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Lecture XXXIX. Pastoral Poetry - Lyric Poetry

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LECTURE XXXIX.

PASTORAL POETRY — LYRIC POETRY.

LECT. **I**N the last Lecture, I gave an account of the
XXXIX. Rise and Progress of Poetry, and made some observations on the nature of English Versification. I now proceed to treat of the chief kinds of Poetical Composition; and of the critical rules that relate to them. I shall follow that order, which is most simple and natural; beginning with the lesser forms of Poetry, and ascending from them to the Epic and Dramatic, as the most dignified. This Lecture shall be employed on Pastoral, and Lyric Poetry.

THOUGH I begin with the consideration of Pastoral Poetry, it is not because I consider it as one of the earliest forms of Poetical Composition. On the contrary, I am of opinion that it was not cultivated as a distinct species, or subject of Writing, until Society had advanced in refinement. Most Authors have indeed indulged the fancy, that because the life which mankind at first led was rural, therefore, their first Poetry was Pastoral, or employed in the celebration of

rural scenes and objects. I make no doubt, that it would borrow many of its images and allusions, from those natural objects with which men were best acquainted; but I make as little doubt, that the calm and tranquil scenes of rural felicity were not, by any means, the first objects which inspired that strain of Composition, which we now call Poetry. It was inspired, in the first periods of every nation, by events and objects which roused men's passions; or, at least, awakened their wonder and admiration. The actions of their Gods and Heroes, their own exploits in war, the successes or misfortunes of their countrymen and friends, furnished the first Themes to the Bards of every country. What was of a Pastoral kind in their Compositions, was incidental only. They did not think of choosing for their Theme, the tranquillity and the pleasures of the country, as long as these were daily and familiar objects to them. It was not till men had begun to be assembled in great cities, after the distinctions of rank and station were formed, and the bustle of Courts and large Societies was known, that Pastoral Poetry assumed its present form. Men then began to look back upon the more simple and innocent life, which their forefathers led, or which, at least, they fancied them to have led: they looked back upon it with pleasure; and in those rural scenes, and pastoral occupations, imagining a degree of felicity to take place, superior to what they now enjoyed, conceived the idea of celebrating it in Poetry. It was in the

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LECT. court of King Ptolomy, that Theocritus wrote
XXXIX. the first Pastorals with which we are acquainted;
and, in the court of Augustus, he was imitated
by Virgil.

BUT whatever may have been the origin of Pastoral Poetry, it is, undoubtedly, a natural, and very agreeable form of Poetical Composition. It recalls to our imagination, those gay scenes, and pleasing views of nature, which commonly are the delight of our childhood and youth; and to which, in more advanced years, the greatest part of men recur with pleasure. It exhibits to us a life, with which we are accustomed to associate the ideas of peace, of leisure, and of innocence; and, therefore, we readily set open our heart to such representations as promise to banish from our thoughts the cares of the world, and to transport us into calm Elysian regions. At the same time, no subject bids fairer for being favourable to Poetry. Amidst rural objects, nature presents, on all hands, the finest field for description; and nothing appears to flow more, of its own accord, into Poetical Numbers, than rivers and mountains, meadows and hills, flocks and trees, and shepherds void of care. Hence, this species of Poetry has, at all times, allured many Readers, and excited many Writers. But, notwithstanding those advantages it possesses, it will appear, from what I have farther to observe upon it, that there is hardly any species of Poetry which is more difficult to be carried

to perfection, or in which fewer Writers have excelled.

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PASTORAL life may be considered in three different views; either such as it now actually is; when the state of Shepherds is reduced to be a mean, servile, and laborious state; when their employments are become disagreeable, and their ideas gross and low: or such as we may suppose it once to have been, in the more early and simple ages, when it was a life of ease and abundance; when the wealth of men consisted chiefly in flocks and herds, and the Shepherd, though unrefined in his manners, was respectable in his state: or, lastly, such as it never was, and never can in reality be, when, to the ease, innocence, and simplicity of the early ages, we attempt to add the polished taste, and cultivated manners, of modern times. Of these three states, the first is too gross and mean, the last too refined and unnatural, to be made the ground-work of Pastoral Poetry. Either of these extremes is a rock upon which the Poet will split, if he approach too near it. We shall be disgusted if he give us too much of the servile employments, and low ideas of actual peasants, as Theocritus is censured for having sometimes done; and if, like some of the French and Italian Writers of Pastorals, he makes his Shepherds discourse as if they were courtiers and scholars. he then retains the name only, but wants the spirit of Pastoral Poetry.

HE must, therefore, keep in the middle station

LECT. between these. He must form to himself the idea
 XXXIX. of a rural state, such as in certain periods of
 Society may have actually taken place, where
 there was ease, equality, and innocence; where
 Shepherds were gay and agreeable, without
 being learned or refined; and plain and artless,
 without being gross and wretched. The great
 charm of Pastoral Poetry arises, from the view
 which it exhibits of the tranquillity and happiness
 of a rural life. This pleasing illusion, therefore,
 the Poet must carefully maintain. He must display,
 to us, all that is agreeable in that state, but hide
 whatever is displeasing *. Let him paint its sim-

* In the following beautiful lines of the First Eclogue,
 Virgil has, in the true spirit of a Pastoral Poet, brought
 together as agreeable an assemblage of images of rural
 pleasure as can any where be found.

Fortunate senex! hic inter flumina nota,
 Et fontes sacros frigus captabis opacum.
 Hinc tibi, quæ semper vicino ab limite sepes,
 Hyblæis apibus, florem depasta salicti,
 Sæpe levi somnum suadebit inire fufurro.
 Hinc altâ sub rupe canet frondator ad auras;
 Nec tamen interea, raucæ, tua cura, palumbes,
 Nec gemere aëriâ cessabit turtur ab ulmo.

Happy old man! here mid th' accustomed streams
 And sacred springs you'll shun the scorching beams;
 While from yon willow fence, thy pastures bound,
 The bees that suck their flowery stores around,
 Shall sweetly mingle with the whispering boughs,
 Their lulling murmurs, and invite repose.
 While from steep rocks the pruner's Song is heard;
 Nor the soft cooing dove, thy fav'rite bird,
 Meanwhile shall cease to breathe her melting strain,
 Nor turtles from the aerial elms to plain. WARTON.
 plicity

plicity and innocence to the full; but cover its rudeness and misery. Distresses, indeed, and anxieties he may attribute to it; for it would be perfectly unnatural to suppose any condition of human life to be without them; but they must be of such a nature, as not to shock the fancy with any thing peculiarly disgusting in the pastoral life. The Shepherd may well be afflicted for the displeasure of his mistress, or for the loss of a favourite lamb. It is a sufficient recommendation of any state, to have only such evils as these to deplore. In short, it is the pastoral life somewhat embellished and beautified, at least, seen on its fairest side only, that the Poet ought to present to us. But let him take care, that, in embellishing nature, he does not altogether disguise her; or pretend to join with rural simplicity and happiness, such improvements as are unnatural and foreign to it. If it be not exactly real life which he presents to us, it must, however, be somewhat that resembles it. This, in my opinion, is the general idea of Pastoral Poetry. But, in order to examine it more particularly, let us consider, first, the scenery; next, the characters; and lastly, the subjects and actions, which this sort of composition should exhibit.

As to the Scene, it is clear, that it must always be laid in the country, and much of the Poet's merit depends on describing it beautifully. Virgil is, in this respect, excelled by Theocritus, whose descriptions of natural beauties are richer,

LECT. and more picturesque than those of the other *.
 XXXIX. In every Pastoral, a scene, or rural prospect,
 should be distinctly drawn, and set before us. It

* What rural scenery, for instance, can be painted
 in more lively colours than the following description exhi-
 bits?

————— ἐν τε βάθειαις
 Ἄδεις ὄρνιθι χαμῆυσιν ἐκλινόμεναις
 Ἐν τε νεοτακτοῖσι γυγαῖοτεσσι σινκερεῖσι.
 Πολλοὶ δ' ἄμμιν ὑπερθε κατὰ κρατος δύνοντο
 Ἀγρίοι πτερεῖ τε. το δ' ἐγγυθεν ἱερὸν ὕδωρ
 Νυμφῶν ἐξ ἀντροῖο κατειβόμενον κελαιρῶδεν.
 Τοὶ δὲ ποτὶ σικεραῖς ὀροθαμνίσιν αἰθαλιανῶν
 Τεττιγες λαλαγεύοντες ἔχον πονον. αἱ δ' ἐλαρυγῶν
 Τηλοβὴν ἐν πυκνῇσι βάτων τρυφῶσιν ἀκάνθαις.
 Ἀείδον κυρδοὶ καὶ ἀκάνθιδες, ἔρπον τεύχων.
 Πωτῶντο ἔνθα περὶ πίδακος αἰφί μελισσαι.
 Πᾶντ' ὥσδεν βερεὸς μαλα πινόν, ὥτδ' ἐπ' ὤψεως.
 Ὀρχαὶ μὲν παρ ποταί, παρὰ πλουρησί δὲ μαλα
 Δαδίλειαι ἄμμιν ἐκλινόμεναι τοὶ δ' ἐκχυντο
 Ὀρπηκεῖς βραβυλοῖσι καταβριθόντες ἑρασταί.

THEOCRIT. Idyll. vii. 132.

————— on soft beds recline
 Of lentisk, and young branches of the vine;
 Poplars and elms above, their foliage spread,
 Lent a cool shade, and waved the breezy head;
 Below a stream, from the nymph's sacred cave,
 In free meanders led its murmuring wave;
 In the warm sunbeams, verdant shades among,
 Shrill grasshoppers renewed their plaintive song:
 At distance far, concealed in shades, alone,
 Sweet Philomela poured her tuneful moan:
 The lark, the goldfinch, warbled lays of love,
 And sweetly pensive coo'd the turtle dove;
 While honey bees, for ever on the wing,
 Humm'd round the flowers, or sipt the silver spring
 The rich, ripe season, gratified the sense
 With summer's sweets, and autumn's redolence.
 Apples and pears lay strewed in heaps around,
 And the plum's loaded branches kiss'd the ground.

FAWKES

is not enough, that we have those unmeaning groups of violets and roses, of birds, and brooks, and breezes, which our common Pastoral-mongers throw together, and which are perpetually recurring upon us without variation. A good Poet ought to give us such a landscape, as a painter could copy after. His objects must be particularised; the stream, the rock, or the tree, must, each of them, stand forth, so as to make a figure in the imagination, and to give us a pleasing conception of the place where we are. A single object, happily introduced, will sometimes distinguish and characterise a whole scene; such as the antique rustic Sepulchre, a very beautiful object in a landscape, which Virgil has set before us, and which he has taken from Theocritus:

Hinc ideo media est nobis via; jamque sepulchrum

Incipit apparere Bianoris; hic ubi densas

Agricolæ stringunt frondes ———— ECCL. IX. *

Not only in professed descriptions of the scenery, but in the frequent allusions to natural objects, which occur, of course, in Pastorals, the Poet must, above all things, study variety. He must diversify his face of nature, by presenting to us new images; or otherwise, he will soon become

* ——— To our mid journey are we come,
I see the top of old Bianor's tomb;
Here, Maris, where the swains thick branches prune,
And strew their leaves, our voices let us tune.

WARTON.

LECT. insipid with those known topics of description,
 XXXIX. which were original, it is true, in the first Poets,
 who copied them from nature, but which are
 now worn thread-bare by incessant imitation. It
 is also incumbent on him, to suit the scenery to
 the subject of the Pastoral; and, according as it
 is of a gay or a melancholy kind, to exhibit
 nature under such forms as may correspond with
 the emotions or sentiments which he describes.
 Thus Virgil, in his second Eclogue, which con-
 tains the Lamentation of a despairing Lover,
 gives, with propriety, a gloomy appearance to
 the scene:

*Tantum inter densas, umbrosa cacumina, fagos,
 Assidue veniebat; ibi hæc incondita solus
 Montibus et sylvis studio jactabat inani **

WITH regard to the characters, or persons,
 which are proper to be introduced into Pastorals,
 it is not enough that they be persons residing in
 the country. The adventures, or the discourses of
 courtiers, or citizens, in the country, are not
 what we look for in such Writings; we expect
 to be entertained by Shepherds, or persons whol-
 ly engaged in rural occupations; whose innocence
 and freedom from the cares of the world may,

** Mid shades of thickest beech he pined alone,
 To the wild woods and mountains made his moan;
 Still day by day, in incoherent strains,
 'Twas all he could, despairing told his pains.*

WARTON.

in our imagination, form an agreeable contrast, L E C T.
with the manners and characters of those who are XXXIX.
engaged in the bustle of life.

ONE of the principal difficulties which here occurs has been already hinted; that of keeping the exact medium between too much rusticity on the one hand, and too much refinement on the other. The Shepherd, assuredly, must be plain and unaffected in his manner of thinking, on all subjects. An amiable simplicity must be the ground-work of his character. At the same time, there is no necessity for his being dull and insipid. He may have good sense and reflection; he may have sprightliness and vivacity, he may have very tender and delicate feelings; since these are, more or less, the portion of men in all ranks of life; and since, undoubtedly, there was much Genius in the world, before there were learning, or arts to refine it. But then he must not subtilise; he must not deal in general reflections, and abstract reasoning; and still less in the points and conceits of an affected gallantry, which surely belong not to his character and situation. Some of these conceits are the chief blemishes of the Italian Pastorals, which are otherwise beautiful. When Aminta, in Tasso, is disentangling his mistress's hair from a tree to which a Savage had bound it, he is represented as saying; "Cruel tree! how couldst thou injure that lovely hair which did thee so much honour? thy rugged trunk was not worthy of such lovely knots. What advantage have the servants of love, if

LECT. "those precious chains are common to them and
 XXXIX. "to the trees*?" Such strained sentiments as these, ill befit the woods. Rural personages are supposed to speak the language of plain sense, and natural feelings. When they describe, or relate, they do it with simplicity, and naturally allude to rural circumstances; as in these beautiful lines of one of Virgil's Eclogues:

Sepibus in nostris parvam te roscida mala
 (Dux ego vester eram) vidi cum matre legentem;
 Alter ab undecimo tum me jam cœperat annus,
 Jam fragiles poteram a terrâ contingere ramos.
 Ut vidi, ut perii, ut me malus abstulit error †!

IN another passage, he makes a Shepherdess throw an apple at her lover:

* Già di nodi sì bei non era degno
 Così ruvido tronco; or che vantaggio
 Hanno i servi d'amor, se lor commune
 È colle piante il prezioso laccio?
 Pianta crudel! potesti quel bel crine
 Offender, tu, ch'a te feo tanto onore?

ATTO, III. Sc. I.

† Once with your mother to our fields you came
 For dewy apples; thence I date my flame;
 The choicest fruit I pointed to your view,
 Tho' young, my raptur'd soul was fix'd on you;
 The boughs I just could reach with little arms;
 But then, even then, could feel thy powerful charms.
 O, how I gaz'd, in pleasing transport lost!
 How glow'd my heart in sweet delusion lost!

WARTON.

Tum fugit ad falices, et se cupit ante videri *.

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This is *naïve*, as the French express it, and perfectly suited to Pastoral Manners. Mr. Pope wanted to imitate this passage, and, as he thought, to improve upon it. He does it thus:

The sprightly Sylvia trips along the green,
She runs; but hopes she does not run unseen;
While a kind glance at her pursuer flies,
How much at variance are her feet, and eyes?

This falls far short of Virgil; the natural and pleasing simplicity of the description is destroyed, by the quaint and affected turn in the last line: "How much at variance are her feet, and eyes."

SUPPOSING the Poet to have formed correct ideas concerning his Pastoral characters and personages; the next enquiry is, about what is he to employ them? and what are to be the subjects of his Eclogues? For it is not enough, that he gives us Shepherds discoursing together. Every good Poem, of every kind, ought to have a subject which would, in some way, interest us. Now, here, I apprehend, lies the chief difficulty of Pastoral Writing. The active scenes of country life either are, or to most describers ap-

* My Phillis me with pelted apples plies;
Then, tripping to the wood, the wanton hies,
And wishes to be seen before she flies.

DRYDEN.

LECT. pear to be, too barren of incidents. The state
 XXXIX. of a Shepherd, or a person occupied in rural employments only, is exposed to few of those accidents and revolutions which render his situation interesting, or produce curiosity or surprise. The tenor of his life is uniform. His ambition is conceived to be without policy, and his love without intrigue. Hence it is, that, of all Poems, the most meagre commonly in the subject, and the least diversified in the strain, is the Pastoral. From the first lines, we can, generally, guess at all that is to follow. It is either a Shepherd who sits down solitary by a brook, to lament the absence, or cruelty of his mistress, and to tell us how the trees wither, and the flowers droop, now that she is gone; or we have two shepherds who challenge one another to sing, rehearsing alternate verses, which have little either of meaning or subject, till the Judge rewards one with a studded crook, and another with a beechen bowl. To the frequent repetition of common-place topics, of this sort, which have been thrummed over by all Eclogue Writers since the days of Theocritus and Virgil, is owing much of that insipidity which prevails in Pastoral Compositions.

I MUCH question, however, whether this insipidity be not owing to the fault of the Poets, and to their barren and slavish imitation of the ancient pastoral topics, rather than to the confined nature of the subject. For why may not Pastoral Poetry take a wider range? Human na-

ture, and human passions, are much the same in every rank of life; and wherever these passions operate on objects that are within the rural sphere, there may be a proper subject for pastoral. One would indeed chuse to remove from this sort of Composition the operations of violent and direful passions, and to present such only as are consistent with innocence, simplicity, and virtue. But under this limitation, there will still be abundant scope for a careful observer of nature to exert his Genius. The various adventures which give occasion to those engaged in country life to display their disposition and temper; the scenes of domestic felicity or disquiet; the attachment of friends and of brothers; the rivalry and competitions of lovers; the unexpected successes or misfortunes of families, might give occasion to many a pleasing and tender incident; and were more of the narrative and sentimental intermixed with the descriptive in this kind of Poetry, it would become much more interesting than it now generally is, to the bulk of readers*.

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THE two great fathers of Pastoral Poetry are, Theocritus, and Virgil. Theocritus was a Sicilian; and as he has laid the scenes of his Eclogues in his own country, Sicily became

* The above observations on the barrenness of the common Eclogues, were written before any translation from the German had made us acquainted in this country with Gesner's Idylls, in which the ideas that had occurred to me for the improvement of Pastoral Poetry, are fully realized.

LECT. ever afterwards a sort of consecrated ground for
XXXIX. Pastoral Poetry. His *Idyllia*, as he has entitled them, are not all of equal merit; nor indeed are they all pastorals; but some of them poems of a quite different nature. In such, however, as are properly pastorals, there are many and great beauties. He is distinguished for the simplicity of his sentiments; for the great sweetness and harmony of his numbers, and for the richness of his scenery and description. He is the original, of which Virgil is the imitator. For most of Virgil's highest beauties in his *Eclogues* are copied from Theocritus; in many places he has done nothing more than translate him. He must be allowed, however, to have imitated him with great judgment, and in some respects to have improved upon him. For Theocritus, it cannot be denied, descends sometimes into ideas that are gross and mean, and makes his shepherds abusive and immodest; whereas Virgil is free from offensive rusticity, and at the same time preserves the character of pastoral simplicity. The same distinction obtains between Theocritus and Virgil, as between many other of the Greek and Roman Writers. The Greek led the way, followed nature more closely, and showed more original Genius. The Roman discovered more of the polish, and correctness of art. We have a few remains of other two Greek Poets in the Pastoral Style, Moschus and Bion, which have very considerable merit; and if they want the simplicity of Theocritus, excel him in tenderness and delicacy.

THE Modern Writers of Pastorals have generally contented themselves with copying, or imitating, the descriptions and sentiments of the ancient Poets. Sannazarius, indeed, a famous Latin Poet, in the age of Leo X. attempted a bold innovation. He composed Piscatory Eclogues; changing the scene from Woods to the Sea, and from the life of Shepherds to that of Fishermen. But the innovation was so unhappy, that he has gained no followers. For the life of Fishermen is, obviously, much more hard and toilsome than that of Shepherds, and presents to the fancy much less agreeable images. Flocks, and trees, and flowers, are objects of greater beauty, and more generally relished by men, than fishes and marine productions. Of all the Moderns, M. Gesner, a Poet, of Switzerland, has been the most successful in his Pastoral Compositions. He has introduced into his Idylls (as he entitles them) many new ideas. His rural scenery is often striking, and his descriptions are lively. He presents pastoral life to us, with all the embellishments of which it is susceptible; but without any excess of refinement. What forms the chief merit of this Poet, is, that he writes to the heart; and has enriched the subjects of his Idylls with incidents, which give rise to much tender sentiment. Scenes of domestic felicity are beautifully painted. The mutual affection of husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, as well as of lovers, are displayed in a pleasing and touching

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LECT. manner. From not understanding the language
XXXIX. in which M. Gesner writes, I can be no judge
of the Poetry of his Style: but, in the subject
and conduct of his Pastorals, he appears to me,
to have outdone all the Moderns.

NEITHER Mr. Pope's nor Mr. Philips's Pastorals, do any great honour to the English Poetry. Mr. Pope's were composed in his youth; which may be an apology for other faults, but cannot well excuse the barrenness that appears in them. They are written in remarkably smooth and flowing numbers; and this is their chief merit; for there is scarcely any thought in them which can be called his own; scarcely any description, or any image of nature, which has the marks of being original, or copied from nature herself; but a repetition of the common images that are to be found in Virgil, and in all Poets who write of rural themes. Philips attempted to be more simple and natural than Pope; but he wanted genius to support his attempt, or to write agreeably. He, too, runs on the common and beaten topics; and endeavouring to be simple, he becomes flat and insipid. There was no small competition between these two Authors, at the time when their Pastorals were published. In some papers of the *Guardian*, great partiality was shown, to Philips, and high praise bestowed upon him. Mr. Pope, resenting this preference, under a feigned name procured a Paper to be inserted in the *Guardian*, wherein he seemingly carries on the plan of extolling

Philips; but in reality satirises him most severely with ironical praises; and in an artful covered manner, gives the palm to himself *. About the same time, Mr. Gay published his *Shepherd's Week*, in Six Pastorals, which are designed to ridicule that sort of simplicity which Philips and his partizans extolled, and are, indeed, an ingenious burlesque of Pastoral Writing, when it rises no higher than the manners of modern clowns and rustics. Mr. Shenstone's Pastoral Ballad, in four parts, may justly be reckoned, I think, one of the most elegant Poems of this kind, which we have in English.

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I HAVE not yet mentioned one form in which Pastoral Writing has appeared in latter ages, that is, when extended into a Play, or regular Drama, where plot, characters, and passions, are joined with the simplicity and innocence of rural manners. This is the chief improvement which the Moderns have made on this species of Composition; and of this nature, we have two Italian Pieces which are much celebrated, Guarini's *Pastor Fido*, and Tasso's *Aminta*. Both of these possess great beauties, and are entitled to the reputation they have gained. To the latter, the preference seems due, as being less intricate in the plot and conduct, and less strained and affected in the sentiments; and though not wholly free of Italian refinement (of which I already gave one instance, the worst, indeed, that

* See Guardian, No. 40.

LECT. occurs in all the Poem), it is, on the whole,
 XXXIX. a performance of high merit. The strain of the Poetry is gentle and pleasing; and the Italian Language contributes to add much of that softness, which is peculiarly suited to Pastoral †.

† It may be proper to take notice here, that the charge against Tasso for his points and conceits, has sometimes been carried too far. Mr. Addison, for instance, in a Paper of the Guardian, censuring his Aminta, gives this example, "That Sylvia enters adorned with a garland of flowers, and after viewing herself in a fountain, breaks out in a speech to the flowers on her head, and tells them, that she did not wear them to adorn herself, but to make them ashamed." "Whoever can bear this," he adds, "may be assured, that he has no taste for Pastoral." Guard. No. 38. But Tasso's Sylvia, in truth, makes no such ridiculous figure, and we are obliged to suspect that Mr. Addison had not read the Aminta. Daphne a companion of Sylvia, appears in conversation with Thyrsis, the confidant of Aminta, Sylvia's lover, and in order to show him, that Sylvia was not so simple, or insensible to her own charms, as she affected to be, gives him this instance; that she had caught her one day adjusting her dress by a fountain, and applying now one flower, and now another to her neck; and after comparing their colours with her own, she broke into a smile, as if she had seemed to say, I will wear you, not for my ornaments, but to show how much you yield to me: and when caught thus admiring herself, she threw away her flowers, and blushed for shame. — This description of the vanity of a rural coquette, is no more than what is natural, and very different from what the Author of the Guardian represents it.

This censure of Tasso was not originally Mr. Addison's. Bouhours, in his *Manière de bien penser dans les ouvrages d'esprit*, appears to have been the first who gave this

I MUST not omit the mention of another Pastoral Drama, which will bear being brought into L E C T. XXXIX.

misrepresentation of Sylvia's Speech, and founded a criticism on it. Fontenelle, in his Discourse on Pastoral Poetry, followed him in this criticism. Mr. Addison, or whoever was the Author of that Paper in the Guardian, copied from them both. Mr. Warton, in the Prefatory Discourse to his Translation of Virgil's Eclogues, repeats the observation. Sylvia's Speech to the flowers, with which she was adorned, is always quoted as the flagrant instance of the false taste of the Italian Poet. Whereas Tasso gives us no such Speech of Sylvia's, but only informs us of what her companion supposed her to be thinking, or saying to herself, when she was privately admiring her own beauty. After charging so many eminent Critics, for having fallen into this strange inaccuracy, from copying one another, without looking into the Author whom they censure, it is necessary for me to insert the passage which has occasioned this remark. Daphne speaks thus to Thyrsis:

Ora per dirti il ver, non mi risolvo
 Se Sylvia è semplicetta, come pare
 Alle parole, agli atti. Jer vidi un segno
 Che me ne mette in dubbio. Io la trovai
 Là presso la cittade in quei gran prati,
 Ove fra stagni giace un' isoletta,
 Sovra essa un lago limpido e tranquillo,
 Tutta pendente in atto, che pare
 Vagheggiar se medesima, e' insieme insieme
 Chieder consiglio all' acque, in qual maniera
 Dispor dovessè in sù la fronte i crini,
 E sovra i crini il velo, e sovra'l velo
 I fior, che tenea in grembo; e spesso spesso
 Or prendeva un ligustro, or una rosa,
 E l'accostava al bel candido collo,
 Alle guance vermiglie, e de' colori
 Fea paragone; e poi, siccome lieta

LECT. comparifon with any Compofition of this kind,
 XXXIX. in any language: that is, Allan Ramfay's Gentle Shepherd. It is a great difadvantage to this beautiful Poem, that it is written in the old ruftic dialect of Scotland, which, in a fhort time, will probably be entirely obfolete, and not intelligible; and it is a farther difadvantage, that it is fo entirely formed on the rural manners of Scotland, that none but a native of that country can thoroughly underftand, or relifh it. But though fubject to thofe local difadvantages, which confine its reputation within narrow limits, it is full of fo much natural defcription, and tender fentiment, as would do honour to any Poet. The characters are well drawn, the incidents affecting, the fcenery and manners lively and juft. It affords a ftrong proof, both of the power which nature and fimplicity poffefs, to reach the heart in every fort of Writing; and of the variety of pleafing characters and fubjects, with which Pa-

Della vittoria, lampeggiava un rifo
 Che pareva che dicelfe: io pur vi vinco;
 Ne porto voi per ornamento mio,
 Ma porto voi fol per vergogna vofttra,
 Perchè fi veggia quanto mi cedete.
 Ma mentre ella s'ornava, e vagheggiava
 Rivolfe gli occhi a cafo, e fi fù accorta
 Ch'io di lei m'era accorta, e vergognando,
 Rizzofli tofto, e i fior lafcio cadere;
 In tanto io piu ridea del fuo roffore,
 Ella piu s'arroffia del rifo mio.

AMINTA. ATTO II. Sc. II.
 toral

toral Poetry, when properly managed, is capable of being enlivened. LECT.
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I PROCEED next, to treat of Lyric Poetry, or the Ode; a species of Poetical Composition which possesses much dignity, and in which many Writers have distinguished themselves, in every age. Its peculiar character is, that it is intended to be sung, or accompanied with music. Its designation implies this. Ode is, in Greek, the same with Song or Hymn; and Lyric Poetry imports, that the Verses are accompanied with a lyre, or musical instrument. This distinction was not, at first, peculiar to any one species of Poetry. For, as I observed in the last Lecture, Music and Poetry were coeval, and were, originally, always joined together. But after their separation took place, after Bards had begun to make Verse Compositions, which were to be recited or read, not to be sung, such Poems as were designed to be still joined with Music or Song, were, by way of distinction, called Odes.

IN the Ode, therefore, Poetry retains its first and most ancient form; that form, under which the original Bards poured forth their enthusiastic strains, praised their Gods and their Heroes, celebrated their victories, and lamented their misfortunes. It is from this circumstance, of the Ode's being supposed to retain its original union with Music, that we are to deduce the proper idea, and the peculiar qualities of this kind of Poetry. It is not distinguished from other kinds, by the subjects on which it is employed; for

LECT. these may be extremely various. I know no
XXXIX. distinction of subject that belongs to it, except
that other Poems are often employed in the recital
of actions, whereas sentiments, of one kind or
other, form, almost always, the subject of the
Ode. But it is chiefly the spirit, the manner of
its execution, that marks and characterises it.
Music and Song naturally add to the warmth
of Poetry. They tend to transport, in a higher
degree, both the person who sings, and the per-
sons who hear. They justify, therefore, a bolder
and more passionate strain, than can be supported
in simple recitation. On this is formed the peculiar
character of the Ode. Hence, the enthusiasm
that belongs to it, and the liberties it is allowed
to take, beyond any other species of Poetry.
Hence, that neglect of regularity, those digressions,
and that disorder which it is supposed to admit;
and which, indeed, most Lyric Poets have not
failed sufficiently to exemplify in their practice.

THE effects of Music upon the mind are chiefly
two; to raise it above its ordinary state, and
fill it with high enthusiastic emotions; or to
soothe, and melt it into the gentle pleasurable
feelings. Hence, the Ode may either aspire to
the former character of the sublime and noble,
or it may descend to the latter of the pleasant
and the gay; and between these, there is, also,
a middle region, of the mild and temperate
emotions, which the Ode may often occupy to
advantage.

ALL Odes may be comprised under four

denominations. First, Sacred Odes; Hymns addressed to God, or composed on religious subjects. Of this nature are the Psalms of David, which exhibit to us this species of Lyric Poetry, in its highest degree of perfection. Secondly, Heroic Odes, which are employed in the praise of heroes, and in the celebration of martial exploits and great actions. Of this kind are all Pindar's Odes, and some few of Horace's. These two kinds ought to have sublimity and elevation, for their reigning character. Thirdly, moral and philosophical Odes, where the sentiments are chiefly inspired by virtue, friendship, and humanity. Of this kind, are many of Horace's Odes, and several of our best modern Lyric productions; and here the Ode possesses that middle region, which, as I observed, it sometimes occupies. Fourthly, Festive and Amorous Odes, calculated merely for pleasure and amusement. Of this nature, are all Anacreon's, some of Horace's, and a great number of songs and modern productions, that claim to be of the Lyric species. The reigning character of these, ought to be elegance smoothness, and gayety.

ONE of the chief difficulties in composing Odes arises from that enthusiasm which is understood to be a characteristic of Lyric Poetry. A professed Ode, even of the moral kind, but more especially if it attempt the sublime, is expected to be enlivened and animated, in an uncommon degree. Full of this idea, the Poet, when he begins to write an Ode, if he has any real warmth of

LECT. Genius, is apt to deliver himself up to it, without
XXXIX. control or restraint; if he has it not, he strains
after it, and thinks himself bound to assume the
appearance, of being all fervour, and all flame.
In either case, he is in great hazard of becoming
extravagant. The licentiousness of writing with-
out order, method, or connexion, has infected
the Ode more than any other species of Poetry.
Hence, in the class of Heroic Odes, we find so
few that one can read with pleasure. The Poet
is out of sight, in a moment. He gets up into
the clouds; becomes so abrupt in his transitions;
so eccentric and irregular in his motions, and of
course so obscure, that we essay in vain to follow
him, or to partake of his raptures. I do not
require, that an Ode should be as regular in the
structure of its parts, as a Didactic, or an Epic
Poem. But still, in every Composition, there
ought to be a subject; there ought to be parts
which make up a whole; there should be a
connexion of those parts with one another. The
transitions from thought to thought may be light
and delicate, such as are prompted by a lively
fancy; but still they should be such as preserve
the connexion of ideas, and show the Author to
be one who thinks, and not one who raves.
Whatever authority may be pleaded for the
incoherence and disorder of Lyric Poetry, no-
thing can be more certain, than that any com-
position which is so irregular in its method, as

to become obscure to the bulk of Readers, is so much worse upon that account*. LECT.
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THE extravagant liberty which several of the modern Lyric Writers assume to themselves in their Versification, increases the disorder of this species of Poetry. They prolong their periods to such a degree, they wander through so many different measures, and employ such a variety of

* “ La plupart de ceux qui parlent de l'enthousiasme de l'Ode, en parlent comme s'ils étaient eux-mêmes dans le trouble qu'ils veulent définir. Ce ne sont que grands mots de fureur divine, de transports de l'ame, de mouvemens, de lumières, qui, mis bout-à-bout dans des phrases pompeuses, ne produisent pourtant aucune idée distincte. Si on les en croit, l'essence de l'enthousiasme est de ne pouvoir être compris que par les esprits du premier ordre, à la tête desquels ils se supposent, et dont ils excluent tous ceux qui osent ne les pas entendre. — Le beau désordre de l'Ode est un effet de l'art; mais il faut prendre garde de donner trop d'étendue à ce terme. On autoriserait par-là tous les écarts imaginables. Un poëte n'aurait plus qu'à exprimer avec force toutes les pensées qui lui viendraient successivement; il se tiendrait dispensé d'en examiner le rapport, et de se faire un plan, dont toutes les parties se prêtassent mutuellement des beautés. Il n'y aurait ni commencement, ni milieu, ni fin, dans son ouvrage; et cependant l'auteur se croirait d'autant plus sublime, qu'il serait moins raisonnable. Mais que produirait une pareille composition dans l'esprit du lecteur? Elle ne laisserait qu'un étourdissement, causé par la magnificence et l'harmonie des paroles, sans y faire naître que des idées confuses, qui chasseraient l'une l'autre, au lieu de concourir ensemble à fixer l'esprit.”

OEUVRES DE M. DE LA MOTTE, Tome I.
Discours sur l'Ode,

LECT. long and short lines, corresponding in rhyme at
XXXIX so great a distance from each other, that all sense
of melody is utterly lost. Whereas Lyric Composition ought, beyond every other species of Poetry, to pay attention to melody and beauty of sound; and the Versification of those Odes may be justly accounted the best, which renders the harmony of the measure most sensible to every common ear.

PINDAR, the great Father of Lyric Poetry, has been the occasion of leading his imitators into some of the defects I have now mentioned. His Genius was sublime; his expressions are beautiful and happy; his descriptions, picturesque. But finding it a very barren subject to sing the praises of those who had gained the prize in the public games, he is perpetually digressive, and fills up his Poems with Fables of the Gods and Heroes, that have little connexion either with his subject, or with one another. The Ancients admired him greatly; but as many of the histories of particular families and cities, to which he alludes, are now unknown to us, he is so obscure, partly from his subjects, and partly from his rapid, abrupt manner of treating them, that notwithstanding the beauty of his expression, our pleasure in reading him is much diminished. One would imagine, that many of his modern imitators thought the best way to catch his spirit, was to imitate his disorder and obscurity. In several of the choruses of Euripides and Sophocles, we have the same kind of Lyric Poetry as in Pindar,

carried on with more clearness and connexion, L E C T.
and at the same time with much sublimity. XXXIX.

OF all the writers of Odes, Ancient or Modern, there is none, that, in point of correctness, harmony, and happy expression, can vie with Horace. He has descended from the Pindaric rapture to a more moderate degree of elevation; and joins connected thought, and good sense, with the highest beauties of Poetry. He does not often aspire beyond that middle region, which I mentioned as belonging to the Ode; and those Odes, in which he attempts the sublime, are perhaps not always his best*. The peculiar character, in which he excels, is grace and elegance; and in this Style of Composition, no Poet has ever attained to a greater perfection than Horace. No Poet supports a moral sentiment with more dignity, touches a gay one more happily, or possesses the art of trifling more agreeably, when he chuses to trifle. His language is so fortunate, that with a single word or epithet, he often conveys a whole description to the fancy. Hence he ever has been, and ever will continue to be, a favourite Author with all persons of taste.

* There is no Ode, whatever of Horace's, without great beauties. But though I may be singular in my opinion, I cannot help thinking that in some of those Odes which have been much admired for sublimity (such as Ode iv. Lib. 4. "*Qualem ministrum fulminis alitem*," &c.) there appears somewhat of a strained and forced effort to be lofty. The genius of this amiable Poet shows itself, according to my judgment, to greater advantage, in themes of a more temperate kind.

LECT. AMONG the Latin Poets of later ages, there
XXXIX. have been many imitators of Horace. One of the most distinguished is Casimir, a Polish Poet of the last century, who wrote four books of Odes. In graceful ease of expression, he is far inferior to the Roman. He oftener affects the sublime; and in the attempt, like other Lyric writers, frequently becomes harsh and unnatural. But, on several occasions, he discovers a considerable degree of original Genius, and poetical fire. Buchanan, in some of his Lyric Compositions, is very elegant and classical.

AMONG the French, the Odes of Jean Baptiste Rousseau, have been much, and justly, celebrated. They possess great beauty, both of sentiment and expression. They are animated, without being rhapsodical; and are not inferior to any poetical productions in the French language.

IN our own Language, we have several Lyric Compositions of considerable merit. Dryden's Ode on St. Cecilia, is well known. Mr. Gray is distinguished in some of his Odes, both for tenderness and sublimity; and in Doddsley's Miscellanies, several very beautiful Lyric Poems are to be found. As to professed Pindaric Odes, they are, with a few exceptions, so incoherent, as seldom to be intelligible. Cowley, at all times harsh, is doubly so in his Pindaric Compositions. In his Anacreontic Odes, he is much happier. They are smooth and elegant; and, indeed, the most agreeable, and the most perfect, in their kind, of all Mr. Cowley's Poems.