

SONNETS

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649708918

Sonnets by John Eagles

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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JOHN EAGLES

SONNETS

S O N N E T S

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BY THE

REV. JOHN EAGLES, M.A.

OXON.

AUTHOR OF "THE SPECTATOR" ETC.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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TO
The Memory
OF
JOHN KENYON, ESQ.

TO WHOM, HAD HE LIVED,
THIS VOLUME WOULD HAVE BEEN DEDICATED,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF
HIS LONG AND UNVARYING FRIENDSHIP WITH THE AUTHOR,
BEGUN IN BOYHOOD,
RENEWED AND PERFECTED IN MATURER YEARS,
AND INTERRUPTED ONLY BY DEATH.

Z. K.

February 19, 1858.

P R E F A C E.

THE Sonnets in the present volume were written during the last thirty years; many of them have appeared in the pages of *Blackwood's Magazine*, but as several remained unpublished, the whole are now collected. In a review of the Sonnets* of his friend, the Rev. Charles Strong, Mr Eagles introduced the following remarks on the structure of that species of composition:—

“ Poets, in truth, are a disinterested race. They delight in adding to a manufacture that does not go off. All write Sonnets; and though few are daring enough to send them forth unprotected to the chance of the world's blessing, you will seldom find a volume of poems in which some twenty or thirty, or more, do not each occupy its own page as the author's

* *Sonnets.* By the Rev. C. STRONG. London: Murray.

especial favourites. If they are, as we believe they are, the author's favourites, they ought to bear mostly the impress of genius, the concentrated essence of poetry in fourteen lines. They ought to charm universally, but the fashion at one time set in strongly against them.

“ Poetry shares the fate of painting ; school supercedes school, and master master, in public estimation. It is now the Flemish—now the Italian. Admiration and dislike are outrageous, and come by fits, while the subjects of them remain the same for ever.

“ Sanity of taste is a blessed thing. To lose the relish for anything good, is worse than never to have enjoyed it, for there is a void made in the mind, into which some imp of evil is sure to enter, begetting envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness ; and then nothing is easier than to decry the ‘ querulous sonneteer,’ though he ‘ discourse most excellent music.’

“ We look upon sonnets, when they are such as sonnets should be, as cabinet pictures, each one com-

plete in itself. Long poems, with their episodes and descriptive interpositions, may be whole galleries; but the sonnet is one highly-finished picture, richly framed, admitting, strictly speaking, but one prominent idea, one subject, every line tending to the point, as all within the frame would converge to the principal subject. They are cabinet pictures all of a size, the frames bespoken fourteen inches in the clear. One impression alone must be made, and it is not the arbitrary will of the composer, but the necessity of the subject, which must fix the termination of the fourteenth line. If it be good, you cannot add another line or thought, though with such evil intention you put your imagination on the rack: if good, it will be like an epigram in its completeness—the old Greek epigram—or the epigram in the modern sense, rejecting its smartness, which, if it were not an impertinent term, would yet express the necessity of the termination. It should show the pith and marrow of the whole in the concluding line: it is then that the maker lays down his pen

with the dictum of a master, ' Verbum non amplius addam.'

" Many Sonnets have this glowing defect, that they string together thoughts and images, nearly allied indeed, but without any *one* meaning in the social concord; and there is no reason why a whole family of ideas—all that are within the range of cousinship—should not be tacked on *ad infinitum*.

" Many professed sonnetteers have been remarkable for this defect: and it must be confessed they are wearisome enough when neither the understanding nor the ear are satisfied with the conclusion. Their performances are like patches cut out of a larger piece, and you would fain look behind the frame for what may be turned round.

" So Van Diest, the painter, used to treat his pictures: if any one admired a small part in one of large dimensions, he would cut it out, repatch his canvass, and work in again. Some of his pictures have many of these sonnet-marks; but I