

they left it. On all these points, the poet, without quitting the track of his narrative, soon gives the fullest information. The storm rises; the Trojans are driven to Africa, and hospitably received by the Queen of the country; at whose desire their commander relates his adventures.

The action of *Paradise Lost* commences not many days before Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden, which is the concluding event. This poem, as its plan is incomparably more sublime and more important, than that of either the *Iliad* or *Eneid*, opens with a far more interesting scene: a multitude of angels and archangels shut up in a region of torment and darkness, and rolling on a lake of unquenchable fire. Who these angels are, and what brought them into this miserable condition, we naturally wish to know; and the poet in due time informs us; partly from the conversation of the fiends themselves; and more particularly by the mouth of a happy spirit, sent from heaven to caution the father and mother of mankind against temptation, and confirm their good resolutions by unfolding the dreadful effects of impiety and disobedience.

This poetical arrangement of events, so different from the historical, has other advantages besides those arising from brevity, and compactness of detail: it is obviously more affecting to the fancy, and more alarming to the passions; and, being more

suitable

suitable to the order and the manner in which the actions of other men strike our senses, is a more exact imitation of human affairs. I hear a sudden noise in the street, and run to see what is the matter. An insurrection has happened, a great multitude is brought together, and something very important is going forward. The scene before me is the first thing that engages my attention; and is in itself so interesting, that for a moment or two I look at it in silence and wonder. By and by, when I get time for reflection, I begin to inquire into the cause of all this tumult, and what it is the people would be at; and one who is better informed than I, explains the affair from the beginning; or perhaps I make this out for myself, from the words and actions of the persons principally concerned. — This is a sort of picture\* of poetical arrangement, both in Epic and Dramatic Composition; and this plan has been followed in narrative odes and ballads both ancient and modern. — The historian pursues a different method. He begins perhaps with an account of the manners of a certain age, and of the political constitution of a certain country; then introduces a particular person, gives the story of his birth, connections, private character, pursuits, dis-

\* This illustration, or something very like it, I think I have read in Batteux's Commentary on Horace's Art of Poetry.

appointments, and of the events that promoted his views, and brought him acquainted with other turbulent spirits like himself; and so proceeds, unfolding, according to the order of time, the causes, principles, and progress of the conspiracy;—if that be the subject which he undertakes to illustrate. It cannot be denied, that this latter method is more favourable to calm information: but the former, compared with it, will be found to have all the advantages already specified, and to be more effectually productive of that mental pleasure which depends on the passions and imagination.

VI. If a work have no determinate end, it has no meaning; and if it have many ends, it will distract by its multiplicity. Unity of design, therefore, belongs in some measure to all compositions, whether in verse or prose. But to some it is more essential than to others; and to none so much as to the higher poetry. In certain kinds of history, there is unity sufficient, if all the events recorded be referred to one person; in others, if to one period of time, or to one people, or even to the inhabitants of one and the same planet. But it is not enough, that the subject of a poetical fable be the exploits of *one person*; for these may be of various and even of opposite sorts and tendencies, and take up longer time, than the nature of poetry can admit:—far less can a regular poem comprehend the affairs of *one period*, or of *one peo-*

*ple*:—it must be limited to some *one great action or event*, to the illustration of which all the subordinate events must contribute; and these must be so connected with one another, as well as with the poet's general purpose, that one cannot be changed, transposed, or taken away, without affecting the consistence and stability of the whole \*. In itself an incident may be interesting, a character well drawn, a description beautiful; and yet, if it disfigure the general plan, or if it obstruct or incumber the main action, instead of helping it forward, a correct artist would consider it as but a gaudy superfluity or splendid deformity; like a piece of scarlet cloth sowed upon a garment of a different colour †. Not that all the parts of the fable either are, or can be, equally essential. Many descriptions and thoughts, of little consequence to the plan, may be admitted for the sake of variety; and the poet may, as well as the historian and philosopher, drop his subject for a time, in order to take up an affecting or instructive digression.

The doctrine of poetical digressions and episodes has been largely treated by the critics. I shall only remark, that, in estimating their propriety, three things are to be attended to:—their connection with the fable or subject;—their own peculiar excellence;

\* Aristot. Poet. § 8.

† Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 15. &c.



—and their subserviency to the poet's design.

1. Those digressions, that both arise from and terminate in the subject; like the episode of the angel Raphael in *Paradise Lost*, and the transition to the death of Cæsar and the civil wars in the first book of the *Georgic*; are the most artful, and if suitably executed claim the highest praise:—those that arise from, but do not terminate in the subject, are perhaps second in the order of merit; like the story of Dido in the *Eneid*, and the encomium on a country-life in the second book of the *Georgic*:—those come next, that terminate in, but do not rise from the fable; of which there are several in the third book of the *Eneid*, and in the *Odyssey*:—and those, that neither terminate in the fable, nor rise from it, are the least artful; and if they be long, cannot escape censure, unless their beauty be very great.

But, 2. we are willing to excuse a beautiful episode, at whatever expence to the subject it may be introduced. They who can blame Virgil for obtruding upon them the charming tale of Orpheus and Eurydice in the fourth *Georgic*, or Milton for the apostrophe to light in the beginning of his third book, ought to forfeit all title to the perusal of good poetry; for of such divine strains one would rather be the author, than of all the books of criticism in the world. Yet still it is better, that an episode possess the beauty of connection, together with its own

intrinsic elegance, than this without the other. Moreover, in judging of the propriety of episodes, and other similar contrivances, it may be expedient to attend, 3. to the *design* of the poet, as distinguished from the fable or subject of the poem. The great design, for example, of Virgil, was to interest his countrymen in a poem written with a view to reconcile them to the person and government of Augustus. Whatever, therefore, in the poem tends to promote this design, even though it should, in some degree, hurt the contexture of the fable, is really a proof of the poet's judgement, and may be not only allowed but applauded. — The progress of the action of the *Eneid* may seem to be too long obstructed, in one place, by the story of Dido, which, though it rises from the preceding part of the poem, has no influence upon the sequel; and, in another, by the episode of *Cacus*, which, without injury to the fable, might have been omitted altogether. Yet these episodes, interesting as they are to us and to all mankind, because of the transcendent merit of the poetry, must have been still more interesting to the Romans, because of their connection with the Roman affairs; for the one accounts poetically for their wars with Carthage; and the other not only explains some of their religious ceremonies, but also gives a most charming rural picture of those hills and vallies in the neighbourhood

bourhood of the Tiber, on which, in after times, their majestic city was fated to stand. — And if we consider, that the design of Homer's *Iliad* was, not only to show the fatal effects of dissension among confederates, but also to immortalise his country, and celebrate the most distinguished families in it, we shall be inclined to think more favourably than critics generally do, of some of his long speeches and digressions; which, though to us, they may seem trivial, must have been very interesting to his countrymen, on account of the genealogies and private history recorded in them. — Shakespeare's *Historical Plays*, considered as *Dramatic fables*, and tried by the laws of *Tragedy* and *Comedy*, appear very rude compositions. But if we attend to the poet's *design*, (as the elegant critic \* has with equal truth and beauty explained it), we shall be forced to admire his judgement in the general conduct of those pieces, as well as unequalled success in the execution of particular parts.

There is yet another point of view (as hinted formerly) in which these digressions may be considered. If they tend to elucidate any important character, or to introduce any interesting event not otherwise within the compass of the poem, or to give an amiable display of any particular virtue, they

\* *Essay on the writings and genius of Shakespeare*,  
 pag. 55.

may

may be intitled, not to our pardon only, but even to our admiration, however loosely they may hang upon the fable. All these three ends are effected by that most beautiful episode of Hector and Andromache in the sixth book of the Iliad; and the two last, by the no less beautiful one of Euryalus and Nisus, in the ninth of the Æneid.

The beauties of poetry are distinguishable into local and universal. The former may reflect great honour on the poet, but the latter are more excellent in themselves; and these chiefly we must be supposed to have in our eye, when we speak of the essential characters of the art. A well-invented fable, as it is one of the most difficult operations of human genius\*, must be allowed to be one of

\* The difficulty of constructing an Epic or Dramatic fable may appear from the bad success of very great writers who have attempted it. Of Dramatic fables there are indeed several in the world, which may be allowed to have come near perfection. But the beauty of Homer's fable remains unrivalled to this day. Virgil and Tasso have imitated, but not equalled it. That of *Paradise Lost* is artful, and for the most part judicious: I am certain the author could have equalled Homer in this, as he has excelled him in some other respects:—but the nature of his plan would not admit the introduction of so many incidents, as we see in the Iliad, co-operating to one determinate end.—Of the Comic Epopee we have two exquisite models in English, I mean the *Amelia* and *Tom Jones* of Fielding. The introductory part of the latter follows indeed the historical arrangement, in a way somewhat resembling the practice of Euripides in his Prologues, or at least as excusable: but, with this excep-  
tion,

of the highest beauties of poetry. The *design*, as distinguished from the *fable*, may stand in need of commentators to explain it; but a well-wrought fable is universally understood, and universally pleasing. And if ever a poet shall arise, who to the art of Sophocles and Homer, can join the correctness and delicacy of Virgil, and the energy, variety, and natural colouring of Shakespeare, the world will then see something in poetry more excellent than we can at present conceive.

tion, we may venture to say, that both fables would bear to be examined by Aristotle himself, and, if compared with those of Homer, would not greatly suffer in the comparison. This author, to an amazing variety of probable occurrences, and of characters well drawn, well supported, and finely contrasted, has given the most perfect unity, by making them all co-operate to one and the same final purpose. It yields a very pleasing surprise to observe, in the unravelling of his plots, particularly that of *Tom Jones*, how many incidents, to which, because of their apparent minuteness, we had scarce attended as they occurred in the narrative, are found to have been essential to the plot. And what heightens our idea of the poet's art is, that all this is effected by natural means, and human abilities, without any machinery: — while his great master Cervantes is obliged to work a miracle for the cure of *Don Quixote*. — Can any reason be assigned, why the inimitable Fielding, who was so perfect in Epic fable, should have succeeded so indifferently in Dramatic? Was it owing to the peculiarity of his genius, or of his circumstances? to any thing in the nature of Dramatic writing in general, or of that particular taste in Dramatic Comedy which Congreve and Vanburgh had introduced, and which he was obliged to comply with?

• • • And

And now, from the position formerly established, that the end of this divine art is, *to give pleasure*, I have endeavoured to prove, that, whether in displaying the appearances of the material universe, or in imitating the workings of the human mind, and the varieties of human character, or in arranging and combining into one whole the several incidents and parts whereof his fable consists, — the aim of the poet must be, to copy Nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection in which, consistently with the particular genius of the work, and the laws of verisimilitude, it may be supposed to be.

Such, in general, is the nature of that poetry which is intended to raise admiration, pity, and other *serious* emotions. But in this art, as in all others, there are different degrees of excellence; and we have hitherto directed our view chiefly to the highest. All serious poets are not equally solicitous to improve nature. Euripides is said to have represented men as they were; Sophocles, more poetically, as they should or might be \*. Theocritus, in his Idyls, and Spenser, in his Shepherd's Calendar, give us language and sentiments more nearly approaching those of the *Rus. verum et barbarum* †, than what we meet with in the Pastorals of Virgil and Pope. In the *Historical drama*, human characters and events must be according to hi-

\* Aristot. Poet.

† Martial.

historical truth, or at least not so remote from it, as to lead into any important misapprehension of fact. And in the *Historical Epic poem*, such as the *Pharsalia* of Lucan, and the *Campaign* of Addison, the historical arrangement is preferred to the poetical, as being nearer the truth. Yet nature is a little improved even in these poems. The persons in Shakespeare's Historical Plays, and the heroes of the *Pharsalia*, talk in verse, and suitably to their characters, and with a readiness, beauty, and harmony of expression, not to be met with in real life, nor even in history; speeches are invented, and, to heighten the description, circumstances added, with great latitude; real events are rendered more compact and more strictly dependent upon one another, and fictitious ones brought in, to elucidate human characters, and diversify the narration.

The more poetry improves nature, by copying after general ideas collected from extensive observation, the more it partakes (according to Aristotle) of the nature of philosophy; the greater stretch of fancy and of observation it requires in the artist, and the better chance it has to be universally agreeable. An ordinary painter can give a portrait of a beautiful face: but from a number of such faces to collect a general idea of beauty more perfect than is to be found in any individual, and then to give existence to that idea, by drawing it upon canvas,



yas, (as Zeuxis is said to have done when he made a famous picture of Helen \*), is a work which one must possess invention and judgement, as well as dexterity, to be able to execute. For it is not by copying the eyes of one lady, the lips of another, and the nose of a third, that such a picture is to be formed: — a medley of this kind would probably be ridiculous, as a certain form of feature may suit one face, which would not suit another: — but it is by comparing together several beautiful mouths, (for example), remarking the peculiar charm of each; and then conceiving an idea of that feature, different perhaps from all, and more perfect than any; and thus proceeding through the several features, with a view, not only to the colour, shape, and proportion, of each part, but also to the harmony of the whole. It rarely happens, that an individual is so complete in any one quality as we could desire; and though it were in the opinion of some, it would not in that of all. A lover may think his mistress a model of perfection; she may have moles and freckles on her face, and an odd cast of her eye; and yet he shall think all this becoming; but another man sees her in a different light; discovers many blemishes perhaps, and but few beauties; thinks her too fat or too lean, too short or too tall. Now, what would be the conse-

\* Plin. Hist. Natur. lib. 35.

quence, if this lady's portrait were to appear in a picture, under the character of Helen or Venus? The lover would admire it; but the rest of the world would wonder at the painter's taste. Great artists have, however, fallen into this error. Rubens, while he was drawing some of his pieces, would seem to have had but two ideas of feminine loveliness; and those were copied from his two wives: all the world approves his conjugal partiality; but his taste in female beauty all the world does not approve.

Individual objects there are, no doubt, in nature, which command universal admiration. There are many women in Great Britain, whose beauty all the world would acknowledge. Nay, perhaps, there are some such in every nation: for, however capricious our taste for beauty may be esteemed by modern philosophers, I have been assured, that in the West Indies a female negro seldom passes for handsome among the blacks, who is not really so in the opinion of the white people. There are characters in real life, which, with little or no heightening, might make a good figure even in Epic poetry: there are natural landscapes, than which one could not desire any thing of the kind more beautiful. But such individuals are not the most common; and therefore, though the rule is not without exceptions, it may, however, be admitted as a rule, That the poet or painter, who means to adapt himself

to the general taste, should copy after general ideas collected from extensive observation of nature. For the most part, the peculiarities of individuals are agreeable only to individuals; the manners of Frenchmen to Frenchmen; the dress of the season to the beaux and belles of the season; the sentiments and language of Newmarket, to the heroes of the turf, and their imitators. But manners and sentiments, dresses and faces, may be imagined, which shall be agreeable to all who have a right to be pleased; and these it is the business of the imitative artist to invent, and to exhibit.

Yet mere portraits are useful and agreeable: and poetry, even when it falls short of this philosophical perfection, may have great merit as an instrument of both instruction and pleasure. Some minds have no turn to abstract speculation, and would be better pleased with a *notion* of an individual, than with an *idea* of a species\*; or with

\* *Idea*, according to the usage of the Greek philosophers, from whom we have the word, signifies, "A thought of the mind which is expressed by a general term." *Notion* is used by many English writers of credit to signify, "A thought of the mind which may be expressed by a proper or individual name." Thus, I have a *notion* of London, but an *idea* of a city; a *notion* of a particular hero, but an *idea* of heroism. These two words have long been confounded by the best writers: but it were to be wished, that, as the things are totally different, the names had been so too. Had this been

with seeing in an Historical picture or Epic poem, the portraits or characters of their acquaintance, than the same form of face or disposition improved into a general idea. And to most men, simple unadorned nature is, at certain times, and in certain compositions, more agreeable, than the most elaborate improvements of art; as a plain short period, without modulation, gives a pleasing variety to a discourse. Many such portraits of simple nature there are in the subordinate parts both of Homer's and of Virgil's poetry: and an excellent effect they have (as was already observed) in giving probability to the fiction; as well as in gratifying the reader's fancy with images distinct and lively, and easily comprehended. The historical plays of Shakespeare raise not our pity and terror to such a height, as Lear, Mac-

been the case, a great deal of confusion peculiar to modern philosophy, and arising from an ambiguous, and almost unlimited, use of the word *idea*, might have been prevented.

\* An historical picture, like West's *Death of Wolfe*, in which the faces are all portraits of individual heroes, and the dresses according to the present mode, may be more interesting now, than if these had been more picturesque, and those expressive of different modifications of heroism. But in a future age, when the dresses are become unfashionable, and the faces no longer known as portraits, is there not reason to fear, that this excellent piece will lose of its effect?

† See chap. 3.

beth,

• beth, or Othello; but they interest and instruct us greatly, notwithstanding. The rustiest of the Eclogues of Theocritus, or even of Spenser, have by some authors been extolled above those of Virgil, because more like real life. Nay, Corneille is known to have preferred the *Pharsalia* to the *Eneid*, perhaps from its being nearer the truth; or perhaps from the sublime sentiments of Stoical morality so forcibly and so ostentatiously displayed in it.

Poets may refine upon nature too much, as well as too little; for affectation and rusticity are equally remote from true elegance.

— The style and sentiments of comedy should no doubt be more correct and more pointed than those of the most polite conversation: but to make every footman a wit, and every gentleman and lady an epigrammatist, as Congreve has done, is an excessive and faulty refinement. The proper medium has been hit by Menander and Terence, by Shakespeare in his happier scenes, and by Garrick, Cumberland, and some others of late renown. — To describe the passion of love with as little delicacy as some men speak of it, would be unpardonable; but to transform it into mere platonic adoration, is to run into another extreme, less criminal indeed, but too remote from universal truth to be universally interesting. To the former extreme Ovid inclines; and Petrarch, and his imitators, to the latter. Virgil

gil has happily avoided both: but Milton has painted this passion, as distinct from all others, with such peculiar truth and beauty, that we cannot think Voltaire's encomium too high, when he says, that love in all other poetry seems a weakness, but in Paradise Lost a virtue. — There are many good strokes of nature in Ramsay's Gentle Shepherd; but the author's passion for the *Rus verum* betrays him into some indelicacies\*: — a censure that falls with greater weight upon Theocritus, who is often absolutely indecent. The Italian pastoral of Tasso and Guarini, and the French of Fontenelle, run into the opposite extreme, (though in some parts beautifully simple), and display a system of rural manners, so quaint and affected as to outrage all probability. I should oppose several great names, if I were to say, that Virgil has given us the pastoral poem in its most perfect state; and yet I cannot help being of this opinion, though I have not time at present to specify my reasons. — In fact, though mediocrity of execution in poetry be allowed to deserve the doom

\* The language of this poem has been blamed, on account of its vulgarity. The Scotch dialect is sufficiently rustic, even in its most improved state: but in the Gentle Shepherd it is often debased by a phraseology not to be met with, except among the most illiterate people. Writers on pastoral have not always been careful to distinguish between coarseness and simplicity; and yet a plain suit of cloaths and a bundle of rags are not more different.

pronounced upon it by Horace\*; yet is it true, notwithstanding, that in this art, as in many other good things, the point of excellence lies in a middle between two extremes; and has been reached by those only who sought to improve nature as far as the genius of their work would permit, keeping at an equal distance from rusticity on the one hand, and affected elegance on the other. If it were asked, what effects a view of nature degraded, or rendered less perfect than the reality, would produce in poetry; I should answer, The same which caricatura produces in painting;—it would make the piece ludicrous. In almost every countenance, there are some exceptionable features, by heightening the deformity whereof, it is easy to give a ridiculous likeness even of a good face. And in most human characters there are blemishes, moral, intellectual, or corporeal, by exaggerating which to a certain degree, you may form a comic character; as by raising the virtues, abilities, or external advantages of individuals, you form Epic or Tragic characters. I say, to a certain degree; for if, by their vices, want of understanding, or bodily infirmities, they should raise disgust, pity, or any other important emotion, they are then no longer the objects of comic ridicule; and it is an egregious fault

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 373.



in a writer to attempt to make them so\*. It is a fault, because it proves his judgement to be perverted, and tends to pervert the sentiments, and ruin the morals of mankind.

But is nature always degraded in Comic performances? I answer, No; neither is it always improved, as we remarked already; in serious poetry. Some human characters are so truly heroic, as to raise admiration, without any heightenings of poetical art; and some are so truly laughable, that the comic writer would have nothing to do, but to represent them as they are. Besides, to raise laughter is not always the aim, either of the Epic Comedy †, or of the Dramatic: sublime passions and characters are sometimes introduced; and these may be heightened as much as the poet finds necessary for his purpose, provided that, in his style, he affect no heroical elevation; and that his action, and the rank of his persons, be such as might probably be met with in common life. In regard to fable, and the order of events, all Comedy requires, or at least admits, as great perfection as Epic poetry itself.

\* See Essay on Laughter, chap. 3.

† Of the Epic Comedy, which might perhaps be called rather the *Comic Epopee*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* are examples.

## C H A P. VI.

## Remarks on Music.

## S E C T. I.

*Of Imitation, Is Music an Imitative Art?*

**M**AN from his birth is prone to imitation, and takes great pleasure in it. At a time when he is too young to understand or attend to rules, he learns, by imitating others, to speak, and walk, and do many other things equally requisite to life and happiness. Most of the sports of children are imitative, and many of them dramatical. Mimickry occasions laughter; and a just imitation of human life upon the stage is highly delightful to persons of all ranks, conditions, and capacities.

Our natural propensity to imitation may in part account for the pleasure it yields: for that is always pleasing which gratifies natural propensity; nay, to please, and to gratify, are almost synonymous terms. Yet the peculiar charm of imitation may also be accounted for upon other principles. To

compare

compare a copy with the original, and trace out the particulars wherein they differ and wherein they resemble, is in itself a pleasing exercise to the mind; and, when accompanied with admiration of the object imitated, and of the genius of the imitator, conveys a most intense delight; which may be rendered still more intense by the agreeable qualities of the *instrument* of imitation, — by the beauty of the colours in painting, by the harmony of the language in poetry; and in music, by the sweetness, mellowness, pathos, and other pleasing varieties of vocal and instrumental sound. And if to all this there be added, the merit of a moral design, Imitation will then shine forth in her most amiable form, and the enraptured heart acknowledge her powers of pleasing to be irresistible.

Such is the delight we have in imitation, that what would in itself give neither pleasure nor pain, may become agreeable when well imitated. We see without emotion many faces, and other familiar objects; but a good picture even of a stone, or common plant, is not beheld with indifference. No wonder, then, that what is agreeable in itself, should, when surveyed through the medium of skilful imitation, be highly agreeable. A good portrait of a grim countenance is pleasing; but a portrait equally good of a beautiful one, is still more so. Nay, though a man in a violent passion, a mon-

fierce wild beast, or a body agonized with pain, be a most unpleasant spectacle; a picture, or poetical description of it, may be contemplated with delight \*; the pleasure we take in the artist's ingenuity, joined to our consciousness that the object before us is not real, being more than sufficient to counterbalance every disagreeable feeling occasioned by the deformity of the figure †. Even human vices, infirmities, and misfortunes, when well represented on the stage,

\* Aristot. Poet. sect. 4.; Gerard on Taste, part 1. sect. 4.

† Pictures, however, of great merit as imitations, and valuable for the morality of the design, may yet be too horrid to be contemplated with pleasure. A robber, who had broke into a repository of the dead, in order to plunder a corpse of some rich ornaments, is said to have been so affected with the hideous spectacle of mortality which presented itself when he opened the coffin, that he sunk away, trembling and weeping, without being able to execute his purpose. I have met with an excellent print upon this subject; but was never able to look at it for half a minute together. Too many objects of the same character may be seen in Hogarth's *Progress of Cruelty*. — There is another class of shocking ideas, which poets have not always been sufficiently careful to avoid. Juvenal and Swift, and even Pope himself, have given us descriptions which it turns one's stomach to think of. And I must confess, that, notwithstanding the authority of Atterbury and Addison, and the general merit of the passage, I could never reconcile myself to some filthy ideas, which, to the unspeakable satisfaction of Mr Voltaire, Milton has unwarily introduced in the famous allegory of Sin and Death.

be allowed to be a principal cause of the pleasure which we witness either tragedy or form

form a most interesting amusement. So great is the charm of imitation, That has been thought a very mysterious pleasure, which we take in witnessing tragical imitations of human action, even while they move us to pity and sorrow. Several causes seem to co-operate in producing it; 1. It gives an agreeable agitation to the mind, to be deeply interested in any event, that is not attended with real harm to ourselves or others. Nay, certain events of the most substantial distress would seem to give a gloomy entertainment to some minds: A else why should men run so eagerly to see shipwrecks, executions, riots, and even battles, and fields of slaughter? But the distress upon the stage neither is, nor is believed to be, real; and therefore the agreeable exercise it may give to the mind is not allayed by any bitter reflections, but is rather heightened by this consideration, that the whole is imaginary. To those who mistake it for real, as children are said to do sometimes, it gives no pleasure, but intense pain. 2. Throughout the performance, we admire the genius of the poet, as it appears in the language and sentiments, in the right conduct of the fable, in diversifying and supporting the characters, and in devising incidents affecting in themselves, and conducive to the main design. 3. The ingenuity of the actors must be allowed to be a principal cause of the pleasure with which we witness either tragedy

or comedy. A bad play well acted may please, and in fact often does; but a good play ill acted is intolerable. 4. We sympathise with the emotions of the audience, and this heightens our own. For I apprehend, that no person of sensibility would chuse to be the sole spectator of a play, if he had it in his power to see it in company with a multitude. When we have read by ourselves a pleasing narrative, till it has lost every charm that novelty can bestow, we may renew its relish by reading it in company, and perhaps be even more entertained than at the first perusal. 5. The ornaments of the theatre, the music, the scenery, the splendor of the company, nay the very dress of the players, must be allowed to contribute something to our amusement: else why do managers expend so much money in decoration? And, lastly, let it be observed, that there is something very peculiar in the nature of pity. The pain, however exquisite, that accompanies this amiable affection, is such, that a man of a generous mind would not disqualify himself for it, even if he could: nor is the "luxury of woe," that we read of in poetry, a mere figure of speech, but a real sensation, wherewith every person of humanity is acquainted, by frequent experience. Pity produces a tenderness of heart very friendly to virtuous impressions. It inclines us to be circumspect and lowly, and sensible of the uncertainty of human things, and of

our



our dependence upon the great Author of our being; while continued joy and prosperity harden the heart, and render men proud, irreligious, and inattentive: so that Solomon had good reason for affirming, that “by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.” The exercise of pity, even towards imaginary sufferings, cannot fail to give pleasure, if attended, as it generally is, with the approbation of reason and conscience, declaring it to be a virtuous affection, productive of signal benefit to society, and peculiarly suitable to our condition, honourable to our nature, and amiable in the eyes of our fellow-creatures\*.

Since Imitation is so plentiful a source of pleasure, we need not wonder, that the imitative arts of poetry and painting should have been greatly esteemed in every enlightened age. The imitation itself, which is the work of the artist, is agreeable; the thing imitated, which is nature, is also agreeable; and is not the same thing true of the instrument of imitation? Or does any one doubt, whether harmonious language be pleasing to the ear, or certain arrangements of colour beautiful to the eye?

Shall I apply these, and the preceding reasonings, to the Musical Art also, which I

\* Since these remarks were written, Dr Campbell has published a very accurate and ingenious dissertation on this subject. See his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, vol. 1.



have elsewhere called, and which is generally understood to be, Imitative? Shall I say, that some melodies please, because they imitate nature, and that others, which do not imitate nature, are therefore unpleasing? — that an air expressive of devotion, for example, is agreeable, because it presents us with an imitation of those sounds by which devotion does naturally express itself? — Such an affirmation would hardly pass upon the reader; notwithstanding the plausibility it might seem to derive from that strict analogy which all the fine arts are supposed to bear to one another. He would ask, What is the natural sound of devotion? Where is it to be heard? When was it heard? What resemblance is there between Handel's *Te Deum*, and the tone of voice natural to a person expressing, by articulate sound, his veneration of the Divine Character and Providence? — In fact, I apprehend, that critics have erred a little in their determinations upon this subject, from an opinion, that Music, Painting, and Poetry, are all imitative arts. I hope at least I may say, without offence, that while this was my opinion, I was always conscious of some unaccountable confusion of thought, whenever I attempted to explain it in the way of detail to others.

But while I thus insinuate, that Music is not an imitative art, I mean no disrespect to Aristotle, who seems in the beginning of his

Poetics to declare the contrary. It is not the whole, but *the greater part* of music, which that philosopher calls Imitative; and I agree with him so far as to allow this property to some music, though not to all. But he speaks of the ancient music, and I of the modern; and to one who considers how very little we know of the former, it will not appear a contradiction to say, that the one might have been imitative, though the other is not.

Nor do I mean any disrespect to music, when I would strike it off the list of imitative arts. I allow it to be a fine art, and to have great influence on the human soul: I grant, that, by its power of raising a variety of agreeable emotions in the hearer, it proves its relation to poetry, and that it never appears to the best advantage but with poetry for its interpreter: and I am satisfied, that, though musical genius may subsist without poetical taste, and poetical genius without musical taste; yet these two talents united might accomplish nobler effects, than either could do singly. I acknowledge too, that the principles and essential rules of this art are as really founded in nature, as those of poetry and painting. But when I am asked, What part of nature is imitated in any good picture or poem, I find I can give a definite answer: whereas, when I am asked, What part of nature is imitated in *Handel's Water-music*, for instance, or in *Corelli's*

*eighth concerto*, or in any particular English song or Scotch tune, I find I can give no definite answer:—though no doubt I might say some plausible things; or perhaps, after much refinement, be able to show, that Music may, by one shift or other, be made an imitative art, provided you allow me to give any meaning I please to the word *imitative*.

Music is imitative, when it readily puts one in mind of the thing imitated. If an explication be necessary, and if, after all, we find it difficult to recognise any exact similitude, I would not call such music an imitation of nature; but consider it as upon a footing, in point of likeness, with those pictures, wherein the action cannot be known but by a label proceeding from the mouth of the agent, nor the species of animal ascertained without a name written under it. But between imitation in music and imitation in painting, there is this one essential difference:—a bad picture is always a bad imitation of nature, and a good picture is necessarily a good imitation; but music may be exactly imitative, and yet intolerably bad; or not at all imitative, and yet perfectly good. I have heard, that the *Pastorale* in the eighth of Corelli's *Concertos* (which appears by the inscription to have been composed for the night of the Nativity) was intended for an imitation of the song of angels hovering above the fields of Bethlehem, and gradually soaring up to heaven. The music,

music, however, is not such as would of itself convey this idea : and, even with the help of the commentary, it requires a lively fancy to connect the various movements and melodies of the piece with the motions and evolutions of the heavenly host; as sometimes flying off, and sometimes returning; singing sometimes in one quarter of the sky, and sometimes in another; now in one or two parts, and now in full chorus. It is not clear, that the author intended any imitation; and whether he did or not, is a matter of no consequence; for the music will continue to please, when the tradition is no more remembered. The harmonies of this *pastorale* are indeed so uncommon, and so ravishingly sweet, that it is almost impossible not to think of heaven when one hears them. I would not call them imitative; but I believe they are finer than any imitative music in the world.

Sounds in themselves can imitate nothing directly but sounds, nor in their motions any thing but motions. But the natural sounds and motions that music is allowed to imitate, are but few. For, first, they must all be consistent with the fundamental principles of the art, and not repugnant either to melody or to harmony. Now, the foundation of all true music, and the most perfect of all musical instruments, is the human voice; which is therefore the prototype of the musical scale, and a standard of musical

sound. Noises, therefore, and inharmonious notes of every kind, which a good voice cannot utter without straining, ought to be excluded from this pleasing art: for it is impossible, that those vocal sounds which require any unnatural efforts, either of the finger or speaker, should ever give permanent gratification to the hearer. I say, permanent gratification; for I deny not, that the preternatural screams of an Italian finger may occasion surprise, and momentary amusement: but those screams are not music; they are admired, not for their propriety or pathos, but, like rope-dancing, and the eating of fire, merely because they are uncommon and difficult. — Besides, the end of all genuine music is, to introduce into the human mind certain affections, or susceptibilities of affection. Now, all the affections, over which music has any power, are of the agreeable kind. And therefore, in this art, no imitations of natural sound or motion, but such as tend to inspire agreeable affections, ought ever to find a place. The song of certain birds, the murmur of a stream, the shouts of multitudes, the tumult of a storm, the roar of thunder, or a chime of bells, are sounds connected with agreeable or sublime affections, and reconcilable both with melody and with harmony; and may therefore be imitated, when the artist has occasion for them: but the crowing of cocks, the barking of dogs, the mewings of cats, the grunt-  
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ing of swine; the gabbling of geese; the cackling of a hen; the braying of an ass; the creaking of a saw; or the rumbling of a cart-wheel, would render the best music ridiculous. The movement of a dance may be imitated, or the stately pace of an embattled legion; but the hobble of a trotting horse would be intolerable.

There is another sort of imitation by sound, which ought never to be heard, or seen, in music. To express the local elevation of objects by what we call *high* notes, and their depression by *low* or *deep* notes, has no more propriety in it, than any other pun. We call notes *high* or *low*, with respect of their situation in the written scale. There would have been no absurdity in expressing the highest notes by characters placed at the bottom of the scale or musical line, and the lowest notes by characters placed at the top of it, if custom or accident had so determined. And there is reason to think, that something like this actually obtained in the musical scale of the ancients. At least it is probable, that the deepest or gravest sound was called *Summa* by the Romans, and the shrillest or acuteest *Ima*; which might be owing to the construction of their instruments; the string that sounded the former being perhaps highest in place; and that which sounded the latter lowest. — Yet some people would think a song faulty, if the word *heaven* was set to

what



what we call a *low* note, or the word *bell* to what we call a *high* one.

All these sorts of illicit imitation have been practised, and by those too from whom better things were expected. This abuse of a noble art did not escape the satire of Swift; who, though deaf to the charms of music, was not blind to the absurdity of musicians. He recommended it to Dr Ecclin, an ingenious gentleman of Ireland, to compose a *Cantata* in ridicule of this puerile mimicry. Here we have *motions* imitated, which are the most inharmonious, and the least connected with human affections; as the *trotting*, *ambling*, and *galloping*, of Pegasus; and *sounds* the most unmusical, as *crackling* and *snivelling*, and *rough roystering rustic roaring strains*: the words *high* and *deep* have high and deep notes set to them; a series of short notes of equal lengths are introduced, to imitate *shivering* and *shaking*; an irregular rant of quick sounds, to express *rambling*; a sudden rise of the voice, from a low to a high pitch, to denote *flying above the sky*; a ridiculous run of chromatic divisions on the words *Celia dies*; with other droll contrivances of a like nature. In a word, Swift's *Cantata* alone may convince any person, that music uniformly imitative would be ridiculous.—I just observe in passing, that the satire of this piece is levelled, not at absurd imitation only, but also at some other musical improprieties; such as the idle repetition



tion of the same words, the running of long extravagant divisions upon one syllable, and the setting of words to music that have no meaning.

If I were entitled to suggest any rules in this art, I would humbly propose, (and a great musician and ingenious writer seems to be of the same mind \*), that no imitation should ever be introduced into music purely instrumental. Of vocal melody the expression is, or ought to be, ascertained by the poetry; but the expression of the best instrumental music is ambiguous. In this, therefore, there is nothing to lead the mind of the hearer to recognise the imitation, which, though both legitimate and accurate, would run the risk of being overlooked and lost. If, again, it were so very exact, as to lead our thoughts instantly to the thing imitated, we should be apt to attend to the imitation only, so as to remain insensible to the general effect of the piece. In a word, I am inclined to think, that imitation in an instrumental *concerto* would produce either no effect, or a bad one. The same reasons would exclude it from instrumental *solos*; provided they were such as deserve to be called music: — if they be contrived only to show the dexterity of the performer, imitations, and all possible varieties of sound, may be thrown in *ad libitum*: any thing will

\* Avison on Musical Expression, p. 57. 60. second edit.

do, that can astonish the audience; but to such fiddling or fingering I would no more give the honourable name of Music, than I would apply that of Poetry to Pope's "Flut-  
"tering spread thy purple pinions," or to Swift's *Ode on Ditton and Whiston*. —

In vocal music, truly such, the words render the expression determinate, and fix the hearer's attention upon it. Here therefore legitimate imitations may be employed; both because the subject of the song will render them intelligible, and because the attention of the hearer is in no danger of being seduced from the principal air. Yet even here, these imitations must be laid upon the instrumental accompaniment, and by no means attempted by the singer, unless they are expressive, and musical, and may be easily managed by the voice. In the song, which is the principal part, expression should be predominant, and imitations never used at all, except to assist the expression. Besides, the tones of the human voice, though the most pathetic of all sounds, are not suited to the quirks of imitative melody, which will always appear to best advantage on an instrument. In the first part of that excellent song, "Hide me from day's gairish  
"eye," "While the bee with honey'd thigh  
"At her flowery work does sing, "And the  
"waters murmuring, "With such concert  
"as they keep, "Intice the dewy feather'd  
"sleep," — Handel imitates the murmur of  
groves

groves and waters by the accompaniment of tenors : in another song of the same *Oratorio*, "On a plat of rising ground," "I hear the far-off curfew sound," "Over some wide-water'd shore," "Swinging flow with fullen roar," — he makes the bass imitate the evening-bell : in another fine song, "Hush, ye pretty warbling choir," — he accompanies the voice with a flageolet that imitates the singing of birds : in the "Sweet bird that shun'st the noise of folly," the chief accompaniment is a German flute imitating occasionally the notes of the nightingale. — Sometimes, where expression and imitation happen to coincide, and the latter is easily managed by the voice, he makes the song itself imitative. Thus, in that song, "Let the merry bells ring round," "And the jocund rebecks sound," "To many a youth and many a maid," "Dancing in the chequer'd shade," — he makes the voice in the beginning imitate the *sound* of a chime of bells, and in the end the *motion* and gaiety of a dance.

Of these imitations no body will question the propriety. But Handel, notwithstanding his inexhaustible invention, and wonderful talents in the sublime and pathetic, is subject to fits of trifling, and frequently errs in the application of his imitative contrivances. In that song, "What passion cannot music raise and quell," when he comes to the words, "His listening brethren stood around,"

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“And wondering on their faces *fell*,” — the accompanying violoncello *falls* suddenly from a quick and *high* movement to a very *deep* and long note. In another song of the same piece \*, “Sharp violins proclaim  
“Their jealous pangs and desperation, “Fury, frantic indignation, “*Depth* of pains  
“and *height* of passion, “For the fair disdainful dame;” — the words “*Depth* of pains and *height* of passion,” are thrice repeated to different keys; and the notes of the first clause are constantly *deep*, and those of the second as regularly *high*. The poet however is not less blameable than the musician. — And many other examples of the same kind might be produced from the works of this great artist †.

What has been said may serve to show both the extent, and the merit of Imitative Music ‡. It extends to those natural sounds and motions only, which are agree-

\* Dryden's Ode on St Cecilia's day.

† That pretty pastoral ode of Shakespeare, “When daisies pied and violets blue,” has been set to music by Mr Leveridge; who makes the singer imitate, not only the note of the cuckoo, (which may be allowed, because easily performed, and perfectly musical), but also the shriek of the owl.

‡ By Imitative Music I must always be understood to mean, that which imitates *natural* sounds and motions. Fugues, and other similar contrivances, which, like echoes, repeat or imitate particular portions of the melody, it belongs not to this place to consider.

able in themselves, consistent with melody and harmony, and associated with agreeable affections and sentiments. Its merit is so inconsiderable, that music purely instrumental is rather hurt than improved by it; and vocal music employs it only as a help to the expression, except in some rare cases, where the imitation is itself expressive as well as agreeable, and at the same time within the power of the human voice.

The best masters lay it down as a maxim, that melody and harmony are not to be deserted, even for the sake of expression itself\*. Expression that is not consistent with these is not *musical* expression; and a composer who does not render them consistent, violates the essential rules of his art†. If we compare

\* Avifon on Musical Expression, page 56.

† Harmony and Melody are as essential to genuine music, as perspective is to painting. However solicitous a painter may be to give expression to the figures in his back ground, he must not strengthen their colour, nor define their outlines, so as to hurt the perspective by bringing them too near. A musician will be equally faulty, if he violate the harmony of his piece, in order to heighten the pathos. There is likewise in poetry something analogous to this. In those poems that require a regular and uniform versification, a poet may perhaps, in some rare instances, be allowed to break through the rules of his verse, for the sake of rendering his numbers more emphatical. Milton at least is intitled to take such a liberty;

Eternal wrath  
Burn'd after them to the bottomless pit. *Parad. Lost.*

pare Imitation with Expression, the superiority of the latter will be evident. Imitation without Expression is nothing: Imitation detrimental to Expression is faulty: Imitation is never tolerable; at least in serious music, except it promote and be subservient to Expression. If then the highest excellence may be attained in instrumental music, without imitation; and if, even in vocal music, imitation have only a secondary merit; it must follow, that the imitation of nature is not essential to this art; though sometimes, when judiciously employed, it may be ornamental.

Different passions and sentiments do indeed give different tones and accents to the

And Virgil:

*Proluit infans contorquens vortice sylvas*

*Fluviorum rex Eridanus. —* *Geor. i.*

And Homer:

*Διὸς ἄνευ ἁετῶν ἦλθε παῖς ἐκὼν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἔγχετο.* *Iliad iii.*

But these licences must not be too glaring: and therefore I know not whether Dyer is not blameable for giving us, in order to render his numbers imitative, a Trochaic verse of four feet and an half, instead of an Iambic of five:

The pilgrim oft  
At dead of night, midst his prison hears  
Aghast the voice of Time; departing towers  
Tumbling all precipitate, down dash'd,  
Rattling around, &c.

*Ruins of Rome.*

human



human voice. But can the tones of the most pathetic melody be said to bear a resemblance to the voice of a man or woman speaking from the impulse of passion? — The *flat key*, or *minor mode*, is found to be well adapted to a melancholy subject; and, if I were disposed to refine upon the imitative qualities of the art, I would give this for a reason, that melancholy, by depressing the spirits, weakens the voice, and makes it rise rather by *minor thirds*, which consist of but four semitones, than by *major thirds*, which consist of five. But is not this reason more subtle than solid? Are there not melancholy airs in the *sharp key*, and chearful ones in the *flat*? Nay, in the same air, do we not often meet with a transition from the one key to the other, without any sensible change in the expression?

Courage is apt to vent itself in a strong tone of voice: but can no musical strains inspire fortitude, but such as are sonorous? The Lacedemonians did not think so; otherwise they would not have used the music of soft pipes when advancing to battle\*. If it be objected, that the firm deliberate valour, which the Spartan music was intended to inspire, does not express itself in a blustering, but rather in a gentle accent, resembling the music of soft pipes, I would recommend it to the objector to chuse, from

\* Aulus Gellius, li). i. cap. 11.



all the music he is acquainted with, such an air as he thinks would most effectually awaken his courage; and then consider, how far that animating strain can be said to resemble the accent of a commander complimenting his troops after a victory, or encouraging them before it. Shakspeare speaks of the "spirit-stirring drum;" and a most emphatical epithet it must be allowed to be. But why does the drum excite courage? Is it because the *sound* imitates the voice of a valiant man? or does the *motion* of the drumsticks bear any similitude to that of his legs or arms?

Many Christians (I wish I could say *all*) know to their happy experience, that the tones of the organ have a wonderful power in raising and animating devout affections. But will it be said, that there is any resemblance between the sound of that noble instrument, or the finest compositions that can be played on it, and the voice of a human creature employed in an act of worship?

One of the most affecting styles in music is the *Pastoral*. Some airs put us in mind of the country, or rural sights and rural "sounds," and dispose the heart to that cheerful tranquillity, that pleasing melancholy, that "vernal delight," which groves and streams, flocks and herds, hills and vallies, inspire. But of what are these pastoral airs imitative? Is it of the murmur of waters, the warbling of groves, the lowing of herds, the

the bleating of flocks, or the echo of vales and mountains? Many airs are pastoral, which imitate none of these things. What then do they imitate? — the songs of ploughmen, milkmaids, and shepherds? Yes: they are such, as we think we have heard, or might have heard, sung by the inhabitants of the country. Then they must *resemble* country-songs; and if so, these songs must also be in the pastoral style. Of what then are these country-songs, the supposed archetypes of pastoral music, imitative? Is it of other country-songs? This shifts the difficulty a step backward, but does not by any means take it away. Is it of rural sounds, proceeding from things animated, or from things inanimate? or of rural motions — of men, beasts, or birds? of winds, woods, or waters? — In a word, an air may be pastoral, and in the highest degree pleasing, which imitates neither sound nor motion, nor any thing else whatever.

After all, it must be acknowledged, that there is some relation at least, or analogy, if not similitude, between certain musical sounds, and mental affections. Soft music may be considered as analogous to gentle emotions; and loud music, if the tones are sweet and not too rapid, to sublime ones; and a quick succession of noisy notes, like those we hear from a drum, seems to have some relation to hurry and impetuosity of passion. Sometimes, too, there is from nature,

ture, and sometimes there comes to be from custom, a connection between certain musical instruments, and certain places and occasions. Thus a flute, hautboy, or bagpipe, is better adapted to the purposes of rural music, than a fiddle, organ, or harpsichord, because more portable, and less liable to injury from the weather: thus an organ, on account both of its size and loudness, requires to be placed in a church, or some large apartment: thus violins and violoncellos, to which any degree of damp may prove hurtful, are naturally adapted to domestic use; while drums and trumpets, fifes and french-horns, are better suited to the service of the field. Hence it happens, that particular tones and modes of music acquire such a connection with particular places, occasions, and sentiments, that by hearing the former we are put in mind of the latter, so as to be affected with them more or less, according to the circumstances. The sound of an organ, for example, puts one in mind of a church, and of the affections suitable to that place; military music, of military ideas; and flutes and hautboys, of the thoughts and images peculiar to rural life. This may serve in part to account for musical expressiveness or efficacy; that is, to explain how it comes to pass, that certain passions are raised, or certain ideas suggested, by certain kinds of music: but this does not prove music to be an imitative art, in the  
2 same

same sense wherein painting and poetry are called imitative. For between a picture and its original ; between the ideas suggested by a poetical description and the objects described, there is a strict similitude : but between soft music and a calm temper there is no strict similitude ; and between the sound of a drum or of an organ and the affection of courage or of devotion, between the music of flutes and a pastoral life, between a concert of violins and a chearful company, there is only an accidental connection, formed by custom, and founded rather on the nature of the instruments, than on that of the music.

It may perhaps be thought, that man learned to sing by imitating the birds ; and therefore, as vocal music is allowed to have been the prototype of instrumental, that the whole art must have been essentially imitative. Granting the fact, this only we could infer from it, that the art was imitative at first : but that it still continues to be so, does not follow ; for it cannot be said, either that the style of our music resembles that of birds, or that our musical composers make the song of birds the model of their compositions. But it is vain to argue from hypothesis : and the fact before us, though taken for granted by some authors, is destitute of evidence, and plainly absurd. How can it be imagined, that mankind learned to sing by imitating the feathered race ? I would as soon suppose, that we learned to speak by imitating

the neigh of a horse, or to walk by observing the motion of fishes in water; or that the political constitution of Great Britain was formed upon the plan of an ant-hillock. Every musician, who is but moderately instructed in the principles of his art, knows, and can prove, that, in the *sharp series* at least, the divisions of the diatonic scale, which is the standard of human music, are no artificial contrivance, but have a real foundation in nature: but the singing of birds, if we except the cuckoo and one or two more, is not reducible to that scale, nor to any other that was ever invented by man; for birds diversify their notes by intervals which the human organs cannot imitate without unnatural efforts, and which therefore it is not to be supposed that human art will ever attempt to express by written symbols. In a word, it is plain, that nature intended one kind of music for men, and another for birds: and we have no more reason to think, that the former was derived by imitation from the latter, than that the nests of a rookery were the prototype of the Gothic architecture, or the combs in a bee-hive of the Grecian.

Music, therefore, is pleasing, not because it is imitative, but because certain melodies and harmonies have an *aptitude* to raise certain passions, affections, and sentiments in the soul. And, consequently, the pleasures we derive from melody and harmony are seldom

dom or never resolvable into that delight which the human mind receives from the imitation of nature.

All this, it may be said, is but a dispute about a word. Be it so: but it is, notwithstanding, a dispute somewhat material both to art and to science. It is material, in science, that philosophers have a determined meaning to their words, and that things be referred to their proper classes. And it is of importance to every art, that its design and end be rightly understood, and that artists be not taught to believe that to be essential to it, which is only adventitious, often impertinent, for the most part unnecessary, and at best but ornamental.

## S E C T. II.

*How are the pleasures we derive from Music to be accounted for?*

IT was said, that certain melodies and harmonies have an aptitude to raise certain passions, affections, and sentiments, in the human soul. Let us now inquire a little into the nature of this aptitude; by endeavouring, from acknowledged principles of the human constitution, to explain the cause of that pleasure which mankind derive from



music. I am well aware of the delicacy of the argument, and of my inability to do it justice; and therefore I promise no complete investigation, nor indeed any thing more than a few cursory remarks. As I have no theory to support, and as this topic, though it may amuse, is not of any great utility, I shall be neither positive in my assertions, nor abstruse in my reasoning.

The vulgar distinction between the sense of hearing, and that faculty by which we receive pleasure from music, and which is commonly called *musical ear*. Every body knows, that to hear, and to have a relish for melody, are two different things; and that many persons have the first in perfection, who are destitute of the last. The last is indeed, like the first, a gift of nature; and may, like other natural gifts, languish if neglected, and improve exceedingly if exercised. And though every person who hears, might, no doubt, by instruction and long experience, be made sensible of the musical properties of sound, so far as to be in some measure gratified with good music and disgusted with bad; yet both his pain and his pleasure would be very different in kind and degree, from that which is conveyed by a true musical ear. Does not part of the pleasure, both of melody and of harmony, arise from the very nature of the notes that compose it? Certain inarticulate sounds, especially when continued,



continued, produce very pleasing effects on the mind. They seem to withdraw the attention from the more tumultuous concerns of life, and, without agitating the soul, to pour gradually upon it a train of softer ideas, that sometimes lull and soothe the faculties, and sometimes quicken sensibility, and stimulate the imagination. Nor is it altogether absurd to suppose, that the human body may be mechanically affected by them. If in a church one feels the floor, and the pew, tremble to certain tones of the organ; if one string vibrates of its own accord when another is sounded near it of equal length, tension, and thickness; if a person who sneezes, or speaks loud, in the neighbourhood of a harpsichord, often hears the strings of the instrument murmur in the same tone; we need not wonder, that some of the finer fibres of the human frame should be put in a tremulous motion, when they happen to be in unison with any notes proceeding from external objects. — That certain bodily pains might be alleviated by certain sounds, was believed by the Greeks and Romans: and we have it on the best authority, that one species at least of madness was once curable by melody \*. I have seen even instrumental music of little expression draw tears from those who had no knowledge of the art, nor any particular relish for it. Nay, a friend of mine, who

First book of Samuel, chap. xvi. vers. 23. *and he continued*

who is profoundly skilled in the theory of music, well acquainted with the animal economy, and singularly accurate in his inquiries into nature, assures me, that he has been once and again wrought into a feverish fit by the tones of an Eolian harp. These, and other similar facts, that might be mentioned, are not easily accounted for, unless we suppose, that certain sounds may have a mechanical influence upon certain parts of the human body. — Be that however as it will, it admits of no doubt, that the mind may be agreeably affected by mere sound, in which there is neither meaning nor modulation; not only by the tones of the Eolian harp, and other musical instruments, but also by the murmur of winds, groves, and water-falls\*; nay by the shouts of multitudes, by the uproar of the ocean in a storm; and, when one can listen to it without fear, by that “deep and dreadful organ-pipe,” the thunder itself.

Nothing is more valued in a musical instrument or performer, than sweetness, fullness, and variety of tone. Sounds are disagreeable, which hurt the ear by their shrillness, or which cannot be heard without pain-

\* *Quæ tibi, quæ tali reddam pro carmine dona?*

*Nam neque me tantum venientis fribus austri,*

*Nec percussa juvant fluctu tam litorea, nec quæ*

*Saxosâ inter decurrunt flumina valles.*

ful attention on account of their exility. But *loud and mellow* sounds, like those of thunder, of a storm, and of the full organ, elevate the mind through the ear; even as vast magnitude yields a pleasing astonishment, when contemplated by the eye. By suggesting the idea of great power, and sometimes of great expansion too, they excite a pleasing admiration, and seem to accord with the lofty genius of that soul whose chief desire is for truth, virtue, and immortality, and the object of whose most delightful meditation is the greatest and best of Beings. *Sweetness* of tone, and beauty of shape and colour, produce a placid acquiescence of mind, accompanied with some degree of joy, which plays in a gentle smile upon the countenance of the hearer and beholder. *Equable* sounds, like smooth and level surfaces, are in general more pleasing than such as are rough, uneven, or interrupted; yet, as the flowing curve, so essential to elegance of figure, and so conspicuous in the outlines of beautiful animals, is delightful to the eye; so notes *gradually swelling*, and *gradually decaying*, have an agreeable effect on the ear, and on the mind; the former tending to rouse the faculties, and the latter to compose them; the one promoting gentle exercise, and the other rest.

\* See Longinus, sect. 34. Spectator, No. 413. Pleasures of Imagination, book 1. vers. 151. &c.

But

But of all sounds, that which makes its way most directly to the human heart, is the human voice: and those instruments that approach nearest to it are in expression the most pathetic, and in tone the most perfect. The notes of a man's voice, well tuned and well managed, have a mellowness, variety, and energy, beyond those of any instrument; and a fine female voice, modulated by sensibility, is beyond comparison the sweetest, and most melting sound, in art or nature. Is it not strange, that the most musical people upon earth, dissatisfied, as it would seem, with both these, should have incurred a dreadful reproach, in order to introduce a third species of vocal sound, that has not the perfection of either? For may it not be affirmed with truth, that no person of uncorrupted taste ever heard for the first time the music I allude to, without some degree of horror; proceeding not only from the disagreeable ideas suggested by what was before his eyes, but also from the thrilling sharpness of tone that startled his ear? Let it not be said, that by this abominable expedient, choruses are rendered more complete, and melodies executed, which before were impracticable. Nothing that shocks humanity ought to have a place in human art; nor can a good ear be gratified with unnatural sound, or a good taste with too intricate composition. Surely, every lover of music, and of mankind, would wish to

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see a practice abolished which is in itself a disgrace to both; and, in its consequences, so far from being desirable, that it cannot truly be said to do any thing more than to debase a noble art into trick and grimace, and make the human breath a vehicle, not to human sentiments, but to mere empty screaming and squalling.

II. Some notes, when sounded together, have an agreeable, and others a disagreeable effect. The former are *concord's*, the latter *discord's*. When the fluctuations of air produced by two or more contemporary notes do mutually coincide, the effect is agreeable; when they mutually repel each other, the effect is disagreeable. These coincidences are not all equally perfect; nor these repulsions equally strong: and therefore all concord's are not equally sweet, nor all discord's equally harsh. A man unskilled in music might imagine, that the most agreeable harmony \* must be made up of the sweetest concord's, without any mixture of discord: and in like manner, a child might fancy, that a feast of sweet-meats would prove the most delicious banquet. But both would be mistaken. The same concord may be more or less pleasing, according to its position; and

\* *Melody*, in the language of art, is the agreeable effect of a single series of musical tones: *Harmony* is the agreeable effect of two or more series of musical tones sounded at the same time.

the sweeter concords often produce their best effect, when they are introduced by the harsher ones, or even by discords; for then they are most agreeable, because they give the greatest relief to the ear: even as health is doubly delightful after sickness, liberty after confinement, and a sweet taste when preceded by a bitter. Dissonance, therefore, is necessary to the perfection of harmony. But consonance predominates; and to such a degree, that, except on rare occasions, and by a nice ear, the discord in itself is hardly perceptible.

Musicians have taken pains to discover the principles on which concords and discords are to be so arranged as to produce the best effect; and have thus brought the whole art of harmony within the compass of a certain number of rules, some of which are more, and others less indispensable. These rules admit not of demonstrative proof: for though some of them may be inferred by rational deduction from the very nature of sound; yet the supreme judge of their propriety is the human ear. They are, however, founded on observation so accurate and so just, that no artist ever thought of calling them in question. Rousseau indeed somewhere insinuates, that habit and education might give us an equal relish for a different system of harmony: a sentiment which I should not have expected from an author, who for the most part recommends an implicit confidence



confidence in our natural feelings, and who certainly understands human nature well, and music better than any other philosopher. That a bass of *sevenths* or *fourths*, or even of *fifths*, should ever become so agreeable to any human ear, as one constructed according to the system, is to me as inconceivable, as that Virgil, though turned into rugged prose, would be read and admired as much as ever. Rousseau could not mean to extend this remark to the whole system, but only to some of its mechanical rules: and indeed it must be allowed, that in this, as well as in other arts, there are rules which have no better foundation than fashion, or the practice of some eminent composer.

Natural sensibility is not taste, though it be necessary to it. A painter discovers both blemishes and beauties in a picture, in which an ordinary eye can perceive neither. In poetical language, and in the arrangement and choice of words, there are many niceties, whereof they only are conscious who have practised versification, as well as studied the works of poets, and the rules of the art. In like manner, harmony must be studied a little in its principles by every person who would acquire a true relish for it; and nothing but practice will ever give that quickness to his ear which is necessary to enable him to enter with adequate satisfaction, or rational dislike, into the merits or demerits of a musical performance. When once

he can attend to the progress, relations, and dependencies, of the several parts; and remember the past, and anticipate the future, at the same time he perceives the present; so as to be sensible of the skill of the composer, and dexterity of the performer; — a regular concerto, well executed, will yield him high entertainment, even though its regularity be its principal recommendation. The pleasure which an untutored hearer derives from it is far inferior: and yet there is something in harmony that pleases, and in dissonance that offends, every ear; and were a piece to be played consisting wholly of discords, or put together without any regard to rule, I believe no person whatever would listen to it without great disgust.

After what has been briefly said of the agreeable qualities of musical notes, it will not seem strange, that a piece, either of melody or of harmony, of little or no expression, should, when elegantly performed, give some delight; not only to adepts, who can trace out the various contrivances of the composer, but even to those who have little or no skill in this art, and must therefore look upon the whole piece as nothing more than a combination of pleasing sounds.

III. But Pathos, or Expression, is the chief excellence of music. Without this, it may amuse the ear, it may give a little exercise to the mind of the hearer, it may for a moment withdraw the attention from the  
anxieties

anxieties of life, it may show the performer's dexterity, the skill of the composer, or the merit of the instruments; and in all or any of these ways, it may afford a slight pleasure: but, without engaging the affections, it can never yield that permanent, useful, and heart-felt gratification, which legislators, civil, military, and ecclesiastical, have expected from it. Is it absurd to ascribe utility, and permanence, to the effects produced by this noble art? Let me expatiate a little in its praise. — Did not one of the wisest, and least voluptuous, of all ancient legislators, give great encouragement to music\*? — Does not a most judicious author ascribe the humanity of the Areadians to the influence of this art, and the barbarity of their neighbours the Cynethians to their neglect of it†? — Does not Montaigne, one of the first names in modern philosophy, prefer it to all other amusements, as being that which least corrupts the soul‡? — Quintilian is very copious in the praise of music; and extols it as an incentive to valour, as an instrument of moral and intellectual discipline, as an auxiliary to science, as an object of attention to the wisest men, and a source of comfort and an assistant in

\* *Lycurgus*. See *Plutarch*.

† *Polybius*. *Hist.* lib. 4.

‡ *Esprit des Loix*, liv. 4. ch. 8.

labour,

labour, even to the meanest\*. The heroes of ancient Greece were ambitious to excel in music; and it is recorded of Themistocles, as something extraordinary, that he was not. Socrates appears to have had checks of conscience for neglecting to accomplish himself in this art; for he tells Cebes, a little before he swallowed the deadly draught, that he had all his life been haunted with a dream, in which one seemed to say to him, "O Socrates, compose and practise music;" in compliance with which admonition he amused himself while under sentence of death, with turning some of Esop's fables into verse, and making a hymn in honour of Apollo, — the only sort of harmonious composition that was then in his power †. In armies, music has always been cultivated as a source of pleasure, a principle of regular motion, and an incentive to valour and enthusiasm. The Son of Sirach declares the ancient poets and musicians to be worthy of honour, and ranks them with the benefactors of mankind ‡. Nay, Jesus Christ and his apostles were pleased to introduce this art into the Christian worship; and the church has in every age followed the example.

MUSIC, however, would not have recom-

\* *Inf. Orat. lib. 1. cap. 8.*

† *Plat. Phædon. sect. 4.*

‡ *Ecclesiasticus, xlv. 1.*

mended

mended itself so effectually to general esteem, if it had always been merely instrumental. For, if I mistake not, the expression of music without poetry is vague and ambiguous; and hence it is, that the same air may sometimes be repeated to every stanza of a long ode or ballad. The change of the poet's ideas, provided the subject continue nearly the same, does not always require a change of the music: and if critics have ever determined otherwise, they were led into the mistake, by supposing, what every musician knows to be absurd, that, in fitting verses to a tune, or a tune to verses, it is more necessary, that *particular words* should have *particular notes* adapted to them, than that the *general tenor* of the music should accord with the *general nature* of the sentiments.

It is true, that to a favourite air, even when unaccompanied with words, we do commonly annex certain ideas, which may have come to be related to it in consequence of some accidental associations: and sometimes we imagine a resemblance (which however is merely imaginary) between certain melodies and certain thoughts or objects. Thus a Scotchman may fancy, that there is some sort of likeness between that charming air which he calls *Tweedside*, and the scenery of a fine pastoral country: and to the same air, even when only played on an instrument, he may annex the ideas of romantic love and rural tranquillity; because these

form

form the subject of a pretty little ode, which he has often heard sung to that air. But all this is the effect of habit. A foreigner, who hears that tune for the first time, entertains no such fancy. The utmost we can expect from him is, to acknowledge the air to be sweet and simple. He would smile, if we were to ask him, whether it bears any resemblance to the hills, groves, and meadows, adjoining to a beautiful river; nor would he perhaps think it more expressive of romantic love, than of conjugal, parental, or filial affection, tender melancholy, moderate joy, or any other gentle passion. Certain it is, that on any one of these topics, an ode might be composed, which would suit the air most perfectly. So ambiguous is musical expression.

It is likewise true, that music merely instrumental does often derive significance from external circumstances. When an army in battle-array is advancing to meet the enemy, words are not necessary to give meaning to the military music. And a solemn air on the organ, introducing or dividing the church-service, may not only elevate the mind, and banish impertinent thoughts, but also, deriving energy from the surrounding scene, may promote religious meditation.

Nor can it be denied, that instrumental music may both quicken our sensibility, and give a direction to it; that is, may both prepare the mind for being affected, and de-



termine it to one set of affections rather than another;—to melancholy, for instance, rather than merriment, composure rather than agitation, devotion rather than levity, and contrariwise. Certain tunes, too, there are, which, having been always connected with certain actions, do, merely from the power of habit, dispose men to those actions. Such are the tunes commonly used to regulate the motions of dancing.

Yet it is in general true, that Poetry is the most immediate and most accurate interpreter of Music. Without this auxiliary, a piece of the best music, heard for the first time, might be said to mean something, but we should not be able to say what. It might incline the heart to sensibility: but poetry, or language, would be necessary to improve that sensibility into a real emotion, by fixing the fancy upon some definite and affecting ideas. A fine instrumental symphony well performed, is like an oration delivered with propriety, but in an unknown tongue; it may affect us a little, but conveys no determinate feeling; we are alarmed, perhaps, or melted, or soothed, but it is very imperfectly, because we know not why:—the singer, by taking up the same air, and applying words to it, immediately translates the oration into our own language; then all uncertainty vanishes, the fancy is filled with determinate ideas, and determinate emotions take possession of the heart.

A great part of our fashionable music seems intended rather to tickle and astonish the hearers, than to inspire them with any permanent emotions. And if that be the end of the art, then, to be sure, this fashionable music is just what it should be, and the simpler strains of former ages are good for nothing. Nor am I now at leisure to inquire, whether it be better for an audience to be thus tickled and astonished, than to have their fancy impressed with beautiful images, and their hearts melted with tender passions, or elevated with sublime ones. But if you grant me this one point, that music is more or less perfect, in proportion as it has more or less power over the heart, it will follow, that all music merely instrumental, and which does not derive significancy from any of the associations, habits, or outward circumstances, above mentioned, is to a certain degree imperfect; and that, while the rules hinted at in the following queries are overlooked by composers and performers, vocal music, though it may astonish mankind, or afford them a slight gratification, will never be attended with those important effects that we know it produced of old in the days of simplicity and true taste.

I. Is not good music set to bad poetry as unexpressive, and therefore as absurd, as good poetry set to bad music, or as harmonious language without meaning? Yet the generality of musicians appear to be indifferent