

**LA BAGATELLA; OR,
DELINEATIONS OF HOME
SCENERY. A DESCRIPTIVE POEM
IN TWO PARTS; WITH NOTES,
CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL**

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La Bagatella; or, Delineations of home scenery. A descriptive poem in two parts; with notes, critical and historical by William Fox

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WILLIAM FOX

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LA BAGATELLA;

OR,

DELINEATIONS OF HOME SCENERY.

A DESCRIPTIVE POEM.

IN TWO PARTS.

WITH

NOTES,

CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL.

BY WILLIAM FOX, JUN^R.

“ I have devoted this book to my kindred and friends, to the end,
“ that when they have lost me, which they will do soon, they may
“ there retrace some of my qualities and humours, and, consequently,
“ that their remembrance of me may be more lively and entire.”

MONTAIGNE'S Preface to his Essays.

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INTRODUCTION.

IT may, perhaps, amuse my readers to learn the history of the following BAGATELLE ; which is, briefly, this: It happened, that on a fine morning, in the early part of the last Spring, having just recovered from the languors of an indisposition, I strolled forth through the fields, that lie contiguous to my habitation ; and, feeling greatly revived by the genial warmth of the air, and the fresh and blooming aspect of every object around me, I could not forbear, on returning from my walk, to express myself in terms, perhaps too enthusiastic, of the beauties of the country, and the pleasantness of the scenery, over which I had rambled.

A lady, who was then visiting in my family, rallied me a great deal on the poetic fervour of my descriptions, but sarcastically lamented, that my labours should have been employed on scenes so entirely unworthy of the embellishment, which I had bestowed upon them ; and concluded, by triumphantly asking, “ What of Sylvan, or of rustic beauty, could be any where found at a distance of not more than three miles from the metropolis, within the din of its noises, and the very smoke of its chimnies ?”

Piqued by the severity of the observation, my spirit inwardly muttered, " Although, my fair friend, you despise now these home-scenes, in the praises of which I am so lavish, yet I will, methinks, one day compel, even *you*, to allow, that they are not destitute of every attraction; and that, if to your eyes they can present no real verdure, you shall one day confess, that at least they " look green in song."

Pleased, and strongly impressed with such an idea, I examined, with some attention, the capabilities of my subject for poetic embellishment; and I will freely acknowledge, that the first result of this examination was by no means flattering to my wishes. Not, however, to be diverted from my design, and not easily to be discouraged by difficulty, I turned over, in my recollection, the many admired poems, which had been produced from materials even more barren and unyielding than those, on which I had fallen; and, thus animated, I resolved upon the prosecution of my design.

As many of my readers may be unacquainted with those * barren topics in which genius hath sometimes

* Plus les choses sont seches et mal aiseés à dire en vers, plus elles frappent quand elles sont dites noblement, et avec cette elegance qui fait proprement la poésie.

BOILEAU. Lettre à Mons^r de Maucroix,

chosen to exert its powers, it may not be unamusive to notice two or three of these singular triumphs of the Muse.

One of the earliest of these poems that occurs to my recollection, is the *Secchia Rapita* of Tassoni, first published in the year 1622. This poem, which was read with so much avidity, and by which its author acquired immortal fame, is founded simply upon a popular tradition of a certain wooden bucket, which is kept at Modena, in the treasury of the cathedral, that came from Bologna, and that had been forcibly taken away by the Modenese.

From no other materials than a *DESK did Boileau contrive to furnish a poem ^b, which has been as much

Poetry, like electricity, communicates its fire to every thing it touches, and animates and embellishes whatever it treats of. There seems to be no subject in the universe to which poetry cannot be applied, and that it cannot render equally brilliant and pleasing. .

ELEMENTS of Universal Erudition.

* *Le Lutrin*.

^b An odd occasion (says Boileau) gave rise to this poem. In a company I was lately engaged in, the conversation turned upon Epic Poetry: every one delivered his opinion, according to his abilities. When mine was asked, I confirmed what I had advanced in my *Art of Poetry*, that an heroic poem, to be truly excellent, ought to be charged with little *matter*, which it was the business of invention to support and extend. The opinion was warmly contested: but, after many reasons for and against,

admired, and as frequently quoted, as almost any other of the productions of that celebrated writer.

it happened, as it generally does in these sort of disputes, that nobody was convinced, and that each continued in his own opinion. The heat of dispute being over, we talked on other subjects, and laughed at the violence into which we had been betrayed, in discussing a question of so little importance. We moralized on the folly of men, who pass almost their whole lives, in treating the greatest trifles in a serious manner, and in making, to themselves, an important affair of something quite indifferent. To this purpose, a country gentleman related a famous quarrel, that had lately happened in a little church in his province, between the treasurer and the chanter, the two principal dignitaries of that church, about the place in which a reading-desk was to stand. We thought it a ridiculous affair. Upon this one of the critics in company, who could not so soon forget our late dispute, asked me, if I, who thought so little *matter* necessary for an heroic poem, would undertake to write one on a quarrel so little abounding in incidents? I said, Why not? before I had even reflected on the question. This made the company laugh, and I could not help laughing with them; not in the least imagining I should ever be able to keep my word. But finding myself at leisure in the evening, I revolved the subject in my mind, and having considered, in every view, the pleasantry it would admit of, I made twenty verses, which I shewed to my friends. They were diverted with this beginning. The pleasure which I saw these gave them, induced me to write twenty more. Thus, from twenty verses to twenty, I lengthened the work to near nine hundred. This is the whole history of the trifle I now offer to the public.

The *Cyder* of Philips, and *The Fleece* of Dyer, both of which are familiar to my countrymen, may be considered as subjects neither of them promising, but which, by the ingenuity of poetic fancy and embellishment, have obtained, for their authors, a high reputation.

The *Trivia* and the ‘*Fan*’ of Gay may, likewise, be adduced as examples of the slender foundation, on which

The *Lutrin* of Boileau is the model on which the heroic poems produced, since his time, have, in a great measure, been formed. It claims, with the *Rape of the Lock*, the honour of being one of the two most beautiful originals, in that species of composition, written in any language.

ANDREWS'S *Letters from France*.

The *Lutrin* is a work entirely of genius; a castle in the air, supported only by the art and strength of the architect. We behold in it the genius that creates, the judgment which arranges, the imagination that enriches, and the strain that animates the whole.

M. FORMEY'S *Elementary Principles of the Belles Lettres*.

‘I am very much recreated and refreshed with the news of the advancement of the *Fan*, which, I doubt not, will delight the eye and sense of the fair, as long as that agreeable machine shall play in the hands of posterity. I am glad your *Fan* is mounted so soon, but I would have you varnish and glaze it at your leisure, and polish the sticks as much as you can. You may then cause it to be borne in the hands of both sexes, no less in Britain than it is in China; where it is ordinary for a Mandarin to fan himself cool after a debate, and a statesman to hide his face with it when he tells a grave lie.

MR. POPE. *Letter to Mr. Gay*.