

the inanimate world of phenomena than to the realities of active life, and to the inner and spontaneous emotions of the mind, the earliest, and, at the same time, the noblest directions of the poetic spirit were epic and lyric. In these artificial forms, descriptions of nature can only occur as incidental accessories, and not as special creations of fancy. As the influence of antiquity gradually disappeared, and as the bright beauty of its blossoms faded, rhetorical figures became more and more diffused through descriptive and didactic poetry. This form of poetry, which in its earliest philosophical, half-sacerdotal type, was solemn, grand, and devoid of ornament—as we see exemplified in the poem of Empedocles *On Nature*—by degrees lost its simplicity and earlier dignity as it became more strongly marked by a rhetorical character.

I may be permitted here to mention a few particular instances in illustration of these general observations. In conformity with the character of the Epos, we find the most attractive scenes of nature introduced in the Homeric songs merely as secondary adjuncts. “The shepherd rejoices in the stillness of night, in the purity of the sky, and in the starry radiance of the vault of heaven; he hears from afar the rush of the mountain torrent, as it pursues its foaming course swollen with the trunks of oaks that have been borne along by its turbid waters.”* The sublime description of the sylvan loneliness of Parnassus, with its somber, thickly-wooded and rocky valleys, contrasts with the joyous pictures of the many-fountained poplar groves in the Phæacian island of Scheria, and especially of the land of the Cyclops, “where meadows waving with luxuriant and succulent grass encircle the hills of unpruned vines.”† Pindar, in a dithyrambus in praise of Spring, recited at Athens, sings of “the earth covered with new-born flowers, when, in the Argive Nemæa, the first opening shoot of the palm announces the coming of balmy Spring.” Then he sings of Ætna as “the pillar of heaven, the fosterer of enduring snow;” but he quickly turns away

* *Ilias*, viii., 555–559; iv., 452–455; xi., 115–119. Compare, also, the crowded but animated description of the animal world, which precedes the review of the army, ii., 458–475.

† *Od.*, xix., 431–445; vi., 290; ix., 115–199. Compare, also, “the verdant overshadowing of the grove” near Calypso’s grotto, “where even an immortal would linger with admiration, rejoicing in the beautiful view,” v. 55–73; the breaking of the surf on the shores of the Phæacian Islands, v. 400–442; and the gardens of Alcinoüs, vii., 113–130. On the vernal dithyrambus of Pindar, see Böckh, *Pindari Opera*, t. ii., part ii., p. 575–579.