

polytheism, or war, or amorous intrigues, or intemperance, or to secure favor from the great, by flattering their vanity. Indeed, though the Old Testament is full of poetry, and though it has ever been employed in the religious worship of Jews and Christians, yet it seems not to have been imagined till lately, that this delightful art had been perverted and degraded by being employed to sustain heathenism, and to pander to intemperance, licentiousness, and war; nor that it could ever be made thoroughly Christian, and thus exalted in character and effect. The great poets of antiquity were so fully heathen, and some of them, as Anacreon and Horace, had woven so many garlands for the intoxicating cup, that it seems to have been taken for granted that the muse could never be made to pour forth numbers as sweet and enticing on loftier and purer themes. Even the splendid efforts of Milton and Dante did not open the eyes of Christians to the true use of poetry. Indeed, the polytheistic and warlike numbers of Homer and Virgil, and the bacchanalian songs of the ancient lesser poets, were piety and purity, compared to the philosophic blasphemy of Shelley, the atheism and profligacy of Byron and Moore, and — must I add? — the bacchanalian songs of Robert Burns. Furthermore, if it be true, as Milton affirmed, that a poet's life is itself a true poem, we shall be obliged sadly to swell the list of modern poems devoted to vice and irreligion. For when biography informs us that Addison, Prior, and Steele were intemperate, that Thomson was a voluptuary, Goldsmith dissipated, Sterne a decided sensualist, and that even Johnson could practise abstinence but not temperance, and when we know, that though Pope's constitution was too delicate to allow him to indulge in luxurious excesses, yet his writings show a bad preëminence of wantonness and indecency, we are led to exclaim with Milton, —