

not only the great but almost the sole criterion of the merits of administration; they make patriotism dwindle into parsimony. Yet in the eye of the enlightened politician, honour, ultimate security, public order, the power of giving pecuniary aid to suffering neighbours, hold a still higher rank. The authors alluded to confine themselves to vague charges of embezzlement, and clamor for radical reform, without examining and stating distinctly those points which would truly admit of amendment. Errors and irregularities prevail in the British system of finance to a less degree than in any other, but they are still considerable; and he who, scrutinizing every arrangement according to sound principles of political economy, should point out and press them on the attention of the legislature, would do a real and exemplary service. Nothing can be done by loose and vague generalities, and by calling for violent measures, which perhaps could not, and certainly would not be adopted.

The same presumption, the same determination to administer to the vilest passions of the lowest orders of society, the same affectation of intuitive sagacity and instinctive rectitude on subjects which have baffled the acutest intellect, and the most exalted genius, are observable in their attacks, sometimes blasphemous, and sometimes insidious on the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion. They frequently dismiss with a supercilious, but most probably a sardonic sneer, or in a tone of infallible decision, those important and obtrusive questions which have baffled the acuteness of a Paley, and defied the laborious investigation of a Newton and a Bentley. The doctrine of a Trinity in the hands of a skillful master like Cobbet, is of the most easy solution; the Examiner, treating to the evidence of an unblemished conscience, calmly sits down to the composition of weekly nonsense, and monthly dogrel, and intimates, *en passant*, that the devil is a very useful and entertaining being, that Moses was an idiot, and that the practice of public or private worship is an evidence of complete and incurable silliness. The sophistry and the witticisms of

these philosophers, whose wonderful talents and extensive knowledge overflow in a page of sophistry, or a line of abortive wit, all that Milton studied, or Crabtree worth enforced, become the models of humble imitation to their weekly brethren. The sagacious deductions and laborious rhapsody of Ecce Homo and Tom Paine, are familiarised to the unenlightened readers through the vehicle of a newspaper; and the purchaser who chances to be unwarily seduced into the perusal of a candid discussion on original sin, or the tenets of the Unitarians, is shocked or contaminated by all the insidious and malignant artifice of wanton infidelity. The punishment of Daniel Isaac Eaton, far from repressing or discouraging their repeated attacks on the Christian religion, on its professors, and on the national establishment, presents them an additional theme of declamation against the encroachments of ministers and judges on the liberty of the press. For the last twelve months the profaneness of Cobbet has been shrouded in the obscurity of politico-religious declamation, and while the people are corrupted beneath the mask of patriotism, their sophistry escapes its merited reward by its artful evasion of the statute.

I am, Sir, yours, &c. P. P.

(To be resumed.)
 "Living Poets," *Scourge*, 10 (Nov. 1815), 241-50.

LIVING POETS.

SIR,

WHEN I contrast the vigour of mind displayed by the writer in your last number, who analyzed the character of Wordsworth, with some of the opinions he expresses in that criticism, I find it difficult to believe that he delivered his real thoughts. He commences by doubting the accuracy of a proposition which few I apprehend would venture to deny, *viz.* "that the English muse has sunk into a state of hopeless dolage, and that her mightiest efforts are not to be compared with the vigor

and brilliance of the productions of elder times." What may be the causes of this declension is an inquiry of greater extent than I am at present disposed to prosecute; but of the declension itself I entertain no doubt. There are branches of literature in which we excel our ancestors. The researches of science have been extended, and illustrated by experiment, in such a manner as to reduce the theories of our predecessors almost to the dreams of children. Historical composition is the exclusive growth of the last sixty years. There was nothing in our language that could aspire to the dignity of history before the works of Hume, Robertson, Gibbon, Henry, and Stuart appeared. Philosophy also enlarged her boundaries within the same period. But in poetry, in works of fiction, in all that emanates from a fervid imagination and a creative fancy, our pretensions are poor indeed compared to those giants whose labours have descended to us.

Your correspondent says "there is nothing in the circumstances of modern society, but what should lead us to expect as great a display of poetical genius in our own as in any former age." I was a little surprised at reading this inconclusive position. To all human undertakings there are inevitable limits. We can but attain these limits; we cannot overleap them. The field that is already reaped, must be sown with fresh seed, ere it can be again productive: and they who follow must be content with a few scattered gleanings. Boundless as the excursive faculties of man may seem, it will be found in fact that he is confined to a very narrow space, and that when he can penetrate into no new regions, when he can astonish or delight by no novelties, he satisfies himself with working into new forms of elegance and variety the materials which have been already used. He who is deeply and familiarly conversant with the writings of Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, and a long et cetera, will find no difficulty in

have of good, is chiefly a modification of something they had given us before; and when they depart from their models it is only to disgust by affectation, or repel by absurdity. It would be easy to find in the moral and political progress of society an adequate cause for the superiority of our early poets: but to account for the inferiority of our living ones it is only necessary to remember that they have lived above a century too late. All that is really excellent they have found pre-occupied. I will boldly challenge the most devoted idolater of Southey, Walter Scott, or Wordsworth, to produce me a portion of any of their works that shall bear comparison with those that the most casual inspection of our early poets would immediately present. Even in the passages which your correspondent has selected as unequivocal proofs of the soaring genius of Mr. Wordsworth, what do they contain but childish simplicity, or tortured resemblances between the physical and moral world? He is in extacy, however, at the description of a child holding a shell to its ear. How would he contain his emotions if Mr. Wordsworth should describe all the amusements of a nursery, from Master Tommy on his rocking-horse, to Miss Nancy with her doll and mimic kitchen? He is penetrated with the same exquisite sensations of delight at another descriptive effusion which he extracts, where a "snow white ram" is seen upon a bank,

"And in the crystal stream,
Another, and the same most beautiful!"

This reminds me of a finished piece of nonsense in one of Mr. Wordsworth's minor poems:

"The swans on sweet St. Mary's lake
Float double; swan and shadow."

I will not extend this letter any further except to express my wonder that your correspondent should have penned the following sentence: "The names of Massinger, and Beaumont and Fletcher, vanish before those of a Sheridan." With

consent to place him by the side of Massinger, or the associated bards, and as to the others, I hold it absolute profanity to name them as competitors. To appropriate a witticism of the late Professor Porson, their works will be read and admired, *only* when those of Massinger, Ford, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Shirley, are forgotten: certainly not before.

I remain, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

October 5th, 1815.

W.

ON THE POETICAL CHARACTER OF LEONARD
WELSTED.

SIR,

THE pages of your interesting publication being equally devoted to the sallies of wit, and the enquiries of criticism, I apprehend you will feel no reluctance in giving admission to the present letter. The object of it is to rescue, from unmerited obloquy, the memory of a man of genius, who unfortunately happened to provoke the spleen of a satirist more remarkable for the bitterness than the truth of his invectives. He who could select the author of the Careless Husband as the hero of a poem which celebrates the glory of dunces, must be considered as no infallible judge of merit.

It must be allowed that many of the writers whom Pope, in the moment of irritation, or from the dictates of vanity, consigned to a station in his Dunciad, were persons of no ordinary talent, and who had no other claim to the angry and petulant notice of the satirist, but that they had opposed, censured, or ridiculed him. Among this number was Welsted, whose works exhibit many proofs of taste and genius; but he offended Pope, and therefore his reputation was to be sunk. This offence consisted of some sarcastic lines which Welsted wrote against the "What d'ye call it?" that celebrated abor-

tion of a celebrated satirist, Pope, in revenge, placed him in the Dunciad, and attacked him in his Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot. When the war was openly commenced, Welsted buckled on his shield, and marched against his antagonist. That he was no weak opponent let the following character of Pope testify:—

"Oh mighty rhymers, haste, new palms to seize,

Thy little, envious, angry genius tease.

Let thy weak, wilful head, unrein'd by art,

Obeys the dictates of thy flattering heart.

Divide a busy, fretful life, between

Smut, libel, sing-song, vanity, and spleen.

With long brew'd malice, warm thy languid page;

And urge delicious nonsense into rage.

Let bawdy emblems now thy hours beguile,

Now fustian epic, spicing Virgil's style;

To Virgil like, to Indian clay as delf,

Or Pulterley, drawn by Jervas, to herself.

Remains heap'd on remains, incessant may'st thou blot.

A little, trifling, pert, one knows not what.

With all thy might pursue, and all thy will,

That unobating thirst to scribble still,

Give'st at thy birth! the poetaster's dust,

False and unsat as the eunuch's just."

He knows little of Pope's character who can believe that he had these lines with indifference; and impartial truth must allow that the pen which could produce them was to be feared rather than despised.

The works of Welsted, which were collected and published in 1787, by John Nichols, to whom our native literature is indebted for many valuable accessions, consist of various essays in prose and verse. He was a man who had received a good classical education, as his translations from Longinus, Horace, and Tibullus, prove. He attempted the drama also, but much cannot be said in favor of his Dissembled Wanton, a comedy, though it met with some success, when first performed. It must be confessed, indeed, that in some of his early poems he afforded too much room for sportive criticism, by many feeble

lines, and re-iterated tautologies. The following, for instance, are selected from a poem on the victory of Oudenarde, which contains, however, many fine thoughts, happily and forcibly expressed.

“ Hang on their flight, and hover o’er their rear.”

“ Hot in pursuit, and eager in the chase.”

“ Resolves to stand the shock, and bear the fray.”

“ High, eminent, and all the ranks above.”

“ Though to an empire born, and destined to a throne.”

“ That fancied kingdom, and that fairy realm.”

If the reader examines these lines, he will find that the latter half of each of them contains only an iteration of the idea expressed in the first half. To “ hang on the flight of an army,” is surely “ to hover o’er their rear;” to be “ hot in pursuit,” is to be “ eager in the chase;” and he who is “ born to an empire,” may be considered as “ destin’d to a throne.” Faults such as these a young writer may commit; but when the critic is in search of errors, it cannot be supposed he will overlook them. The poem, however, which contains these blemishes, is not destitute of merit. The following lines, descriptive of the Duke of Marlborough’s exploits, may almost be considered as prophetic of our living hero, who transcends his great predecessor no less in military glory than in moral excellence.

“ Yes, still that ornament of virtue’s name,

That mighty favorite and friend of fame;

Shall, like great Cyrus, Heav’n’s immortal son,

Go on successful, as he first began.

Make haughty Galha’s proudest turrets bend,

And o’er the continent his arms extend :

A suffering monarch’s injur’d cause maintain,

Till he his empire has, her freedom, Spain :

That, thus defeating France’s vast designs,

We may not tremble with her western mines :

That the new world, no more, may vex the old,

Nor Europe’s freedom shake with India’s gold.”

Welsted possessed considerable powers of satire ; nor

do I think that any thing from his antagonist Pope, could be selected more felicitous in expression, or more musical in cadence, than the following description of a fashionable beauty in the reign of George I.

“ Our shining Pict* with borrow’d lustre reign,
And o’er our hearts, felonious conquest gain :

They buy the artful beauties which they wear,

And every nymph that is not poor, is fair.

To blend with skill the blushing red, is known,

And glaze the neck with lilies, not its own ;

To teach the coral on the lip to stand,

And polish with eburnean white, the hand :

The swains, whose souls in dying murmurs waste,

See not, they pine for wash, and sigh for paste :

Each the complexion that she loves can frame,

And is, at will, another or the same :

Hers, whom the evening saw a gay brunette

The morning oft admires in lovely jet.

The same that sleeps with eye-brows of japan,

To-morrow shines more snowy than the swan.

She, on whose cheek too high the colour glows,

Mingles the softer olive with the rose ;

Her lover views, with doubts perplexing tost,

Another face, and mourns his mistress lost.”

I come now to a poem of Welsted’s, which I have no hesitation in pronouncing eminently beautiful in its descriptions. It is entitled “ Acon and Lavinia, a Love Tale,” and was first printed in the Free Thinker in 1778, a periodical paper projected by Ambrose Phillips, and carried on in conjunction with Welsted, and other associates, one of whom was Dr. Boulter, then only minister of a parish in Southwark, but afterwards elevated to the primacy of Ireland. Its title implies a character which the work does not possess ; for there is nothing in it either licentious or irreligious : the Free-thinker aspired only to an emancipation from unreasonable prejudices.

* Every reader of the Spectator, who remembers Will. Honeycombe’s adventure with a Pict in the forty-first number, will understand this term.

Some of the essays are well written; but as a whole, it is dull and uninteresting.

The poem of "Acon and Lavinia," unquestionably suggested to Thomson some ideas in his beautiful episodes of Palemon and Lavinia, and Musidora. The latter, indeed, is founded upon an incident precisely similar, only more chaste and delicate in its result. The lover of Musidora beholds and retires: the lover of Lavinia seizes the happy moment and triumphs. Let the sex determine which of the poets best understood human nature.

Thomson describes the "polished limbs" of Lavinia,

"Veil'd in a simple robe, their best attire,
Beyond the pomp of dress: for loveliness
Needs not the foreign aid of ornament;
But is, when unadorned, adorned the most."

Welsted's Love Tale contains a parallel thought:

"She boasts more graces unadorn'd."

Many imitations may be traced between the two poets, which clearly evince that Thomson was indebted to Welsted. The following is a striking one:

"Every grace,

Flushing anew, a mellow lustre shed:
As shines the lily thro' the crystal mild;
Or as the rose amid the morning dew,
Fresh from Aurora's hand, more sweetly glows."

Welsted, describing Lavinia when bathing, says,

"Her pliant limbs the liquid waves divide,
And shine, like polish'd marble thro' the tide;
As lilies clos'd in crystal, court the sight
With a new lustre, and a purer white."

If, therefore, notwithstanding the similitude of the incident, it might be thought probable that it occurred accidentally to the imagination of Thomson, it would still be impossible, or rather contrary to the deductions of sound criticism to suppose that the coincidence of the imagery also was purely adventitious.

I shall now proceed to make a few extracts from this poem, which may justify the opinion I have expressed of it. The description of Lavinia is anticipated and poetical:

"The crowd of females shiver in gay brocades,
And half their charms are lost in lights and shades:
Hid in the rich embarrassments of art,
A nymph is, of herself, the smallest part:
Lavinia, nor with diamond stars is dress'd,
Nor rubies bleed in crosslets on her breast;
The Persian loom, and glittering tissue scorn'd,
She boasts more envied graces unadorn'd;
No aid from cost she needs; for nature's care,
With a free hand, indulg'd her to be fair.
Her glossy tresses wear the golden hue,
The lustre which in sunny rays we view:
Her rosy cheek a genuine vermeil dyes,
And a bright blue, the fluid in her eyes!
Behold her bosom, an expanded white,
Opening at large, the prospect of delight!
The finish'd figure, not retouch'd by art,
Imprints a lasting image on the heart."

Lavinia is characterized as a rebel to the joys of love, an apostate from the first duties of her sex. She is supposed to have made a vow which, though often professed, is never kept but from the want of an opportunity to break it, to "live and die a maid." A virgin so beautiful of course has many suitors; but she rejects them all for the ambitious enjoyments of freedom. Among those who woo her is Acon, whom she hears with the least reluctance:

"Not proud to scorn, nor kind to ease his fate,
Averse to love, but wanting power to hate;
His growing virtues lavish to commend,
She wish'd those virtues in a female friend;
All she could give, she gave, and strove to show
She was not Acon's, but his passion's foe."

The following extract, though somewhat long, will be read with pleasure by those to whom the works of Wel-

sted are not familiar. It contains the incident upon which the whole tale turns.

“The scene that bless’d Lavinia’s leisure smil’d
With hills, and vales, and woods ! a booming wild !
She shunn’d the sultry ray in jasmine bowers ;
She trod on carpets of sweet-smelling flowers ;
Where’er she turns, luxuriant landscapes rise,
And still she breathes in aromatic skies ;
For with the day spontaneous sweets are born,
And shed the fragrant freshness of the morn,
Echoes and rude cascades are heard around,
While, with soft murmurs, through th’ enchanted ground
A winding rivulet shapes its silver flow,
And shows a shining bed of sands below :
Wide-branching trees are rang’d on either side,
The branching shadows tremble in the tide,
This chaste recess, this unfrequented shade,
By day for nymphs, by night for fairies made,
Lavinia’s hours, devoid of cares, employ’s,
And soothes her soul with fond romantic joys.
(Oft in the silver stream herself she views,
And, often pleas’d, her likeness oft renews ;
There grace in dress she leav’r’d, in motion ease,
And practis’d, though she knew not why, to please :
Now some poetic tale her mind relieves ;
And now she bathes, and now the garland weaves ;
A thousand follies, to amuse she tries ;
A thousand different ways from love she flies :
But all her thousand follies fruitless prove,
For all the arts she tries are snares of love.
A youthful suitor, Acon was his name,
Though hopeless to approve his faithful flame,
Languish’d her beauties naked to explore,
And still the more he saw, he languish’d more.
Within a secret grot, clandestine laid,
Oft, when she bath’d, he view’d the heavenly maid :
His piercing eye ran quick o’er every part,
And took in all Lavinia, but her heart !
As painters master-works, he scans her o’er,
He dwells on beauties unobserv’d before ;

And spies out graces, through her faultless frame,
So cast in shades, ~~so cast in shades, so cast in shades,~~
“Once on a day, a most auspicious day !
White in his grot the longing lover lay,
She came, her wonted hour, to bathe undrest :
Misdeming nought, she loos’d her flowing vest :
Her vest by wanton winds was wav’d aside,
And only fann’d the limbs it us’d to hide :
The needless covering, now, apart she threw,
And gave her spotless form entire to view :
A blaze of charms, unveil’d, the vestal shows,
And beauties in a bright assemblage rose :
Awhile her watery picture she survey’d,
Pleas’d with the fair creation which she made ;
Then, stepping in, defac’d the rival shade :
Confiding to the stream, around her throng
The liquid waves, and bear the nymph along,
Her pliant limbs the liquid waves divide,
And shine, like polished marble, through the tide ;
As lilies closed in chrystal, court the sight
With a new lustre, and a purer white.
And now her sportive exercise is o’er ;
Cool from the stream, she seeks the flowery shore ;
Stretch’d on the tender herb, with cowslips spread,
Her ivory arm supports her bending head ;
And now soft sleep her softer soul disarms,
And triumphs o’er her unmisgiving charms.
Half naked, cover’d half, supine she lay,
In sight of Acon, and the face of day.
How should the impatient youth an object bear,
Distracting sight ! so opportunely fair !
Forth from the grot he springs, resolved to prove
The lucky hour, if such there be in love ;
Resolv’d, how’er, his certain fate to try ;
To live below’d, or by her scorn to die.
Her nearer beauties give him new surprise ;
He views her all at large, except her eyes ;
Her eyes alone the power of sleep withdrew,
He view’d her lips, but could not only view ;
He gently stoop’d, and, fearful of the bliss,
Ravish’d with doubtful joy a hasty kiss :

The virgin started, and back sprung the swain,
With fear half-dying, but his fear was vain;

For 'twas not the kind kiss that made her start;

'Twas not the kiss that trembled from her heart."

The reader may easily anticipate what follows. Acon avails himself of the unprepared condition of the sleeping maid: she awakes, reproves at first, but finally relenting, forgives a theft which she hardly considers as a loss, and the lovers are happy. I anticipate the judgment of your readers, who will surely confess that the author of such a poem, and of such passages as I have cited, had but little claim to be ranked among the dunces of his day. In another letter I shall pursue my enquiry into the remainder of Wielsted's works, but before I conclude this, I cannot refrain from noticing the wilful incorrectness with which Pope and his associates in Martinus Scriblerus quote those they wished to make ridiculous. In the eleventh chapter the following couplet is selected from Acon and Lavinia, as an example of the Paronomasia or pun:

"Behold the virgin lye
Naked, and only covered by the sky."

Now what are the actual lines?

"Now Acon, the coy nymph is wholly thine,
Nor will her fame permit her to decline
His suit who saw her, with familiar eyes,
Asleep, and only covered with the skies."

To such arts will genius descend when stimulated by
resentment!

I remain, Sir,

Yours, &c.

W.

THE HUE AND CRY;—OR, GENERAL RECOVERY
OFFICE.

WHEREAS sundry articles, belonging to divers persons, have been lost, stolen, or mislaid, to the great inconvenience of the owners: this is to give notice that a handsome reward will be given to any person who shall find any of the following:

LOST.

The Character of a Young Lady.—Supposed to have been left behind her on a sofa, where she had been sitting with Capt. B.—

The Garters of an Old Maid.—N. B. Never been heard of since the coachman's breeches were found under her pillow.

The Affection of a whole People.—Whoever will bring the valuable article to Court or House, will be liberally remunerated.

The Credit of R. B. Shrewsbury, Esq.—This is of no use to any one, and the owner wishes to have it back again only because it is a curiosity.

The Reputation of a Naval Officer.—Supposed to have been dropped on the Stock-Exchange.

The Temper of a Chief Justice—the Principles of a Member of Parliament—and the Modesty of an Attorney General.

These articles are much wanted down at Westminster. *The Reputation of a Northern Poet.*—It is said this was conveyed away from Edinburgh and concealed in several quarto volumes.

The Verdity of an Historian.—Whoever will bring this to Sir N. W.—, will be duly rewarded.

The Courage of an Irish Barrister.—It was missed on the road to Ostend, in consequence of which the owner was forced to return, as it was no use going on without it.