


***VARIOUS***



***ORACLES FROM  
THE POETS:  
A FANCIFUL  
DIVERSION FOR  
THE DRAWING  
ROOM***

**Various**

# **Oracles from the Poets: A Fanciful Diversion for the Drawing Room**

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# PREFACE.

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I was led to arrange "THE ORACLES FROM THE POETS," by observing the vivid interest taken by persons of all ages in a very common-place Fortune-Teller in the hands of a young girl. It occurred to me that I might avail myself of this love of the mysterious, for the intellectual enjoyment of my family circle.

Instead, however, of the pastime of a few days, it has been the work of every leisure moment for six months. The first movement was the pebble thrown into the stream; circle after circle formed, until I found, with old Thomas Heywood,

"My pen was dipt  
As well in opening each hid manuscript,  
As tracts more vulgar, whether read or sung  
In our domestic or more foreign tongue."

How rich these six months have been in the purest and highest enjoyment, I will not stop to say; but to be allowed to float in such an atmosphere, buoyed up with the sweetest sympathies of friends, may be conceived to be no common happiness. And now, with the hope of communicating a portion of this pleasure more extensively, I yield this volume up as a public offering, for the advancement of those

rational social enjoyments which seem to belong to the moral movement of the age.

I do not know how far early associations may have influenced me, but I distinctly recollect the first Oracle of my childhood. At the age of eight years I attended a female seminary in a village. The classes were allowed a half hour for recreation, and they usually played on the green within view of the academy building. One day I observed a group of girls of the senior class pass beyond the bounds and enter the church, which was opened for some approaching occasional service. I followed quietly. They walked through the aisle with agitated whispers, and ascended to the pulpit. Then each, in turn, opening the large Bible, laid a finger, with closed eyes, on a verse, and read it aloud, as indicating her fate or character.

I well remember the eagerness with which I listened on the stairs, for I was afraid to crowd into the pulpit with the *big* girls. As they retired, I entered. I can recall the timid feeling with which I glanced round the shadowy building, the awe with which I closed my eyes and placed my small finger on the broad page, and the faith with which I read my *Oracle*.

I must make an early apology for venturing to alter the tenses of authors so as to conform to answers. I tried the method of literal extracts, but they were deficient in spirit and directness. I can now only warn my readers not to quote the Oracles habitually, as exact transcripts, but resort to the originals. I have trembled as if it were sacrilege to turn thus the streams of Helicon into this little channel, but I hope the

evil may be balanced by the increased acquaintance of many with slighted authors.

I have not allowed myself to select from periodicals, though American journals contain perhaps more favorable specimens of our literature than the published volumes to which I have felt bound to confine myself.

My selections have extended so far beyond the limits of my plan, that I propose furnishing another volume, in the course of the year, with additional questions, including translations from popular authors. One question in the present volume, *To what have you a distaste or aversion?* is, I think, nearly exhausted, while its opposite, *What gratifies your taste or affections?* presents still an ample field for gleaning. Will this furnish any argument against those ascetics, who think misery preponderates over happiness? One fanciful question in the succeeding volume will be, *What is the name of your Lady-love?* and another, *Of him who loves you?*

I shall consider with respectful attention friendly suggestions made to me directly, or through my publishers, preparatory to the arrangement of another volume, particularly in bringing to view any poet, who, by accident, may have escaped attention.

I have been urged to communicate, in a preface, the literary results which have necessarily flowed from the examination and comparison of such a mass of poets, but the task is beyond the limits of this humble effort. It would, indeed, be a rich field for a Schlegel or De Stäel.

A few curious speculations, however, may present themselves to the most superficial critic. In Shakspeare, for

instance, so affluent in various delineations of character and personal appearance, I looked in vain for places of residence. There seemed not to be even a fair proportion of passages descriptive of musical sounds, hours, seasons, and (except in *The Winter's Tale*) of flowers.

In Wordsworth, scarcely a flower or musical sound is described. They are alluded to, but not painted out. The poetry of Crabbe, though abounding in numerous characters, could surrender almost none for my purpose, on account of their being woven into the general strain of his narratives. Shelley, Landon, and Howitt, are eminently the poets of flowers, while Darwin, with a whole *Botanic Garden* before him, and Mason, in his *English Garden*, gave me, I think, none that I conceived fairly entitled to selection.

Few passages of any sort, except those hackneyed into adages, could be gained from Milton, on account of the abstract, lofty, and continuous flow of his diction. Coleridge has corresponding peculiarities.

Keats and Shelley are the poets of the heavens. Byron, with faint exceptions, does not describe a flower, or musical sound, or place of residence.

The American poets, in contradistinction to their elder and superior brethren of the fatherland, display a more marked devotion to nature, with which a continual glow of religious sentiment aptly harmonizes.

But I am recalled by these lengthening paragraphs to my disclaimer, and only wish that an abler and more philosophical pen than mine could take my recent experience.

After a close examination of the earlier dramatic poets, though I have rescued from them some exquisite gems, it seems to me far from desirable that they should be brought forward as prominently as many of their wordy commentators desire. A kind of pure instinct in the British taste has placed Shakspeare without a brother on the throne. The fathers of dramatic poetry acted according to their light, but it was not the "true light." A few relics, selected with caution, may honor their memory, but we should be careful while warning our youth against the impurities of some modern poets, how we extol these vulgarities of a darker moral age.

Before parting I must ask clemency for classing all my authors among *Poets*, that great word so deservedly sacred, and to which I bow with deep reverence; but the Parnassus of my Oracles has many steps, and I cannot but feel kindly towards those, who sit gracefully even on the lower platform, nor apprehend that they will do more than look up deferentially to the laurel-crowned worthies at its summit. Besides, it has been the character of my taste, or perhaps philosophy, whenever literally or figuratively I gather a wreath of flowers, to twine the wild blossom as heartily as the exotic, and even insert a weed, if its color or contrast lends beauty to the combination;—and thus with my Oracles.

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- WELLS
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- MRS. WARE
- WILDE
- WHITMAN
- WILCOX
- WOODWORTH



The Game of the Oracles is composed of the following fourteen Questions, with sixty Answers each, numbered.

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## **DIRECTIONS**

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FOR THE GAME OF THE ORACLES FROM THE POETS.

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FOR A FORTUNE-TELLER WITH TWO PERSONS.

The person who holds the book asks, for instance, What is your character? The individual questioned selects any one of the sixty answers under that head, say No. 3, and the