

# THE BULLFROG.

seems most effectually to damp the brilliant imagination is that of sitting down and deliberately composing a poem to glorify such victories as the Nile or Waterloo. Such works are peculiarly susceptible to the never-failing blight which affects the official productions of all laureates and authors of prize poems. Perhaps the mere magnitude of the subject, and the serious interests involved, cause a fatal hesitation in the writer. The founder of a well-known University poetical prize appears to have thought that solemnity of subject would natural y call forth genius; and he accordingly directed that the competing exercises should treat of the "attributes and perfections of the Supreme Being until the subject was exhausted," after which, heaven, hell, death and other sacred themes were to be selected. Although it appears from the titles of the latter poems that all these subjects are considered to have been "exhausted," we are not aware that any permanent contributions to literature have been called forth by the competition. If the depression of spirit caused by the mere contrast between the apparently trivial occupation of making rhymes, and the apparently important one of killing and being killed, be not a sufficient explanation of poverty of this class of poetry, the want of spontaneous energy of authorship may account for it. The poet's mind has become not a springing well, but a pump; verses made to order are very apt, whatever their subjects, to be verses with the string taken out.

It is, therefore, not to be wondered at if the American war has not yet given rise to any very startling display of poetical talent. The two or three poems which appear to have become popular must owe their celebrity to some quality utterly inappreciable by the European reader. Everybody knows that John Brown's body lies mouldering in the grave, although his soul is a-marching on. The statement has a strange half-humorous grimness which is not unimpressive, though no one would have guessed, from looking at it, that it formed a complete stanza in a poem. The verses which follow have an indefinite number of variations, and may probably be extemporized without much fear of offending the taste of an audience. The most popular ones consist of the assertions that "he's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord," that "John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back," that "his pet lambs will meet him on the way," and that "they (apparently the pet lambs) "will hang Jeff. Davis to a sour-apple tree;" each verse being followed by the chorus about his (John Brown's) soul marching on. The whole production is sung to a Methodist hymn tune, and seems like a fragment of the o'd Puritan psalmody which has lost rhyme and reason from the uncongenial company it is forced to keep. It is, notwithstanding, the nearest approach to a national air, expressing, as it does, the bitterest kind of fanaticism—that of the extreme Abolitionist party. The counter poem, which appears to have gained the greatest popularity in the South, is the well-known song beginning—

The despot's heel is on thy shore,  
Maryland!  
His touch is at thy temple door,  
Maryland!  
Avenge the patriotic gore  
That flecked the streets of Baltimore,  
And be the battle queen of yore,  
Maryland, my Maryland!

We must confess, however, that the Southern spirit appears, on the whole, to considerably better advantage in the field than on paper. It does not seem that a Komer has yet risen amongst them to combine the two, or perhaps his songs have not yet run the blockade. We cannot complain if the embryo poets of the South cannot spare time enough from more engrossing occupations. The two poems of which we have spoken, have given rise to innumerable adaptation and parodies. Indignant patriots suggest that if people must sing about John Brown, they might as well sing sense; and they proceed to supply this desirable quality—generally with the result of destroying the quaintness of the words as they have spontaneously grown up, and substituting the sort of stuff of which third-rate hymns are composed. They make it coherent, but also simply stupid. The song of "Maryland, my Maryland" seems to have specially irritated the Northern poets. Although we cannot honestly express a very high opinion of its literary merits, it is doubtless an irritating song to be hummed or sung to your face in Baltimore. Accordingly, if not silenced by more direct means Northern papers try to turn its flank by supplying words of orthodox Unionist tendency. Thus we have the gentle remonstrance:

Soldiers called to Washington,  
Through Maryland, my Maryland!  
True ladies would not spit upon,  
In Maryland, my Maryland!  
Nor turn up nose, as they pass by,  
Nor "Northern Sam" or "Mud-sill's" cry,  
Nor "Lincoln's tools" too mean to die,  
In Maryland, my Maryland!

This line of argument is pursued through some ten stanzas. We presume that the poet's indignation is a measure rather of his disgust at the original of his parody than of suffering from insults of the nature so delicately described as actually perpetrated by the ladies of Baltimore. Some of the poetry intended to appeal directly to patriotic sentiment descends to a lower order, and partakes of the comic tone or the nigger melody. We find, for example, the elegant chorus, "Co ca che lunk che lala," &c. &c., appended to a verse about our patriot sires in glory and our sainted Washington; or the President of the Confederate States receives this touching expostulation to a somewhat convivial tune, which has a certain absurd resemblance to the metres of the *Ingoldsby Legends*—

What shall be found upon history's page?  
Jefferson D., Jefferson D.!  
When the student explores the republican age?  
Jefferson D.!  
It will, find, as is meet,  
That at Julia's feet  
You sit in your shame, with the impotent plea,  
That you hand the land and the law of the free,  
Jefferson D.!

To which the South replies with a little more poetical feeling:—

Oh, they have the finest of musical ears,  
Chivalrous C.S.A.!  
Yankee Doodle's too vulgar for them, it appears,  
Bully for C.S.A.!  
The North may sing it and whistle it still,  
Miserable U.S.A.!  
Three cheers for the South now, boys, with a will!  
And groans for the U.S.A.!

To descend a little lower still, we have enthusiastic assertions about Dixie's Land in a variety of more or less nigger-like compositions, of which the most unintelligible perhaps represents most fairly the condition of hopeless muddle of the "contraband" mind. The following insensate outburst may present, to any one who has the skill to unravel its meaning, the impression made upon the nigger by the struggle raffing above him. It is said to be the favourite air of the "contrabands" at Fort Monroe:—

Wake up snakes, pelicans, and Sesh-ners,  
Don't yer hear 'um comin'—  
Comin' on de run!  
Wake up I tell yer! Git up, Jefferson?  
Bobolishion's comin'—  
Bob-o-lish-ion!

"Bobolishion" is to the negro a mysterious being, who is expected to wake up snakes, pelicans and "Seshers." What is to follow is not so clear.

More ambitious authors of loyal melody take a shorter cut to excellence. Some well-known air is appropriated, and altered with more or less success, to fit the circumstances. One gentleman publishes what he calls a version of the "Marseillaise," the choir of the church to which he was pastor having informed him that they meant to sing it. It seems they carried out their intention on the next "Sabbath" evening, the vast audience joining in the chorus with enthusiasm. We must add, that the worthy pastor gave it such a decidedly religious turn as to make it quite as like a Methodist hymn as it is to the "Marseillaise"—rather awkward subjects for a compromise. A more favourite device for appropriating the necessary frame-work ready made is found in such songs as "Scots, wha hae," or "March, march, Ettrick and Teviotdale," both of which are easily "fixed" as our cousins would say, by substituting Jefferson and "Old Hickory" for Bruce and Wallace, the "palmetto state" for Ettrick, &c. Another poem which seems to be considered as specially appropriate is "excelsior." Thus a sympathetic Yankee describes how "the shades of night were falling fast," &c., when a youth-of course of Southern origin—passed through a village carrying "a banner with the strange device, Skedaddle;" and then, after recounting his tragical death apparently due to an overhasty flight from McClellan, the poet touchingly adds:—

There in the twilight thick and grey,  
Considerably played out he lay;  
And through the vapor grey and thick  
A voice full like a rocket stick,  
Skedaddle!