

NUMB. 37. TUESDAY, July 24, 1750.

*Canto quæ solitus, si quando armenta vocabat,  
Amphion Dircaeus.*

VIRG.

**I**N writing or judging of pastoral poetry, neither the authors nor criticks of latter times seem to have paid sufficient regard to the originals left us by antiquity, but have entangled themselves with unnecessary difficulties, by advancing principles, which, having no foundation in the nature of things, are wholly to be rejected from a species of composition in which, above all others, mere nature is to be regarded.

It is, therefore, necessary to enquire after some more distinct and exact idea of this kind of writing. This may, I think, be easily found in the pastorals of Virgil, from whose opinion it will not appear very safe to depart, if we consider that every advantage of nature, and of fortune, concurred to complete his productions; that he was born with great accuracy and severity of judgment, enlightened with

with all the learning of one of the brightest ages, and embellished with the elegance of the Roman court; that he employed his powers rather in improving, than inventing, and therefore must have endeavoured to recompense the want of novelty by exactness; that taking Theocritus for his original, he found pastoral far advanced towards perfection, and that having so great a rival, he must have proceeded with uncommon caution.

IF we search the writings of Virgil, for the true definition of a pastoral, it will be found *a poem in which any action or passion is represented by its effects upon a country life.* Whatsoever therefore may, according to the common course of things, happen in the country, may afford a subject for a pastoral poet.

IN this definition, it will immediately occur to those who are versed in the writings of the modern criticks, that there is no mention of the golden age. I cannot indeed easily discover why it is thought necessary to refer descriptions of a rural state to remote times, nor can I perceive that any writer has consistently preserved the Arcadian manners and sentiments. The only reason, that I have read, on which  
this

this rule has been founded, is, that, according to the customs of modern life, it is improbable that shepherds should be capable of harmonious numbers, or delicate sentiments; and therefore the reader must exalt his ideas of the pastoral character, by carrying his thoughts back to the age in which the care of herds and flocks was the employment of the wisest and greatest men.

THESE reasoners seem to have been led into their hypothesis, by considering pastoral, not in general, as a representation of rural nature, and consequently as exhibiting the ideas and sentiments of those, whoever they are, to whom the country affords pleasure or employment, but simply as a dialogue, or narrative of men actually tending sheep, and busied in the lowest and most laborious offices; from whence they very readily concluded, since characters must necessarily be preserved, that either the sentiments must sink to the level of the speakers, or the speakers must be raised to the height of the sentiments.

IN consequence of these original errors, a thousand precepts have been given, which have only contributed to perplex and to confound.

found. Some have thought it necessary that the imaginary manners of the golden age should be universally preserved, and have therefore believed, that nothing more could be admitted in pastoral, than lilies and roses, and rocks and streams, among which are heard the gentle whispers of chaste fondness, or the soft complaints of amorous impatience. In pastoral, as in other writings, chastity of sentiment ought doubtless to be observed, and purity of manners to be represented; not because the poet is confined to the images of the golden age, but because, having the subject in his own choice, he ought always to consult the interest of virtue.

THESE advocates for the golden age lay down other principles, not very consistent with their general plan; for they tell us, that, to support the character of the shepherd, it is proper that all refinement should be avoided, and that some slight instances of ignorance should be interspersed. Thus the shepherd in Virgil is supposed to have forgot the name of Anaximander, and in Pope the term Zodiack is too hard for a rustick apprehension. But if we place our shepherds in their primitive condition, we may give them learning among  
their

their other qualifications; and if we suffer them to allude at all to things of later existence, which, perhaps, cannot with any great propriety be allowed, there can be no danger of making them speak with too much accuracy, since they conversed with divinities, and transmitted to succeeding ages the arts of life.

OTHER writers, having the mean and despicable condition of a shepherd always before them, conceive it necessary to degrade the language of pastoral, by obsolete terms and rustick words, which they very learnedly call Dorick, without reflecting, that they thus become authors of a mingled dialect, which no human being ever could have spoken, that they may as well refine the speech as the sentiments of their personages, and that none of the inconsistencies which they endeavour to avoid, is greater than that of joining elegance of thought with coarseness of diction. Spenser begins one of his pastorals with studied barbarity;

Diggon Davie, *I bid her good-day :*

Or, Diggon *her is, or I missay.*

Dig. *Her was her while it was day-light,*  
*But now her is a most wretched wight.*

What

What will the reader imagine to be the subject on which speakers like these exercise their eloquence? Will he not be somewhat disappointed, when he finds them met together to condemn the corruptions of the church of Rome? Surely, at the same time that a shepherd learns theology, he may gain some acquaintance with his native language.

PASTORAL admits of all ranks of persons, because persons of all ranks inhabit the country. It excludes not, therefore, on account of the characters necessary to be introduced, any elevation or delicacy of sentiment; those ideas only are improper, which, not owing their original to rural objects, are not pastoral. Such is the exclamation in Virgil.

*Nunc scio quid sit Amor, duris in cautibus  
illum*

*Ismarus, aut Rhodope, aut extremi Garamantes,  
Nec generis nostri puerum nec sanguinis, edunt;*  
which Pope endeavouring to copy, was carried to still greater impropriety.

*I know thee, Love, wild as the raging main,  
More fierce than tigers on the Libyan plain;  
Thou wert from Etna's burning entrails torn,  
Begot in tempests, and in thunders born!*

Sentiments like these, as they have no ground  
in



in nature, are indeed of little value in any poem, but in pastoral they are particularly liable to censure, because they want that exaltation above common life, which in tragick or heroick writings often reconciles us to bold flights and daring figures.

PASTORAL being the *representation of an action or passion, by its effects upon a country life*, has nothing peculiar but its confinement to rural imagery, without which it ceases to be pastoral. This is its true characteristick, and this it cannot lose by any dignity of sentiment, or beauty of diction. The *Pollio* of Virgil, with all its elevation, is a composition truly bucolic, though rejected by the criticks; for all the images are either taken from the country, or from the religion of the age common to all parts of the empire.

The *Silenus* is indeed of a more disputable kind, because though the scene lies in the country, the song being religious and historical, had been no less adapted to any other audience or place. Neither can it well be defended as a fiction, for the introduction of a God seems to imply the golden age, and yet  
he

he alludes to many subsequent transactions, and mentions Gallus the poet's contemporary.

It seems necessary, to the perfection of this poem, that the occasion which is supposed to produce it, be at least not inconsistent with a country life, or less likely to interest those who have retired into places of solitude and quiet, than the more busy part of mankind. It is therefore improper to give the title of a pastoral to verses, in which the speakers, after the slight mention of their flocks, fall to complaints of errors in the church, and corruptions in the government, or to lamentations of the death of some illustrious person, whom when once the poet has called a shepherd, he has no longer any labour upon his hands, but can make the clouds weep, and lilies wither, and the sheep hang their heads, without art or learning, genius or study.

It is part of Claudian's character of his rustick, that he computes his time not by the succession of consuls, but of harvests. Those who pass their days in retreats distant from the theatres of business, are always least likely to hurry their imagination with publick affairs.



THE facility of treating actions or events in the pastoral stile has incited many writers, from whom more judgment might have been expected, to put the sorrow or the joy which the occasion required into the mouth of Daphne or of Thyrsis, and as one absurdity must naturally be expected to make way for another, they have written with an utter disregard both of life and nature, and filled their productions with mythological allusions, with incredible fictions, and with sentiments which neither passion nor reason could have dictated, since the change which religion has made in the whole system of the world.



NUMB. 38. SATURDAY, July 28, 1750.

*Auream quisquis mediocritatem*

*Diligit, tutus caret obsoleti*

*Sordibus tecti, caret invidendâ*

*Sobrius aulâ.*

HOR.

**A**MONG many fanciful parallels which men of more imagination than experience have drawn between the natural and moral state of the world, it has been observed that