

CAMDEN



GAZETTE.

Number 28.

CAMDEN, S. C.

Thursday, October 10, 1816.

Volume I.

Miscellany.

FROM THE PORTICO.

View of the present state of Public Learning.

CHAPTER IX.

Of Poetry.

No art has flourished with such splendour, in the earliest stages of society, and the rudest degrees of civilization, as that of poetry. The inspiration of fancy, was the first fire that kindled the genius of primitive man to sublime invention. The most perfect poem ever produced, was the offspring of an uncultivated age, devoid of science, and barren of refinement. Homer's genius, like the lightning riding upon the storm, illuminated a dark and gloomy period, which but for him had never been remembered. The poetry of the Hebrews, that primeval people of the globe, is also remarkable for the same circumstances attending its beauty. The song of Solomon, the Psalms of David, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah, breathe a fervent strain of sacred rapture and glow with the chastest fires of poetick imagination. Bold and resplendent imagery, with striking allusions, are the characteristic charms of their majestic pages; and while they impress the mind with awful pleasure, they suggest the durability of an art, which can outlive a people, and procure their writings veneration and renown, when they have themselves ceased to excite compassion or inspire esteem!

In modern countries, and more recent times, the same sublimity of poetick fancy, is discerned to characterize ages yet immersed in barbarity, when compared with their subsequent refinement. Shakspeare, Massinger, and Milton, and shall we omit Spencer? were the chief poets in the English tongue. Their productions allow of no superfluities, and were coexistent with a state of society, that was rather rude, unpolished and unrefined, than delicate and accomplished. It was an age destitute of many of the arts necessary to comfort; and only distinguished for an infant cultivation of substantial learning, and a budding state for natural sentiment, unvarnished beauty, and genuine simplicity of style and language.

To advert to other nations, during the same period, we may remark similar peculiarities attending the Italian Poets. Tasso and Ariosto, were planets that illuminated the twilight of learning. *Jerusalem Delivered*, by the first, and *Orlando*, by the latter, were the productions of an age, obviously barbarous in manners, depraved in morals, and darkened by superstition. Coexistent also with those authors, was Camoens, the poet of Portugal; the only name, but an amiable and renowned one! which can rescue that degenerate nation from the gloom of oblivion, or save her from the stigma of stupidity.

Instances so numerous, frequent, and uniform, of great poetical genius being the regular concomitant of a rude age, must assuredly imply some connectig principle. between this divine attainment, and the moral condition of the state that gives it birth. Before the mind is tamed by science,

and the imagination chilled by judgment, the greatest poets always flourish! Does not this emphatically prove that an age of unilluminated nature is most auspicious to their grandeur, sublimity, and magnificence? It is only such an age that can afford *inbusastick* genius; that genius, whose bold and lofty flights, spurn the restrictions of the critic, and only consult feeling for perfection. It is only then, too, that the whole store of figurative language, is unappropriated by any, and open to unbounded choice. As it does not require progressive refinement, therefore, to make it perfect, we may safely infer, that it has long since assumed its most brilliant form, and sparkled in its most dazzling colours.

Besides the poets above mentioned, who have soared on wings of fire to renown, we behold the two last ages crowded with a galaxy of genius, that could scarcely fail to confer perfection, on any period or any people. Dryden in dramatick poetry, was the ornament of his age and the envy of his contemporaries; and has brought the lyrick, to a pitch of perfection, which future competitors have departed of being able to equal.

Didactic poetry can not be advanced, beyond the excellence to which it was carried, by Pope, Akenside, and Armstrong, to whom we must emphatically add the names of Dr. Young, and of Cowper. Nor let Johnson or Savage be depreciated or forgotten, in the midst of multitudes, whilst genius continues to be revered, or perfection to be applauded!

In this enumeration of examples, I would most gladly dispense with the parade of names, were it compatible with distinct proof. But who can strew flowers at every step, or soothe the languor of toil by harmony, when he is only solicitous to mark the road, survey the country, and point out the tracts of cultivated plenty to the doubtful stranger? But do we not tread on flowers, and inhale fragrance at every step of this delightful topic?

Poetry of a descriptive nature, can truly boast a bright preeminence; and I boldly affirm, that no addition can be made to its various beauties. The vast affluence of rich description, that has devolved to us from the ancients, as well as that which more recent genius has given birth to, argues no probability of its higher advancement. Milton in his *L. Allegro*, and *Il Penseroso*, has displayed some of the most fascinating beauties of this kind of writing. His two *Epick Poems* likewise abound in them to a luxuriant degree; and vie with the most celebrated descriptions, that Homer, Virgil, or Camoens possess. Dryden and Pope, are not sufficient in the same graces. In Thompson we behold a peerless constellation of this sort of imagery, which would confer fresh renown, and add unequalled beauty to the most splendid pages of classic Letters.

Goldsmith's *Traveller*, with the *Deserted Village*, and Parnell's *Hermit*, are also replete with shining examples of descriptive excellence. And the *Wanderer of Savage*, shows

a display of power in this walk, which may hold its superiority.

Upon Drama, or poesy, who shall attempt to improve? Or who will allege, that it has not reached an impassable perfection? Nature and art have confessed their inability to do more. The laughing graces and the mask of merriment deride the feeble efforts of an imitative age; any the poisoned bowl is full to overflowing. Without referring to the Greek stage, a copious storehouse of exhaustless beauties! or considering the state of the Drama in different modern nations, what genius or toil, can rise above the regal Triumvirate, of Shakspeare, Massinger, and Johnson? What exceeds the pathos of *Orway*, the impressiveness of Rowe, the passion of Young, or the solemnity of Congreve; Who can equal the humour of Goldsmith, the wit of Steele, or the sarcasm of Fielding?

I have already adverted to the great authors of the *Epopee*, who adorned and ennobled the nations from whence they sprung. The eighteenth century can boast of no *Epick Poet* of exalted powers, for surely Voltaire cannot be ranked as one of so high a class! Yet this deficiency cannot be ascribed to a deficient intellect, vapid imagination, or defective taste. The soil was not barren, the seed were destroyed. Scarcely any two successive ages, have ever given birth to sublime *Epick Poems*. Perhaps few revolutions of time, beget suitable incidents and events for this species of poesy. The models that already exist are perfect. Numerous attempts, built on slender foundations, inevitably lead to a pernicious aberration, and rather produce a degenerate taste, than advance the perfection of learning, or conduce to the elevation of genius. The premature attempt of an American poet, has flung the disgrace of miscarriage on our native genius. Yet it may be questioned, whether it is a disgrace to fail when so few have succeeded!

A new species of poetry, of recent invention, forcibly attracts the attention of mankind; and has bestowed the applause of invention upon the age. This is a sort of middle *Epick*, adapted to less dignified topics than the *Epopee*. Whatever merit or perfection, can flow from unexpected originality, will contribute to enhance the character of the period of which we are speaking; and it will more evidently appear hereafter, that this invention has augmented the difficulty of improvement, and left for posterity to perform.

From the *Philadelphia True American*.

We are glad to see a piece of wit these dull times. The following, from the Greensburg (Westmoreland) Gazette, will excite a smile at the expence of the "boosing," hand shaking—whisky treating—electioeering gentry of all parties.

Hemphield Township, 12th Aug. 1816.

I am about preparing for publication a Farce, to be called "*The Election*." You may publish the following soliloquy out of it, if you think proper: Perhaps I may send

you some other parts, if your readers relish this.

AN AUTHOR.

Enter Muggins, staggering.

These Demo and Feds are main kind people, before an election. Now there be Dr. Physick the demo, and Counsellor Law, the fed, who be just hand and glove with me. At home, in the old country, I durst no more speak to such big folks no more than I durst speak to the Lord Mayor of Lunnun. Why, no less nor yesterday, I meets Dr. Physick, and he smiled so at me, and was so kind it would have done your heart good to see us shake hands. Says he, my friend Muggins, how is all home? Purely, your honour, says I, only Bet has got the hives and Bill has got the worms. Oh! says his honour, you must make use of a little pedeluvia, if that wont do I will give you some stimuli. But says I, your honour, what will you charge me? not a cent, my dear friend, says he. Well, says I, I'll vote for your honour, you can talk so learned, and you would make such learned laws amongst the congress people—But in less time than a cow could crack her thumb does I meet Counsellor Law—Oh, ho! is that you, my honest fellow, Muggins, says he, come, it is past twelve o'clock—come to my house, and we will have some old whiskey and cool water. With all my heart says I, and so at it we went, cheek by jowl. But I had not taken more than a or two pull out of the blue bottle, before he says, Muggins, who are you going to vote for, and wif is your neighbours, Christophe, Honiele, and Phety for? Why, your honour, says I, we be all for you—for to the truth his liquor was mar good and plenty of it. But after all I was in a peck of troubles who to vote for, so I ax'd my wife—Why John, you fool you, says she, and she looked so convitvical—throw Physick to the dogs, what act of charity did he ever perform? what poor man's debt did he ever pay? or who did he ever bail out of jail? And any how, you fool, Law can only take your purse, but Physic may take your life. Well, well, lovee, says I, don't be so very dispassionate—I'll vote for Law—Yes burn me if I don't.

Exit MUGGINS.

The Ant Grass—*Cyperus hydra*.

The following notice of this plant, is added to the description of it, in Elliott's Sketch of the Botany of South-Carolina and Georgia, the 1st No. of which has been lately published.

"This plant is becoming a great scourge to our planters. It shoots from the base of its stem, a thread like fibre, which descends perpendicularly 6-8 inches, and then produces a small tubor. From this, horizontal fibres, extends in every direction, producing new tubres in intervals of 6 or 8 inches, and these immediately shoot up stems to the surface of the earth, and throw out lateral fibres to form a new progeny. This process is interminable, and it is curious to see what a chain, or net-work of plants, and fibres can with some care be dug up in a loose sod. The only process yet discovered, by which the grass can be extirpated, is to plough or hoe the spots in which it grows, every day through a whole