

THE MINSTREL

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The Minstrel by James Beattie

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JAMES BEATTIE

THE MINSTREL



THE MINSTREL.

BY JAMES BEATTIE.

WITH THIRTY-THREE DESIGNS BY BIRKET FOSTER,
ENGRAVED BY THE BROTHERS DALZIEL.

LONDON:
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & CO. FARRINGDON STREET.
NEW YORK: 18, BEEKMAN STREET.
1858.

280. e. 41.

PREFACE.

THE design was to trace the progress of a Poetical Genius, born in a rude age, from the first dawning of fancy and reason, till that period at which he may be supposed capable of appearing in the world as a *Minstrel*, that is, as an itinerant Poet and Musician;—a character which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only respectable, but sacred.

I have endeavoured to imitate *SPENSER* in the measure of his verse, and in the harmony, simplicity, and variety of his composition. Antique expressions I have avoided; admitting, however, some old words, where they seemed to suit the subject; but I hope none will be found that are now obsolete, or in any degree not intelligible to a reader of English poetry.

To those who may be disposed to ask, what could induce me to write, in so difficult a measure, I can only answer, that it

pleases my ear, and seems, from its Gothic structure and original, to bear some relation to the subject and spirit of the Poem. It admits both simplicity and magnificence of sound and of language, beyond any other stanza that I am acquainted with. It allows the sententiousness of the couplet, as well as the more complex modulation of blank verse. What some critics have remarked, of its uniformity growing at last tiresome to the ear, will be found to hold true only when the poetry is faulty in other respects.

BOOK I.

*“ Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Muses,
Quarum sacra fero, incerti periculum amoris,
Accipiant.”*— VIRGIL.



I.

Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar ;

I

B

THE MINSTREL.

Ah ! who can tell how many a soul sublime
Has felt the influence of malignant star,
And waged with Fortune an eternal war ;
Checked by the scoff of Pride, by Envy's frown,
And Poverty's unconquerable bar,
In life's low vale remote has pined alone,
Then dropt into the grave, unpitied and unknown !

II.

And yet the languor of inglorious days
Not equally oppressive is to all ;
Him who ne'er listen'd to the voice of praise,
The silence of neglect can ne'er appal.
There are, who, deaf to mad Ambition's call,
Would shrink to hear th' obstreperous trump of Fame ;
Supremely blessed, if to their portion fall
Health, competence, and peace. Nor higher aim
Had we, whose simple tale these artless lines proclaim.

III.

The rolls of fame I will not now explore ;
Nor need I here describe, in learned lay,