

moded by heat, that they are not to be found, in summer, except in the caverns of rocks, amidst the fragments of unmelted ice, under the shade of high spreading trees, or of rough and hanging precipices which face the north, and shield them from the rays of the sun. In the morning and evening they go to pasture, but seldom during the heat of the day. They run along the rocks with seeming ease and indifference, and jump from one to another; they cannot therefore be pursued by dogs. Nothing can be more extraordinary than the facility with which they climb and descend precipices, which to all other quadrupeds are inaccessible: they also mount or descend in an oblique direction, throw themselves down a rock of thirty feet, and fix with great security upon some excrescence or fragment, on the side of the precipice, which is just large enough to place their feet upon; they strike the rock however, in their descent, with their feet, three or four times, to stop the velocity of their motion; and when they have got upon the base below, they at once appear secure and fixed.

THOUGHTS ON POETRY, especially
modern, with Criticisms on several
POETS

SIR,

Dec. 17.

THE nauseous mechanism of the great body of modern poetry; the false principles of excellence that are set up; the minute, and foolish criticisms, that stare me in the face in almost every book of the present day that treats on the subject; put me out of all patience. What, I confess, brought the matter more immediately to my mind, was turning over the long and tedious controversy in some of your late volumes, be-

tween Mr. Weston and Miss Seward;—a discussion I would not on any account wish to be renewed; for which reason I shall decline expressing my opinion upon a point, on which I own I wonder how, but on what are now the fashionable criticisms of merit, there can be a doubt. In our times the shadow is mistaken for the substance: the dress for the thought; the mechanical incidents for the principal; and, as Dr. Johnson applies it,

“—Pars minima est ipsa puella sui.”

Perpetual personification, metaphors, though trite unceasing, thick-clustered imagery, un-original, and ill-combined, like a gaudy nosegay of flowers of all kinds, borrowed from all quarters, and arranged without taste, attempt to supply the place of natural and energetic flights of imagination, of the elevated and pathetic sentiments, and the bold reflections of genius. Alas! how easy it is to be a poet, if that divine name may be applied to the authors of such *compositions*! I do not add to my complaint the monotonous and mechanical harmony of Pope;—that fashion, it seems, like other meteors of a day, has vanished; but I add, what is equally sensurable, a harshness of language, encumbered with consonants, and almost enigmatically involved; unpointed, unfinished, so as to puzzle the sense, and disappoint, if not disgust the ear.

Yet fashion loves to combine extremes: the same age that applauds these things applauds also prose hitched into rhyme, and, extolling the most vapid tales, the most insipid sentiments, and the most commonplace remarks, expressed in a language the most unelevated, debased by terms the most cant and familiar, added to the laxest versification, rings their praises for simplicity, man-

liness, and classicallity. Johnson, of the magnitude and comprehension of whose mind I find every day more reason to be convinced, somewhere says, that definitions of poetry are dangerous. What he thought difficult, I shall not attempt. But he who, with a loftiness of sentiment, a copiousness of fancy, and an exquisite sensibility, possesses that attention which can arrest the operations of his own mind and heart, and that command of language, and of ear, which can cloath them in words and in rhyme, may be safely pronounced a true poet. Such were Spencer and Shakespeare, Milton and Cowley, of which latter Pope so happily says,

"Forgot his Epic, nay Pindaric art,
"Yet still we love the language of the heart."

Yes! I will affirm, that every man of taste will continue through life to read his moral essays, both in prose and verse, with increasing delight; while his Davides, and too many of his odes, are neglected, as the ill-directed efforts of the most energetic understanding, and the richest imagination. And why? Here he set up artificial models of excellence; he sacrificed simplicity to the fashion of the day; "he plucked," as the great biographer says, "a deciduous laurel;" and the natural consequence has followed.

Dryden, it may be said, is injured, by not being classed with the four poets already named;—his faculties of ratiocination were undoubtedly great; his fancy was truly brilliant, and inexhaustible; his powers of diction were in general nervous, comprehensive, and happy beyond all praise; his ear was exquisite;—but then—(with fear and diffidence I speak it) he wanted that extreme susceptibility of heart, which gives to imagination its wildest and richest directions; its tenderest, its most delicate, and interesting hues.

Pope appears to me to have had similar defects, though not similar merits. Once indeed, he wrote on a subject that came home to his own bosom; and then how did he exceed himself! I mean the "Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady." But this only adds strength to my position. Were it not for that, and the "Eloisa to Abelard," I dare not say in which class I should be inclined to place him. Yet even these will not avail to me, who prefer thought to expression, the fire and vehemence of natural eloquence to the stiff periods of labour, and the harmony of nature to the monotonous instrument, so long as I recollect the Tancred and Sigismunda; the Theodore and Honoria; and the Ode on Alexander's Feast. And, if to such a writer objections can be made, how rare must be the combination of faculties, that can produce a perfect poem!

Gray, whose talents were certainly of the first order, has in his Elegy given one of the purest instances of his genuine poetry. Of his Pindaric Odes, though they do not lessen my opinion of his ability, my admiration has long been on the decline. The cause of his failure, if he has failed, seems to me to have been over anxiety, labour, and too much study of the arts of writing. Passages of stupendous splendor and sublimity there are; but, as a whole, they are too artificially combined; their connexions are too remote, and wanting that natural association of ideas, which, like Dryden's Ode, proves itself to have been produced under one impression of the mind, and at a single sitting.

Next, therefore, to the Alexander's Feast, and in some respects superior, is Collins's noble Ode to the Passions, which, whether we consider the originality and magnificence of the design of the whole, and its parts, or its imagery its sentiments,

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its expressions, and its versification, has ever appeared to me one of the happiest efforts of human poetry. To be thus successful again could not be expected; yet, from his almost constant adherence to allegory, it is a subject of great regret that even he seems sometimes to have mistaken them for the soul.

Why does Thomson continue to please, nay, to gather strength, and have his sails filled with the increasing blasts of fame, as he rolls down the tide of time? Why, but because he does not study what he shall write; nor dresses up a trice thought in tinsel expressions, like a common harlot disguised in rich apparel, but because he sits down to describe the scenes of nature, that have from childhood delighted his exuberant fancy, and the benevolent feelings with which they have made his big heart expand. His language is not perhaps always the most pure and polished; but, being sufficient to convey his ideas without debasing them, though it may not add to their power of charming, can diminish little from it.

Akenside's Pleasures of Imagination is a most splendid and beautiful poem, especially when we recollect it was produced before the age of twenty-four; and such persons of taste as wish to see an instance how little learning, and toil, and attention to the rules of criticism, will do towards the excellence of such a work, may compare this brilliant composition with the dull and vapid performance which the Doctor, in the latter part of his life, by re-writing the whole, intended to have substituted for it.

Sonnets, or what they call such, are become very fashionable of late. Your Magazines are over-run with them; for, being short, the writer's labour, however great, (and great I have no doubt it often is), soon comes to a close. Three four-lined elegiac

stanzas, of alternate rhyme, are strung together, with a couplet at the end—and then, (however crude, complex, unnatural, dull, and hobbling), the deed is done. Johnson has said that the legitimate sonnet is ill-adapted to our language; and has condemned even those of Milton. I must differ from him here. That it is very difficult, I confess: the repetition of rhymes will, without great command of language, produce embarrassment to the expression, and dissonance to the flow of the verse. To my ear, habituated to the general structure of Milton's sentences, and cadence of his verses, he does not appear to have failed in these respects: in elevation of thought, and majestic plainness of phrase, I must think his sonnets of a tone with his other poems. How noble are the 7th, the 8th, the 12th, the 14th, the 15th, the first part of the 16th, the 18th, 20th, 21st, 22d; and above all the 23d and last.

After these what shall I name? Among the older poets, a few of Drummond of Hawthornden, and perhaps one or two of Daniel and Drayton! Of the latter, the highly-plaintive and perfect one of Gray, and the best of T. Warton!—Shall I mention the living! Those of Mr. Smith, always natural and pathetic, and full of fancy; and sometimes sublime, are above my praise! The objection to them is, too little variety. But grief will harp on the same strings. Yet few of these sonnets are legitimate. This is certainly a defect; but only a subordinate one, as it affects their form alone. But if genius like hers may be excused from these rules, is it to be endured, that poetasters, of whose productions the outward resemblance (very slight as it is) is the only claim they have to the title, should be exempt from the laws that mark their shape?

Miss Seward, the superiority of
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whose imagination over her judgment, every person of understanding must be convinced of, and herself probably may not be unwilling to allow; always poetical, always respectable, (except when she paraphrases Horace), though very unequal; when she pursues the natural fire of her fancy, produces passages of sublimity or pathos, that leave all competitors far behind her.—But when she bewilders herself with critical systems, when she reigns-in “her coursers of etherial race” to follow after models of petty excellence, we lament the degradation of the brightest talents. The more equable strains of Mrs. Parbauld, elegant and easy, give a more placid delight to the judgment, if they do not equally transport the soul. And here I close the list, nor enter upon those other female names with which Miss S. has chosen to stuff her list, and flatter her contemporaries. But let me stop my pen; lest I preclude myself from that indulgence, of which I fear that I stand in too much need. My own productions may be too liable to those objections, that I have so liberally imputed to others. Alas! I fear they may!—There was, I suspect, a time, of that youth, which is not yet fled, when, dazzled by the tinsel of corrupt examples, and deserting the standards of antiquity with which the simplicity of my childhood was delighted, and to the merits of which the sympathy of my heart bore testimony, I cramped my thoughts, and controlled the ardor of my soul, in search of false beauties, and the inanimate sparkles of affectation. But hope flatters me the time is not past, and that I shall yet live to complete the designs with which the dreams of my infancy filled my sanguine heart, and which, however depressed by disappointment, repelled by envy and malice, and overclouded by grief, still rise buoyant over the waves of opposition, and direct the tenor of my thoughts and actions. PIERRE DE GRANDISON.

Extract from the
RIGHTS of WOMEN.
By a WOMAN.

THIS important volume will be read with satisfaction and delight, as long as virtue, genius, sense, and feeling are held in proper estimation. It is our ardent wish to do the fair writer every justice, and surely it will be said by such who peruse with attention, and who can possibly refuse it to the following extracts, that her best praise is contained in her work.

“Suppose a woman,” says the accomplished writer, “trained up to obedience, married to a sensible man, who directs her judgment without making her feel the servility of her subjection, to act with as much propriety by this reflected light as can be expected when reason is taken at second hand, yet she cannot ensure the life of her protector; he may die, and leave her with a large family.

“A double duty devolves on her; to educate them in the character of both father and mother; to form their principles and secure their property. But, alas! she has never thought, much less acted for herself. She has only learned to please men, to depend gracefully on them, yet, encumbered with children, how is she to obtain another protector—a husband to supply the place of reason? A rational man, for we are no treading on romantic ground, though we may think her a pleasing docile creature, will not chuse to marry a family for love, when the world contains many more pretty creatures. What is then to become of her? She either falls an easy prey to some mean fortune-hunter, who defrauds the children of their paternal inheritance, and renders her miserable; or becomes the victim of discontent and blind indulgence. Unable to educate her sons, or impress them with respect; for it is not
a play