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THE
BACHELOR'S WIFE;

A SELECTION OF
CURIOUS AND INTERESTING EXTRACTS,
WITH
CURSORY OBSERVATIONS.

By JOHN GALT, Esq.

“ What's in a name ? the rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.”

EDINBURGH ;
PUBLISHED BY
OLIVER & BOYD, TWEEDDALE-COURT,
AND
G. & W. B. WHITTAKER, LONDON.

1824.

PREFACE.

THE only apology which this work perhaps requires is with regard to the title, for otherwise it belongs to a class of publications, of which the value is so obvious as to admit of no question.

As a compilation, it will be readily seen, that it has been generally formed upon the principle of affording specimens of the literature of different epochs, not indeed methodically arranged, but so chosen as to exhibit a more extensive view of the literary mind of the country, historically considered, than has been attempted in any previous selection of extracts.

The works of popular authors of the present time have not been particularly resorted to, because Mr M'Diarmid, by his tasteful and judicious selection in "The Scrap Book," has rendered this inexpedient. It was also thought, and the reader will not be backward in acknowledging the propriety of the opinion,

that there are many gems, both in prose and verse, hidden in works, which, however much esteemed in their day, have long since ceased to be generally accessible. To gather a few of these, and to bring them again to light, was one of the objects which the compiler proposed to himself in this undertaking; but it would have been inconsistent with the light and cursory nature of his design, to have brought them forward, either in any sort of chronological order, or with any particular formality of disquisition. In fact, the colloquies with which he has prefaced the extracts were suggested by an after-thought, in order to give an air of freshness to the results of a task that necessarily excluded originality.

To accomplish this, he has therefore not scrupled to assume opinions, which he would hesitate, in many instances, to acknowledge as his own, and also to maintain paradoxes, calculated rather to excite reflection than to induce persuasion; at the same time, nothing will be found either in the one or the other, to which any objection can be reasonably made. The book has indeed been prepared for the parlour table, and is likely to afford amusement, in the intervals of business, to a class of readers who would never

think of looking at many of the originals from which the selections have been made. Every thing, accordingly, doubtful in principle, or questionable in tendency, has been carefully excluded ; and, although it is in appearance a production of very humble pretensions, it will perhaps be found more valuable than some other publications, to which the public has been so indulgent as to receive with favour.

FEBRUARY 20, 1824.

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CHAP. XLII.

BÜRGER, THE GERMAN POET.

THE Bachelor, one evening on returning home, found his Nymph in a state of tremour amounting almost to alarm. Her countenance was pale, and her eyes bright and startled; a hectic flush now and then passed over her cheek, and in the same moment her lips became livid. Her dark hair fell in pythian disorder over her shoulders, and the whole apparition was sublime and mystical. "What has happened? What has terrified you?" cried the kind and affectionate Benedict. She, however, made him no immediate answer; but, flinging back her hair, took a paper which was lying before her on the table, and said,—“Have you ever read the ballads of Bürger, the German poet?”

“No; neither the poets nor the proserers of that nation, you know, are favourites of mine.”

“Then,” exclaimed Egeria, “you deny yourself the high sensations of delightful horror, an impassioned sentiment, which the writers of no other language have so effectually succeeded in exciting.—Here have I, for the last hour, been in a state of agitation which I know not how to describe. I have felt something like what I conceive to be the rapture of the bard in the paroxysms of his inspiration. It is quite astonishing what effect a man of genius may produce, when he happens to employ the proper current of his powers; I say happens, because I am of opinion, that authors are not always aware of the peculiarities in which the real pith of their talent lies; and Bürger is an instance of how much a man may write without lighting upon his proper vein.—He may be said to be the father of our taste for German literature, and yet he owes all his fame amongst us to these two simple ballads: the translations have indeed been executed with a degree of felicity and energy that gives them the force and spirit of originality; I never read them but with renewed and augmented interest,”—and, with these words, she began to read”—

LENORA.

At break of day, with frightful dreams
 Lenora struggled sore;
 ‘My William, art thou slane,’ said she;
 ‘Or dost thou love no more?’

He went abroad with Richard’s host,
 The Paynim foes to quell;

But he no word to her had writt,
An he were sick or well.

With sowne of trump, and beat of drum,
His fellow-soldyers come ;
Their helmes bydeckt with oaken boughs,
They seeke their long'd-for home.

And ev'ry road and ev'ry lane
Was full of old and young,
To gaze at the rejoicing band,
To hail with gladsome tounge.

' Thank God !' their wives and children saide,
' Welcome !' the brides did saye :
But greete or kiss Lenora gave
To none upon that daye.

She askte of all the passing traine,
For him she wisht to see :
But none of all the passing traine
Could tell if lived hee.

And when the soldyers all were bye,
She tore her raven haire,
And cast herself upon the growne
In furious despaire.

Her mother ran and lyfte her up,
And clasped in her arme,
' My child, my child, what dost thou ail ?
God shield thy life from harm !'

' O mother, mother ! William's gone !
What's all besyde to me ?

There is no mercye, sure, above !
All, all were spar'd but hee !'

' Knell downe, thy paternoster saye,
'Twill calm thy troubled spright ;
The Lord is wyse, the Lord is good :
What hee hath done is right.'

' O mother, mother ! say not so ;
Most cruel is my fate :
I prayde, and prayde ; but watt away!d !
'Tis now, alas ! too late.'

' Our Heavenly Father, if we praye,
Will help a suff'ring childe ;
Go take the holy sacrament :
So shall thy grief grow milde.'

' O mother, what I feel within,
No sacrament can staye ;
No sacrament can teche the dead
To bear the sight of daye.'

' May be, among the heathen folk
Thy William false doth prove,
And puts away his faith and troth,
And takes another love.

' Then wherefore sorrow for his loss ?
Thy moans are all in vain :
And when his soul and body parte,
His falsehode brings him paine.'

' O mother, mother ! gone is gone :
My hope is all forlorne ;

The grave mie only safeguard is—
O, had I ne'er been borne !

' Go out, go out, my lampe of life :
In grislie darkness die ;
There is no mercye, sure, above !
For ever let me die.'

' Almighty God ! O do not judge
My poor unhappy childe ;
She knows not what her lips pronounce,
Her anguish makes her wilde.

' My girl, forget thine earthly woe,
And think on God and bliss ;
For so, at least, shall not thy soule
Its heavenly bridegroom miss.'

' O mother, mother ! what is blisse,
And what the fiendis celle ?
With him 'tis heaven any where,
Without my William, helle.

' Go out, go out, my lampe of life ;
In endless darkness die :
Without him I must loathe the earth,
Without him scorn the skye.'

And so despaire did rave and rage
Athwarte her boiling veins ;
Against the Providence of Heaven
She hurlde her impious strains.

She bet her breaste, and wrung her hands,
And rollde her tearlesse eye,

From rise of morne, till the pale stars
Again did freeke the skye.

When, harke ! abroade she hearde the trampe
Of nimble-hoofed steed ;
She hearde a knighte with clank alighte,
And climb the stair in speede.

And soon she herde a tinkling hande,
That twirled at the pin ;
And thro' her door, that open'd not,
These words were breathed in.

' What ho ! what ho ! thy dore undoe ;
Art watching or asleepe ?
My love, dost yet remember mee,
And dost thou laugh or weep ?'

' Ah ! William, here so late at night !
Oh ! I have watchte and wak'd :
Whence dost thou come ? For thy return
My herte has sorely ak'd.'

' At midnight only we may ride ;
I come o'er land and sea :
I mounted late, but soon I go ;
Aryse, and come with mee.'

' O William, enter first my bowre,
And give me one embrace :
The blasts athwarte the hawthorn hiss ;
Awayte a little space.'

' The blasts athwarte the hawthorn hiss,
I may not harbour here ;

My spurre is sharpe, my courser pawes,
My houre of flighte is nere.

‘ All as thou lyst upon thy couch,
Aryse, and mount behinde ;
To-night we’le ride a thousand miles,
The bridal bed to finde.’

‘ How ! ride to-night a thousand miles ?
Thy love thou dost bemocke :
Eleven is the stroke that still
Rings on within the clocke.’

‘ Looke up ; the moone is bright, and we
Outstride the earthlie men :
I’ll take thee to the bridal bed,
And night shall end but then.’

‘ And where is, then, thy house and home ?
And where thy bridal bed ?’
‘ ’Tis narrow, silent, chilly, dark ;
Far hence I rest my head.’

‘ And is there any room for mee,
Wherein that I may creepe ?’
‘ There’s room enough for thee and mee,
Wherein that wee may sleepe.’

‘ All as thou ly’st upon thy couch,
Aryse, no longer stop ;
The wedding guests thy coming waite,
The chamber door is ope.’

All in her sarke, as there she lay,
Upon his horse she sprung ;

And with her lily hands so pale
About her William clung.

And hurry-skurry forth they go,
Unheeding wet or dry ;
And horse and rider snort and blow,
And sparkling pebbles fly.

How swift the flood, the mead, the wood,
Aright, aleft, are gone !
The bridges thunder as they pass,
But earthlie swoone is none.

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speede ;
Splash, splash, across the see :
' Hurrah ! the dead can ride apace :
Dost feare to ride with mee ?

' The moone is bryghte, and blue the nyghte ;
Dost quake the blast to stem ?
Dost shudder, mayde, to seek the dead ?
' No, no, but what of them ?'

' How glumlie sownes yon dirgye song !
Night-ravens flappe the wing.
What knell doth slowlie toll ding-dong ?
The psalmes of death who sing ?

' It creeps, the swarthie funeral traine,
The corse is onn the beere ;
Like croke of todes from lonely moors,
The chaunte doth meet the eere.

' Go, bear her corse, when midnight's past,
With song, and tear, and wayle ;

I've got my wife, I take her home,
My howre of wedlocke hayl.

' Lead forth, O clarke, the chaunting quire,
To swell our nuptial song :
Come, preaste, and reade the blessing soone ;
For bed, for bed we long.'

They heede his calle, and husht the sowne ;
The biere was seen no more ;
And followde him ore feeld and flood
Yet faster than before.

Halloo ! halloo ! away they goe,
Unheeding wet or drye ;
And horse and rider snort and blowe,
And sparkling pebbles flye.

How swifte the hill, how swifte the dale,
Aright, aleft, are gone ?
By hedge and tree, by thorde and towne,
They gallop, gallop on.

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speede ;
Splash, splash, acrossse the see :
' Hurrah ! the dead can ride apace ;
Dost fear to ride with me ?

' Look up, look up, an airy crewe
In roundel daunces reele :
The moone is bryghte, and blue the nyghte,
Mayst dimlie see them wheele.

' Come to, come to, ye ghostlie crewe,
Come to, and follow mee,
And daunce for us the wedding daunce,
When we in bed shall be.'

And brush, brush, brush, the ghostlie crewe
 Come wheeling ore their heads,
 All rustling like the wither'd leaves
 That wyde the wirlwind spreads.

Halloo! halloo! away they goe,
 Unheeding wet or drye ;
 And horse and rider snort and blowe,
 And sparkling pebbles flye.

And all that in the moonshyne lay,
 Behynde them fled afar ;
 And backwarde scudded overhead
 The sky and every star.

Tramp, tramp, across the land they speede ;
 Splash, splash, across the see :
 ' Hurrah ! the dead can ride apace ;
 Dost fear to ride with mee ?

' I weene the cock prepares to crowe :
 The sand will soon be runne ;
 I snuffe the earlye morning aire :
 Downe, downe ! our work is done.

' The dead, the dead can ride apace !
 Our wed-bed here is fit ;
 Oure race is ridde, our journey ore,
 Our endlesse union knitt.'

And lo ! an yren-grated gate
 Soon biggens to their viewe :
 He crackte his whyppe ; the clanginge boltes,
 The doores asunder flew.

They pass, and 'twas on graves they trode ;
 ' 'Tis hither we are bounde :'

And many a tombstone ghostlie white
Lay in the moonshyne round.

And when hee from his steede alytte,
His armour, black as cinder,
Did moulder, moulder all awaye,
As were it made of tinder.

His head became a naked scull ;
Nor haire nor eyne had hee :
His body grew a skeleton,
Whilome so blythe of blee.

And att his drye and boney heele
Nor spur was left to be ;
And inn his witherde hande you might
The scythe and houre-glasse see.

And lo ! his steede did thin to smoke,
And charnel fires outbreathe ;
And pal'd, and bleach'd, then vanish'd quite
The mayde from underneath.

And hollow howlings hung in aire,
And shrekes from vaults arose.
Then knew the mayde she mighte no more
Her living eyes unclose.

But onwarde to the judgment-seat,
Thro' myste and moonlight dreare,
The ghostlie crewe their flyghte persewe,
And hollowe inn her eare :—

' Be patient ; tho' thyne herte shoulde breke,
Arrayne not Heaven's decree ;
Thou nowe art of thie bodie refte,
Thie soule forgiven bee !'

“It is said,” resumed the Nymph, “that when Bürger first wrote this poem, he was a very young man, and read it to his companions with such spirit and vehemence, that they started from their seats in horror at the impassioned accent with which he uttered the expression in the original, which is so happily rendered by ‘he crackte his whyppe.’ I have also heard it stated, that he is considered among his countrymen as Coleridge and Wordsworth are among us, not so much for genius as for rejecting what is called the conventual phraseology of regular poetry, in favour of popular forms of expression, gathered from the simple and energetic utterance of the common people. Imitative harmony he pursues almost to excess,—the onomatopœia is his prevailing figure,—the interjection his favourite part of speech,—arrangement, rhythm, sound, rhyme, are always with him an echo to the same. The hurrying vigour of his poetical diction is unrivalled, yet it is so natural, even in its sublimity, that his poetry is singularly fitted to become national with the people. Of these two ballads some prefer ‘The Parson’s Daughter’ to Lenora. It has been no less happily translated than the other, under the title of”

THE LASS OF FAIR WONE.

Beside the parson’s bower of yew,
 Why strays a troubled spright,
 That peaks and pines, and dimly shines
 Thro’ curtains of the night?

Why steals along the pond of toads
 A gliding fire so blue,
 That lights a spot where grows no grass,
 Where falls no rain nor dew?

The parson's daughter once was good,
And gentle as the dove,
And young and fair,—and many came
To win the damsel's love.

High o'er the hamlet, from the hill,
Beyond the winding stream,
The windows of a stately house
In sheen of evening gleam,

There dwelt, in riot, rout, and roar,
A lord so frank and free,
That oft, with inward joy of heart,
The maid beheld his glee.

Whether he met the dawning day,
In hunting trim so fine,
Or tapers, sparkling from his hall,
Beshone the midnight wine.

He sent the maid his picture, girt
With diamond, pearl, and gold ;
And silken paper, sweet with musk,
This gentle message told :

' Let go thy sweethearts, one and all ;
Shalt thou be basely woo'd,
That worthy art to gain the heart
Of youths of noble blood ?

' The tale I would to thee bewray,
In secret must be said :
At midnight hour I'll seek thy bower ;
Fair lass, be not afraid.

' And when the amorous nightingale
Sings sweetly to his mate,

I'll pipe my quail-call from the field :
Be kind, nor make me wait.'

In cap and mantle clad he came,
At night, with lonely tread ;
Unseen, and silent as a mist,
And hush'd the dogs with bread.

And when the amorous nightingale
Sung sweetly to his mate,
She heard his quail-call in the field,
And, ah ! ne'er made him wait.

The words he whisper'd were so soft,
They won her ear and heart ;
How soon will she, who loves, believe !
How deep a lover's art !

No lure, no soothing guise, he spar'd,
To banish virtuous shame ;
He call'd on holy God above,
As witness to his flame.

He clasp'd her to his breast, and swore
To be for ever true :
' O yield thee to my wishful arms,
Thy choice thou shalt not rue.'

And while she strove, he drew her on,
And led her to the bower
So still, so dim—and round about
Sweet smelt the beans in flower.

There beat her heart, and heaved her breast,
And pleaded every sense ;
And there the glowing breath of lust
Did blast her innocence.

But when the fragrant beans began
Their fallow blooms to shed,
Her sparkling eyes their lustre lost ;
Her cheek, its roses fled ;

And when she saw the pods increase,
The ruddier cherries stain,
She felt her silken robe grow tight,
Her waist new weight sustain.

And when the mowers went afield,
The yellow corn to ted,
She felt her burden stir within,
And shook with tender dread.

And when the winds of autumn hist
Along the stubble field ;
Then could the damsel's piteous plight
No longer be conceal'd.

Her sire, a harsh and angry man,
With furious voice revil'd :
' Hence from my sight ! I'll none of thee—
I harbour not thy child.'

And fast, amid her fluttering hair,
With clenched fist he gripes,
And seiz'd a leathern thong, and lash'd
Her side with sounding stripes.

Her lily skin, so soft and white,
He ribb'd with bloody wales ;
And thrust her out, though black the night,
Though sleet and storm assails.

Up the harsh rock, on flinty paths,
The maiden had to roam ;

On tottering feet she grop'd her way,
And sought her lover's home.'

' A mother thou hast made of me,
Before thou mad'st a wife :
For this, upon my tender breast,
These livid stripes are rife :

' Behold ;' and then with bitter sobs,
She sank upon the floor—
' Make good the evil thou has wrought ;
My injur'd name restore.'

' Poor soul,—I'll have thee hous'd and nurs'd ;
Thy terrors I lament.
Stay here ; we'll have some further talk—
The old one shall repent—'

' I have no time to rest and wait ;
That saves not my good name,—
If thou with honest soul hast sworn,
O leave me not to shame ;

' But at the holy altar be
Our union sanctified ;
Before the people and the priest
Receive me for thy bride.'

' Unequal matches must not blot
The honours of my line ;
Art thou of wealth or rank for me,
To harbour thee as mine ?

' What's fit and fair I'll do for thee ;
Shalt yet retain my love—
Shalt wed my huntsman, and we'll then
Our former transports prove.'

‘ Thy wicked soul, hard-hearted man,
May pangs in hell await !
Sure, if not suited for thy bride,
I was not for thy mate.

‘ Go, seek a spouse of nobler blood,
Nor God’s just judgments dread—
So shall, ere long, some base-born wretch
Defile thy marriage-bed.—

‘ Then, traitor, feel how wretched they
In hopeless shame immerst ;
Then smite thy forehead on the wall,
While horrid curses burst.

‘ Roll thy dry eyes in wild despair—
Unsooth’d thy grinning wo ;
Through thy pale temples fire the ball,
And sink to fiends below.’

Collected, then, she started up,
And, through the hissing sleet,
Through thorn and briar, through flood and mire,
She fled with bleeding feet.

‘ Where now,’ she cried, ‘ my gracious God !
What refuge have I left ?’
And reach’d the garden of her home,
Of hope in man bereft.

On hand and foot she feebly crawl’d
Beneath the bower unblest ;
Where withering leaves, and gathering snow,
Prepar’d her only rest.

There rending pains and darting throes
Assail’d her shuddering frame ;

And from her womb a lovely boy,
With wail and weeping came.

Forth from her hair a silver pin
With hasty hand she drew,
And prest against its tender heart,
And the sweet babe she slew.

Erst when the act of blood was done,
Her soul its guilt abhorr'd :
' My Jesus ! what has been my deed ?
Have mercy on me, Lord !'

With bloody nails, beside the pond,
Its shallow grave she tore ;
' There rest in God,—there shame and want
Thou can'st not suffer more ;

' Me vengeance waits. My poor, poor child,
Thy wound shall bleed afresh,
When ravens from the gallows tear
Thy mother's mould'ring flesh.'—

Hard by the bower her gibbet stands,
Her skull is still to show ;
It seems to eye the barren grave,
Three spans in length below.

That is the spot where grows no grass ;
Where falls no rain nor dew,—
Whence steals along the pond of toads
A hovering fire so blue.

And nightly when the ravens come,
Her ghost is seen to glide ;
Pursues and tries to quench the flame,
And pines the pool beside.