

THE
CRITICAL REVIEW;

OR

Annals of Literature,

EXTENDED AND IMPROVED

BY

A SOCIETY OF GENTLEMEN.

A NEW ARRANGEMENT.

VOLUME the EIGHTH.

— NOTHING EXTENUATE,
NOR SET DOWN AUGHT IN MALICE.

QUALIS AB INCEPTO. —

SHAKSP.

HOR.

L O N D O N,



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1793.

of him for the present; but with an intention of soon returning to the examination of the demonstration contained in his Essays.

(To be continued.)

Ver-Vert, or, the Parrot of Nevers: a Poem, in Four Cantos.

Freely translated from the French of J. B. Gresset. 4to.

2s. 6d. Johnson. 1793.

TO translate is not always to transfuse. The poem of Ver-Vert, as the translator truly tells us, has long been admired amongst the most elegant of the mock heroics. It has not the dignity and strong satire of the *Lutrin*, nor the rich invention of the *Rape of the Lock*; but is distinguished by its lightness, gaiety, and ease. These graces are very difficult to render into another language; we do not, therefore, mean to call this version a bad one, when we confess, that though the features are faithfully rendered, we miss in it the charm which engaged us in reading Gresset. — The translator, indeed, lies under a peculiar disadvantage from the subject. The various terms relative to the convent, do not naturalize well in English, nor are we sufficiently familiar with the manner of life there. When we think of nuns, it is in the high heroic strain. We are accustomed to see,

‘ In her cell sad Eloisa spread,

but we know nothing of the coquetry of the *parloir*. The story of the Poem is briefly this. Ver-Vert was a parrot belonging to the nuns of the visitation at Nevers, and a great favourite with the whole sisterhood. The young novices treated him with sugar plumbs and bon bons; the mothers taught him Ave Marias and Pater Nosters, from which he profited so well that his fame spread to a sisterhood at Nantes, the nuns of which sent an earnest request that this edifying bird might be permitted to pay them a visit. He is accordingly sent to them by the Loire; but during the voyage, having for his fellow passengers two or three dragoons and other company of that stamp, he unfortunately forgets all the pious aspirations of the convent, and learns the reprobate language of his new companions, in which, to their infinite surprize and disappointment, he accosts the nuns of Nantes, who are struck with horror at his graceless conversation, so different from what they were taught to expect, and send him back in disgrace to Nevers, where the change in his manners excites equal astonishment. Poor Ver-Vert is condemned to a penitentiary cell and bread and water, till his fault is supposed to be

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be expiated; but on the day appointed for his restoration to favour, the joy and affection of the younger nuns leads them to feast him so profusely with sweetmeats and other good things, that he is literally killed with kindness.

Such is the outline of the tale, to which Gresset has given infinite spirit, by having thrown so much of character into the portrait of his hero, who appears, in the first part, a novice, innocent and demure; and after his transformation, a lively rake and petit maître.

The translator has not been always sufficiently attentive to this beauty; for instance, where Gresset says, the nuns loved nothing so well except their confessor, nay

‘ dans plus d’un cœur,
Souvent l’Oiseau l’emporta sur le pere.’

The translator renders it,

‘ Nay some soft sisters in the bloom of youth,
Prefer’d the fowl’—

where the term fowl is peculiarly unhappy, presenting the idea of a dish upon the table, rather than the object of a tender affection.

He has likewise made the naughty words which the unfortunate Ver-Vert learnt on board the vessel somewhat broader and coarser, which takes off from the elegance of the poem; nor is the verse finished with the care which it ought to have been in a piece, of which delicate raillery, playfulness, and grace, form the merit as much as humour.

Upon the whole, however, Ver-Vert, in its present dress, must be considered as an acceptable present to the English reader. He will see in it a pleasant tale, but he must not think that he has seen Gresset. To those who are acquainted with both languages, we shall give the pleasure of comparing the following passages:

‘ Admis par tout, si l’on en croit l’histoire,
L’Amant chéri, mangeoit au réfectoire :
Là, tout s’offroit à ses friands desirs ;
Outre qu’encor, pour ses menus plaisirs,
Pour occuper son ventre infatigable,
Pendant le tems qu’il passoit hors de table,
Mille bonbons, mille exquises douceurs
Chargeoient toujours les poches de nos sœurs,
Les petits soins, les attentions fines,
Sont nés, dit-on, chez les Visitandines ;
L’heureux Ver-Vert l’éprouvoit chaque jour ;
Plus mitonné qu’un Perroquet de cour,

Tout

Tout s'occupoit du beau pensionnaire ;
 Ses jours couloient dans un noble loisir :
 Au grand dortoir il couchoit d'ordinaire,
 Là, de cellule il avoit à choisir ;
 Heureuse encor, trop heureuse la mere
 Dont il daignoit au retour de la nuit,
 Par sa présence honorer le réduit !
 Très-rarement les antiques Discrettes,
 Logeoient l'Oiseau ; des Novices proprettes
 L'alcove simple étoit plus de son goût ;
 Car, remarquez qu'il étoit propre en tout.
 Quand, chaque soir, le jeune Anachorette
 Avoit fixé sa nocturne retraite,
 Jusqu'au lever de l'astre de Venus
 Il reposoit sur la boëtte aux Agnus :
 A son réveil, de la fraîche Nonette,
 Libre témoin, il voyoit la Toilette ;
 Je dis Toilette, & je le dis tout bas ;
 Oui, quelque part, j'ai lu, qu'il ne faut pas,
 Aux fronts voilés, des miroirs moins fideles
 Qu'aux fronts ornés de ponpons & dentelles ;
 Ainsi qu'il est pour le Monde & les Cours,
 Un art, un goût de modes & d'atours,
 Il est aussi des modes pour le voile ;
 Il est un art de donner d'heureux tours
 A l'étamine, à la plus simple toile ;
 Souvent l'essain des solâtres amours,
 Essain qui sçait franchir grilles & tours,
 Donne aux bandeaux une grâce piquante,
 Un air galant à la guimpe flotante ;
 Enfin, avant de paroître au parloir,
 On doit au moins deux coups d'œil au miroir,
 Ceci soit dit, entre nous, en silence ;
 Sans autre écart revenons au héros,
 Dans ce séjour de l'oïseive iadolence,
Ver-Vert vivoit sans ennuis, sans travaux,
 Dans tous les cœurs il regnoit sans partage :
 Pour lui sœur Thecle oublioit les moineaux ;
 Quatre Serins en étoient morts de rage,
 Et deux Matous, autrefois en faveur,
 Dépérissoient d'envie & de langueur.

* At dinner-time, the pamper'd glutton ate
 Whate'er he lik'd ; from any mother's plate :
 All this beside the secret sugar'd things
 That some good-natur'd sister hourly brings.

For

For Ver-vert's indefatigable paunch,
 Tho' ever cramming, was for ever staunch.
 The petty cares among those dames, 'tis thought,
 Were either born, or to perfection brought!
 This Ver-vert found.—Not ev'n at court, 'tis said,
 To the queen's Poll was more attention paid.

When night approach'd, he, like a *sultan*, chose
 The fav'rite cell, in which he would repose.
 Nice was, indeed, his choice; for, it appears,
 He never harbour'd with a nun of years;
 But where he found a nunlet young and neat,
 There he was sure to make his ev'n-retreat.
 Upon the box, her *agnuses* that kept
 And other holy toys, he perch'd, and slept.
 Whether, with her, his ev'ning hymn he said;
 Or, graceless, went, without a pray'r, to bed;
 It is not known—Yet probably, I ween,
 He to her orisons might say: "Amen."
 Nor is it known what were his holy dreams:
 Ideal cracknels? or ideal creams?
 All that, as yet, I have for certain found
 About his sleep, is—that his sleep was found.

But soon as break of day begins to peep;
 And busy bells rouse lazy nuns from sleep;
 He too awakes, to view with curious eyes,
 Fresh from her couch, the lovely vestal rise:
 To see her lave, and dress—in short, to share
 In all her little toilet's morning care.
Toilet, I say, but say in lowly tone,
 What to the vulgar ought not to be known—
Toilet, I say—For I have heard it said,
 That nuns themselves call in the toilet's aid
 To raise their charms, and make them still appear
Devoutly decent, ev'n in holy gear.
 Not a less faithful mirror is requir'd,
 When holy fronts are meant to be attir'd
 In simple gauze, than is requir'd to place
 On fronts profane *bijoux* and Brussels-lace.
 For, as the court and city have *their* modes;
 Just so it happens in *those* blest abodes;
 Where as much art and taste may be display'd
 In the adjustment of a simple braid,
 As by the mundane fair-one is employ'd
 To deck herself in all the pomp of pride,

Nay,

Nay, oft the free and fancy-following loves,
 Forsaking parks, and palaces, and groves,
 Have wing'd their way o'er convent-walls and gates;
 And, 'spite of bolts, and bars, and iron grates,
 Shed all their influence on a vestal's face,
 And giv'n to weeds and veils resistless grace.
 This by the bye—Now to my tale again,
 Of which no more I mean to break the chain.

In this abode of ease and indolence
Ver-vert resided, like a Persian prince.
 Idle, inactive, without toil or care,
 He reign'd in all the hearts of all the fair.
 For him, her sparrows, ah! how hard their lot!
 Her darling sparrows sister *Ann* forgot.
 Four sweet canaries, once the parlour's pride,
 Now disregarded, broke their hearts, and died!
 Ev'n the two mastiffs, guardians of the door,
 And mighty, mighty favourites before,
 Neglected lie upon uncushion'd benches;
 And, through pure envy, waste away by inches!

Our readers will see the translation is not very exact. *Matou* is, we think, injudiciously changed for mastiff; old cats and old maids, being always considered as congenial. The translator says, very truly, we have no word that fully expresses *les petits soins*: *attentions*, however, would render the phrase better than *petty cares*; *soins*, in the sense in which it is used here, does not mean cares at all, but *observances*, *little offices*, which we render to such as we desire to please—two of the prettiest lines,

‘ Enfin, avant de paroître au parloir,
 On doit au moins deux coups d’œil au miroir’—

are not translated at all. *Nunlet* is neither French nor English. *Bijou* is a word purely French, which has an English word *jewel*, exactly corresponding to it: we cannot, therefore, see the propriety of leaving that word untranslated in a publication, the professed business of which is to translate. The words *lave*, *gear*, have a stiffness that do not accord with the general style of the poem, which is not that of the grave, but of the light mock heroic. We are thus particular, not from a spirit of captiousness, but because we think it more serviceable to give particular than general criticism. If it were our present business to criticise Gresset himself, we should suggest that, perhaps, he would have told his story more neatly, had he concluded it with the arrival of his hero at Nantes.