantos by Seba Smith

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SEBA SMITH

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A METRICAL ROMANCE,
IN SEVEN CANTOS.

BY SEBA SMITH.

"He cometh to you with a tale, that holdeth children from play and old men from
the chimney-corner."—*Sir Philip Sidney.*

NEW-YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, CLIFF-STREET.
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TO THE
YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES,
IN THE HOPE THAT HE MAY DO SOME GOOD IN HIS DAY AND GENERATION,
BY ADDING SOMETHING TO THE SOURCES OF RATIONAL
ENJOYMENT AND MENTAL CULTURE,
THIS VOLUME IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
BY THE AUTHOR.

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P R E F A C E .

"POETRY is a mere drug," say the publishers; "bring us no more poetry, it won't sell."

"Poetry is a terrible bore," say a majority of the dear public; "it is too high-flown; we can't understand it."

To all this, we are tempted to reply in the language of doctor Abernethy to one of his patients. The good old lady, when the doctor entered the room, raised her arm to her head, and drawing her face into a very painful expression, exclaimed, "Oh, oh! O dear, Doctor, it almost kills me to lift my arm up so; what shall I do?"

"Well, madam," said the doctor, gravely, "then you must be a very great fool to lift your arm up so."

Leaving the reader to make the application, we hasten to deny the premises assumed by the publishers and a portion of the public. What they say, is not true of *poetry*; it is in direct contradiction to the experience of the world in all ages and all nations, for thousands of years. But it may be true, and *is* true, of endless masses of words that are poured forth from the press under the *name* of poetry. But we do not believe, that genuine poetry, that which is

worthy of the name, is either "a drug," or "too high-flown" to be enjoyed and understood by the mass of the reading public.

"The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there."

Poetry like that, will always find readers and admirers among all classes, whether high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned. True poetry is the unsophisticated language of nature—so plain and simple, that he that runs may read. In proof of this, it is found, that among the writings of popular authors, those poems most marked for simple and natural language, other things being equal, are always the most popular. There must be taste and judgment in the selection of subjects, for many subjects are in their nature unsuited to the true spirit of poetry.

The author of *Powhatan* does not presume to claim for his production the merit of good and genuine poetry; nor does he pretend to assign it a place in the classes or forms into which poetry is divided. He has chosen to call it a metrical romance, as a title of less pretension than that of poem; and he is perfectly willing that others should call it by whatever name they please. Whatever may be its faults, they must rest solely upon the author. They cannot be chargeable to the subject, for that is full of interest, and dignity, and poetry. Nor can they be palliated by the plea of hasty composition; for he has had the work on his

hands at intervals for several years, though to be sure something more than half of it has been written within the year past. Of one thing the author feels confident; but whether it may be regarded as adding to, or detracting from, the merit of the work, he knows not; he believes it would be difficult to find a poem that embodies more truly the spirit of history, or indeed that follows out more faithfully many of its details. Of the justness of this remark, some evidence may be found in the notes attached to the work.

Finally, with regard to its merits, the test by which the author desires to be tried, is the common taste of *common readers*. If *they* shall read it with pleasure, and if the impression made by its perusal shall induce them to recur to it again with renewed delight, he will care little for the rules by which critics may judge it, but will find satisfaction in the assurance that he has added something honorable to the literature of his country.

New York, January, 1841.