

I shall conclude this head by the following remark.

Notwithstanding there appears in the human body a certain capacity of long life, which seems to dispose it to preserve its existence in every situation; yet this capacity does not always protect it

from premature destruction; for among the old people whom I examined, I scarcely met with one who had not lost brothers or sisters in early and middle life, and who were born under circumstances equally favourable to longevity with themselves.

For the EUROPEAN MAGAZINE.

THOUGHTS ON POETRY.

OF all the sciences which afford matter of speculation to the mind of man, there is something in Poetry that not only distinguishes it from every other species of knowledge, but that bears about it the marks of divinity and inspiration. The possession of this talent is looked upon, even in these days of degeneracy, as an emanation of the divine Spirit; and it is well known that the Bards and Minstrels of antiquity were venerated by the Pagans with a sentiment of adoration, that bore all the marks of that zeal which distinguishes the Christian world in their reverence of their Prophets and their Saints.

The antiquity of Poetry is universally allowed, but the origin of it is variously accounted for. Mr. Pope coincides with the opinion of Scaliger and Fontenelle, and lays it down as arising in the calm occupations of rural life, and celebrating in pastorals the happiness and tranquillity of a shepherd's days. But it is more natural and more rational to suppose, that the first poems were hymns or odes made in praise of the Deity, who by the Royal Poet commanded his people *to praise him in the cymbals and dances*. And this conjecture seems to be strongly favoured by those beautiful fragments that are scattered thro' the sacred writings, and especially the songs of Moses, which are the very soul of grandeur and sublimity.

There can be no doubt but that Poetry, in its infant state, was the language of devotion and of love. It was the voice and expression of the heart of man, when ravished and transported with a view of the numberless blessings that perpetually flowed from God, the fountain of all goodness. When the first-created pair found themselves in the garden of Paradise, amidst an infinite number of creatures, *so fearfully and wonderfully made*; when they saw every herb, plant, and flower rise up for their use and pleasure, and every creature submit to their will; when they

heard the morning's dawn ushered in with the orisons of birds, and the evening warbled down with notes of thanks and gratitude; when all nature exulted in praise of the omnipotent Creator; when *the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy*; that spirit of devotion which seemed to breathe through the universe, inspired the human heart, and these happy objects of divine love

— join'd their vocal worship to the choir

Of creatures wanting voice.—

Enraptured thus with the love of God, and filled with an awful idea of his power, glory, and goodness, the soul, incapable of finding words in common language suitable to its lofty conceptions, and disdaining every thing low and prosaic, was obliged to invent a language of its own. Tropes and figures were called in to express its sentiments, and the diction was dignified and embellished with metaphors, beautiful descriptions, lively images, similes, and whatever else could help to express, with force and grandeur, its passion and conception: Disdaining all common thoughts and trivial expressions, it soars, like a being of superior faculties, into a distant region, and aspires at all that is sublime and beautiful, in order to approach perfection and beatitude. Nor was this sufficient:—the mind dissatisfied with culling only the most noble thoughts arrayed in forcible and luxuriant terms, and perceiving the sweetness which arose from the melody of birds, called in music to its aid; when these illustrious thoughts, dignified and dressed with pomp and splendor, were so placed as to produce harmony: the long and short, the smooth and rough syllables were variously combined to recommend the sense by the sound, and elevation and cadence employed to make the whole more musically expressive.

Hence Poetry became the parent of

music, and indeed of dancing; for the method of measuring the time of their *verses per Asin et Theſin*, and of beating the bars or divisions of music, gave rise, we may suppose, to this art, and taught the poet also to express the transports of the soul. And this will in some measure account, not only for the great antiquity of dancing, but for its application to religious ceremonies even in the first ages of the world. Poetry, music, and dancing, were all used by the Israelites of old in their worship, and are thus employed by many of the eastern nations, and by the Indians of America to this day.

What has been said of the origin of Poetry will account for the necessity there is for that enthusiasm, that fertility of invention, those sallies of the imagination, lofty ideas, noble sentiments, bold and figurative expressions, harmony of numbers, and indeed that natural love of the grand, sublime and marvellous, which are the essential characteristics of a good Poet. The Poet, not satisfied with exploring all nature for subjects, wanders in the fields of fancy, and creates beings of his own. He raises floating islands, dreary deserts, and enchanted castles, which he peoples by the magic of his imagination with Satyrs, Sylphs, and Fairies; and, as Shakespeare says,

—as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the
Poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy
nothing
A local habitation and a name.

This is what is called the inspiration of Poetry, and what can never be either conveyed by precept or obtained by study. It is something of too fine a nature to come within the power of definition; and all the rules and dissertations of all the critics in the world, can never supply the place of genius, or brighten an imagination that is obscure by nature. Receipts for poetical compositions, like the Pope's anathemas, begin to lose their virtue, and be universally despised. The truth is, they touch only on the externals or form of the thing, without entering into the spirit of it; they play about the surface of Poetry, but never dive into its depth. The secret, the soul of good writing is not to be come at through such mecha-

nic laws; the main graces, and the cardinal beauties, as they are somewhere styled, of this charming art, are too retired within the bosom of nature, and are of too fine and subtle an essence, to fall under the discussion of pedants and commentators. These beauties, in short, are rather to be felt than described. By what precepts shall a writer be taught only to think poetically, or to trace out, among the various powers of thought, that particular vein or feature of it which poetry loves; and to distinguish between the good sense which may have its weight and justness in prose, and that which is of the nature of verse? What instruction shall convey to him that flame which can alone animate a work, and give it the glow of Poetry? And how, and by what industry shall be learned, among a thousand other charms, that delicate contexture in writing, by which the colours, as in the rainbow, grow out of one another, and every beauty owes its lustre to a former, and gives being to a succeeding one? Could certain methods be laid down for obtaining these excellencies, every one that pleased might be a poet, as every one that pleased may be a geometrician, if he will but have due patience and attention. Many of the graces in Poetry may be talked of in very intelligible language, but intelligible only to those who have a natural taste for it, or are born with a talent of judging. To have what we call Taste, is having, one may say, a new sense or faculty superadded to the ordinary ones of the soul, the prerogative of fine spirits! and to go about to pedagogue a man into this sort of knowledge, who has not the seeds of it in himself, is the same thing as if one should teach an art of seeing without eyes. True conceptions of Poetry can no more be communicated to one born without taste, than adequate ideas of colours can be given to one born without sight; all which is saying no more than it would be to say, that to judge finely of music, it is requisite to have naturally a good ear for it.—Those celestial bodies, which through their distance cannot appear to us but by the help of glasses, do yet as truly exist as if they could be seen by the naked eye: so are the graces of poetry, though they come within the reach but of few, as real as if they were perceptible alike to all.

* *Decant choros et carmina dicunt.*

Vine.

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The difference is, the telescope, which brings the one to our view, is artificial; that which shews us the other is natural: In short, the same arguments that will convince a sightless man of the reality of light,—and another who has no idea but of noise, of the reality of harmony,—will as conclusively prove to one wholly void of taste, the existence of poetical excellences. Some of these, it is allowed, may be discoursed of with accuracy and clearness enough; that is to say, so as to be understood by those who understand them already; but there are others of that exquisite nicety, that they will not fall under any description, nor yield to the torture of explanation. We are irresistibly captivated by them wherever we find them in good authors, without being able to say precisely what that power is that captivates us; as when one views a very beautiful woman, one is immediately affected with her beauty, tho' we cannot mechanically explain the cause that has that force over us; we feel the enchantment, and the eye strikes it into the heart, but are at a loss for the solutions and reasons of it; we know we are silently struck by the power of a certain proportion or symmetry, but do not strictly know the measure of that symmetry, and the positive laws by which it is governed. Poetry, in this particular view of it, as Dryden observes, may be said to flow from a source, which, like the Nile, it conceals; the stream is rich and transparent, while the fountain is hid. Here then, at least, rules are impracticable; but it must not be understood by this assertion, that the talent of writing in verse is a lawless mystery, a wild ungoverned province, where reason has nothing to do.

It is certain that every thing depends on reason, and must be guided by it; but it is certain, that reason operates differently when it has different things for its object. Poetical reason is not the same as mathematical reason; there is in good poetry as rigid truth as there is in a question of algebra, but that truth is not to be proved by the same process or way of working. Poetry depends much more on imagination than other arts, but is not, on that account, less reasonable than they; for imagination is as much a part of reason as memory or judgment is, or rather a more bright emanation from it, as to paint and throw light upon ideas is a finer act of the understanding than simply to separate or com-

pare them. The plays, indeed, and the flights of fancy do not submit to that sort of discussion which moral or physical propositions are capable of, but must, nevertheless, to please, have justness and natural truth. The care to be had in judging of things of this nature, is to try them by those tests that are proper to themselves, and not by such as are proper only to other points of knowledge. Thus Poetry is not an irrational art, but as closely linked with reason, exerted in a right way, as any other knowledge; what it differs in, as a science of reason, from other sciences, is, that it does not, equally with them, lie open to all capacities; that a man, rightly to perceive the reason and truth of it, must be born with taste, or a faculty of judging; and that it cannot be reduced to a formal science, or taught by any determined precepts. In most other arts, care and application are chiefly required, which is not sufficient in Poetry. A Poet often owes more to his good fortune than to his industry, and this is what is usually called the felicity of a writer; that is, when in the warmth of his imagination he lights upon any conception, an image, or way of turning a thought or phrase with a beauty which he could not have attained by any study, and which no rules could have led him to; and this happiness it is, which, in honour to great Poets, is called or believed to be inspiration. But the mind requires to be wonderfully filled and elevated with the contemplation of its subject before it hits upon those sublimities of thought and felicities of expression, and to be entirely undisturbed by all foreign passions that might either call up unpleasant sensations, or divert it from its object. Nothing requires so much cheerfulness and serenity of spirit: It must not be either overwhelmed, says Cowley, speaking on the same subject, with the cares of life, or overcast with the clouds of melancholy and sorrow, or shaken and disturbed with the storms of injurious fortune; it must, like the halcyon, have fair weather to breed in. The soul must be filled with bright and beautiful ideas, when it undertakes to communicate delight to others, which is the principal end of all poetry. One may see through the stile of *Ovid de Trist.* the humble and dejected condition of spirit with which he wrote it; there scarce remain any footsteps of that genius, *Quem nec Jovis ira, nec ignis, &c.*

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The cold of the country had penetrated all his faculties, and benumbed the very feet of his verses. He is himself, methinks, like one of the stories of his own *Metamorphoses*; and though there remain some weak resemblance of Ovid at Rome, it is but, as he says of Niobe,

*In vultu color est sine sanguine, lumina
maestis
Stant immota genis; nihil est in imagine
vivum,
Flet tamen.*—

The truth is, for a man to write well, it is necessary to be in a good humour; neither is wit less eclipsed with the inquietness of the mind, than beauty with the indisposition of the body; so that it is almost as difficult a thing to be a Poet in spite of fortune as it is in spite of nature. Upon the whole, one may safely pronounce, that the qualifications of a Poet are the peculiar gifts of Heaven, and promoted and embellished by a happy concurrence of events. Poetry is not the province of art; and I think what Valerius Maximus has affirmed concerning virtue, may, with equal, or better reason, be applied to general maxims and rules in Poetry.—*Quid enim doctrina proficit? Ut politiora, non ut meliora fiant ingenia; quoniam quidem sola virtus nascitur magis quam fingitur. Some of these maxims may possibly serve to polish a genius, but cannot make it better than nature made it; as a rough diamond is not heightened in value, but only prepared to be set in view by the hand of the lapidary.*

I intended to have said a few words here on the utility of Poetry, but as this paper already exceeds my original design, I shall only insert the Third Ode of the Fourth Book of Horace, to shew the enthusiastic notions that writer had of the efficacy of genius and nature in Poetry, and how fruitless he judged all other aids to be without them.

*QUEM tu, Melpomene, semel
Nascentem placido lumine videris,
Illum non labor Isthmius
Clarabit pugilem; non equus impiger
Curru ducet Achaico
Victorem; neque res bellica Delius
Ornatum solus ducem,
Quod regum tumidas contuderit
minas,
Offendit Capitolio:
Sed cum Tibur aquas fertile perfluit,
Ex spissis nemoribus comes,*

*Fingent Æolio carmine nobilem
Romæ principis urbem
Dignatur soboles inter amabiles
Vatum ponere me choros;
Et jam dente minus mordeor invidæ.
O testudinis aures
Dulem quæ strepitum. Pieri, tem-
peras!
O mutis quoque piscibus
Donatura cyeni, si libeat, sonum!
Totum muneris hoc tui est,
Quod monstror digito prætereuntium,
Romanæ fidicen lyra: [est.
Quod spiro, et placeo, si placeo, tuum*

The commendation given by Scaliger to this Ode is so extraordinary, that it is known almost to every body, viz. *That he had rather have been the writer of it than King of Arragon.* The following is a Translation of it by a Poet that flourished some years ago.

HOR. ODE III. LIB. IV.

WHOM thou, O daughter chaste of Jove,

Didst, at his birth, with eyes of love Behold; in Isthmian games, nor he Fam'd for the wrestler's wreath shall be,

Nor his latest lineage grace,
By conquering in the chariot-race:
Nor him the toils to warriors known,
A laurel'd chief! shall lead along;
But fruitful Tibur's winding floods,
And the silent gloomy woods,
To render famous shall conspire,
For the poem of the lyre.

Imperial Rome, the nurse of fame,
Kindly does enroll my name
Among the Poets charming choir,
And Envy now abates her ire.
Goddess! who the notes dost swell
So sweetly on my golden shell;
Who canst give, if such thy choice,
To fishes mute the cygnet's voice,
'Tis to thee I wholly owe
Whispers flying where I go,
That to the pressing throng I'm show'd,
Inventor of the Roman Ode!

Mons. Dacier has some very pretty observations on this Ode, and with them I shall beg leave to conclude this paper. "Horace," says he, "in this poem, thanks the Muses for the favourable or propitious eye which they cast upon him in the hour of his nativity; he acknowledges, it was at that first instant of his being that he received from them what ever distinguishes him, and by this acknow-
knowledge."

knowledge he very evidently shews he was persuaded, that no man can be a Poet, unless he received at his birth from heaven, by some happy influence or impression, that spirit of Poetry which art and study can never give." The celebrated Sir William Temple takes a step yet further, and asserts concerning learning in the gross, that "the least grain of wit one is born with, is worth all the improvements

one can afterwards make by study." This would be eminently true, applied to Poetry; and though it ought, perhaps, to be received in a qualified sense in regard of learning in general, yet it is certain, that a great part of what goes by that name consists in such things "as a wise man," to use Seneca's words, "if he knew them would labour to forget."

X. Y. Z.

D R O S S I A N A.

NUMBER LII.

ANECDOTES of ILLUSTRIOUS and EXTRAORDINARY PERSONS PERHAPS NOT GENERALLY KNOWN.

— A THING OF SHREDS AND PATCHES!

HAMLET.

(Continued from Vol. XXIV. Page 451.)

JAMES THE SECOND.

"I DO not know how it is, but I never knew a modest man make his way at Court," said that Prince one day to Mr. Sedley, "Please your Majesty, whose fault is that?" was the reply. In a Journal kept by one of James's Courtiers, there are these curious circumstances:

"OCTOBER 23, 1688.

"Jacques Second grandement inquiet fit placer une Girouette dans un lieu où il la puisse voir de ses appartements la voie."

"OCTOBER 30, 1688.

"Jacques disoit à M. Barillon, Ambassadeur de France (moi présent), Voila donc la vent déclaré Papiste; & puis il ajouta en baissant la voix, "Vous savez que depuis trois jours j'ai fait exposer le saint sacrement."

"DECEMBER 17, 1688.

"Jacques trouve apropos de s'en aller un second fois:

"Qui terret plus ille timet, fors ista tyrannis."

"How hard a fate a tyrant bears,
More than himself is fear'd he fears."

"On cite a chaque instant la prophétie de Nostradamus, écrite sur l'année 1566.

"Celui qui la principauté
Tiendra par grande cruauté

"A la fin verra grande phalange
Porter coup de feu, tres dangereux.

"Par accord pourra faire mieux
Autrement, boira suc d'Orange."

"He who the British empire's reins
By force and cruelty maintains,

"Shall in his turn each horror feel,
The blazing fire, the avenging steel.

"The blazing fire, the avenging steel.

"Then let him with his foe agree,
And save the land from misery;
Or to his lips the Orange juice
Shall poison's fatal ill produce."

The diary of this misguided Prince, and many other curious MSS. relative to the history of Britain, were in the library of the Scots College of Paris. It is to be hoped that they have been preserved from the fury and ravages of the present savages of Europe, if indeed it is not doing them too much honour to give them that appellation. Some one was saying the other day, before a celebrated writer, "that the modern French were a compound of the Monkey and the Tyger."—"Pray, Sir, what have these poor animals ever done to deserve the comparison?" was the reply.

CARDINAL DE BERULLE.

This pious man died, as the late excellent Mr. Grainger did, as he was celebrating the Sacrament. The Cardinal fell down dead upon the steps of the altar at the moment of consecration, as he was pronouncing the words, "Hanc igitur oblationem." This occasioned the following distich:

*Capta sub extremis nequeo dum sacra
sacerdos*

Perficere, at saltem vixima perficiam.

In vain the rev'rend Pontiff tries
To terminate the sacrifice;

Himself within the holy walls
The heav'n-devoted victim falls.

Card. Berulle came over with Henrietta Maria, Queen of Charles the First, to England, to the Court of which he endeared himself by the sanctity of his morals, and the extreme propriety of his behaviour.