

often ecclesiastical censors in disguise, who compare the merits of the Popish and the Reformed Churches, and discourse of the careless or faithful pastor of Christ's flock, blending politics meanwhile with their more ecclesiastical discussions, and praising or blaming, under fictitious names, some of the existing bishops of the church. This of course is foreign to the objects of pastoral poetry, and gives us an ill-disguised polemic in the form and with many of the features of the pastoral. That it is often in the true pastoral vein, however, everyone will admit; and to those familiar with Allan Ramsay's "Gentle Shepherd," it not unfrequently recalls the style and the manner of that most perfect of eclogues.

The "Epithalamium," composed on the occasion of the poet's own nuptials, is a magnificent poem. The stanza is perfect for the purpose: its gently swaying cadence, its shorter and more majestic lines, ever recurring in regular alternations, with its repetition or recitative at the close of each stanza, make it the happiest measure that could have been chosen: it is the very expression of sustained and subdued passion, and of gentlest hopes and best and fondest wishes. The prodigality of imagery, and of ideas appropriate to the occasion, is wonderful, and is equal to anything in any poet. It is interesting to compare the grander style in which Spenser, of that more chivalric age, welcomed his wife to Kilcolman Castle on the Mulla, with the humbler, but as impassioned, manner in which Burns in his song—

"Of a' the airts the wind can blaw," &c.,

welcomed his Jean to Ellisland on the banks of the Nith. We have the difference of the two ages as well as the two minds in the compositions.

On Spenser's sonnets and his other poems we cannot here dwell. They are worthy of him, and of the perusal and study of every lover of poetry.

It would be idle, with the limits we have at our disposal, to venture upon any minute criticism of Shakspeare, on whom volumes have been written without exhausting the subject. Every reader of Shakspeare, however, has formed his own idea of his merits, and every one is warranted, as he may feel himself prompted or inclined, to express that idea, although it may still be far enough from any adequate estimate of so transcendent and universal a genius.

The grand peculiarity of Shakspeare, which distinguishes him from every other writer, and gives him such a pre-eminence above every other, is his universality. He seems defective in no one faculty of the human mind, but rather to possess every one in a transcendent degree. Nothing seems shut out from him, or beyond his capacity and capability: all departments of being seem open to him: the very spirit-world discloses its secrets; he is familiar with every phase and aspect of life and character; every changing mode of thought and feeling. It is as if he had been actually himself in every condition of being, or, Proteus-like, passed through every possible character. He can be the king or the clown, the noble or the peasant, the patrician or one of the "plebs," the courtier or the fopling; he can impersonate the saint or the villain; and he can do, or be, all this in a degree that goes beyond, if we may say so, every several character in its own way. He can talk more royally than the Monarch, more wittily than the clown: never did any noble or courtier enact it so in his liege's presence: never had we such dialogues in the case of any actual lord or waiter-on at court: never did fancy play so subtly as does a Mercurio's, or wit flash so electrically as Benedicts', or humour laugh