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ART. I. *Gertrude of Wyoming, a Pennsylvanian Tale, and other Poems, by Thomas Campbell, Author of the Pleasures of Hope, &c.* 4to. pp. 130. London, Longman. 1809.

WE open this volume with no ordinary impression of the delicacy and importance of the task which it imposes on us, and the difficulty of discharging it at once with justice to the author and to that public at whose bar we as well as Mr. Campbell must be considered to stand. It is not our least embarrassment that in some respects Mr. Campbell may be considered as his own rival; and in aspiring to extensive popularity has certainly no impediment to encounter more formidable than the extent of his own reputation. To decide on the merit of *Gertrude of Wyoming* as the work of a poet hitherto undistinguished, would be comparatively easy. But we are unavoidably forced upon comparing it with Mr. Campbell's former pieces, and while our judgment is embroiled by the predilections, prejudices, and preferences, which the recollection of them has imprinted upon our imagination; there are other peculiar circumstances which enhance expectation, and increase proportionally the difficulty of affording it complete gratification.

The Pleasures of Hope, a poem dear to every reader of poetry, bore, amidst many beauties, the marks of a juvenile composition, and received from the public the indulgence due to a promise of future excellence. Some license was also allowed for the didactic nature of the subject, which, prescribing no fixed plan, left the poet free to indulge his fancy in excursions as irregular as they are elegant and animated. It is a consequence of both these circumstances that the poem presents in some degree the appearance of an unfinished picture. In gazing with pleasure on its insulated groups and figures, the reflection will often intrude, that an artist, matured in taste and experience would have methodised his subject, filled up the intermediate spaces, and brought to perfection a sketch of so much promise. The public readily made every allowance that could be claimed on

the score of youth—a seeming generosity often conferred on the first essays of poets, painters, and orators, but for which a claim of reward or payment with usurious interest is regularly preferred against them upon their next appearance. But the hope of improvement was, in Mr. Campbell's case, hardly necessary to augment the expectations raised by the actual excellence of his first poem. The beauties of an highly polished versification, that animated and vigorous tone of moral feeling, that turn of expression, which united the sweetness of Goldsmith with the strength of Johnson, a structure of language alike remote from servile imitation of our more classical poets, and from the babbling and jingling simplicity of ruder minstrels; new, but not singular; elegant, but not trite; justified the admirers of the Pleasures of Hope in elevating its author to a pre-eminence among living poets. Neither did Mr. Campbell suffer the admiration excited by his first essay to subside or be forgotten. From time to time we were favoured with exquisite lyrical effusions calculated rather to stimulate than to gratify the public appetite. The splendid poems of Hohenlinden and Lochiel, manifesting high powers of imagination, and other short performances replete either with animation or tenderness, seemed to declare their author destined to attain the very summit of the modern Parnassus. By some this pre-eminence was already adjudged to him, while others only adjourned their suffrage until a more daring, extended, and sustained flight should make good the promises of his juvenile work and of his shorter detached poems.

It has for a considerable time been known that a new poem of some length was in Mr. Campbell's contemplation, and when it was whispered that he who sung the doubtful conflict of Hohenlinden and the carnage of Culloden, had chosen for his theme the devastation of Wyoming, expectation was raised to its height. Desire was not too suddenly quenched; and it is only after a long period of suspense that the work has been given to the public. But it is no easy matter to satisfy the vague and indefinite expectation which suspense of this nature seldom fails to excite. Each reader is apt to form an idea of the subject, the narrative and the style of execution, so that the real poem is tried and censured not upon its own merits, but for differing from the preconceived dream of the critic's imagination. There are few who have not felt disappointment of a similar nature on visiting for the first time any spot highly celebrated for its scenery. Expectation has not only exaggerated its beauties, but often sketched a landscape of its own which the mind unwillingly exchanges even for the most splendid reality. Perhaps therefore it is a natural consequence of over-strained hope, that the immediate reception of "Gertrude of Wyoming" should be less eminently favourable than the intrinsic merit of the poem and the acknowledged genius of the author appeared to insure; and perhaps too w

may be able in the course of our investigation to point out other reasons which may for a season impede the popularity of a poem containing passages both of tenderness and sublimity, which may decline comparison with few in the English language.

The tale of Gertrude of Wyoming is abundantly simple. It refers to the desolation of a beautiful track of country situated on both sides of the Susquehannah, and inhabited by colonists whose primæval simplicity and hospitality recalled the idea of the golden age. In 1778, Wyoming, this favoured and happy spot, was completely laid waste by an incursion of Indians and civilized savages under a leader named Brandt. The pretext was the adherence of the inhabitants to the provincial confederacy; but the lust of rapine and cruelty which distinguished the invaders was such as to add double horrors even to civil conflict.

We do not condemn this choice of a subject in itself eminently fitted for poetry; yet feeling as Englishmen, we cannot suppress a hope that Mr. Campbell will in his subsequent poems choose a theme more honourable to our national character, than one in which Britain was disgraced by the atrocities of her pretended adherents. We do not love to have our feelings unnecessarily put in arms against the cause of our country. The historian must do his duty when such painful subjects occur; but the poet, who may choose his theme through the whole unbounded range of truth and fiction, may well excuse himself from selecting a subject dishonourable to his own land.

Although the calamity was general, and overwhelmed the whole settlement of Wyoming, Mr. Campbell has judiciously selected a single group as the subject of his picture; yet we have room to regret that in some passages at least he has not extended his canvass to exhibit, in the back ground, that general scene of tumult and horror which might have added force to the striking picture which he has drawn of individual misery.

The opening of the poem describes Wyoming in a state of more than Arcadian ease and happiness, where exiles or emigrants from all quarters of Europe met in peace, and contended only which should best adorn and improve their seat of refuge. The following stanzas comprehend this interesting description, and are at the same time a just specimen of the style and structure of the poem.

I.

‘ On Susquehana’s side, fair Wyoming,
 Although the wild-flower on thy ruined wall
 And roofless homes a sad remembrance bring
 Of what thy gentle people did befall,
 Yet thou wert once the loveliest land of all
 That see the Atlantic wave their morn restore.
 Sweet land! may I thy lost delights recall,

And paint thy Gertrude in her bowers of yore,
Whose beauty was the love of Pennsylvania's shore!

II.

' It was beneath thy skies that, but to prune
His Autumn fruits, or skim the light canoe,
Perchance, along thy river calm at noon,
The happy shepherd swain had nought to do
From morn till evening's sweeter pastime grow;
Their timbrel, in the dance of forest's brown
When lovely maidens pranked in flowretnew,
And aye, those sunny mountains half way down
Would echo flagelet from some romantic town.

III.

' Then, where of Indian hills the daylight takes
His leave, how might you the flamingo see
Disporting like a meteor on the lakes—
And playful squirrel on his nut-grown tree:
And every sound of life was full of glee,
From merry mock-bird's song, or hum of men,
While hear'ning, fearing, nought their revelry,
The wild deer arch'd his neck from glades, and then,
Unhunted, sought his woods and wilderness again.

IV.

' And scarce had Wyoming of war or crime
Heard but in transatlantic story rung,
For here the exile met from ev'ry clime,
And spoke in friendship ev'ry distant tongue;
Men from the blood of warring Europe sprung,
Were but divided by the running brook;
And happy where no Rhenish trumpet sung,
On plains no sieging mine's volcano shook,
The blue-ey'd German chang'd his sword to pruning-hook.

V.

' Now, far some Andalusian saraband
Would sound to many a native roundelay.
But who is he that yet a dearer land
Remembers, over hills and far away?
Green Albyn!* what though he no more survey
Thy ships at anchor on the quiet shore,
Thy pellochs rolling from the mountain bay;
Thy lone sepulchral cairn upon the moor,
And distant isles that hear the loud Corbrechtan roar!†

VI.

' Alas! poor Caledonia's mountaineer,
That want's stern edict e'er, and feudal grief,

* Scotland.

† The great whirlpool of the Western Hebrides.

Had forc'd him from a home he lov'd so dear!
 Yet found he here a home and glad relief,
 And plied the beverage from his own fair sheaf,
 That fir'd his highland blood with mickle glee;
 And England sent her men, of men the chief,
 Who taught those sires of Empire yet to be,
 To plant the tree of life; to plant fair freedom's tree!

VII.

'Here was not mingled in the city's pomp
 Of life's extremes the grandeur and the gloom;
 Judgment awoke not here her dismal tramp,
 Nor seal'd in blood a fellow creature's doom,
 Nor mourn'd the captive in a living tomb,
 One venerable man, beloved of all,
 Suffic'd where innocence was yet in bloom,
 To sway the strife, that seldom might befall,
 And Albert was their judge in patriarchal hall.'—p. 5 to 9.

This Albert, the judge and patriarch of the infant settlement, is an Englishman; Gertrude, the heroine of the poem, is his only child. The chaste and affecting simplicity of the following picture would furnish a beautiful subject for the pencil.

XIII.

'I may not paint those thousand infant charms;
 (Unconscious fascination; undesigh'd!)
 The orison repeat'd in his arms,
 For God to bless her sire and all mankind;
 The book, the bosom on his knee reclin'd;
 Or how sweet fairy-love he heard her con,
 (The playmate ere the teacher of her mind);
 All uncompanion'd else her years had gone
 Till now in Gertrude's eyes their ninth blue summer shone.'

p. 13.

An Indian, of a tribe friendly to the settlers, approaches their cottage one morning, leading in his hand an English boy

'Of Christian vesture and complexion bright,
 Led by his dusky guide like morning brought by night.'

The swarthy warrior tells Albert of a frontier fort occupied by the British which had been stormed and destroyed by a party of Hurons, the allies of France. The Oneida chief who narrates the story hastened to aid, but only arrived in time to avenge its defenders. All had been massacred, excepting the widow of the commander of the garrison and her son, a boy of ten or twelve years old. The former, exhausted with fatigue and grief, dies in the arms of the friendly Indians; and bequeaths to their chief the task of conducting her son to Albert's care, with a token to express that he was the son of Julia

Waldegrave. Albert instantly recognises the boy as the offspring of two old and dear friends. A flood of kindly recollections, and the bitter contrast between the promise of their early days, and the dismal fate which finally awaited the parents of Waldegrave, rush at once on the mind of the old man, and extort a pathetic lamentation. The deportment of the Indian warrior forms an admirable contrast to Albert's indulgence of grief, and the stanzas in which it is described rank among the finest in the poem.

XXIII.

'He said—and strain'd unto his heart the boy :
Far differently the mute Oneyda took
His calumet of peace, and cup of joy ;
As monumental bronze unchanged his look :
A soul that pity touch'd, but never shook :
Train'd, from his tree-rock'd cradle to his bier,
The fierce extremes of good and ill to brook
Impassive—fearing but the shame of fear—
A stoic of the woods—a man without a tear.

XXIV.

'Yet deem not goodness on the savage stock
Of Outalissi's heart disdain'd to grow ;
As lives the oak unwither'd on the rock
By storms above, and barrenness below :
He scorn'd his own, who felt another's woe :
And ere the wolf-skin on his back he flung,
Or laced his mocasins, in act to go,
A song of parting to the boy he sung,
Who slept on Albert's couch, nor heard his friendly tongue.'

pp. 20 and 21.

After a lyrical effusion addressed to the slumbering boy, his 'own adopted one', the savage returns to his deserts. His capacity of tracking his way through the wilderness by a species of instinct, or rather by the habit of observing the most minute signs derived from the face of earth or heaven, is described in nervous and striking poetry, and closes the first part of the poem.

Part II. opens with a description of Albert's abode, situated between two woods near a river, which, after dashing over a thundering cascade, chose that spot to expand itself into a quiet and pellucid sheet of living water. Beautiful in itself, the scene was graced by the presence of Gertrude, yet more beautiful, an 'enthusiast of the woods,' alive to all the charms of the romantic scenery by which she was surrounded, and whose sentimental benevolence extended itself even to England, which she knew only by her father's report. And here commences the great defect of the story. We totally lose sight of the orphan Waldegrave, whose arrival makes the only inci-

dent in the first canto, and of whose departure from Wyoming we have not been apprised. Neither are we in the least prepared to anticipate such an event, excepting by a line in which Julia expresses a hope that her orphan would be conveyed to 'England's shore'—an *inuendo* which really escaped us in the first, and even in the second, perusal of the poem, and which, at any rate, by no means implies that her wish was actually fulfilled. The unaccountable disappearance of this character, to whom we had naturally assigned an important part in the narrative, is not less extraordinary than that Gertrude, in extending her kind wishes and affectionate thoughts towards friends in Britain whom she never knew, and only loved because they might possibly possess

‘ Her mother’s looks—perhaps her likeness strong,’

omits all mention or recollection of the interesting little orphan of whom every reader has destined her the bride from the first moment of his introduction. Of him, however, nothing is said, and we are left to conjecture whether he has gone to Britain and been forgotten by his youthful playfellow, or whether he remains an unnoticed and undistinguished inmate of her father’s mansion. We have next a splendid, though somewhat confused, description of a ‘ deep untrodden grot,’ where, as it is beautifully expressed,

‘ rocks sublime
To human art a sportive semblance wore ;
And yellow lichens coloured all the clime,
Like moon-light battlements and towers decayed by time.’

To this grotto, embosomed in all the splendid luxuriance of transatlantic vegetation, Gertrude was wont to retire ‘ with Shakspeare’s self to speak and smile alone,’ and here she is surprised by the arrival of a youth in a Spanish garb, leading in his hand his steed, who is abruptly announced as

‘ The stranger guest of many a distant land.’

We were at least as much startled as Gertrude by this unexpected intruder, and are compelled to acknowledge that the suspense in which we were kept for a few stanzas is rather puzzling than pleasing. We became sensible that we had somehow lost the thread of the story, and while hurriedly endeavouring to recover it, became necessarily insensible to the beauties of the poetry. The stranger inquires for the mansion of Albert, is of course hospitably received, and tells of the wonders which he had seen, in Switzerland, in France, in Italy, and in California, whence he last arrived. At length Albert inquires after the orphan Waldegrave, who (as his question for the first time apprises the reader) had been sent to his relations in England at the age of twelve, after three years residence in the earthly paradise of Wyoming. The quick eye of Gertrude discovers the mysterious

stranger to be 'Waldegrave's self of Waldegrave come to tell,' and all is rapturous recognition. And here, amidst many beauties, we are again pressed by the leading error of the narrative, for this same Waldegrave—who, for no purpose that we can learn, has been wandering over half the world—of whom the reader knows so little—who appears to have been entirely forgotten during the space of one third of the poem, and whom even Gertrude did not think worth of commemoration in orisons which called for blessings on friends she had never known—this same Waldegrave, of whose infantine affection for Gertrude we no where receive the slightest hint, with even more than the composure of a fine gentleman returned from the grand tour, coolly assures her and Albert at their first interview that she 'shall be his own with all her truth and charms.' This extraordinary and unceremonious appropriation is submitted to by Gertrude and her father with the most unresisting and astonishing complacency. It is in vain to bid us suppose that a tender and interesting attachment had united this youthful couple during Waldegrave's residence at Wyoming. This is like the reference of Bayes to a conversation held by his personages behind the scenes; it is requiring the reader to guess what the author has not told him, and consequently what he is not obliged to know. This inherent defect in the narrative might have been supplied at the expense of two or three stanzas descriptive of the growing attachment between the children, and apprizing us of Waldegrave's departure for England. The omission is the more provoking as we are satisfied of Mr. Campbell's power to trace the progress of their infant love, and the train of little incidents and employments which gave it opportunity to grow with their growth, and strengthen with their strength; in short, to rival the exquisite picture of juvenile affection presented in *Thalaba*.

But to proceed with our tale. Gertrude and Waldegrave are united, and spend three short months in all the luxury of mutual and innocent love described in the concluding stanza of part second.

XXV.

'Then would that home admit them—happier far
Than grandeur's most magnificent saloon—
While, here and there, a solitary star
Flush'd in the dark'ning firmament of June;
And silence brought the soul-felt hour, full soon,
Ineffable, which I may not pourtray;
For never did the Hymenean moon
A paradise of hearts more sacred sway,
In all that slept beneath her soft voluptuous ray,'—p. 43.

The third part continues this delightful picture, so true in itself where pure affection and regulated desires combine to form communal bliss; and we feel all that the poet would impress upon us when in the fifth stanza he announces the storm, which, in the wreck of na-

tions, was to involve this little structure of home-built happiness ; and describes the transitory nature of human felicity in the most beautiful and original simile which we have yet found applied to a theme so often sung.

V.

‘ And in the visions of romantic youth,
 What years of endless bliss are yet to flow !
 But mortal pleasure, what art thou in truth !
The torrent’s smoothness ere it dash below !
 And must I change my song ? and must I shew,
 Sweet Wyoming ! the day when thou wert doom’d,
 Guiltless, to mourn thy loveliest bow’rs laid low !
 When where of yesterday a garden bloom’d,
 Death overspread his pall, and black’ning ashes gloom’d.’—

p. 50.

The approach of civil war in America, and the attachment of Waldegrave to the provincial cause, are briefly touched upon, as are the boding apprehensions of Gertrude, too soon to be fatally realized. One evening, while danger was yet deemed remote, an Indian worn with fatigue and age rushes hastily into Albert’s cottage, and is with difficulty recognised to be the Oneyda chief Outalissi, who had guided Waldegrave to Wyoming. After an indulgence of former recollections, rather too long to be altogether consistent with the pressing nature of his errand, the Indian informs the domestic circle that the savages led by Brandt had extirpated his whole tribe on account of their friendship to the Americans, and were approaching to wreak their vengeance by laying waste the settlement of Wyoming.

XIX.

‘ Scarce had he utter’d,—when Heaven’s verge extreme
 Reverberates the bomb’s descending star,—
 And sounds that mingled laugh,—and shout,—and scream,
 To freeze the blood, in one discordant jar,
 Rung to the pealing thunderbolts of war.
 Whoop after whoop with rack the ear assail’d ;
 As if unearthly fiends had burst their bar ;
 While rapidly the marksman’s shot prevail’d ;
 And aye, as if for death, some lonely trumpet wail’d.—

XX.

‘ Then look’d they to the hills, where fire o’erhung
 The bandit groups, in one Vesuvian glare ;
 Or swept, far seen, the tow’r, whose clock, unrun,
 Told legible that midnight of despair.’—p. 60.

These sounds of tumult and desolation are mingled with the more cheering notes of the drums and military music of a body of provincialists, who arrive, it would seem, to protect the inhabitants of

Wyoming. The description of this band, composed of the descendants of various climes, and arrayed by 'torch and trumpet,' evinces the same high tone of military poetry which glows through the stanzas on the battle of Hohenlinden. We are, however, again compelled to own some disappointment arising from the indistinctness of the narrative. The provincialists appear prepared to fight in defence of the Pennsylvanian Arcadia. Oualissi chants his battle song, and Albert invokes, amid the blaze of neighbouring villages, the protection of the God of Hosts on the defenders of their native country; Waldegrave too assumes the sword and plume; yet, without any reason assigned, these preparations for battle terminate in a retreat to a neighbouring fort, and we are left to conjecture the motive for flight in a band so energetic and so amply provided. The destruction too of Wyoming might have claimed a more lengthened detail than is afforded by the lines which we have quoted, and the main interest in the fate of Albert and his family would have been increased rather than diminished by a glance at those numerous groups who must necessarily have accompanied the flight, or remained to perish with their dwellings. But of these we learn no more than if Waldegrave and Julia had, like our first parents, been the sole inhabitants of this terrestrial paradise. Covered by the friendly battalion, they reach in safety the fort which was to afford them shelter; and in the few accurate yet beautiful lines which characterize its situation and appearance, the poet has happily compelled into his service even the terms of modern fortification, and evinced a complete conquest over those technical expressions which probably any other bard would have avoided as fit only for the disciples of Cohorn or Vaubau.

XXV.

' Past was the flight, and welcome seem'd the tow'r,
That, like a giant standard-bearer, frown'd
Defiance on the roving Indian pow'r.
Beneath, each bold and promontory mound
With embrasure emboss'd, and armour crown'd,
And arrowy frize, and wedged ravelin,
Wove like a diadem its tracery round
The lofty summit of that mountain green;
Here stood secure the group, and ey'd a distant scene.'—p. 63.

Here, while surveying in fancied security the progress of the devastation, Albert and Gertrude fall, pierced by the bullets of the lurking marksmen of the enemy. A death-speech, affecting, yet somewhat too long, exhausts the last efforts of the expiring Gertrude; and as her husband kneels by the bodies in ineffable despair, the following exquisite description of Oualissi's sympathy gives an originality and wildness to the scene of woe at once appropriate to America, and distinct from the manners of every other country.

XXXIV.

' Then mournfully the parting bugle bid
 Its farewell o'er the grave of worth and truth;
 Prone to the dust afflicted Waldegrave hid
 His face on earth;—him watch'd in gloomy ruth,
 His woodland guide; but words had none to sooth
 The grief that knew not consolation's name:
 Casting his Indian mantle o'er the youth,
 He watch'd, beneath its folds, each burst that came
 Convulsive, ague-like, across his shuddering frame!—p. 69.

We have gazed with delight on the savage witnessing the death of Wolfe with awe and sorrow acting upon habits of stubborn apathy; and we have perused the striking passage in Spenser whose Talus 'an iron man ymade in iron mould' is described as having nevertheless an inly feeling of sympathy with the anguish of Britomarte; yet neither the painter nor the poet has, in our apprehension, presented so perfect and powerful an image of sympathetic sorrow in a heart unwont to receive such a guest, as appears in the mute distress of the Oneyda warrior bending over his despairing foster-son. His grief at length becomes vocal in a death-song, which, did our limits permit, we would willingly transfer to these pages. But we have been so profuse in quotation, that the concluding stanzas are all we can produce to justify our asserting for the author the pre-eminence of his lyrical poetry.

XXXVII.

' To-morrow let us do or die!*
 But when the bolt of death is hurl'd,
 Ah! whither then with thee to fly,
 Shall Outalissa roam the world?
 Seek we thy once-lov'd home?
 The hand is gone that cropt its flowers!
 Unheard their clock repeats its hours!—
 Cold is the hearth within their bow'rs!—
 And should we thither roam,
 Its echoes, and its empty tread,
 Would sound like voices from the dead!

XXXVIII.

' Or shall we cross yon mountains blue,
 Whose streams' my kindred nation quaff'd;
 And by my side in battle true,
 A thousand warriors drew the shaft?

* This expression occurs in Burns's Bannockburn; yet it is a kind of common property, being the motto, we believe, of a Scottish family. We might more justly, on the part of the ingenious Dr. Leyden, reclaim the line,

' Red is the cup they drink, but not with wine.'

But these occasional coincidences, over which stupidity delights to doze, are hardly worth noticing in criticising original poetry.

Ah! there in desolation cold,
 The desert serpent dwells alone,
 Where grass o'ergrows each mould'ring bone,
 And stones themselves to ruin grown,
 Like me, are death-like cold.
 Then seek we not their camp—for there—
 The silence dwells of my despair!

XXXIX.

'But hark, the trümp!—to-morrow thou
 In glory's fires shalt dry thy tears :
 Ev'n from the land of shadows now
 My father's awful ghost appears ;
 Amidst the clouds that round us roll,
 He bids my soul for battle thirst—
 He bids me dry the last—the first—
 The only tears that ever burst—
 From Outalissi's soul ;—
 Because I may not stain with grief
 The death-song of an Indian chief.'—pp. 71—73.

With these stanzas the curtain is dropped over the dead and the mourners, and the poem is concluded.

Before we proceed to any general examination of Gertrude of Wyoming, we think it necessary to intimate to our readers, that it is by no means owing to deficiency of wit, on our own part, that we have conducted them in sober sadness from the beginning to the end of Mr. Campbell's affecting tale. We are perfectly aware that, according to the modern canons of criticism, the Reviewer is expected to shew his immense superiority to the Author reviewed, and at the same time to relieve the tediousness of narration by turning the epic or dramatic, moral story before him into quaint and lively burlesque. We had accordingly prepared materials for caricaturing Gertrude of Wyoming, in which the irresistible Spanish pantaloons of her lover were not forgotten, Albert was regularly distinguished as old Jonathan, the provincial troops were called Yankie-doodles, and the sombrous character of the Oneyda chief was relieved by various sly allusions to 'blankets, strouds, stinkübus, and wampum.' And having thus clearly demonstrated to Mr. Campbell and to the reader that the whole effect of his poem was as completely at our mercy as the house which a child has painfully built with a pack of cards, we proposed to pat him on the head with a few slight compliments on the ingenuity of his puny architecture, and dismiss him with a sugar-plum as a very promising child indeed. But, however prepared we came to quizz what is no otherwise ridiculous than because serious and pathetic, our hearts recoiled from the disingenuousness of the task. We shall ever be found ready to apply the lash of ridicule to conceit, presumption or dulness ; but no temptation to display our own wit

or to conciliate popularity, shall prompt us to expose genius to the malignant grin of envious folly, or by low and vulgar parody to derogate from a work which we might strive in vain to emulate.

We return from this digressive apology to the merits and defects of Gertrude of Wyoming, which have this marked singularity, that the latter intrude upon us at the very first reading, whereas, after repeated perusals, we perceive beauties which had previously escaped our notice. We have indeed rather paradoxically been induced to ascribe the most obvious faults to the same cause which has undoubtedly produced many of the excellencies of the poem,—to the anxious and assiduous attention, which the author has evidently bestowed upon it before publication. It might be expected that the public would regard with indulgence those imperfections which arise from the poet's diffidence of his own splendid powers, and too great deference to the voice of criticism. In some respects, however, public taste, like a fine lady, 'stoops to the forward and the bold;' and the modest and anxious adventurer is defrauded of the palm, merely that his judges may enjoy the childish superiority of condemning an overlaboured attempt to give them pleasure. Let no reader suppose that we recommend to imitation the indiscreet, and undaunted precipitation with which another popular poet is said to throw his effusions before the public, with the indifference of an ostrich as to their success or failure. To sober criticism the fault of him who will not do his best is greater than the excess of over caution, as the sin of presumption is greater than that of spiritual despondency. Carelessness is also a crime of deeper dye when considered with reference to its effects upon public taste; for the habit of writing loosely is particularly captivating to the fry of young scribblers, and we are in danger of being deluged with rhapsodical romances by poets who would shrink from the attempt of imitating the condensed, polished, and laboured stanzas of Gertrude of Wyoming. But considered with reference not to the ultimate reputation, but to the immediate popularity of the author, it is dangerous to allow the public to suppose that they have before them the work upon which, after the most solicitous and anxious exertion, he is willing to stake his poetical character. A spirit of contradiction, which animates the mass of mankind; impels them to depreciate that which is presented as the *chef d'œuvre* of the artist; and the question is no longer whether the work be excellent, but whether it has attained that summit of excellence on which no poet ever was or ever will be placed by his contemporaries.

We have hitherto only considered the labour bestowed upon Gertrude of Wyoming as an impediment to the flow of popularity which has in the present day attended poems of a ruder structure. But the public taste, although guided in some degree by caprice, is also to a certain extent correctly grounded upon critical doctrine; and the truth is, that an author cannot work upon a beautiful poem beyond a

certain point, without doing it real and irreparable injury in more respects than one.

It is in the first place impossible to make numerous and minute alterations, to alter the position of stanzas, to countermarch and invert the component parts of sentences, without leaving marks of their original array. The epitaph of the Italian valetudinary will apply as well in poetry as in regimen; and it may be said of many a laboured effort of genius, "*Stava bene, ma per star meglio, sto qui.*" There are in Gertrude passages of a construction so studiously involved, that nothing but the deepest consideration could have enabled the author to knit the Gordian knot by which his meaning is fettered, and which unfortunately requires similar exertion of intellect ere it can be disentangled. An ordinary reader is sometimes unable and always unwilling to make such an effort, and hence the volume is resigned and condemned in a moment of splenetic impatience. Some of the introductory stanzas have their beauties thus obscured, and afford rather a conjectural than a certain meaning. We allude to the second in particular. Similar indistinctness occurs in the construction of the following sentence:

' But high in amphitheatre above
His arms the everlasting aloe threw :
Breathed but an air of heaven, and all the grove
Instinct as if with living spirit grew.'

The idea here is beautiful, but it is only on reflection that we discover that the words in italics mean not that the aloe breathed an air of heaven, but that the grove grew instinct with living spirit so soon as the slightest air of heaven breathed on it. Sometimes passages, of which the tone is simple and natural, are defaced by affected inversion, as in Gertrude's exclamation:

' Yet say ! for friendly hearts from whence we came
Of us does oft remembrance intervene ?'

Again, in altering and retouching, inverting and condensing his stanzas, an author will sometimes halt between his first and his latter meaning, and deviate into defects both of sense and grammar. Thus in the Oneyda's first song we have—

' Sleep, wearied one ! and in the dreaming land
Shouldst thou the spirit of thy mother greet,
O say *to-morrow* that the white man's hand
Hath plucked the thorns of sorrow from thy feet.'

Lastly, and above all, in the irksome task of repeated revision and reconsideration, the poet loses, if we may use the phrase, the impulse of inspiration; his fancy, at first so ardent, becomes pallid and flattened, and no longer excites a correspondent glow of expression. In this state of mind he may correct faults, but he will never add beau-

ties; and so much do we prefer the stamp of originality to tame correctness, that were there not a medium which ought to be aimed at, we would rather take the *prima cura* with all its errors and with all its beauties, than the over-amended edition in which both are obliterated. Let any one read the most sublime passage in Shakspeare, an hundred times over, without intermission, it will at length convey to the tired ear neither pathos nor sublimity; hardly even an intelligible idea. Something analogous to this occurs to every poet in the melancholy task of correction. The Scythians, who debated their national affairs first in the revel of a festival and afterwards during a day of fasting, could hardly experience a greater sinking of spirit in their second consultation, than the bard who, in revising the offspring of moments of enthusiastic feeling, experiences that

The dear illusion will not last,
The era of enchantment's past.

Then occur the doubtful and damping questions, whether the faded inspiration was genuine, whether the verses corresponded in any degree to its dictates, or have power to communicate to others a portion of the impulse which produced them. Then comes the dread of malignant criticism; and last, but not least tormenting, the advice of literary friends, each suggesting doubts and alterations, till the spirit is corrected out of the poem, as a sprightly boy is sometimes lectured and flogged for venial indiscretions into a stupid and inanimate dunce. The beautiful poem of Lochiel, which Mr. Campbell has appended to the present volume, as if to illustrate our argument, exhibits marks of this injudicious alteration. Let us only take the last lines where in the original edition the champion declares that even in the moment of general rout and destruction,

' Though my perishing ranks should be strew'd in their gore,
Like ocean weeds heap'd on the surf-beaten shore,
Lochiel, untainted by flight or by chains,
While the kindling of life in his bosom remains,
Shall victor exult, or in death be laid low,
With his back to the field, and his feet to the foe!
And, leaving in battle no blot on his name,
Look proudly to heav'n from the death-bed of fame.'

The whole of this individual, vigorous, and marked picture of the Highland chieftain lying breathless amid his broken and slaughtered clan—a picture so strong, that we even mark the very posture and features of the hero—is humbled and tamed, abridged and corrected, into the following vague and inexpressive couplet :

' Lochiel _____
Shall victor exult in the battle's acclaim,
Or look to yon heav'n from the death bed of fame.

If the pruning knife has been applied with similar severity to the beauties of Gertrude of Wyoming, the hatchet of the Mohaw Brandt himself was not more fatally relentless and indiscriminate in its operations.

The book contains, besides Gertrude of Wyoming, several of Mr. Campbell's smaller pieces. Lochiel in particular and Hohenlinde are introduced, although they made part of the author's last quart volume. We cannot be offended at meeting our favourites anywhere: yet when we connect the circumstance last mentioned, with the reflection that Lochiel has been unnecessarily altered and abridged, we are not thoroughly satisfied with their insertion in the present volume. Two beautiful war odes, entitled the Mariners of England, and the Battle of the Baltick, afford pleasing instances of the short and impetuous lyric sally in which Mr. Campbell excels all his contemporaries. Two ballads, Glenara, and Lord Ullin's Daughter, the former approaching the rude yet forcible simplicity of the ancient minstrels, the latter upon a more refined plan, conclude the volume. They were new to us, and are models in their several styles of composition.

ART. II. *The History of Barbadoes, from the first Discovery of the Island in the Year 1605, till the Accession of Lord Seaforth, 1801.* By John Poyer. pp. 668, 1 vol. 4to. London: Mawman, 1808.

THE numerous and respectable list of subscribers by which this work is accompanied, affords a presumption that the talent and diligence of Mr. Poyer are held in high estimation by his countrymen in Barbadoes, for whose amusement and instruction his labours have been employed; and the candour and modesty with which he has brought forward, in his preface, some disqualifying confessions which it depended upon himself to withhold, could not fail to prepossess us in his favour. 'The best and most copious account of this country extant,' says he, 'is said to have been published by O'Meara in his History of the British Empire in America. This publication I have never seen. Anxious to consult every author who has written on the subject, I offered, by public advertisement, any price for the book; but those who had it were not liberal enough to indulge me with the use of it.' He also says, 'the journals of the Colonial parliament, had I been allowed access to them, would have supplied every deficiency, and smoothed the way before me; but this was an advantage which I was not permitted to enjoy.' Lastly, with the hope of averting the severity of criticism, he tells us that he would 'denied the advantages of an academical education.' This deficiency