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THE RANZ-DES-VACHES.

Every body talks about the Ranz-des-Vaches, and not one in fifty knows what they are. This man can affirm that they are Swiss or perhaps Alpine; the other has heard of their effect in promoting homesickness; while a third considers the phrase as the name of a single tune and tells you that he has heard it. Two or three clear notions on the point will not be unwelcome to our musical friends.

In the patois of the Swiss the word *Ranz* signifies a row, line, or file, of moving bodies; and *Ranz-des-vaches* therefore means a *row or procession of cows*. "The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea." In the mountain pastures, the ideas of wealth, liberty, and pastoral joy are associated with the herd, and the lowing kine are beloved by the peasantry and made the subject of their song. The lays which bear this name are many in number, varying with the different cantons and districts, and the provincial dialects belonging to each. Some of the songs are in German and some in French. The most familiar is that beginning *Quand reverrai-je un jour*; which has been translated by Montgomery. But most of them are in the patois of the valleys, sometimes very like German, sometimes towards the south savouring strongly of the Italian or Romance. We shall say something first of the

DIALOGUE.

It is certainly a curious and interesting fact, that the master-pieces both of Greek and Latin prose composition are in the form of dialogue. We refer of course to the best works of Cicero and Plato. The same thing can hardly be affirmed of any cultivated modern language, although no French or English prose is likely to last longer than that of Fenelon and Landor, both of whom have shown a very marked predilection for this form of composition. It has also acquired great popularity as forming the body or substance of the modern romance, which differs from the older compositions of the same name in nothing more remarkably than in the relative amount of space allotted to mere narrative and dialogue respectively. Another familiar application of this method is in books of a didactic character, especially such as are intended to convey the rudiments of useful knowledge, in an interesting manner, to the younger class of readers. We say nothing of dramatic composition, from which this form is inseparable, because, from its design, it is necessarily confined within very narrow limits, as compared with the untrammelled Dialogue of which we are now speaking.

In all these applications of the Dialogue, experience has shown that while on one hand nothing can be more attractive or effective when skilfully executed, nothing on the other can be more insipid and wearisome when badly done. Writers and readers have no doubt often wondered, that the same expedient should in one case render ineffective even the most interesting subject and original ideas, which in another case may almost be said to supersede the necessity of having any subject or ideas at all—and that not only in the case of different writers but of one and the same.

The secret of this difference is simple and intelligible, though perhaps not obvious. The Dialogue, to be effective, must be really two-sided, that is, both the speakers must

have something of their own to say, a character if not opinions to maintain, or else the Dialogue is nothing but a Monologue, spun out and divided by impertinent and needless interruptions. This last is the character of multitudes of books, which have been called into existence by the success of one happily conceived and executed for the purpose of juvenile or popular instruction. The original model owes its effect to the skill or instinct, which has led the writer to delineate on paper the reciprocal action of two minds, however feeble, on a common theme, however unimportant. The herd of imitators, foolishly ascribing the effect to the mere external form of composition, vainly strive to reproduce it by mechanically breaking up the page into short paragraphs, with different names prefixed to them alternately, not knowing, or learning to their cost, that the great majority of readers would much rather hear what one mouth can intelligibly utter, from that one mouth than from two or any greater number.

The error of making dialogues one-sided, may be rendered clear by an example. The following will be recognized by most readers as by no means an exaggerated specimen of this style, as exhibited in numerous books.

Mr. Smith. We may now proceed to the history of the House of Brunswick.

Arabella. Oh, papa, that will be very pleasant.

Mr. S. Of this house six have already occupied the throne.

A. Only six! I thought there had been more.

Mr. S. Five kings and one queen.

A. One queen! I wonder who that can be.

Mr. S. Four Georges, William and Victoria.

A. Ah, now I know. The one queen is Victoria.

Mr. S. George the First was a German, and could never speak good English.

A. I don't see how a German could be king of England.

Mr. S. His father was Elector of Hanover; but his mother was descended from James the First.

A. And how did he come to be king of England?

Mr. S. When James II. became a Roman Catholic, the crown was transferred to his daughter Mary and her husband, William, Prince of Orange, who was also her cousin.

A. And how did they lose it?

Mr. S. They died without children, and it went to James's younger daughter.

A. Who was that, papa?

Mr. S. Queen Anne.

A. Then her children ought to have succeeded her, if she had any.

Mr. S. She had many children, but they all died before her.

A. Indeed, papa? That is very unusual, is it not?

Mr. S. It is, my dear. The next Protestant heir was the Elector of Hanover, who accordingly became king of England, by the title of George the First.

A. In what year, papa?

Mr. S. In the year 1714.

A. Exactly one hundred and thirty-six years ago! How very singular!

Mr. S. That will do for the present.

A. Thank you, papa! Good night, papa!"

We believe there are many very worthy people who would think this a much better lesson in history than the following:

"We now proceed to the history of the House of Brunswick. Of this house six have already occupied the throne, five kings and one queen, four Georges, William, and Victoria. George the First was a German, and could never speak good English. His father was Elector of Hanover, but his mother was descended from James the First. When James the Second became a Roman Catholic, the crown was transferred to his daughter Mary and her husband, William, Prince of Orange, who was also her cousin. They died without children and it went to James's younger daughter, Queen Anne. She had many children, but they all died before her. The next Protestant heir was the Elector of Hanover, who accordingly became king of England, by the title of George the First, in the year 1714."

Even admitting that the interpellations are of some use, query, whether the pupil could not make them *ex tempore*, and thus save half the space in printing. More hereafter.

OWEN.

READINGS ON SHENSTONE.

In an age that has but little taste for pastorals, it is not surprising that Shenstone's poetry, though good of its kind, is but little read; but that his prose essays are not better known seems unaccountable. These writings contain much