

simplicity of her drefs and countenance, might altogether have a considerable influence in heightening the effect. But if thefe added charms to the mufic, the mufic alfo added charms to thefe; and I refolved, as I fat, to

W. C.

An Effay on the ENGLISH SONNET; illustrated by a Comparison between the Sonnets of MILTON and thofe of CHARLOTTE SMITH.

FEW things are more painful to a generous mind, engaged in the purfuits of literature, than to obferve the pedantic prejudices in favour of the models of eftablifhed writers, by which the wings of aspiring genius are blacked, and the efforts of modern invention fufured and retrained. This, however, is a mortification that muft frequently occur to every one who, fureying for himfelf the region of letters, obferves how the honours of criticism are conferred. The pre-negative of name triumphs over the natural diftinctions of merit; improvement is decided as heretical innovation; and, in the court of Parafuffus, as in thofe of law, *le de rigueur*, in opposition to precedent, is frequently *le de rigueur*.

With refpect to poetry, in particular, which it is fo much eafier to criticife than to compofe, what a torrent of pedantic prejudice have taft and common fenfe to encounter. Poetry, the freft daughter of eternal genius, whole charms frequently depend upon the bold and original eccentricity of her flight—Poetry, the nurfing of intellectual freedom, has been unnaturally doomed to the fharpft operation of this critical bondage; and having thus loaded her plumage with thefe reiterated chains, we meet at the degeneracy with which the appears to languifh, and wonder that the no longer foars with her wonted fublimity.

The immortal Homer role to the unequalled height of epic poetry, became his imagination was unlogged by the chains of former precedent. Why then fhould even Homer himfelf, be made a precedent to circumscribe the operations of future invention?

No one, I am fure, can admire this fuperlative poet more than I myfelf, or be more emporated with the beautiful fymmetry of that arrangement, by which, in his fild, all the charms of variety are blended with all the advantages of the fideft unity of action. Yet (for who fhall dare to prefcribe a boundary, to limit the operations of human intellect) I cannot fee the impoffibility of fome chofen genius, at a future day, prefenting the world with a fpecimen of epic poetry as different, a more beautiful, and even a more perfect plan. Should, however, fuch a thing ever be produced, is it not evident from the prefent fentiments of the literary world, that it muft fall dead-born from the prefs, ftangled in the very womb, if I may to exprefs myfelf, by the pious care of thofe literary midwives the critics, as a monfter too hideous for exiftence?

But leaving this bold imagination to the experiment of fome happier age, when poetic genius fhall be nourifhed by more liberal patronage, I will venture to obferve, that, in the more humble walks of poetry, (notwithstanding all the empiricism of pedantic critics) there are fome who, quitting the dull path of precedent, have prefumed, with daring irregularity, to ftraps the celebrated writers, for improving upon whole models they have been cenfured.

Among the foremoft of thofe is to be reckoned the poetick and elegant Charlotte Smith, whole *Illuftrations* (for the fpiritual cour of criticism has thought proper to baptifm them) difplay a more touching melody, a more poetick fimplicity,

may I will venture to fay, a greater vigour and correctnefs of genius, than any other Englifh poem that I have ever feen, under the fime denomination; and I certainly do not mean to except the fonnets of Milton.

Yet I remember to have heard fome profcribed critics exprefs a very different opinion upon this fubject; and that, too, upon no better argument than their nonconformity to certain arbitrary regulations, 'more honoured (according to my judgement, at leaft) in the breach than the obfervance.'

To criticism of this kind I was by no means difpofed to liften with flout attention. But what was my fuprife when I heard one of thefe 'mighty lords of literary away,' after dwelling for a confiderable time upon the praifes of one of thofe minor wits, whole paffive obedience to the dogmas of the critical tyrant had fured his approbation, conclude his paegyric by obferving, that 'his Sonnet was in Milton's beft fyle; which was certainly the height of all poffible praife.'

Whether this be the cafe or no, let thofe decide who have perufed Milton's Sonnets with pleasure: for my part, I confeff, I read them, as a talk; unwilling to be entirely ignorant of any of the beauties of the author of thofe many fublime and wonderful paegyrics that dignify the Paradiſe Loft, under whatever ples of dulnefs or pedantry, thofe more obfcure beauties might be hid.

But the critic I am fpeaking of, was not content with adding the *dead* of his incense to the effluence of a reputation too eftablifhed to be injured, even by injudicious praife; he muft alfo cloud, with as ill-founded cenfure, the rifing fplendour of our poetick Aurora, and criticife what he appeared to want taft to enjoy.

'Little elegies,' fald he, 'confifting of four ftanzas and a couplet, are no more *fonnets* than they are *epic poems*.' He it to them, replied I, 'call them epic poems if you will. 'The time is coming, I hope, when we fhall estimate things, not by their titles, but their merits.' But, continued he,

'the fonnet is of a particular and arbitrary conftitution; it partakes of the nature of blank verfe, by the lines running into each other at proper intervals.—'Why not write them in blank verfe then? For I appeal to every reader of poetry, whether this is the defcription of a kind of verification ever agreeable in Englifh rhyme, except, indeed, in poems of fome length, where it is occasionally introduced, with great fauce, to relieve the ear from that fatiety, which the uniform harmony of the couplet might elfe produce? But mark the pedantry of the rule that follows.

'Each line,' continued he, 'of the fift eight, rhymes *four times*, and the order in which thefe rhymes fhould fall is *deſigned*.'

Independent of the difficulty of this (for labour, with out critic, is a requifite ingredient of beauty) it is not enough that all the graces of form are beflowed by nature, and ufe of notation and figure by a political cultivation, how upon hour muft be devoted to the tedious, dry, head of art may be confpicuous in the finishing.—Independent, I fay, of the difficulty of this, in a language whole rhymes do not flow with that copious facility, which diftinguifhes the Italian terminations, let me again appeal to the ear of the reader, and ask him, whether even some of the moft beautiful *varzas* in fpecie (in which only one of the rhymes is repeated to the fourth, and another to the third time) do not tie the ear by this frequent recurrence of fublime founds, and whether even the exquisite poem of Beattie does not fometimes become more than it gains by the refinements of this form of verification?

'Of Milton's Englifh fonnets,' purfued the critic, 'only that to O. Cromwell ends with a couplet, but that fingle instance is a fufficient precedent.' ' Bravo!' fald I, 'does not this finter a little of the authoritative wifdom of the Roman law, when every faulty judgment of a fourth or fifth annual emperor, became a precedent for the

"AN ESSAY ON THE ENGLISH SONNET. ILLUSTRATED BY A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SONNETS OF MILTON AND THOSE OF CHARLOTTE SMITH. UNIVERSAL MAGAZINE, 91

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the reputation of future judgments? In my humble opinion, the sonnet is marinating with a couplet, would not have been a whit less beautiful, even though Milton had omitted this single instance.

'The style of the sonnet,' continued the critic, declining to reply to hisacious an observation, 'should be nervous; and where the subject will properly bear elevation, *adlimine* with which simplicity of language is by no means incompatible. If the subject is familiar and domestic, the style should, though affectionate, be vigorous; though plain, energetic.'

With these observations I to perforce quitted them, to show that all the *effort* qualities required by this hyperbolic are to be found in the sonnets, which it was the business of his criticism to decry. What, for example, can be more nervous or sublime than the following sonnet from the novel of Emmeline?

Far on the lonely, the low, retiring hills,
In silent moments fondly seems to flow,
Afloat o'er the world of waters, blue and
wide,

The sighing summer wind forgets to blow.
As rises the day star in the sky's west,
The then waver, with reflection's glow,
Alas! can mortal nature give me rest,
Or leave of heart my soul to repose?
Can the soft labors of the sleeping main,
Yon radiant heaven, or an exalted's
chance,

Emble the written troubles of the brain,
Which memory's tortures and which guilt
disturb?
Or with a better franker quiet prove,
That boasts with vain remorse, and un-
extinguish'd love?

And as for the sonnet on familiar subjects, how enchanting is the ninth of this writer—

'But to you I sigh'd on the turf re-
clined;—No.

Seeing I see you here at play, &c.

But can imagination conceive a more charming association of all the

requires called for by the critic, than in the following?

To Sleep.

'Come, balmy Sleep! thy nature's soft
prior!

On these sad temples all thy poppies shed;
And bid gay dreams from Morpheus' bed
cont,

First in light vision round my aching
head!

Secure of all thy soothing, partial power!
On his head led the patient throws him
down;

And the poor old boy, in the rudest hour,
Enjoys thee more than he who wears a
crown.

Clasp'd in her faithful shepherd's guardian
arms,

Well may the village girl sweet slumbers
prove;

And they, O gentle Sleep! still taste thy
charms,
Who wake to labour, liberty, and love,
But still thy opiate and dost than deny
To calm the anxious breast, to close the
thrumming eye.

Now is it any serious objection to the excellence of this sonnet, that some of the images are borrowed from other poets; since the selection and arrangement sufficiently prove the taste and judgment of the writer, and her claim to imagination is sufficiently substantiated by what she has added, of equal merit, of her own.

I have amiable solicitude with which Mrs. Smith has been careful to quote the passages she has made use of, is an argument of the liberality of her mind, as well as the frequent tributes of applause, she has paid to the genius of contemporary and departed writers; a liberality that should have secured her from the harsh treatment of puny critics. But the cold superiority of pedantry is inferiour to all such appeals of candour. There seems, however, to be a passage, in Young's 'Night Thoughts,' which has escaped the attention of Mrs. Smith, to which the first line at least of this sonnet has some obligations:—

'And Nature's soft recluse! balmy
sleep! &c.

But

But to proceed with the conversation: my critic expatiated on what he called the great models of perfection for the sublime and for the domestic sonnet. In this display of critical acumen, I found that he wandered sometimes into the regions of obscurity; for, with whatever attention I regarded his eloquent declamation, I found it not easy to develop his meaning. I considered, however, that a little obscurity in these subjects, either in the writer or the speaker is not amiss. It gives an air of mystery to the oracular hat, that perplexes the judgment of the hearer, and induces him to implicit submission, that he may avoid the trouble of unravelling the meaning.

'The great models of perfection for the sublime and domestic sonnet:—*Domestic Sonnet*!—I shall never get past this word. I have heard of domestic virtue, domestic enjoyments, domestic animals, domestic utensils, &c. but never of the domestic sonnet before. When we hear a critic talking of domestic poetry, would we not suppose he alluded to some art of cookery in rhyme?—But, 'The models, continued my critic, 'for the sublime and for the domestic sonnet are Milton's, 'To the Soldier to spare his Dwelling place, and 'To Mr. Lawrence.'

Let us bring them before the reader, then, that he may know what perfection is.

SONNET VIII.

When the Affair was introduced in the City.

'Captain or colonel, or knight in arms,
Whole chance on these defenceless doors
may fall,

If dead of honour *did thee ever please*,
Guard them, and him within *grate from*
barren.

He can require thee, for he knows the
chairs
That call him on such gentle as as
these.

And he can spread thy name o'er hands
and feet,
Whatever clime the sun's bright circle
warms.

Lift not thy spear against the mule's
honor?
The great Emilian conqueror did spare
The house of Pinudius, when temple
and tower
Went to the ground: and the repented air
Of sad Elicia's poet had the power
To save the Athenian walls from ruin
bare!

Such is the sonnet adduced by my very critic; and I must confess, that notwithstanding that it is not entirely free from 'certain hardiness,' on which he expatiated much, a noble sonnet it is; yet certainly not equal in sublimity of expression, either to that of Charlotte Smith above quoted, or the one 'To Fortitude, that 'Written at Penbury, in Autumn 1788,' or that 'Written in the Church yard of Middelton on the coast of Suffolk,' by the same lady.

'Prest'd by the moon, mute artichefs of
trees,
While the loud equinox its power com-
bines,
The sea no more its swelling surge con-
fines,
But o'er the thinking land solemnly rides,
The wild blast, rising from the welkin
caves,
Drives the huge billows from their heav-
ing bed;
Tears from their gully towards the village
deaf,
And breathes the silent Sabbath of the grave!
With shells and sea-weed mingled, on this
shore,
Lo! their homes whiten in the frequent
wave.

But vain to them the winds and waters
rave!
They hear the warring elements no more;
While I am down'd—by life's long storm
oppress'd,
To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest!

Perhaps it is not saying too much to declare, that in the narrow compass of these fourteen lines, are included all the requisites of good poetry; vivid painting, numerous harmony, sublimity of thought, and expression, and pathos of sentiment. What, in particular, can surpass the thought of break-

breeding the silent sabbath of the day subjects whatever, that can compare? Due to return to Milton, pass with the following of Mrs. And, is his

SONNET XX.

To Mr. Low.

'Lament of virtuous father, virtuous son,
New-born in this world, and ways
are new,
Where shall we find thee meet, and by
the way
Help wait a fallen day, what may be
From the land of glory? Time will
tell
On father's, till Reason's re-inspire
The new-born earth, and clothe in fresh
garment
The old and cold, that neither flow'd nor
froze.
What in thy god shall find us, light and
cheer,
Of this life, with wine, whence we
To heart the tale well touched, or artful
Woe
Woe! universal poet and Tully in
He was of those that the can judge, and
know.

SONNET IV.

To the Moon.

'Queen of the silver bow! by thy pale
beams,
Above and gentle, I thought to try,
And watch the shadow trembling in the
flecking,
Or mark the floating clouds that cross thy
way.
And while I gaze, thy mild and placid
light
Shalt'st bring forth upon my troubled breast;
And oft I think, fair planet of the night,
That in thy orb the wrecked may have
rest:
The darkness of the earth perhaps may go,
Recess'd by death—to thy bright
light,
And the children of despair and woe
Forget in thee, their cup of sorrow here,
O! that I soon may reach thy world be-
fore,
Poor wretched pilgrim in this toiling scene!

SONNET XXXV.

'Should the lone wanderer, fainting on
his way,
Rest for a moment of the fishy hours,
And, lo! his path thro' thorns and
roughing lay,
Pluck the wild rose, or woodbine's gad-
ding flowers;
Weaving, say wend, beneath some flesh-
ering tree,
The folds of sorrow he awhile may lose;
So have I sought thy flowers, fair Poet;
So charm'd my way, with friendship and
the muse.
But dark'er now grows life's unglorious day,
Dark with new clouds of evil yet to come;
Her pencil blackening fancy throws away,
And points my wiles to that tranquil
shore,
Where the pale spectre Cars, pursues no
more.
Ignorance may perhaps admire the
beaming, but common sense will lay
little for the tale, of the man who
should refuse to be pleased with things
because they are not what he chides.
To turn *de rive jenny*. The meaning
of the word sonnet is nothing more
than

than a *little song*, or *little poem*; and if
we permit the critics to prescribe the
number of lines which it is to consist
of, it is certainly too much to submit
to them also the exact succession of
the rhymes. This ought surely to be
left to the genius of the writer; or at
least to that of the language.

'But Oh!' says the critic, 'this
is making the art of poetry too easy.
The sonnet is certainly the most dif-
ficult' (he might have added the most
affected) 'specimen of composition;
but difficult well subdued is excel-
lence.' Since when? I should be
glad to know, a humbly conceive
that if the mind of the reader is ele-
vated and delighted with any pro-
duction of genius, it is a matter of
small consequence to him, what was
the degree of trouble or facility with
which that production was completed;
otherwise the more coltish the brain of
the poet, the greater ought to be the
delight of the reader; though I be-
lieve in general it will be exactly the
reverse.

MILTON'S SONNET I.

To the Nightingale.

'O Nightingale, that on yon bloomy spray
Wakest, at eve, when all the woods
are still,
Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart
dost fill,
While the jolly hours lead on propitious
Mays.
Thy liquid notes that close thee of
day,
First heard before the swallow cuckoo's
hail,
Portend sweet news in love; O if love's
will
Have linked that amorous power to thy
soft lay,
Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of
hate
Foretell my hopes' doom in some grove
night;
As thou from year to year hast sung too
late
For my relief, yet hadst no reason why?
Whether the muse, or love call thee his
mate,
Both then I serve, and of their traits
am I.

To which I shall contrail

CHARLOTTE SMITH'S SONNET VII.

On the Disappearance of the Nightingale.

'Sweet poet of the woods—a long adieu!
Farewell, soft warbler of the early year!
Ah! thou'lt be long ere thou shalt sing
anew,
And pour thy music on the "night's dull
ear."
Whether on Spring thy wandering flights
await,
Or whether silent in our groves you dwell,
The pensive muse shall own thee for her
mate,
And still protect the fang the loves for well,
With

With cautious step, the love-lorn youth
 Shall glide
 Thro' the lone brake that shades thy mossy
 nest;
 And shepherd girls, from eyes profane
 Shall hide
 The gentle bird who sings of joy best:
 For still thy voice shall soft affections move,
 And still be dew to sorrow, and to love!

Now putting the *just night* and *cherished grace* of the *eternity* out of the question, let me appeal to any lover of poetry, which of these two sets fills his mind, his fancy, his ear, with the sweetest associations of sentiment, imagery, and harmony? Which flows with the easiest and most attractive grace, the true sonnet-like versification of Milton, or the elastic stanza of Charles Smith? Nay, and what more than all exposes the disadvantages of the regular sonnet, is, that in almost all the sonnets of Milton, the last six lines, for which there is more licence, and which indeed are left entirely to the taste of the writer, are eminently superior to the eight that precede.

I shall conclude with observing, that as it was my sole design to vindicate

the freedom of English verse from the pedantic chains of the Italian sonnet, whom every lover of poetry must bow to with veneration, I have uniformly treated the immortal Milton with the utmost candour, quoting none but his best sonnets, that the question might be treated in the fairest and most conclusive manner. Whoever shall call his eye over the little poems of that great master of the epic lyre, or even refer to the worth of them quoted by Dr. Johnson, with his usual kindness, in illustration of the word sonnets, in his dictionary, will be convinced, that if I had a heart bold enough to attempt to injure the reputation of this awful poet, I might have made a different selection. But the whole region of poetry is not to be seized with one grasp. Every province has its separate competitors. Over the epic held, Milton, of all British bards, triumphs without a rival, Shakspeare in the dramatic, and in the sonnet, Charles Smith.

J. T.

The Temple of Wealth: A Vision.

AS I was one evening meditating on the great exigencies of mortals to obtain wealth, I gradually fell into a gentle slumber. My imagination being impressed with the images which it had formed during the time of my reverie, instantly set to work, and I found myself at the bottom of a deep and craggy mountain, on the top of which there appeared a palace built of solid gold, and adorned with a variety of jewels, pearls, diamonds, and other precious stones. The gates were of the most transparent crystal; and, in short, it was the most splendid structure that mortal eyes ever beheld. At the bottom of the mountain, I observed an innumerable crowd of people, of various nations, and, but when they came to a certain densely gazing at the lofty mansion, and attempting to climb up to it.

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ing countenance, attended by two alluring females. The youth, who was called Prodigality, I saw put on the appearance of a very amiable personage named Good Humour, and affect the air of festivity and joy to such an extreme, that I was induced to suspect him an impostor. I, therefore, watched him narrowly, and discovered that, though he put on the appearance of mirth and joy, his bosom was continually torn by remorse, conscious of guilt, and fear of punishment; and that his body was wasting away by the private attacks of a hag, called Intemperance. The two females were Pleasure and Habit Love. These, by their enticements, gradually brought back the pious whom they met, to the place whence they set out, and then left them with derision and scorn. Some, whom I observed set out, proceeded a very little way before they were met by a graceful personage, who invited them into a building, wherein I saw deposited a vast number of books in all arts and sciences, clasped in their several ranks, beside several valuable collections of natural curiosities, and of all the machines which have ever been invented for the improvement of the arts. Some few, I perceived, were taken up with studying the contents of this delightful repository, that they forgot the journey on which they set out, and did not recollect their first design, till they were too well pleased with their present abode to quit it for an uncertainty. While I was gazing at this edifice, which was called the Temple of Science, a new traveller at the foot of the hill attracted my attention. He set out with the utmost carelessness, and contentedly examined the ground, before at last conquered. When he was made any considerable progress, Avarice accompanied the man He went on for some time in this cautious manner, till he came to a place where there were two roads, which led to the top of the hill: the one guarded by Virtue, the other by Vice. These two roads were very conspicuous to each other, and the

traveller