

PANETUS was ill-made, short, ugly, and married to a great throw, who made a cuckold of him at every opportunity. SOCRATES is represented, in *The Clouds*, as walking the streets, with a lofty mien, with baggy eyes, naked feet, an air of self-sufficiency, as purloining the clothes of his disciples, and flovenly.

After this follows the French translation, made, as Labineau observes, falsely after the original Greek, and the ancient Ichniast, without any reference to the Latin version, or to the partial translation of Madame Dacier of *Plutus* and of *The Clouds*. Labineau makes no distinction of acts and terms, as, he says, it would be difficult to find in the original the five acts, which, according to some, constitute the whole economy of theatrical pieces; and he would not make an imaginary distinction.

Of the translation itself we shall only observe, that it is natural and unlaboured, and that it seems to have been matured in retirement, and at a time when the French language had yet, so to speak, its *jeune puer*. In order to copy the manners of the Athenians with the greater verity, the translator has rather chosen to offend some too delicate eyes than to fall short of the refinement of his portraits: as a painter, employed to copy a family picture, ought neither to beautify an ugly figure, nor to change a ridiculous costume.

To the Editor of the Monthly Magazine.

SIR, THE following Essays were read some time in the year 1794, to a Literary Society in Liverpool. If you think them worthy of a place in your Miscellany, they are much at your service, together with the best wishes of your's, P.F.

ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF POETRY. NO. I.

"MANKIND may be divided into two classes, consisting of those that are conversant with the productions of literature, and those that entirely disregard them. The former class may be subdivided into those that are 'pleated they know not why, and care not wherefore,'—and those that enquire into the principles of their pleasures, and bring them to be measured by the standard of reason. It is one thing to be moved—another to enquire by what instruments our emotions are occasioned. The former pre-

dilement allies us to the literary vulgar, the latter associates us with philosophers. "Notwithstanding the contempt that has been shewn in such abundance upon critical enquiries into the principles of works of taste and genius, to these enquiries the human mind is irresistibly impelled. In this respect the creation of the mind stands upon the same footing as the works of God. The delight and astonishment which men experienced at the sight of the wonders of nature, led to an investigation of their cause; and became the germ of what is termed natural philosophy. And the appearance of exquisite literary productions led men to investigate the principles whence flowed the pleasure with which they refreshed the soul; and this gave rise to philosophical criticism.

"But it is a fact well known to those who have formed the slightest habit of reflection, that many subjects which appear most familiar and comprehensible, are in reality most difficult of investigation. The mental faculties are, perhaps, never put more intensely on the stretch than in endeavouring to explain an axiom: and when we set about analyzing and reducing to system, ideas that are daily and hourly floating on the surface of our minds, we meet with more perplexity than we were at first aware of. These observations are surely not irrelevant when they are prefixed to an attempt at an enquiry into the nature and characteristics of poetry.

"Whole breath has not been warmed by the muses? Where is the man whose feelings are so firmly bound by the frost of reason as to be impenetrable to the influence of 'Sacred Song?' I would not dishonour the present assembly so much as to suppose that we had a brother of this description. But if any one be inclined to doubt the difficulty of the enquiry into which it is our business to enter, I shall defend my assertions by the high authority of the investigator of the life and writings of Homer. Having looked into his book for assistance in the task which I unwarily undertook, I found the following passage, that strongly reminded me of the friends of Job, who are so generally known under the character of 'miserable comforters.' "The subject is of a nature so delicate as not to admit of a direct definition; for if ever the *je ne sçais quoi* was rightly applied, it is to the powers of poetry and the faculty that produces it. To go about to describe it, would be like attempting

tempting to define inspiration, or that glow of fancy, or effusion of soul, which a poet feels while in his fit; a sensation so strong, that they express it only by exclamations, adjectives, and rapture. "On common occasions, a sentiment of this kind, coming, as it were *ex cathedra*, would perhaps be sufficient to prevent any further examination. But as it is not the habit of our society to conform to the habit of our society, we are obliged to *disse*, which ought to be *disse*, with a degree of care proportionate to the weight they are likely to have; or even to require finished discourses from those that are requested to open the conversation; but merely a few leading ideas which may serve as beacons to direct us in our course: perhaps I may be excused if I presume to proceed a little farther. *Epigram proferre tenet, non datur ultra*: and, I think, we may safely say, that poetry is an art.

"We have heard much indeed of the maxim *poëta agitur, non fit*, which may appear to contradict this position. It will perhaps be leading us astray from the subject, to enquire how far this doctrine is true; how much of the poet's excellence is to be attributed to the 'sacred bias of the soul;' and how much to the effects of culture? Granting that much depends upon the former, still we must reckon poetry among the arts. For is what does art consist? Let us consult the acute Mr. Harris, who, after a minute investigation, defines art as consisting in 'an habitual power in man of becoming the cause of some effect according to a system of well-approved precepts, operating for the sake of some good, unattainable by his natural and unimproved faculties.

"But arts may be divided into two classes: those that conduce to 'mere being' (if we may borrow the use of a term very familiar to the writer just mentioned) and those that are subservient to 'well being.' The former, such as agriculture and architecture, in their rudest state, carry their energies no farther than barely to the supporting man in existence. The latter sweeten the cup of life, and give birth to innumerable pleasures. These are justly styled ornamental, those necessary, and at a certain period of their progress, useful arts.—Now though when we come to the extremities when the characteristics of necessary and useful end, and that of ornamental begins; and though much has been said of the utility of poetry, yet, as we can easily conceive that mankind could much better spare the art of spinning verses than the art of spinning wool, we shall perhaps agree in numbering poetry among the ornamental arts.

"Whenever Aristotle, directly or indirectly, treats of poetry, he constantly styles it a mimetic or imitative art. In this he seems to be justified; for does not the principle of imitation pervade all its branches? When we open—I had almost said, we open—the library of a Ionian, what do we behold but a lively representation of the actions and speeches of heroes and demi-gods—a picture so exquisitely drawn that we may almost mistake it for reality. We can, in a manner, see the humble Citharus player, haughty monarch of Argos sternly repelling from his presence the peaceful priest. We mark the solitary mourner wandering by the shore of the raging sea, and lifting up his hands to Apollo. We behold the god descending 'wreath in thick glooms.' We see him take his station, and hear the dire twanging of his silver bow. What are the dramas of Shakspeare, or Elchylin, but (as the expression of Cowper) 'a map of busy life?' When Tibullus pours his plaintive song, what does he but present before us the tablet of his heart, where we can trace his feelings, and sympathize with him in his doubts and fears? In what confests the beauty of didactic poetry, but in calling the vivid colouring of picturesque representation to the aid of the uninteresting figures and circles of precept?

"Virgil introduces you to his swain—you follow the progress of his labour.—With him you mark the rustling of the leaves of the forest, hear the raring of the sea, view the cornucopia rising from the waters, and the horn floating above the clouds, and all the other prognostics that forebode the coming storm. "And when Aeneas develops the secret wonders of the mind of man.—"Lightning fires the arch of heav'n, and thunders rock the ground! and Ocean, groaning from his lowest bed, heaves his tempestuous billows to the sky amid the mighty uproar, while below the nations tremble. Shakspeare looks abroad from some tall cliff superior, and enjoys the elemental war." "But amidst these beauties we could wander for ever. Let us quit them, however reluctantly, having gathered, as the fruit of our excursion, that, inasmuch as poetry impresses upon our minds the vivid

robbed poetry of many of its provinces, and circumscribed the sphere of its application.

"But from no country (save Plato's ideal republic) has poetry been banished. To speak in the dialect of materialism, souls formed of finer clay have in every land, and in every generation, arisen, who, themselves smitten with the love of sacred song, have captivated the attention of those that listened to their lays, and have raised themselves and their art to the most sacred shrine of the temple of Fame. Hence the countless multitude of poetic effusions of every description, from the lofty epic to the humble pastoral, which have embellished every language that has assumed a form and body, and which we must form our judgment, on the subject of this evening's enquiry; viz. the *ends of poetry*."

"In the course of our last discussion, we seemed to be unanimously of opinion, that the grand characteristic, the *fine* *non* of poetry, consists in its capacity of impressing the mind with the most vivid pictures. Indeed, the maxim *ut pictura poësis*, is amply illustrated whenever poetry is in any shape the subject of investigation. The terms of the painter's art then infensibly creep into the discourse, and model our phraseology."

"Pursuing, then, this idea, we may perhaps lay it down as the grand and leading end of poetry, to make a strong and lively impression on the feelings. In her operations she hurries us far beyond the reach of the voice of sober judgment, and captivates by exciting the aid of the passions. Here, then, we see the cause of the mighty energy of verse, not wonder at the efficaciousness that has been ascribed to the mutes. For how easily are mankind guided by those that possess the happy art of awakening or allaying their feelings. Though all unconsciously of being under the guidance of another, they turn obedient to the rein. They are routed to infurrection, or moderated to peace, by him who can touch with a skilful hand, the master springs that regulate the motions of their minds. When Brutus ascends the rostrum, the words of truth and soberness are heard, and plain integrity convinces the judgment. But, when Anthony displays the bloody robe, and points to the wounds of Cæsar, reminding the people that this was once their darling benefactor—the multitude are melted to sorrow, and at last roused from pity to fury and revenge."

"Such are the effects that are produced by interesting the passions; and as it is the leading end of poetry to make a lively impression on the feelings, we may judge, as it were *a priori*, of the amazing intensity of its powers, and we shall find our judgment verified, when we come to enquire into the fact. What heart but feels at once the beauty and happiness of conjugal love, as displayed by the chief of bands, in the characters of Hector and Andromache? The situations into which these characters are thrown, present us with a variety of pictures, so affecting, that nothing but the realities of life can possibly be conceived to excel them. We all know the parting scene, where the son of Priam takes his last farewell of the partner of his fortunes. It will therefore be as unnecessary as impossible to describe the emotions excited by the tender solicitude of the wife, for him who was to her a father, a mother, and a brother; or the mild dignity of the hero, softened by the tenderest feelings, and affected by the gloomiest prefigurations."

"What dissertation, what course of argument, however firmly founded, or however skilfully arranged, is calculated to have so powerful an influence upon the mind? Justly, indeed, did Horace say, of the great father of verse, that he is a man."

Qui quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe quid uile quid non

Plinius ac mehus Chrysope & Crambor dixit.

"When Virgil places, as it were, before our eyes, Lausus rushing forward to protect his father, who, wounded and exhausted, is sinking before his powerful foe; when we see the youth, fearless of danger, presenting his body as a shield against the threatened stroke, and nobly sacrificing his own life in defence of his parent, we applaud the generous deed, and at once perceive the beauty of filial affection. And are not our feelings strung to an union with the emotions of friendship, by a perusal of the interesting episode of Nisus and Eurypius; we all know that the tender passion gives itself vent in song, and that the first aim of the "unfledged poet," is by soothing lays to touch the heart of his mistress."

"In short, if we examine poetry throughout all its species, we shall find that its direct tendency is, to influence the feelings. Even when Lucretius undertakes the arduous task of rendering the discussions of philosophy interesting to the public mind, he accomplishes his purpose, he captivates the attention,

by the skilful interposition of descriptive words and narrations, that allure the fancy and improve the feelings. Superstition, and the clouds of heaven, frowns upon the generations of men. The dreadful altar is exposed to view—Ephigeneia is brought forth, and the father, while the fatal stroke is inflicting, hides his face in his mantle. As a contrast to these horrors, the goddess of beauty descends in all her loveliness, and breathes a frether spring throughout calivened nature. There are the artifices by which he keeps out of view the dynasts of the world, and the depth of his enquiries; a train of artifice, which he has himself characterized in that beautiful simile which, however familiar, never suffers from a repetition:

Thus the sick infant's tales, disguised, to meet,

They tinge the vessel's brim with juices

fairer,

The bitter draught his willing lip receives,

He drinks deceived, and so deceived he lives.

"Upon the whole, we may perhaps venture to describe the end of poetry in the words which Mr. Pope used to describe the object of one of its principal branches, and say that its design is—

To wake the soul by tender strokes of art.

"The poet just quoted, has asserted of a certain class of ideas,

"He best shall paint them who shall feel them most."

This observation may be with justice extended to every description of ideas which afford a subject for the effusions of the muse. A poet must be a man of delicate perceptions and strong feelings; and he may be said to have attained the summit of his art, when he is master of a vivid phraseology, that will operate as a conductor, and communicate to his reader, in the highest possible degree, those feelings by which he is himself animated.

"Here, then, this Essay might, perhaps, with propriety, have been closed. But I must rely upon your candour, for the admission of a few more observations, which may, perhaps, tend to illustrate the point to which this enquiry has led us:

"The end of poetry, it is said, is an impression upon the feelings.—But as there is an intimate connection between feeling and action, so that where the one appears, the other follows hard upon; if the foregoing observations be true, we may expect to find that the actions of mankind are, in some measure, influenced by the Muses."

"And if we look to the simpler ages

of society, when we can best distinguish the grand outlines of the human character, where the springs that actuate the conduct of man are, in a manner, bared for inspection, we shall find this to have been the case. In the infancy of aætes, poetry is a method equally captivating and efficacious of forming the dispositions of the people, and kindling in their hearts that love of glory which is their country's safeguard and defence. Whether we look to the cold regions of Scandinavia, or the delicious clime of Greece, we find that when society has made a certain progress, *manliness* *are* *aroused* *by* *a* *love* *of* *songs*, *and* *then*, *with* *rapured* *attention*, *to* *the* *annals* *that* *record* *the* *deeds* *of* *other* *times*, *and* *the* *deeds* *of* *heroes* *of* *old*. They listen till they imbibe the enthusiasm of warfare, and in the day of battle, the hero's arm has not unfrequently been moved by the rough energy of the early bard.—Whether Osgan strike the chords in the Hall of Shelle, or Phœbus attune his voice at the banquet of Ulysses, the principle by which they operate on the soul of the hearer is the same, and they accord in urging them by great examples, to deeds of high renown. The following quotation from the *Odyssey*, is a striking proof of the respect in which minstrels were held in the times of Homer; it also gives us a clue to their general sublimity, and, in all probability, the consequence of an ingenious writer is just, who imagines that he beholds in it a picture of Homer himself:

And now the herald came, leading, with care,
The tuneful bard. Dear to the muse was he,
Who yet appointed him both good and ill;
Took from him sight, but gave him strains
divine.

For him Pœneus in the mist disposed
An argos, shrouded thence; himself it clode.

To a tall column, where he hung his lyre
Above his head, and taught him where to sing.

He set before him next a polished board,
And bakket, and a goblet filled with wine;

For his own sake, and at his own command;
Then all assidèd it once the ready feast,

And when not hunger more nor thirst they felt,
Then came the muse, and pour'd the liquid
fire

Explores of men renown'd.

"It is not to be doubted, that even when the Greeks had attained to a high degree of civilization, their martial ardour was kept alive by the compositions of their poets, who chose, as their darling subjects, the illustrious deeds performed by heroes mingled with the dust, or flourishing with their honours thick

