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A Collection Of Poems In Six Volumes. By Several Hands

Dodsley, Robert

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On Scribling against Genius. An Epistle.

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You should not rhyme in spite of nature? — true ;
 Yet sure 'tis greater trouble, if you do ;
 And if 'tis lab'ring only, men profess,
 Who writes the hardest, writes with most success.

Thus for myself, and friends, I do my part ;
 Promoting doubly the pains-taking art :
 First to myself, 'tis labour to compose ;
 To read such lines, is drudgery to those.



ON SCRIBLING against GENIUS.

AN EPISTLE.

NO single rule's more frequently enjoind,
 Than this ; " Observe the byass of our mind."
 However just by ev'ry one confes'd,
 There not a rule more frequently transgress'd.
 For mortals, to their int'rest blind, pursue
 The thing they like, not that they're fit to do.

This Verro's fault : by frequent praises fir'd,
 He several parts had try'd, in each admir'd.
 That Verro was not ev'ry way compleat,
 'Twas long unknown, and might have been so yet :

But musick-mad, th' unhappy man pursu'd
That only thing heav'n meant he never shou'd ;
And thus his proper road to fame neglected,
He's ridicul'd for that he but affected.

Wou'd men but act from nature's secret call,
Or only, where that fails, not act at all ;
If not their skill, they'd shew at least good sense, —
They'd get no fame — nor wou'd they give offence.

Not that where some one merit is deny'd,
Men must be ev'ry way unqualify'd ;
Nor hold we, like that wrong-concluding wight,
A man can't fish — because he cou'd not write.
View all the world around : each man design'd
And furnish'd for some fav'rite part you find.
That, sometimes low : yet this, so small a gift,
Proves nature did not turn him quite adrift.
The phlegmatick, dull, awkward, thick, gross-witted,
Have all some clumsy work for which they're fitted.
'Twas never known, in men a perfect void,
Ev'n I and T — Id might be well employ'd ;
Wou'd we our poverty of parts survey,
And follow as our genius led the way.

What then ? obedient to that turn of mind
Shou'd men jog on to one dull path confin'd ;
From that small circle never dare depart,
To strike at large, and snatch a grace from art ?
At least with care forbidden paths pursue ?
Who quits the road, should keep it still in view :

From genius some few 'scapes may be allow'd ;
But ever keep within its neighbourhood.

But C ———, faithless to his byass see,
With giant-sin opposing heav'n's decree.
Still fond where he shou'd not, he blunders on
With all that haste fools make to be undone :
Want of success his passion but augments ;
Like eunuchs rage of love, from impotence.

'Mongst all the instances of genius cross,
The rhyming tribe are those who err the most.
Each piddling wretch who hath but common sense,
Or thinks he hath, to verse shall make pretence :
Why not ? 'tis their diversion, and 'twere hard
If men of their estates shou'd be debarr'd.
Thus wealth with them gives every thing beside ;
As people worth so much are qualify'd :
'They've all the requisites for writing fit,
All but that one ——— some little share of wit.
Give way, ye friends, nor with fond pray'rs proceed
'To stop the progress of a pen full speed.
'Tis heav'n, incens'd by some prodigious crime,
Thus for men's sins determines them to rhyme.
Bad men, no doubt ! perhaps 'tis vengeance due
For shrines they've plunder'd, or some wretch they slew.
Whate'er it be, sure grievous is th' offence,
And grievous is (heaven knows !) its recompence.
At once in want of rhyme, and want of rest ;
Plagues to themselves, and to mankind a jest :



Seduc'd by empty forms of false delight—
Such, in some men, their deadly lust to write!

Ev'n I, whose genius seems as much forgot,
(Mine when I write, as yours when you do not;) Who gravely thus can others faults condemn,
My self allowing, what I blame in them;
With no pretence to Phœbus' aid divine,
Nor the least int'rest in the tuneful Nine,
With all the guilt of impotence in view,
Griev'd for past sins, but yet committing new;
Whate'er the wits may say, or wise may think,
Am fooling ev'ry way with pen and ink.
When all who wish me best, begin t' advise,
' That being witty, is not being wise;
' That if the voice of int'rest might be heard,
' For one who wears a gown,—wou'd be prefer'd—
Incorrigibly deaf, I feign a yawn;
And mock their just conclusions, ere they're drawn.
If to my practice, they oppos'd my theme;
And pointed, how I swam against the stream;
With all the rancour of a bard in rage,
Pd quote 'em half the writers of the age;
Who in a wrath of verse, with all their might
Write on, howe'er unqualify'd to write.