

with all his watermen, and many of his landmen, or
centenals,

effort to retrieve his affairs. Particularly as he cannot
in

258

THE MONTHLY VISITOR.

in any pressing exigency, do without his watermen, let him command their services in the most gentle manner. Let all his young men be centenals or land waiters in their turn. Let no man be hindered from catching mules, except in the harvest season, when all should be employed in cutting down their corn. Let all his shepherds on his paternal estate be well paid for taking care of his flock; but let their wages be fixed, and not paid in such a way as to hurt his farmers. Let no man be encouraged to be indolent; though his poor labourers should be treated kindly. Let no man, who cannot cultivate his field or pay his debts, be allowed to keep his farm on John's northern estate, because the man's grandfather or great uncle willed it to, or because such a custom has prevailed formerly; nor let there be any by-laws or farming regulations on his wife's estate that are not on his paternal farms. Let John's ploughmen, his weavers, and his watermen, charge what they please for their wages, provided no man is bound to employ them. Let John alter the regulations both about the price and measure of his corn; and let all his by-laws be plain and simple, that every ploughman, every waterman, and every weaver may understand them. Let John reward every industrious servant, and discourage every spend-thrift and every silly fellow, who will not work in all weathers. And where the health of his people is hurt by their own folly, let him trust more to proper diet, and to air and exercise, than to quack medicines or keeping his people confined to close rooms. Let his people be regularly called to lay open their case to him; and let his overlord be obeyed, but respected and loved rather than dreaded. Let his people be allowed to manage their property as they please; and let John's word be always sacred. But especially let John take proper steps for paying off his load of debt. 'Till this be done, his farmers will be disappointed, his weavers discontented, and his watermen oppressed and ill-treated. His debt is now so great, that they cannot be paid at once; otherwise

"Strictures on the Versification and Sentiment
of Modern Poetry," Monthly Visitor, 4 (July 1798)

THE MONTHLY VISITOR..

259

wife his people would find their interest in paying them. But, instead of paying John for every drop of spirits, ale, and even small beer which they drink, and every bushel of malt, or yard of cloth which they make, and a punnet of little articles about their clothes, their shoes and hats, for the houses in which they dwell, for their windows which admit light in the day-time, or the candle which they use at night, for soap to wash their beads, and for powder to conceal their want of hair on their heads, let John Bull's people shew their attachment to one of the best fellows in the world, by paying every man a small portion of his income to clear off all the debts which John has promised to pay, whether just debts or not; only let the people who pay the money choose proper men to manage it to the best account; and let John Bull's overseers and his clerks be all tied up for the future from booking 200l. or 180l. or 112l. 10s. where John only got 97l. And where this false reckoning has been already made, let them get up John's bonds as cheaply as they can; and let John's managers, whether farmers, weavers, or watermen, be chosen by those who give a considerable sum annually to discharge his debts.

If such measures be adopted, honest John will be relieved from all his difficulties. His ploughmen shall again *whistle* at their ploughs; his weavers shall *dance* at their looms; and his watermen shall give him *three cheers* from their boats.

STRICTURES

ON THE VERSIFICATION AND SENTIMENT OF
MODERN POETRY.

I N presuming to intrude my remarks upon the Publisher on a subject on which I have already written two papers, I feel some apology necessary. To correct the literary

255-66

literary taste of a nation, and point out the prevailing defects of the poetical compositions of the present day, appears an Herculean task, suited only to the strength of those whose transcendent abilities qualify them to become the regulators of science, and will, perhaps, be deemed a Quixotic attempt in one of the most inexperienced votaries of the muse. But while I venture to make a few superficial observations upon the state of poetical studies in this country, I must beg leave utterly to disclaim the ambitious design of assuming the character of a dictator; it is in literary pursuits, as in the transactions of common life, we may be capable of detecting, and justified in censuring the defects of those whose general excellencies we may in vain endeavour to imitate.

Though it must be confessed, that the art of forming lines composed of measured syllables, and ending in correspondent sounds, cannot be considered in itself as forming any part of poetry, yet it is a necessary addition to it. The same ideas which would gain admiration if expressed in verse, would found stiff and bombastic in prose. Much, however, as the "imposing harmony" of numbers is calculated to increase the pleasures produced by the loftiest flights of imagination, or the most refined delicacies of language, there is one inconvenience attending all regular versification, and which cannot be avoided. The delight produced by it is of a nature totally distinct from that arising from the intrinsic excellencies of the poetry. A regular accentuation, and a succession of similar sounds, cannot give additional pathos to an impassioned sentiment, poignancy to a brilliant allusion, or brightness to the lively scenes of a creative fancy; such a delight therefore arises wholly from the lines being so constructed as to fall upon the ear in melodious and agreeable sounds; it is derived from mechanical causes, and its pleasures are merely sensual. It is seldom that the construction of verses will be made to correspond with the subject, and therefore the constant recurrence of the same regular cadence in every line will

will cloy the ear, especially in long poems, and instead of giving energy to the expressions, would in some degree lessen their force, by producing effects similar to what are experienced in hearing an oration delivered throughout in one monotonous tone and accent which are never varied according to the sense. But as experience convinces us that this is not an evil of such importance as to induce us to sacrifice the satisfaction arising from the fascinating harmony of numbers, we should endeavour to draw a medium, by adopting such a measure for general use, as shall possess the advantages of a regular combination of sounds, and will at the same time be attended, in the least degree, with those ill consequences I have already stated. For these purposes the iambic, of which our common verse of eight syllables, and heroic measure of ten syllables, are composed, appears the best; like the smooth gliding of a gentle current, it neither disgusts by its rapidity, or harshness of sounds; while it is sufficiently melodious to delight, its accent is not so forcible as to prevent that emphasis which the nature of the subject demands being adopted. Hence, perhaps, it will be found that poetry composed in this measure will admit of a greater variety of tones and expression, and a more pathetic and energetic mode of delivery in recitation than any other. Another advantage is, that lines which are chiefly formed of iambic feet, admit of more numerous combinations and pauses than other measures; hence the ear is not cloyed by the continual return of the same regular cadence, and the ingenious versifier will meet with frequent opportunities of suiting his verse to the subject, and making the sound the echo of the sense.

There is another measure which, from the example of some eminent writers of the present day, has become very fashionable, this is the anapestick, consisting of feet of three syllables, and is that in which Palsquin wrote his Children of Thelops. This species of versification, from the rapidity of its motion, and the unvarying jingle of

its numbers, does not appear suited to a poem of any length, though its liveliness may please in a short one. It, from the causes just stated, the attention is apt to be drawn off from the sense to the sound, and the effect many passages, especially those of a tender or energetic kind, is thereby considerably diminished; this will appear obvious from hearing a passage in this measure cited; though the reader may possess the most delicate ability, or the nicest discriminative taste, he can introduce but few of the graces of delivery; those tones and accents which are useful in heightening the pathetic and lively conceptions, can seldom be used without injuring the harmony of the line. There is a kind of poetical composition, or rather a medley of kinds put together, to which most writers, who have been successful in their literary attempts, aspire; this is the irregular lyric, by many, falsely, called the Pindaric. Alas, how futile is their ambition! the daring aliminy, the rapture, the melody of the Theban lyre is all; enough is retained but its whimsicality. Perhaps consequence is what induces many to adopt this licentious mode of writing: a line of ten syllables may not admit an easy formation, in some instances; one therefore of six or eight is made to answer the purpose; a rhyme may not readily present itself to their minds to enable them to complete the couplet; its introduction is therefore deferred till the third or fourth, or perhaps the sixth or seventh line from that to which it corresponds. Indeed, there are few appear to understand the true design of this irregular mode of writing, but imagine that emancipation from the ordinary rules of criticism is only to enable them to write with more ease and facility, though it must be confessed that uniformity in regard to the numbers and quantity of our lines, as far as it respects a pleasing influence on the ear, is an advantage which ought not to be sacrificed without necessity. Whenever, therefore, this loose method of writing is adopted, the author ought to be actuated by motives of a more important

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portrait nature than those of mere caprice or convenience. His true intention should be to give additional force and pathos to his ideas, by suiting his harmony to his expressions through all the varying transitions of his poem; perhaps Dryden's celebrated Ode on Cecilia's day, are the finest instances extant, either in our own or any language, of this suitability of the verse to the subject. A great deal of that enthusiasm which runs through them, and which alternately rouses the soul to joy, inflames it with rage, or melts it into tenderness and love, arises from its ingenious modulations.

There is one remark which may be deduced from the foregoing, which is, that great attention should be paid to the subject in this species of writing; as only those which admit of such images as are calculated to delight, surprise, and terrify the imagination, and of such expressions as will excite the keener and most lively sensations of the soul, will be found properly adapted for the purpose. Added to this, the mind should be variously affected by a rapid change of scenery, or by its different passions being influenced by frequent and even abrupt transitions; otherwise the same versification that is suited to one part will be suited to the whole. For want of attention to these considerations the greatest absurdities are committed; pastoral, satirical, political, religious and moral poetry, are frequently written with all the licentiousness of unauthorized and unmeaning irregularity; though such compositions must necessarily be destitute of the wild enthusiasm of the sublime lyric ode, and often, through the inability of the author, sink into the most jejune insipidity of style. Similar remarks to those above may be made on the monody, or irregular elegy: that kind of grief which is of a calm and settled nature, as best expressed by the common elegiac measure of alternate tens; but when, from the death of a mistress, a near relation, or friend, or other causes, the mind is supposed to be overwhelmed by the poignancy of its sufferings, and no longer able to retain a command of its faculties; but vents

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vents itself in unavailing complaint, and broken exclamations; sorrows of so exquisite a nature are best expressed by

"A solemn, strange, and mindfai air,
'Tis sad by fits, by fairs 'in wild."

Perhaps it may be considered that an enquiry into the *sentiments* that characterize modern poetry is more suited to a moral, than a critical differentiation. But the importance of such an enquiry will, I trust, prove an excuse for its being here attempted. The most prevailing characteristic of the generality of compositions in verse, is a romantic affectation of sensibility; the writer, disguised with the dull uniformity of the ordinary transactions of life, and with the grossness and vulgarity that pervade the opinions and manners of ordinary mortals, retires, or at least is supposed to retire, from the bustle of public life to some rural solitude, where he can be at liberty to indulge certain reflections, and enjoy certain refined delicacies of sensation, which can only be known to hearts of the finest texture. In such a situation every surrounding object of nature, the departing glories of the setting sun, the milder radiance of the moon glimmering through the trees, the plaintive notes of the nightingale, and even the murmurs of the western breeze, all conspire to soothe his mind, and dissolve it into tenderness! Under such circumstances the soul delights to indulge mournful ideas. Some afflictive occurrence of his life, the anguish he once felt when the hopes of ardent affection were blasted, the loss of some near relative, or faithful friend, who was the constant participator of his youthful joys and sorrows, or perhaps some generous sympathizing reflections upon the miseries of others, tend to throw a shade over the scenes which an active fancy may portray, and involve him in that pleasing melancholy with which a delicate mind is so well acquainted; though it is, in its nature and effects, a paradox which the deepest enquirers into human nature cannot

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not explain. Under the influence of these sensations he vents his complaints in sonnets, or other trifling effusions, which appear to be produced by a great refinement of sentiment, and an acute sensibility, rather than by a vigorous and lively imagination. It is far from my intention to condemn, or deride such emotions, which I am convinced constitute some of the most amiable feelings of our nature. Yet it ought to be the object of consideration, whether the excessive indulgence of such a romantic pensiveness of temper may not tend to undermine the noblest energies of the soul, and render those who commonly delight in the luxury of sighs and tears, a kind of mental valetudinarians, unfit to perform the common duties of life, and incapable of bearing its most ordinary calamities?

But there is another fault too prevalent in the sentiments of modern poetry, that is an unmanly despondence, and peevish querulousness, which often pervade the compositions of many of our writers. It is not the privilege of genius to be exempt from misfortune, but they appear to deem it their privilege to trouble the Public with their complaints, forgetting that such a kind of writing is the least calculated to gain attention, or to afford delight. They may indeed sometimes produce a transient tear of sympathy; but if their subjects are always of a local and personal nature, and continually involved in the same cheerless gloom, they must fail to interest, and their readers will at length turn with a listless disgust from their productions, to those that are better calculated to amuse and instruct. But their complaints are often attended with reflections that are irreligious and unphilosophical; that are calculated to destroy hope, enervate exertion, and render others as well as themselves the victims of pining discontent; they paint life in the most sombre colours, and represent man as being formed by his Maker merely for misery and disappointment, without reflecting that the afflictions which the virtuous are doomed to bear are designed by the

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the benevolent Author of our existence to exercise patience, strengthen fortitude, and purify them from what they consider as their curse, rather than to

the benevolent Author of our existence to exercise patience, strengthen fortitude, and purify them from vices; they consider rationality as their curse, rather than that privilege and glory, and with, or at least pretend to with, that they could exchange all their attainments in knowledge for the dull insensibility and mental vacuity of the ignorant rustic. Nay, the poor lunatic has been the object of envy to some of our modern melancholics, because he has lost those powers of reflection which are the greatest burden they sustain! This life is not considered by them as a probationary state designed to prepare us for a more perfect and exalted existence, and if ever the prospect of death affords them comfort, it is not because they regard it as a dark avenue leading to scenes of inconceivable brightness; they consider it merely as the

"tranquil shore,
Where the pale spectre Care shall haunt no more."

It is indeed an event they profess ardently to wish for; but the greatest advantage they expect from it, is to let the sense of misery in utter forgetfulness. How degrading is it for true genius to employ itself in such a manner! If a writer is blest with a lively fancy, he ought to endeavour to soothe his own woes, as well as divert those of others, by leading them to wander with him in an eddium of his own creation; and not imitate the real evils of life by conjuring up scenes of fictitious horror. If he is distinguished by a more than ordinary refinement of sentiment, or by an elegance of style in writing, he ought to display his superiority in a better manner than merely by expressing himself with a more gloomy eloquence than that of which others are capable.

JOHN JAMES PEAT.

LEADING

LEADING TRAITS OF PUBLIC CHARACTERS, WITH ANECDOTES;

Or Helps for the Biographic Historian.

BY A FRIEND OF THE VISITOR,

Long conversant in the Circles of Fashion and Literature.

[Continued from page 158]

THE BEAUTIFUL AND CELEBRATED DUCHESS.

THIS Lady, so highly distinguished by rank, beauty, and accomplishments, is one of the most amiable and worthy mothers in the kingdom. Her Grace has always been in the true motherly habit of suckling her own children, to sustain the necessary waste of which, she never scruples to refresh herself with a draught from a tankard of wholesome English beverage, any more than the mothers of lower degree. But however domesticated, her Grace must sometimes play; and that unfortunately seldom failed to bring on an embarrassment for ready cash, notwithstanding the large income of the player. During such streights, her Grace, in former times, that is to say, those of youth and indiscretion, has not unfrequently condescended to deal in silks, by disposing of her imports to the merchants in town, for ready money.

On a certain very pressing occasion, every other resource failing, it was determined to apply to one of those monied men who so liberally offer, through the medium of the public papers, their assistance to such as stand in need of it. Accordingly one of these secretaries of the god Plus was sent for (who at the very mention of the name and rank of the applicant blessed his stars) and introduced to my Lady Duchess. The fellow, who was

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22

an Altherman of the first cut, behaved himself gallantly

very middling, folded up the Duchess's draught upon his