



Golden Treasury

Francis Turner Palgrave

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An introduction to Palgrave's Golden Treasury is little less than an intro to poetry itself, and how shall one write that in a thousand words or so, or find anything to say that has not been said already in language that promises to be immortal? If we are to begin with definitions, we have them at right hand and at left, thicker than the autumnal leaves that strow the brooks in Vallomborsa; and it is futile to invent when one can quote so easily. With Somonides we can say that poetry is a speaking picture; with Dryden that it is articulate music; with Dr. Johnson, bluntly, that it is invention. Or we can agree, vaguely, with Macaulay that we mean by poetry the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination; or announce, mystically with Yeats, that poetry is an endeavour to condense out of the flying vapors of the world an image of human perfection. Or we can call upon Wordsworth to testify that the end of poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure, and that poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. Would we be prosaic with Bridges, we can say that the conditions the perfect poem must fulfill are: First, the right words; secondly, those words in the right order; thirdly, the agreeable sound of them in sequence. Would we be idealistic with Arnold, we can subscribe to the dictum that poetry is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth. Or, if it is eloquence we crave, we can turn to Shelley, and listen while he tells us that a poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.

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