

The Whole Art of Poetry.

We learn from advertisements in the London papers that an apparently most important book has been recently published. It is entitled "A Hand book of Poetry: being a clear and Easy Guide, divested of Technicalities, to the art of making English Verse." This comprehensive title speaks for itself, and seems to indicate that the old theory of "poeta nascetur non fit, i.e. theory of "poetra nascitur non fit, i.e. "a poet is born, not made" is now exploded at the end of this great Nineteenth Century, and that in the present day the poet's art can be acquired like any other form of common business.

We have not seen the book and don't want to see it. We have long been in Arcadia, and know all about that delightful country, and its musical inhabitants. We need no hints from any "Hand book of Poetry," and are able to give our readers all needful instructions how to compose English verse, just as well as the London author. In fact, even at the possible risk of an action for the invasion of copyright, we will venture to give a few hints ourselves on the same subject. Many of these valuable suggestions chance to be included in the work to which we are referring; we cannot help it. It is not our fault. The writer should have sent us a copy for review.

The hints and instructions that we are now about to offer to young poets are, we need hardly say, founded upon a close and critical examination of some of the best models to be found in the works of various modern poets. It seems to us that in the days of our boyhood we heard the names of a Roman named Horace, and a Frenchman one Boileau, who both attempted to force upon the public what they no doubt considered elaborate treatises on the "Art of Poetry." If either of these works are to be found on the bookshelves of the readers of "The Antidote," they may as well be burnt at once, as their occupation will be gone on the publication of the following essay.

In the first place, then, the young poet should ever bear in mind the supreme dignity of poetry. He should never allow the flights of his imagination to be in any way impeded or retarded by any of these trivial considerations which seem to fetter ordinary prose writers. He should on all occasions avail himself to the utmost of what is called "poetic license." For instance in regard to grammar. Many ignorant critics would, if they dared, assert that though the poet may be allowed to soar beyond the realms of fact, and even, on occasions, to dis-



An institution that is openly winked at by the police.

regard all the laws of probability, still the laws of Syntax are as inflexible as those of the Medes and the Persian's. Nothing can be further from the truth. A moment's consideration often works of some of our most popular poets—for, of course, Shakespeare and his contemporaries were ignorant of all grammar—will at once show the fallacy of adhering to the rules of Syntax. Were poets to write grammatically, what would be the use of eternally prating about "poetic license." Did not Byron write of the ocean, "There let him lay?" Are we asked to believe that Byron didn't know what he was about? A vulgar poet might, and probably would, and should have written "lie" instead of "lay." But Byron was not a vulgar poet. Again the ballad-writer sings:

"Let you and I the battle try."
Some miserable blur-eye pedant therewith remarks: "It is against the rules of grammar to say 'let I try.'" Treu, O king! but how would "let you and me the battle try" sound? It might certainly be "sound" grammar, but it would certainly not "sound" well. The true poet is emancipated from all the petty restrictions which bind ordinary mortals. Like the Emperor Sigismund at the Council of Constance in 1414, he has the right to declare "Ego Sum Rex, et supra grammaticum," i.e., "I am a King and above all grammar." Napoleon the Great, it is well known, was a notoriously bad speller, but he excused himself that "a man occupied like himself with public business cannot attend to orthography." It is ridiculous to expect such condescension. Now poets, in our estimation stand quite as high as the Emperors Sigis-

mune and Napoleon. They are entitled to equal privileges with these deceased gentlemen, and should not be compelled by public opinion to pay the lightest respect to grammar or orthography. If we grant this principle, and who is bold enough to deny it? The following lines are perfectly admissible:

Him and me
Was happy and free
As the bright blue sea!

If the author of these charming lines had been obliged to use the nominative case, and say "He and I," there would have been no rhyme. The beauty of the three lines would have been destroyed, and, in fact, the poet might as well have written prose at once.

Again. One of the chief embellishments of poetry is rhyme. The youthful poet, therefore, should be very careful in adopting a correct standard of pronunciation, at any rate in places where it affects the rhyme. Now, as it is universally acknowledged that the Cockney, or London pronunciation of the English language is the purest—for is not London the Metropolis of the World?—the poet must of course adopt the London orthoepy. The following specimens of rhyme will serve to illustrate our meaning:

The maiden spoke; then brushed away a tear,
And rose, with queen-like grace, from off her chair.

N.B.—The word "chair," as all educated scholars know, is always pronounced "cheer" by the "haute nouvelle" of Cockneydom.

Here is another equally instructive example:

"There, while the elements were warring,
Fah Amy sat, the landscape drawing."

N.B.—"Drawing" need not be spelt in the poem with the obtrusive "r," but we give it for showing the true pronunciation of the word.

One more specimen may be added:
No more she'll desert him; through good or through evil
She'll follow. Wherever he goeth, there she vill.

N.B.—The same remark applies here. An ordinary poet would have written "she will." Not so the genuine bard, who in his imagination complete keeps well up to the London standard, and writes "v" for "w."

One more suggestion. It should be borne in mind by the young poet that, so far from intelligibility being essential to poetry, the want of it is frequently the principal—and in some cases the only—claim to excellence. In proof of this we will quote only one instance out of a thousand specimens that we could give, viz, the well-known lines by the lamented Alfred Bunn:

When hollow hearts shall wear a mask,