NUMB. 36, SATURDAY, *July* 21, 1750.

——Ἀμφ' ἔποντο νομῆες
Τερπόμενοι σύριγξι· θέλον δ' ἔτι προνόησαν.
HOMER.

THERE is ſcarcely any ſpecies of poetry, that has allured more readers, or excited more writers, than the paſtoral. It is generally pleaſing, becauſe it entertains the mind with repreſentations of ſcenes familiar to almoſt every imagination, and of which all can equally judge whether they are well deſcribed. It exhibits a life, to which we have been alway's accuſtomed to aſſociate peace, and leiſure, and innocence: and therefore we readily ſet open the heart, for the admiſſion of its images, which contribute to drive away cares and perturbations, and ſuffer ourſelves, without reſiſtance, to be tranſported to elyſian regions, where we are to meet with nothing but joy, and plenty, and contentment; where every gale whiſpers pleaſure, and every ſhade promiſes repoſe.

IT has been maintained by ſome, who love to talk of what they do not know, that paſtoral

ral is the moſt antient poetry; and, indeed, ſince it is probable, that poetry is nearly of the ſame antiquity with rational nature, aud ſince the life of the firſt men was certainly rural, we may reaſonably conjecture, that, as their ideas would neceſſarily be borrowed from thoſe objects with which they were acquainted, their compoſures, being filled chiefly with ſuch thoughts on the viſible creation as muſt occur to the firſt obſervers, were paſtoral hymns, like thoſe which *Milton* introduces the original pair ſinging, in the day of innocence, to the praiſe of their maker.

For the ſame reaſon that paſtoral poetry was the firſt employment of the human imagination, it is generally the firſt literary amuſement of our minds. We have ſeen fields, and meadows, and groves from the time that our eyes opened upon life; and are pleaſed with birds, and brooks, and breezes, much earlier than we engage among the actions and paſſions of mankind. We are therefore delighted with rural pictures, becauſe we know the original at an age when our curioſity can be very little awakened, by deſcriptions of courts which we never beheld, or repreſentations of paſſion which we never felt.

The ſatisfaction received from this kind of writing not only begins early, but laſts long; we do not throw it away among other childiſh amuſements and paſtimes as we advance into the intellectual world, but willingly return to it in any hour of indolence and relaxation. The images of true paſtoral have always the power of exciting delight, becauſe the works of nature, from which they are drawn, have always the ſame order and beauty, and continue to force themſelves upon our thoughts, being at once obvious to the moſt careleſs regard, and more than adequate to the ſtrongeſt reaſon, and ſevereſt contemplation. Our inclination to ſtillneſs and tranquillity is ſeldom much leſſened by long knowledge of the buſy and tumultuary part of the world. In childhood we turn our thoughts to the country, as to the region of pleaſure, we recur to it in old age as a port of reſt, and perhaps with that ſecondary and adventitious gladneſs, which every man feels on reviewing thoſe places, or recollecting thoſe occurrences, that contributed to his youthful enjoyments, and bring him back to the prime of life, when the world was gay with the bloom of novelty, when

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mirth wantoned at his ſide, and hope ſparkled before him.

The ſenſe of this univerſal pleaſure has invited numbers without number to try their ſkill in paſtoral performances, in which they have generally ſucceeded after the manner of other imitators, tranſmitting the ſame images in the ſame combination from one to another, till he that reads the title of a poem, may gueſs at the whole ſeries of the compoſition; nor will a man, after the peruſal of thouſands of theſe performances, find his knowledge enlarged with a ſingle view of nature not produced before, or his imagination amuſed with any new application of thoſe views to moral purpoſes.

The range of paſtoral is indeed narrow, for though nature itſelf, philoſophically conſidered, be inexhauſtible, yet its general effects on the eye and on the ear are uniform, aud incapable of much variety of deſcription. Poetry cannot dwell upon the minuter diſtinctions, by which one ſpecies differs from another, without departing from that ſimplicity of grandeur which fills the imagination; nor diſſect the latent qualities of things, without

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loſing its general power of gratifying every mind by recalling its conceptions. However, as each age makes ſome diſcoveries, and thoſe diſcoveries are by degrees generally known, as new plants or modes of culture are introduced, and by little and little become common, paſtoral might receive, from time to time, ſmall augmentations, and exhibit once in a century a ſcene ſomewhat varied.

But paſtoral ſubjects have been often, like others, taken into the hands of thoſe that were not qualified to adorn them, men to whom the face of nature was ſo little known, that they have drawn it only after their own imagination, and changed or diſtorted her features, that their portraits might appear ſomething more than ſervile copies from their predeceſſors.

Not only the images of rural life, but the occaſions on which they can be properly produced, are few and general. The ſtate of a man confined to the employments and pleaſures of the country, is ſo little diverſified, and expoſed to ſo few of thoſe accidents which produce perplexities, terrors and ſurpriſes, in more complicated tranſactions, that he can be

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ſhewn but ſeldom in ſuch circumſtances as attract curioſity. His ambition is without policy, and his love without intrigue. He has no complaints to make of his rival, but that he is richer than himſelf; nor any diſaſters to lament, but a cruel miſtreſs, or a bad harveſt.

THE conviction of the neceſſity of ſome new ſource of pleaſure induced *Sannazarius* to ſubſtitute fiſhermen for ſhepherds, to remove the ſcene from the fields to the ſea, and derive his ſentiments from the piſcatory life; for which he has been cenſured by ſucceeding criticks, becauſe the ſea is an object of terrour, and by no means proper to amuſe the mind, and lay the paſſions aſleep. Againſt this objection he might be defended by the eſtabliſhed maxim, that the poet has a right to ſelect his images, and is no more obliged to ſhew the ſea in a ſtorm, than the land under an inundation; but may diſplay all the pleaſures, and conceal the dangers, of the water, as he may lay his ſhepherd under a ſhady beech, without giving him an ague, or letting a wild beaſt looſe upon him.

THERE are however two defects in the piſcatory eclogue, which perhaps cannot be ſupplied.

plied. The ſea, though in hot countries it is conſidered by thoſe who live, like *Sannazarius*, upon the coaſt, as a place of pleaſure and diverſion, has notwithſtanding much leſs variety than the land, and therefore will be ſooner exhauſted by a deſcriptive writer. When he has once ſhewn the ſun riſing or ſetting upon it, curled its waters with the vernal breeze, rolled the waves in gentle ſucceſſion to the ſhore, and enumerated the fiſh ſporting in the ſhallows, he has nothing remaining but what is common to all other poetry, the complaint of a nymph for a drowned lover, or the indignation of a fiſher that his oyſters are refuſed, and Mycon's accepted.

ANOTHER obſtacle to the general reception of this kind of poetry, is the ignorance of maritime pleaſures, in which the greater part of mankind muſt always live. To all the inland inhabitants of every region, the ſea is only known as an immenſe diffuſion of waters, over which men paſs from one country to another, and in which life is frequently loſt. They have, therefore, no opportunity of tracing, in their own thoughts, the deſcriptions of winding ſhores, and calm bays, nor can look on the poem in which they are mentioned

ned, with other ſenſations, than on a ſea-chart, or the metrical geography of *Dionyſius*.

THIS defect *Sannazarius* was hindered from perceiving, by writing in a learned language to readers generally acquainted with the works of nature; but if he had made his attempt in any vulgar tongue, he would ſoon have diſcovered how vainly he had endeavoured to make that loved, which was not underſtood.

I AM afraid it will not be found eaſy to improve the paſtorals of antiquity, by any great additions or diverſifications. Our deſcriptions may indeed differ from thoſe of Virgil, as an Engliſh from an Italian ſummer, and, in ſome reſpects, as modern from antient life; but as nature is in both countries nearly the ſame, and as poetry has to do rather with the paſſions of men, which are uniform, than their cuſtoms, which are changeable, the varieties, which time or place can furniſh, will be inconſiderable: and I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, in the next paper, how little the latter ages have contributed to the improvement of the ruſtick muſe.