

FIVE THOUSAND POEMS

There have been collected in a cluster nearly five thousand big and little American poems--all that diligent and long-continued research could lay hands on! The author of 'Old Grimes is Dead' commenced it, more than fifty years ago; then the cluster was pass'd on and accumulated by C. F. Harris; then further pass'd on and added to by the late Senator Anthony, from whom the whole collection has been bequeath'd to Brown University. A catalogue (such as it is) has been made and publish'd of these five thousand poems--and is probably the most curious and suggestive part of the whole affair. At any rate it has led me to some abstract reflection like the following.

I should like, for myself, to put on record my devout acknowledgment not only of the great masterpieces of the past, but of the benefit of all poets, past and present, and of all poetic utterance--in its entirety the dominant moral factor of humanity's progress. In view of that progress, and of evolution, the religious and esthetic elements, the distinctive and most important of any, seem to me more indebted to poetry than to all other means and influences combined. In a very profound sense religion is the poetry of humanity. Then the points of union and rapport among all the poems and poets of the world, however wide their separations of time and place and theme, are much more numerous and weighty than the points of contrast. Without relation as they may seem at first sight, the whole earth's poets and

poetry--en masse--the Oriental, the Greek, and what there is of Roman--the oldest myths--the interminable ballad-romances of the Middle Ages--the hymns and psalms of worship--the epics, plays, swarms of lyrics of the British Islands, or the Teutonic old or new--or modern French--or what there is in America, Bryant's, for instance, or Whittier's or Longfellow's--the verse of all tongues and ages, all forms, all subjects, from primitive times to our own day inclusive--really combine in one aggregate and electric globe or universe, with all its numberless parts and radiations held together by a common centre or verteber. To repeat it, all poetry thus has (to the point of view comprehensive enough) more features of resemblance than difference, and becomes essentially, like the planetary globe itself, compact and orbic and whole. Nature seems to sow countless seeds--makes incessant crude attempts--thankful to get now and then, even at rare and long intervals, something approximately good.