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THE  
BRITISH CRITIC,  
*A NEW REVIEW,*

FOR

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER,  
NOVEMBER, AND DECEMBER.

M DCC XCVI.

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Be thou the first true merit to befriend ;  
His praise is lost, who stays 'till all commend.      Pope.

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VOLUME VIII.

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1796.

ART. XIII. *Leonora. A Tale translated freely from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger. By J. T. Stanley, Esq. F. R. S. 8vo. 2s. 6d. Miller. 1796.*

ART. XIV. *Lenore, a Tale: from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger. By Henry James Pye. 4to. 1s. 6d. Low. 1796.*

ART. XV. *Leonora. Translated from the German of Gottfried Augustus Bürger. By W. R. Spence, Esq. with Designs by the Right Honourable Lady Diana Beauclerc. Folio. 1l. 1s. Edwards. 1795.*

ART. XVI. *Leonora, a Tale, translated and altered from the German of Gottfried Bürger. By J. T. Stanley, Esq. F. R. S. &c. A new Edition. 4to. 5s. Miller. 1796.*

THE attachment of the Germans to wild and preternatural fiction, in works of fancy, has been the subject of remark in a former article. The productions here enumerated, while they confirm this observation, seem to furnish an exception with respect to the taste of our own countrymen. Three translations, and an altered edition, appearing successively, in the order in which we have enumerated them, and within the course of a few months, besides a version which appeared in a periodical publication, seem to prove that a fiction of this nature may be rendered popular in England as well as in Germany. The appearance is, however, most probably fallacious. Curiosity, excited by various circumstances, has perhaps operated to give a partial sale to these translations; but popularity, we may venture to pronounce, they will never have. The first, published by Mr. Stanley, was so defective in point of versification and polish, that it could not be very greatly admired. Such a stanza as the following cannot be read without some wonder how it could be written, much less printed, by a man of elegant taste.

Oh! Mother, mother, Hell or Heaven,  
Woe or joy, are now all even:  
William was Heav'n alone.  
Fade from my eyes the hated light,  
Descend, my soul, to endless night,  
For hope and love are flown.

It is true that this is corrected in the republished or altered edition, but many defects are still left.

Mr.

Mr. Pye's translation, notwithstanding the talents of the writer, seems to possess neither the force nor the ease that such a production requires: an attempt to follow the original too closely, step by step, has produced the effect that such a mode of rendering seldom fails to produce, a stiffness, distinguishing it throughout from original writing. Of this the first, and almost every stanza, affords an example.

Join'd with Frederick's host, he fought  
On Praga's bloody field the foe,  
Since no tidings had been brought  
Of his weal or of his woe.

Would Mr. Pye have written exactly so, if he had written from himself? certainly not. The anonymous version above alluded to, is written in antiquated language, and derives some advantage from the use of familiar terms; according to the style of the old English ballads, which, in this respect, resemble these German poems. But that very circumstance may impede, rather than assist, its general circulation; nor is it free from other faults, which, if it were properly an object of our examination, we could readily specify.

Mr. Spencer's version, from the splendid and extensive form in which it is sent out, cannot become an object of general purchase; but does perhaps, with sufficient felicity imitate the merits of the German poem; and, with sufficient appearance of originality, support its English style, to give it all the currency a tale of such a nature can obtain in this country, were it reprinted in a more popular form. The beautiful designs of Lady D. Beauclerc, full of genius and effect, represented by the elegant gravers of Harding and Bartolozzi, ensure the present sale of it to such purchasers as can indulge their taste at such a price: nor can they easily be rivalled. We take not upon us to judge of such matters with the skill of artists, but as general admirers of a correct taste in works of fancy, we are highly impressed by the propriety, decorum, and grace, which characterize all the figures of this elegant artist, even those that are of a preternatural kind; forming a most striking contrast to the distorted, absurd, and impossible monsters, exhibited in the frontispiece to Mr. Stanley's last edition. Nor can we pass by this opportunity of execrating that detestable taste, founded on the depraved fancy of one man of genius, which substitutes deformity and extravagance for force and expression, and draws men and women without skins, with their joints all dislocated; or imaginary beings, which neither can nor ought to exist.

The tale is briefly this. A maiden, whose lover returns not from battle with his comrades, falls into a desperate and even impious transport of desperation, condemns the justice of God; and

and desires death. At night the trampling of a horse is heard at the gate, her lover calls, and, in earnest but dark terms, urges her to mount behind him, and ride all night to reach their bridal bed. She consents. The journey is terrific; they ride among spectres and goblins, at an alarming pace, he repeating, from time to time, "Hurrah, how swiftly speed the dead!" She alarmed, but not comprehending why he talks of the dead, is conveyed at last to a church-yard, when the "fiend-horse" bursts the gates, and her lover changes suddenly to the skeleton form of Death, and wielding a dart against her, she sinks and dies. Nothing of a more terrible kind can well be conceived. Nor, in our opinion, is the moral bad, or useless. The despair of Lenora is not the despair of a pious mind, it is such as defies heaven and disdains mercy; and though her punishment is death, the reader is left to suppose that all severity terminates there.

"Des Leibes bist du ledig  
Gott sey der Seele gnädig!"

"Here on earth thy days are past,  
Mercy to thy soul be given!"

PRÆ.

This is the exclamation of the beings that howl at her death. For this reason we entirely disapprove of the alteration in Mr. Stanley's last edition, where, for the sake of vindicating divine justice from the charge of severity, the whole is resolved into a dream, at the close, and the lover returns safe. The loss of a life which must be miserable, and the termination of all punishment in that loss, is surely not so extravagantly severe; and what is the tale when altered by Mr. Stanley? merely this; "a girl has a frightful dream, and then is married."

Mr. Spencer's short account of Bürger, in his preface, is satisfactory.

"The works of Mr. Bürger, the author of this and many other poems of the ballad kind, are universally esteemed, wherever the German language prevails as a national idiom, or is cultivated as a branch of education. Simplicity is the characteristic of his compositions; and, of all literary beauties, simplicity must be the most generally attractive. No writer, perhaps, has ever obtained a more decided popularity. To this his subjects and his language equally contribute; for the former he has mostly chosen local traditions or legendary anecdotes; and, in the latter, he is generally elegant, often sublime, and never unintelligible. One of the most powerful causes of Mr. Bürger's literary popularity, is the deep tinge of superstition that shades almost all his compositions. Supernatural incidents are the darling subjects of his countrymen. Their minds vigorously conceive, and their language nobly expresses, the terrible and majestic; and it must be allowed that, in this species of writing, they would  
force

force from our nation the palm of excellence, were it not secured by the impregnable towers of Otranto."

Mr. Spencer apologizes for what he has done very judiciously, the omitting of such expressions of the German author, as are mere imitations of sound, such as "trap, trap, trap," for the trotting of a horse; and "cling, cling, cling," for the ringing of a bell: we may add, "und hurre, hurre, *hop, hop, hop!*" to express the swift motion of the horse. Of these he says, very properly, that literally adopted in an English version, they would appear more ridiculous than descriptive. This is true, unless, perhaps, the mere ballad style had been used, as in the original, which would admit of more licence, and would surely be more proper.

Mr. Spencer's translation has great merit; it is sufficiently literal without being stiff; and, in proper places, familiar, without being low. Smite as we may at the improbability, or, if you please, impossibility of the story, it is not easy to read the following dialogue, or, indeed, the greater part of the composition (especially when aided by Lady D. Beauclerc's designs) without sensations of horror. Nature, in spite of reason, has feelings of this sort, which, perhaps, are never totally suppressed.

"Holla! Holla! my life, my love!

Does Leonora watch or sleep?

Still does her heart my vows approve.

Does Leonora smile or weep?"

"O Wilhelm, thou!—these eyes for thee,

Fever'd with tearful vigils burn;

Aye fear and woe have dwelt with me:

Oh why so late thy wish'd return?"

"At dead of night alone we ride;

From Prague's far distant field I come:

'Twas late ere I could 'gin betride

This coal-black barb, to bear thee home."

"Oh, rest thee first, my Wilhelm, here!

Bleak roars the blast through vale and grove;

Oh come, thy war-worn limbs to cheer,

On the soft couch of joy and love!"

"Let the bleak blast, my child, roar on,

Let it roar on; we dare not stay:

My fierce steed maddens to be gone,

My spurs are set, away, away.

Mount by thy true-love's guardian side;

We should ere this full far have sped;

Five hundred destined miles\* we ride

This night, to reach our nuptial bed."

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\* In German, "hundert Meilen:" the largest German mile being nearly five English.

- “ Our nuptial bed ! this night so dark,  
 So late, five hundred miles to roam?  
 Yet sounds the bell, which struck to mark,  
 That in one hour would midnight come.”
- “ See there, see here, the moon shines clear,  
 We and the dead ride fast away ;  
 I gage, though long our way, and drear,  
 We reach our nuptial bed to-day.”
- “ Say where the bed and bridal hall ?  
 What guests our blissful union greet ?”
- “ Low lies the bed, still, cold, and small ;  
 Six dark boards and one milk-white sheet.”
- “ Hast room for me ?”—“ Room, room enow :  
 Come, mount ; strange hands our feast prepare ;  
 To grace the solemn rite, e'en now  
 No common bridesmen wait us there.”

It is a minute remark, but one which may easily be obviated, that, though Wilhelm says, “ My spurs are set,” he is represented in the first plate without spurs; afterwards he has them. The German artist, Chodowiecki, has represented him as a trooper, with a kevenhuller hat, and pig-tail. The licence taken by Lady D. Beauclerc, of drawing him in armour, gives great dignity and effect to the designs; sufficient, we conceive, to excuse the impropriety. The name of the maiden, in German *Lenore*, has been a snare to all the translators\*. Mr. Pye preserves the German form, and tells his reader to pronounce the final e. It would have been much better to write *Lenora*, according to the idiom of our language, and then neither accent nor direction would have been requisite. Mr. Spencer sometimes makes it *Leonora*, as in the verses we have cited, and sometimes *Lenora*, in pronunciation, though written in the same manner; as in the second line of the poem,

*Leonora* starts at break of day,  
 where the ear demands *Lenora*; and towards the end,  
*Leonora's* heart, it's life blood dried.

Mr. Stanley also, though in general he uses *Leonora* at full length, in some lines has, or ought to have *Lenora*, as

“ *Leonora*, 'tis decreed.”  
 “ *Leonora*, no delay.”

In some instances Mr. Stanley and Mr. Spencer have translated the same passages in the same words, which was certainly better than to seek variety by deviating from what was natural and proper. We have seen another *Leonora* advertised. It might surely have been spared. We did not think

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\* Except the author of the ballad above alluded to.

it advisable to reserve our critique till that should reach our hands. If inferior to what has appeared, it will easily be dismissed; if superior, it will deserve particular and marked commendation. *Schürze*, is once printed *Scbürze* in Mr. Spencer's publication, p. 18, but we have not remarked many other errors.

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