

*LITERARY*  
**MISCELLANIES:**

INCLUDING

A

*DISSERTATION*

ON

**ANECDOTES.**

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**A NEW EDITION, ENLARGED.**

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BY

**I. D'ISRAELI,**

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**LONDON:**

**PRINTED FOR MURRAY AND HIGHLEY,  
FLEET-STREET.**

**1801.**

LE Monde a besoin de plusieurs sortes de Livres; il en faut pour s'occuper, et il en faut pour s'amuser; et parcequ'il y a des gens que lors meme qu'ils ne lisent que pour delasser leur esprit, souhaitent de rencontrer des choses curieuses, et qui ne soient pas indignes de la curiosité d'un homme de lettres, il est bon qu'il y ait des livres, qui sans demander beaucoup d'attention, ni sans etre destiné à la bagatelle, puissent procurer un delassement instructif.

BAYLE, Reponse aux Questions d'un Provincial.

THE World is in want of many kinds of Books; some are requisite to pursue our studies, and some are requisite to indulge our amusements: and since ~~these are persons who~~, when they read only for entertainment, wish to meet with curious matters, and not unworthy of the curiosity of a man of letters, it is proper that we should be provided with books, which, without exacting severe thinking, or being devoted to trifling subjects, may readily afford us instructive recreations.

Luke Hanford, Printer,  
near Lincoln's-Inn Fields.

## P R E F A C E.

**T**HESE Literary Miscellanies have long been out of print, and being still enquired after, I am encouraged once more to present them to the Public:

For the character, the aim, and the utility of works like the present, the Reader will find in the motto, on the opposite page, the opinion of one well experienced in Literature, who, while he was alive to literary wants, was most sensible to literary pleasures. We know the affection of Johnson for that pleasing species of erudition, which combines with opinions, facts to confirm, to illustrate, and to entertain; and we now add the name of Gibbon, whose opinions throw a lustre on all literary discussions, and who advises even the hardy student to have ever at hand Literary Miscellanies.

I have read with utility the various opinions of Journalists, both foreign and domestic, on my publications. One of these has so well described my intention in these Miscellanies, that I shall quote

his words. The Critic says; "The Essays, except that the language is more studied, have the air of conversation among cultivated people, pursued not so much with a view to close discussion, as to deliver what may be said on any subject with brilliancy and point." If a writer may be allowed to suppose that he understands himself, (which however is an indulgence not to be granted to every one) I would say, that the Critic has skilfully designated the purpose and the freedom of these Essays. Another Critic has characterised these Essays as "being of that kind of amusing miscellaneous reading where there is no necessity for previous study, or for severe thinking in it's progress," and he condescends to wish for their continuation. As that Critic is a man of learning, his opinion will always be respectable, though it may not always be the dictate of the Graces. A third Critic has made an ingenious observation so much in favour of these kinds of literary recreations, that the Reader will be gratified by it's opposite defence of works which the mere man of erudition is accustomed to condemn. I shall transcribe his words: "The writer of entertaining *Miscellanies* is a more important character in human society than the pride of erudition may be willing to allow. It has hitherto been customary to value an author in proportion to the duration of *Time* through which the interest of

of

of his compositions is to extend; and those are called the great writers who are read in every age by a dozen persons, and are unknown in every age to the multitude. Surely however it would not be less just to adopt, as the standard of measurement, the extent of *Space* through which the interest of a composition is to prevail, to weigh off the mass of *contemporary* against the mass of *successive* readers, and to assign the same quantity of value to the tutor of three brothers, as to the preceptor of the grandfather, the father, and the son. On this plan of appreciation, the dispersers of knowledge may challenge composition with the discoverers of truth; and the amusers of the toilette and the tea-table may contend for the myrtle with the supposed sources of classical pastime." These are the elegant, and playful, and discriminating conceptions of a man of taste versed in literature.

In every republication of my literary Essays I have lamented the errors of juvenile composition. There are certain radical ones, which no subsequent corrections can ever rectify. In the present volume it were desirable that some of the subjects had been on more uncommon topics; they had then perhaps been less useful, but more interesting. Cardinal Bembo, to apologize for his juvenile compositions, employs a beautiful image: "Le Scritture non ingraviscono, e non divengono Canute

nute con i loro Autori e Compositori; ma si rimangono nella loro età, e nella loro giovinezza sempre; e noi ci mutiamo! Chi può a buona equità maravigliarsi, che i Campi, i quali producono di State utili frutti, habbino vani fiori di primavera generato?" Books do not gather strength, and improve in wisdom with their authors, but still remain in their first state, and ever in their early youth; but we ourselves change! Yet who justly can wonder that the fields which produce in summer useful fruits, should yield but vain and perishable flowers in spring?

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## CONTENTS.

	<i>Page</i>
A DISSERTATION ON ANECDOTES - - -	1
OF MISCELLANIES - - - - -	67
ON PROFESSORS OF ART - - - - -	80
ON STYLE - - - - -	87
HISTORICAL CHARACTERS ARE FALSE } REPRESENTATIONS OF NATURE - }	100
ON PREFACES - - - - -	110
SOME OBSERVATIONS ON DIARIES, SELF- BIOGRAPHY, AND SELF-CHARACTERS. }	120
ON THE CHARACTER OF DENNIS THE } CRITIC - - - - - }	128
ON ERUDITION AND PHILOSOPHY - - -	138
ON POETICAL OPUSCULA - - - - -	150
ON "THE ENLIGHTENED PUBLIC," AND } "THE AGE OF REASON" - - - - }	155
OF LICENSERS OF THE PRESS - - - -	164
ON READING - - - - -	173
ON POETICAL EXPRESSION - - - - -	185
ON	

	<i>Page</i>
ON HABITUATING OURSELVES TO AN INDIVIDUAL PURSUIT - - - - -	} 195
ON LITERARY GENIUS - - - - -	201
ON LITERARY INDUSTRY - - - - -	222
ON THE INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE ON THE HUMAN MIND - - - - -	} 229
ON NOVELTY IN LITERATURE - - - - -	240
THE INFLUENCE OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER IN POLITICS AND RELIGION	} 257
THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN LOVE AND RELIGION . - - - -	} 270

A  
DISSERTATION  
ON  
ANECDOTES.

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P R E F A C E.

**A** DISSERTATION demands (and I confess it) a certain systematical regularity, which is above me. But a Dissertation on Anecdotes is a thing so eccentric, that if, on the whole, my pages are not found to weary the reader, it is just that he should have the candour not to complain, if it does not precisely answer the idea he may form of a Dissertation.

I am even desirous, that this Essay may not be considered as destitute of connection, though at the

first

first glance it may thus appear. The work consists not of a mere mass of loose anecdotes; these are given as sketches of the manner in which various subjects may be conducted; and elucidate those reflections on the nature of anecdotes, which, if they shall be found to be pertinent, is all of which I am solicitous. In my notes, I have taken a greater freedom of discussion; but this has been (to use the language of a master in literary composition) 'with the honest desire of giving useful pleasure.'

There is a singularity respecting the word *Anecdote*, which it is not here improper to notice. Anecdotes is an appellation given by scholars to MSS. which they discovered in libraries, and afterwards published. This term is strictly according to its Grecian derivation *avendota*, i. e. things not yet published. Thus Cicero, as Moreri observes, gave the name of Anecdote to a work which he had not yet published.

We have borrowed the use of this word, in its ordinary signification, from the French, who employ it for any interesting circumstance. In this  
sense

senſe Varillas published *Anecdotes of the family of the Medicis*.

Johnson has defined the word, by ſaying, that 'It is now uſed after the French for a *biographical incident*; a minute paſſage of *private life*.' This confines its ſignification merely to *biography*; but anecdotes are ſuſceptible of a more enlarged application. This word is more juſtly defined in the *Cyclopaedia*, 'a term which (now) denotes a relation of detached and intereſting particulars.' We give *anecdotes* of the art as well as the Artift; of the war as well as the General; of the nation as well as of the Monarch.

In the former edition of this *Differtation*, I expreſſed a wiſh to have a ſeries of ANECDOTES formed which would be found capable of illuſtrating any individual topic. Of the merit of ſuch a work I ſtill retain an exalted notion; of its difficulty, and perhaps of the penurious commendation which moſt readers would beſtow on it, I am not leſs convinced; and ſuch a Writer, however philoſophical, might ſtill have his diligence, rather than his talents diſtinguiſhed. Dr. Johnson has made a remarkable

observation on this subject: ' I love Anecdotes. I fancy mankind may come in time to write all aphoriftically, except in narrative; grow weary of preparation and connection, and illustration, and all thofe arts by which a big book is made. If a man is to wait till he weaves Anecdotes into a fyftem, we may be long in getting them, and get but few, in comparifon of what we might get.'

I confider this not as an objection, but as the higheft approbation of the work I propofed.

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## DISSERTATION, &c.

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**A** WRITER of periodical criticism\*, has given some observations on ANECDOTES, which, because they echo the voice of several men of letters, it may not be improper to investigate. The opinions of our critic, to me, appear erroneous, because they regard anecdotes as only agreeable objects of literary amusement. A writer should correct others, or correct himself; I therefore hazard this essay. A dissertation on anecdotes appears thorny; let us try if we cannot discover blossoms and flowers.

The critic says, 'Anecdotes are among the luxuries of literature;' and he is 'fearful that the mind should be accustomed to them, and reject a severer diet.' I rejoice, however, to be informed, in the same paragraph, that, 'they stimulate the appetite for reading, and create a where deficient.'

I will not deny that anecdotes are to be placed among literary luxuries. The refinement of a nation influences the genius of its literature; we

\* The British Critic for July 1793, p. 384.

now require not only a solid repast, but a delicious dessert. A physician, austere as Hippocrates; a Critic, rigid as Aristotle, are alike inimical to our refreshments. We will not be fooled into their systems. We do not dismiss our fruits and our wines from our tables; we eat, and our health remains uninjured. We read anecdotes with voluptuous delight; nor is our science impaired, or our wit rendered less brilliant.

It is not just to consider anecdotes merely as a source of entertainment; if it shall be found that they serve also for the purposes of utility, they will deserve to be classed higher in the scale of study than hitherto they have been.

*Anecdotes seldom read with reflection.*

All the world read anecdotes; but not many with reflection, and still fewer with taste. To most, one anecdote resembles another; a little unconnected story that is heard, that pleases, and is forgotten. Yet when anecdotes are not merely transcribed, but animated by judicious reflections, they recal others of a kindred nature: and the whole series is made to illustrate some topic that gratifies curiosity, or impresses on the mind some interesting conclusion in the affairs of human life.

*The most agreeable parts of History, consist in its Anecdotes,*

History itself derives some of its most agreeable instructions from a skilful introduction of anecdotes. We should not now dwell with anxiety on a dull chronicle

chronicle of the reigns of monarchs; a parish register might prove more interesting. We are not now solicitous of attending to battles, which have ceased to alarm; to sieges, which can destroy none of our towns; and to storms, which can never burst upon our shores. We turn with disgust from fictions told without the grace of fable, and from truths uninteresting as fables told without grace\*. Our hearts have learnt to sympathise; and we consult the annals of history, as a son and a brother would turn over his domestic memoirs. We read history, not to indulge the frivolous inquisitiveness of a dull antiquary, but to explore the causes of the miseries and prosperities of our country. We are more interested in the progress of the human mind, than in that of empires.

A Hearne

\* Romancers have existed in all nations, under the names of historians, from the notorious Geoffrey of Monmouth, to Jean le Maire, who in his Illustrations of Gaul, makes the French nation descend from the fugitive princes of Troy. This is not quite so marvellous, as the eccentric follies of several modern Irish antiquaries. Col. V..... has pushed his national researches as far back as the time of the deluge. Since he was so employed he might have gone further; for an old writer has even favoured us with the names of the *seven Irish Kings* who flourished before Noab.

Mr. T. Warton, in his observations on the Faery Queen, notices one of Geoffrey's fables. This monk, in his account of the original state of Albion, has these words, 'Erat tunc nomen insulæ Albion quæ a nemine nisi a *paucis gigantibus* inhabitabatur.' A few giants, in that historian's opinion, were but of little consideration.

A Hearne would feel a frigid rapture, if he could discover the name of a Saxon monarch unrecorded in our annals; and of whom as little should remain, as of the doubtful bones of a Saxon dug out of a tumulus. Such are his anecdotes!—A Hume is only interested with those characters who have exerted themselves in the cause of humanity, and with those incidents which have subverted or established the felicities of a people\*.

*Anecdotes*

\* There will always be antiquaries, to solace themselves with the hope, that dull industry will compensate for a total want of the energy of genius. Such will not discern when enquiry dwindles into minute inutility. The elegance and the reflection of Hume, are regarded with contempt by these unenlightened students; and they condemn the philosopher, precisely for what he is most to be commended, for not wasting his pages on researches, that resemble conjectures, into our Saxon annals, which, if they could be known with accuracy, would not be more interesting than the annals of the Abyssinians, over which many a reader of taste has groaned in the bulky volumes of Bruce. On the subject of such remote antiquities, I transcribe a conversation recorded by Boswell. On our antiquarian researches, Johnson said, 'All that is really *known* of the ancient state of Britain, is contained in a *few pages*. We can know no more than what the old writers have told us; yet what large books have we upon it, the whole of which, excepting such parts as are taken from those old writers, is all a dream, such as Whitaker's Manchester.—I have heard Henry's history of Great Britain well spoken of; I am told it is carried on in separate divisions, as the civil, the military, the religious history; I wish much to have one branch well done, and that is, *the history of manners, of common life.*' Robertson answered, 'Henry should have applied his attention to that *alone*, which is enough for any man.' Vol. iii. p. 122.

*Anecdotes serve as materials for the History of Manners.*

Hence the history of manners has become the prime object of the researches of philosophers. How is this prominent feature in history to be depicted? The artist must not here draw at fancy, a beautiful or fantastical line. He must regard his object with minute attention; and reflect long on a thousand little strokes, which are to give the faithful resemblance. The historian should assiduously arrange the minute anecdotes of the age he examines; and oftener have recourse to the diaries of individuals, than to the archives of a nation. Nothing should escape his research, though every thing is not to be reported\*.

*Various*

\* Antiquarian studies begin to rank high in the mind of the philosopher. They seem to be directed to the illustration, not merely of obliterated inscriptions, but of ancient manners. We may observe of what importance, in this interesting subject, are the memorandums of an individual, from the recovery of the book of the Master of the Revels, which Mr. Malone has been so fortunate as to obtain. We enter more fully into the genius of those times, from such publications, than from the superficial accounts and fanciful conjectures of any modern writer. He who would penetrate further into these amusing researches, must apply himself to a close examination of those 200 volumes of old plays which Mr. Garrick has deposited in the British Museum; to a patient perusal of innumerable MSS.; and to the collecting matter from the printed books of the times. We are still in want of a work similar to St. Foix's *Essays on Paris*—one of the most agreeable anecdotal productions which the philosopher and the antiquary has yet produced.

*Various Anecdotes illustrating the History of Manners.*

To inform the world, that in the xvth century, bishops only were permitted the use of silk; that princes and princesses only had the prerogative of wearing scarlet clothes either of silk or of wool; and that only princes and bishops had a right to wear shoes made of silk;—such anecdotes would appear trivial in the hands of a mere antiquary; but they become important when touched by a philosophical historian. These little particulars awaken, in the mind of Voltaire, an admirable reflection; he says, “All these sumptuary laws only shew, that the government of these times had not always great objects in view; and that it appeared easier for ministers to proscribe than to encourage industry.”

Had I to sketch the situation of the Jews in the ninth century, and to exhibit at the same time the character of that age of bigotry, could I do it more effectually than by the following anecdote, which a learned friend discovered in some manuscript records?

A Jew of Rouen in Normandy, sells a house to a christian inhabitant of that city. After some time of residence, a storm happens, lightning falls on the house, and does considerable damage. The christian unenlightened, villainous, and pious, cites the trembling descendant of Israel into court for damages. His eloquent counsellor hurls an admirable philippic against this detestable nation of heretics, and concludes by proving, that it was owing to this house having been the interdicted property of an Israelite, that a thunderbolt fell upon the  
roof.

roof. The judges (as it may be supposed) were not long in terminating this suit. They decreed that God had damaged this house as a mark of his vengeance against the property of a jew, and that therefore it was just the repairs should be at his cost.

Perhaps it is to be acknowledged, that the judges were merciful, and the jew fortunate. To be condemned to rebuild a house, is better than to be burnt with some of its old wood.

I shall add one more instance which may prove, that it is alone by anecdotes the genius of an age or nation is thoroughly to be understood.

The French nation, before their singular revolution, displayed a splendid scene of refinement, of luxury, and of frivolity, which perhaps was never yet presented to the eye of the philosopher, on this theatre of the world. In reading the secret memoirs of that country (a scandalous chronicle, which was carried on for above thirty years) one gathers many curious particulars, which can only be found in these fugitive leaves. Religion was forbidden by the philosophers, and politics by the government. They exhausted their active and volatile genius, on the objects of taste; taste that they contrived should be the image of both, for it had its heresies, and its parties. The theatre, and the book-seller's shop, formed the great concerns of the Parisian. Voltaire was more to be dreaded, than the prime minister; and Mad. Clairon (their celebrated actress) appears to have enjoyed the sovereignty of Paris.

Sometimes we observe, that a publication ferments a town for a week; the minister sends the author to the Bastille for a month: the book is publicly burnt, forbidden to be sold, and every body has it by heart. The police sometimes is so rigid as to put an embargo on all MSS.; to imprison censors of books because they suffered passages to be printed which appeared to the court of an offensive nature; in a word, several printers are compelled to sell their founts, and a dismal barrenness appears in the literature of France.

Sometimes we perceive theatrical representations to be the objects of ministerial vengeance. They forbid a particular play, whose subject might be applicable to the moment; or even a particular passage of a play, which the malicious actor pronounced with emphasis.\*

I give

\* On the 10th February, 1762, in playing *Tancred*, Mad. Clairon, when she came to these verses,

‘ On dépouille Tancrede, on l’exile, on l’outrage,—

‘ C’est le sort d’un Heros d’être persecuté—

‘ Tout son parti se tait; qui sera son appui?

‘ Sa gloire—

‘ Un Heros qu’on opprime attendrit tous le cœurs—’

This sublime actress made such inflections of her voice, so noble and so penetrating, that all the audience recollected the event of that day, which was a lettre de cachet the Marquis de Broglio had received. His name flew from mouth to mouth (says my reporter) and the representation was frequently interrupted by loud applauses which were continually renewed.

The next day the house was forbidden to act the tragedy of *Tancred*, in consequence of what had passed on the preceding representation.

I give one striking example of the national character at this period; and for this purpose I employ the following anecdotes.

Molé, a favourite actor, is taken ill, and is confined to his chamber; when this is announced from the stage, the gaiety of Paris suddenly lours with gloom. The next day his door is besieged by enquiring crowds; his health is the conversation of all companies. It appeared as if Scipio lay confined, and the virtuous Romans passed their hours in melancholy anxiety, for the life of their protector. The physicians find Molé in an exhausted state, and prescribe a free use of wine. This prescription is soon known in the circles at Paris; and Molé finds two thousand bottles of the finest Burgundy sent to his house from various quarters. Molé at length recovers; all Paris rejoices and rushes to his benefit. Such was the public ardour, that it produced him the amazing sum of 24,000 livres. Molé gratefully receives the valuable tribute of their applause; he was in debt, and the benefit formed all his fortune. How then does Molé apply his 24,000 livres? An Englishman would have purchased an annuity, or perhaps have paid his debts. Molé runs to the jeweller, takes its amount in brilliants, and gives them to his mistress, who boasts that she wears all the honours of the public.

This serves to display at once the frivolity of the nation, and of the individual. All Paris is concerned for the indisposition of an actor, and all terminates in giving diamonds to an impudent brunette.

*Histories compared with Memoirs.*

Of the eminent personages in history, there are many differing characters. We know well how the object will appear when seen through the coloured telescope of a prejudiced historian. The most impartial may not always be successful in his delineations. An intelligent reader frequently discovers *traits* before concealed. He does not perceive these faint touches in the broad canvases of the historian, but in those little portraits which have sometimes reached posterity. He acquires more knowledge of individuals by memoirs, than by histories. In histories there is a majesty, which keeps us distant from great men; in memoirs, there is a familiarity, which invites us to approach them. In histories, we appear only as one who joins the crowd to see them pass; in memoirs, we are like concealed spies, who pause on every little circumstance, and note every little expression.

It is thus that such works as Plutarch's Lives, Froissart's Chronicle, the Memoirs of Comines and Brantome, Burnet's and Clarendon's Histories of their own Times, have ever allured curiosity, and gratified inquiry. There are indeed readers who, when they turn over the pages of history, indulge in the marvellous of romance. A visionary perfection darts from their imagination, and throws around a brilliant delusion. Their heroes are prince Arthurs; their heroines, Unas; their statesmen, Merlins. It must be confessed, that in the mode in which history is frequently composed, there are sufficient reasons to render such a system plausible.

sible. One can hardly meet with the most natural event in the histories of such writers as Tacitus, of Strada, and of Mariana, but these refined writers are for deriving it from some profound policy, or intricate deception. In their studious leisure, it must have been with difficulty that they tortured their inventions to such a stretch; an impossibility in those personages who acted in the tumult of affairs, and concussion of public events\*. The historian frequently seems ignorant of that spontaneous ardour with which the most splendid actions are performed, and discovers a regular plot in the accidental combinations of fortune. Every statesman who comes down to us as a Nestor, I doubt, was not the sage we

\* Crebillon the son, who sacrificed his talents on some licentious Romances, in his *Tanzai* and *Neadarne*, C. 4. has made a judicious reflection on readers of history. I snatch this flower thrown among ordures. He writes, 'The reader of history passes his judgment on its heroes, not so much from what they ought to have done in the circumstances in which they appear before him, as from what he concludes they might have done. He puts himself calmly and seriously in their place; and, divested of the passions which fired them, clears or condemns them, according to the success of their enterprizes: but does not once enquire whether the circumstances would allow them time to deliberate; or whether their impulses would permit them even to glance at reflection. Among the various classes of readers, very few examine incidents with judgment; and most who have abilities for this are oftentimes very unjust.' I add a judicious observation of Patin, on this subject: 'The mysterious discovery of the designs of princes, renders a history valuable; but it must be founded on truth, and not on the imagination of an historian who affects continually to make a new discovery.'

we believe him to have been; nor every general, the Achilles he appears. The most eminent personages are not so remotely removed from the level of ordinary humanity, as the vulgar conceive. Transcendant powers are rarely required; tolerable abilities, placed conspicuously, appear to great advantage; as a lighted torch held in the hand is too common an object to fix our attention, but that torch placed favourably on a hill, would excite our admiration. He who is persuaded of this truth, will be more inclined to search for the characters of eminent persons in their domestic privacies, than in their public audiences; and would prefer the artist's recitals of the valet de chambre of Charles I. to the elegant narrative of his apologist Hume.

*An Anecdote reveals a Character.*

A well-chosen anecdote frequently reveals a character, more happily than an elaborate delineation; as a glance of lightning will sometimes discover what had escaped us in a full light. Some instances may enforce this observation.

*Anecdotes which discover the Characters of eminent Men.*

The character of Oliver Cromwell long exercised the historical talents of European writers. Some French academicians have drawn his character with admirable refinement; Gregorio Leti, amused with agreeable fictions; Raguenet tires with dry truths; at home volumes on volumes have wearied curiosity. All these writers would per-

suade us, that he was an artful mixture of the politician and the hypocrite. A single anecdote lets us more into the genius of the man, than this multiplicity of volumes. When he was with some select friends enjoying a convivial hour, a confidential servant enters, and announces a body 'of the Elect.'—'Tell them,' says Cromwell in the language of fanaticism—'Tell them we are seeking for the Lord—These fools think,' continues he, looking under the table, 'that I am seeking for the Lord, while I am only seeking for the Corkscrew.'

Does not this little anecdote at once present us with the artifices of his politics, and the hypocrisy of his religion?

The anecdote of the death of the gallant Sidney, reveals, with a marvellous force, the genius of chivalry: that genius, which was *valour* in the field, and *love* at court. The hand that led through the graceful dance the beloved sovereign of his soul, while he was bleeding to death, could turn with a feeble, yet energetic power, the cruise of water from his pale and parched lips, to those of his humble companion expiring at his feet.

We are more acquainted with the character of Sir Thomas More, by his jocularities on the scaffold, than by some lives which are to be read of him.

I shall close this topic with a few anecdotal sketches of several monarchs, who have formed epochas in the history of their nations.

We are delighted to attend Augustus amidst the embarrassing affairs of government, into his domestic recesses. To see him the preceptor of his son;

to observe him at supper seated between Virgil and Horace, and to mark him with exquisite wit erase one of his own tragedies. Virgil was afflicted by an asthma, and Horace by a fistula lachrymalis. When Augustus was placed between them he used to say, not unpoetically, 'I am now between sighs and tears.' This lover of the art, aspired to become an artist; he wrote a tragedy called Ajax; but had the good sense to perceive, that if born to be an emperor, he was not born to be a poet. One day he effaced with his sponge the whole tragedy; when it was enquired after, he wittily answered, 'Ajax is dead, he has swallowed his sponge;' alluding to a mode of death practised by the Roman gladiators, who frequently in despair swallowed their sponges. These little anecdotes shew the literary dispositions of Augustus, whom perhaps (as other great monarchs who resemble him) a cruel system of politics alone had made a tyrant\*.

Louis

\* I say politics alone compelled Augustus to sanguinary measures. We know that he would never cause enquiries to be made after the authors of certain papers which had been scattered in the senate, and loaded him with calumnies. When Tiberius wondered at his indifference, this great monarch answered, 'You think like a young man. Let them speak ill of me, it is sufficient for me that I know they can do me none.' Does this conduct of Augustus indicate him to have delighted in the effusion of human blood? When he had attained power, he shewed the most amiable disposition. It is said of him, in comparing the commencement of his reign with its close, it had been desirable, that he had never been, or that he had never ceased to be emperor. Augustus is an eminent example of the force of the terrible genius of politics.

Louis XIV. merits the love of posterity. The genius of his people, not his own, inspired him with attempts inimical to the rights of mankind. When this monarch is deprived of that false glory which his adulators have thrown around him, he will appear to advantage, placed in the softer light of those hours, which he devoted to the society of the great men whom his splendid patronage had formed. Numerous anecdotes of this monarch, are eternal testimonies of his intellectual powers and his fine taste. He loved the conversation of Boileau and Racine. He was not a mere auditor of their works; he admired them with exquisite sensibility, and animadverted on them with just criticism; and we know that he detected several errors. The eye that could catch a Boileau and a Racine tripping, it must be confessed was of no ordinary quickness. Several of these royal conversations have been recorded. It is honourable for the satyrical bard, that he had the boldness frequently to speak his sentiments freely; and what is still more honourable, his majesty did not dislike his frankness. I give the reader one or two interesting anecdotes, relating to these two poets.

It is well known, that when Boileau read one of his epistles, in which are these fine verses, describing the Emperor Titus,

- ‘ Qui rendit de son joug l’univers amoureux ;
- ‘ Qu’on n’alla jamais voir, sans revenir heureux ;
- ‘ Qui soupiroit le soir, si sa main fortunée,
- ‘ N’avoit par ses bienfaits signalé la journée’—

his Majesty was enchanted, and made the poet repeat

repeat them thrice. At that moment, perhaps, he proposed Titus for his model; such was the force of poetry! The next day, he gave orders for war; such was the power of politics! When the satiric bard, for the first time after the death of Racine, paid his respects to the king, Louis received him with affection. He sympathised in the loss; and added, in pulling out his watch, ‘Remember, Boileau, I have an hour for you every week.’

I add one more anecdote, which brings us into his apartment. When the French Augustus was one day confined to his chamber, he sent for Racine. The poet read with grace; and his Majesty asked him to take up some book. A life of Plutarch was proposed. The king objected, because of its old French. ‘Will your Majesty permit me to try a life?’ said Racine. The king consented. Our poet took down a volume of Amiot, and turned his obsolete language into a beautiful style. Louis was in raptures; he rose, and embraced the poet.

It is with difficulty I can persuade myself, that Charles I. would have been a tyrant. The Eikon Basilike, which I consider as the memoirs of his heart, abounds with such strokes of natural feeling, that we cannot easily conceive a tyrant to have possessed them. I give in the note some interesting passages from this work\*. The following anecdote, which

\* I cared, not to lessen myself in some things of my wonted prerogative, since I knew I could be no loser, if I might but gain a recompens in my subjects affections.’ p. 2.

‘Popular tumults are not like a storm at sea, which yet  
‘wants

which Mr. Malone reports from the memorandums of the Master of the Revels, tends to prove, that even in prosperity, he would not suffer his people to be insulted by the language of despotism. The following lines were in a manuscript play of Massinger;

Monies? We'll raise supplies *what ways we please,*  
 And force you to subscribe to blanks, in which  
 We'll mulct you as we shall think fit. The Cæsars  
 In Rome were wise, acknowledging no laws;  
 But what their *swords* did ratify—

I cannot

'wants not its terror; but like an earth-quake, shaking the  
 'verie foundations of all, then which nothing in the world  
 'hath more of horror.' p. 14.

'*More than the law gives me, I would not have, and less  
 'the meanest subject should not.*' p. 24.

'I will studie to satisfie my parliament and my people;  
 'but I will *never, for fear or flatterie, gratifie anie faction, bowe  
 'potent soever; for this were to nourish the disease, and op-  
 'press the bodie.*' p. 75.

'The sens of the injuries don unto my subjects, is as sharp  
 'as those don to myself.—My afflictions griev mee not more,  
 'then this doth, that I am afflicted by those, whose prosperitie  
 'I earnestly desire, and whose seduction I heartily deplore.—  
 'Yet I had rather suffer all the miseries of life, and die many  
 'deaths, then shamefully to desert, or dishonourably to betrai  
 'my own just rights and sovereigntie.' p. 109.

'I know the sharp and necessarie tyrannie of my destroyers  
 'will sufficiently confute the calumnies of tyrannie against  
 'mee.' p. 229.

'It is verie strange, that mariners can finde no other  
 'means to appeas the storm themselves have raised, but by  
 'drowning their pilot.' p. 233.

I cannot do better than transcribe the words of Sir Henry Herbert: 'I have entered this, here, for ever to bee remembered by my son, and those that cast their eyes on it, in honour of king Charles, my master, who, readinge over the play at Newmarket, set his marke upon the place with his owne hande, and thes words,

*' This is too insolent, and to bee changed!'*

This anecdote, with others which might be given, and the whole of the eloquent Eikon Basilike, strongly indicate, that the inclinations of Charles were remote from tyranny. He was, indeed, firmly persuaded, that a king had just powers, of which it was as necessary to be careful, as of the just rights of his people. Such was his conviction, that he preferred death, to what he considered ignominy.

I conclude this topic with an anecdote of the unfortunate Louis XVI. little known, but which forcibly characterizes the dispositions of this monarch. In a conversation on the subject of Rousseau's works, he said, that he wished it were possible to annihilate the Emilius, on education; because, in that book, the author attacks religion, disturbs the security of society, and the just subordination of citizens; it can only tend to render men unhappy.—But the social contract has also a most dangerous tendency, observed a courtier.—'As for that,' he replied, in words which ought not to be forgotten, 'it is very different. It only attacks the authority of sovereigns; that is a subject  
5. *proper*

'proper to discuss. There is much to be said; it is susceptible of controversy.'

Does not this anecdote reveal the dispositions of the monarch? It is curious to observe, that Charles I. lost his head, because he was tenacious of his rights, and Louis XVI. because he was ever prompt to yield them to his subjects. A striking testimony this, of the mad ignorance of the multitude, who know not either to govern others, or themselves\*.

*By Anecdots we become acquainted with Human Nature.*

If it is not too solemn a question for this light essay, I ask, in what manner is the knowledge of human nature acquired?

Of some extraordinary minds it has been said, that their knowledge is attained by that sublime conception, which surveys at one glance the species, and becomes as it were by intuition, familiar with the individual. A Shakespeare has certainly given the most forcible language and descriptions

\* Patin has made an admirable reflection on the caprices of that many-headed monster, the people. These are his words: 'Indeed, the people know not what they would have, nor what they should have.' *Plebs plerumque contra sua commoda certat.* The people neither understand nor follow their interests. They murmur against those who elevate themselves; and do not reflect, that when these fall, others will appear still more desirous of doing the same thing, or perhaps, greater evils, and who can only succeed with new calamities to the people.'

descriptions to characters and situations, which never passed under his eye. Such phenomena in nature we admire; but who dare imitate? We gain our knowledge by the slow accession of multiplied facts; these our reflection combines, and thus combined, they form what we call experience. Rochefoucault, when with such energetic conciseness he composed his celebrated Maxims, had ever some particular circumstance, or some particular individual, before him. When he observed, that, 'It displays a great poverty of mind, to have only one kind of genius,' he drew this reflection from repeated *anecdotes* which he had collected in the persons of Boileau and Racine\*. It was a happy idea of Amelot de la Houffaie, when he gave an edition of these admirable Maxims, to illustrate several from examples, or anecdotes, drawn from history. If they were all thus illustrated, by well-collected authorities, it would form not only a rich repast for amateurs of anecdotes, but impress more forcibly the solid sense, sometimes too closely compressed in these concise maxims†.

The

\* See *Curiosities of Literature*, vol. ii. art. *Poets*.

† I will add an instance or two, in what manner Houffaie has enforced some of these reflections.

Rochefoucault observes, 'In jealousy there is less love than self-love.' Which reflection Houffaie illustrates by this anecdote taken from Tacitus. 'Witness Rhadamistus, who threw his beloved wife into a river, that she might not fall into the hands of another.'

The Duke observes, 'The art of setting off moderate qualifications, steals esteem; and often gives more reputation than real merit.' His commentator gives, on this observation,

The bulk of mankind indeed, when facts present themselves to their contemplation, are incapable of contemplating. Ignorant of their utility, they only regard them as objects of idle amusement. Yet the science of human nature, like the science of physics, was never perfected till vague theory was rejected for certain experiment. An Addison and a Bruyere accompany their reflections by characters; an anecdote in their hand informs us better than a whole essay of Seneca. Opinions are fallible, but not examples.

A writer elegantly declaims against the vanity of a poet; but when he judiciously gives a few of the innumerable instances of poetical vanity, we shall comprehend him with more certainty, and follow his reflections with the firm conviction of truth. Would he inform us, that innumerable little follies prevail in very great minds? Every opinion is disputable. But we become persuaded of its truth, when he reminds us, that Sir Robert Walpole, a great minister, was ambitious of being a man of gallantry; and that another great minister,

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tion, the following character from Tacitus: ‘Poppæus Sabinus, of moderate birth, obtained the consulship, and the honour of a triumph; and governed, for four and twenty years, the greatest provinces, without any extraordinary merit; being just capable of his employments, and in no manner above them.’

I have been told of a more curious work of this kind, but have not seen it, written by one of our countrymen, long before Houshaie's time. Dallington's Aphorisms from Guiccardini amplified with authorities, and exemplified with historie. London, 1613. folio.

Cardinal Richelieu, was not less ambitious of being distinguished as a poet; while the one was as awkward in his compliments, as the other in his verses. In a word, the wife Elizabeth was a coquette. The ambitious Charles V. terminated his career by watch-making. Racine believed himself a politician.

When an author gives a character which strikes by its singularity, an anecdote will serve to establish the veracity of its existence. Thus the character of the astronomer in *Rasselas*, finely described by Johnson, is a character founded in nature. With a wonderful sublimity of genius, this student is represented with an imbecility little to be suspected, that of believing himself invested with the power of regulating the seasons. A similar character was this of Pöffel. His Lectures were attended by such crowds, that he was obliged to harangue his auditors at a window, the hall of the collège at Paris not being sufficiently large to contain them; yet this man, (otherwise so judicious) cherished the extravagant folly of believing himself endowed with a supernatural reason. He hoped to convert all the nations of the earth, and had ever in mind the idea of creating an order, to be called the Knights of Christ; and for this purpose associated with the Jesuits, who expelled him when they perceived his disempowered imagination.

We cannot therefore accumulate too many of such little facts; I say facts, otherwise we may err in our deductions: as, when one part of a sum is wrong, the total amount must infallibly be so. Facts are anecdotes, but anecdotes are not always facts.

It

It is only the complaint of unreflecting minds, that we collect too great a number of anecdotes. Why is human knowledge imperfect, but because life is short, and nature infinite? The man of most experience, still finds that he has new characters to understand, old opinions to confirm, and knowledge to correct, as well as to acquire. Human nature, like a vast machine, is not to be understood by looking on its superficies, but by dwelling on its minute springs and wheels. Let us no more then be told, that anecdotes are the little objects of a little mind.

*Anecdotes lead the Mind into Reflections.*

Anecdotes afford the most exquisite instruction. They produce in an ingenious observer, those leading thoughts which throw the mind into an agreeable train of thinking. A skilful writer of anecdotes, gratifies by suffering us to make something that looks like a discovery of our own; he gives a certain activity to the mind, and the reflections appear to arise from ourselves. He scatters unperceivably seeds, and we see those flowers start up, which we believe to be of our own creation. A few pages of interesting anecdotes, afford ample food for the mind\*.

\* I quote the observation of a man of genius on this subject. Lord Bolingbroke says, 'When examples are pointed out to us, there is a kind of appeal with which we are flattered, made to our senses, as well as our understandings. The instruction comes then from our own authorities. We yield to fact, when we resist speculation.'

If we regard anecdotes as they are connected with the republic of letters, I do not hesitate to declare, that they offer the most exquisite gratification.

### *On Literary Anecdotes.*

In literary biography, a man of genius always finds something which relates to himself. In the history of his fellow students, a writer traces the effects of similar studies; he is warned by their failures, or animated by their progress. He discovers that, like himself, the sublimest geniuses have frequently stretched the bow without force, and without skill. He is not displeased to find that Pope composed an epic, a tragedy, and a comedy; that the two first were burnt, and the comedy damned. La Mothe was so sensibly afflicted by the unfortunate fate of his first dramatic essay, that he renounced society, and buried himself in the melancholy retreat of La Trappe. He perhaps considered, that a condemned poet, would make an excellent penitent\*.

### *Various Anecdotes illustrating Literary Topics.*

From anecdotes a man of letters gathers the following particulars interesting to him.

It is curious to observe the first dawn of genius breaking on the mind. Sometimes a man of genius,

\* These instances (and many similar ones of celebrated writers, might be added) I give, not from any petty malignancy of criticism, but with the intention of the writers of the holy Scriptures; who report the failings of *Saints*, that those of feebler powers may not want something to keep them from despair.

nus, in his first effusions, is so far from revealing his future powers, that, on the contrary, no reasonable hope can be formed of his success. In the violent struggle of his mind, he may give a wrong direction to his talents; as Swift, in two pindaric odes, and Dryden by an elegy, which have been unfortunately preserved in their works. Sometimes he displays no talents, even among those who are able to decide on them; his genius, like Æneas, is veiled by a cloud, and remains unperceived by his associates. This was the case of Goldsmith; who was so far from displaying a fine genius, that even his literary companions, before the publication of his beautiful poems, regarded him as a compiler for booksellers, not a writer for men of taste. Sometimes, when an author displays an early genius, it is not expressed with all its force. Several have begun versifiers, and concluded poets; perhaps this is no unjust idea of Pope.

Is a man of genius oppressed with domestic miseries? Does he tread on thorns, while he cultivates flowers? he ceases to feel his own griefs, while he contemplates those of his masters. On the misfortunes of the learned, more than one volume has been composed\*. The domestic persecutions of a  
man

\* Pierius Valerianus, has given a little book, intitled, *De infelicitate litteratorum*, which he wrote from his own situation, in which for many years he participated in the miseries he recorded of other scholars. It was afterwards greatly enlarged.—A collection has been published at Leipzig, in 1647, intitled, *Analeſta de calamitate litteratorum*. Several  
other

man of genius are more frequent, and more formidable to his sensibility, than those of a party or of the public. Exquisite misery! to feel the lacerations of the soul, from the objects to which it turns for repose and delight! An illiterate parent, who harailes the mild dispositions of his philosophic son, and counts, with all the anxiety of the father and the merchant, the hours he lavishes on his studies, has been an ordinary misery of literary men. The father of Petrarch one day, in a barbarous rage, burnt his small but invaluable library before his face; and Voltaire, with a thousand other writers, have broken their fathers' heart by their constant application to poetry, and utter neglect of the law\*. Can we read without indignation, that the family

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other works on this subject have appeared. Dr. Wendeborn observes, 'a great many lives of learned Englishmen might be collected, to enlarge a book which was written in Latin on literary men, who were unhappy, and struggled with misfortunes.' View of England, vol. ii. p. 8.

\* Hume says, in the slight sketch he gives of his life, 'My studious disposition, my sobriety, and my industry, gave my family a notion that the law was a proper profession for me; but I found an insurmountable aversion to every thing but the pursuits of philosophy, and general learning; and while they fancied I was poring upon Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the authors which I was secretly devouring.'

Young has described the character of such a parent as Descartes with his usual vigour of wit:

Lampridius, from the bottom of his breast,  
Sighs o'er one child, but triumphs in the rest.  
How just his grief! one carries in his head  
A less proportion of the father's lead.

The

family of the great Descartes were insensible to the lustre his studies reflected on their name? They grievously lamented, as a blot, which could not be effaced from their arms, that Descartes, who was born a *gentleman*, should become a *philosopher*! This elevated genius was even denied the satisfaction of embracing his expiring parent; while his dwarfish brother, whose mind must have been as diminutive as his person, ridiculed his philosophic relative, and turned to advantage his philosophic dispositions. The sublime Bacon generally sat at the end of his table in a state of abstraction, while at the other his dependants cheated, ridiculed, and loaded him with infamous aspersions. We must not look into the domestic recesses of men of genius, if we would consider them as beloved or happy.

The purpose of this Dissertation is an attempt, however feeble, to exhibit the utility, and the delight of anecdote in the investigation of any topic. I therefore shall not wander from it, in sketching several subjects relative to literary men, composed of reflections, illustrated by anecdotes.

The *dunghill breed* of men a diamond scorn,  
 And feel a passion for a *grain of corn*;  
 Some stupid, plodding, money-loving wight,  
 Who wins their hearts by knowing black from white,  
 Who with much pains exerting *all* his sense,  
 Can range aright his shillings, pounds, and pence.  
 The booby father craves a booby son,  
 And by Heaven's blessing thinks himself undone.

It has been said, that Envy is only the offspring of little minds. This has been repeated from age to age; but it is one of those popular prejudices which are not the less false, because they are of a remote date. Of literary jealousy, to select instances were difficult, because of their abundance. Why does Plato never mention Xenophon, and why does Xenophon inveigh with bitter crimination against Plato and studiously collects every little report which may detract from his fame? They wrote on the same subject! Why did Swift and Milton treat with contempt the rhymes of Dryden? Why did Corneille, tottering on the grave, when Racine consulted him on his first tragedy, advise the author never to write another? Why does Voltaire continually detract from the sublimity of Corneille, the sweetness of Racine, and the fire of Crebillon? Why was the admirable La Fontaine not even mentioned by the French Horace in all his works? Why must posterity lament that the name of Young is to be found in the Dunciad of Pope? Why did Boccaccio, in sending to Petrarch a copy of Dante, make an apology for it? and why did the latter, in his answer, speak coldly of Dante's merits\*?

It

\* Why is Waller silent on the merits of Cowley, why not give one verse to return the praise with which Dryden honoured him? Could not Milton extort his due share of applause? No! he is warm in his panegyric on Beaumont and Fletcher, on Sandys, Ware, and D'Avenant; because of some of these their species of composition was different from his own, and the rest he could not fear. See cursory remarks on some of the antient English poets. London, 1789.

It is difficult to repress our indignation at this envy of writers, who should look for that support from each other, which is sometimes unjustly denied them by the world. In contemplating on this subject, we are struck with the same horror as if, looking into a nest of doves, we beheld vipers hissing at each other.

We must feel another kind of indignation, which falls not upon authors, but their readers. Men of genius have complained, that their acquaintances are the last persons in the world, whose affections they can win. I collect several testimonies.

When the voice of the public shall inform the friends of a man of genius, how much he merits their affection, they will be incapable of bestowing it. A familiar acquaintance with an author (observes Hume) may diminish the applause due to his performance. It was the eternal misery of Rousseau, that his friends did not know how much he merited their affections. On this subject, in the 'Thirty Letters,' the acute Mr. Jackson has judiciously observed, that 'none judge less favourably of an author than his intimate friends; their personal knowledge of him, as a man, destroys a hundred delusions to his advantage as an author.'——Monnoye, in a letter written when he first made his appearance as a writer, has described the situation of a young author with sensibility and truth. These are his words: 'You know the town I inhabit: one of the greatest faults a man can have, it seems, is a little merit; a multitude of enemies is the certain fate of all those who appear  
desirous

‘ desirous of distinguishing themselves. You have  
 ‘ read my poem on the abolishment of duels. They  
 ‘ said, at first, that it was good for nothing; and  
 ‘ after the Academy had crowned it with their prize,  
 ‘ pretended it was not written by me.’

A French orator exclaims, ‘ It is true, that a su-  
 ‘ perior genius finds himself sometimes esteemed  
 ‘ during his life-time; but he must generally seek  
 ‘ for it, at the distance of three hundred leagues.’  
 I transcribe, on this subject, what the ingenious au-  
 ‘ thor of the Mirror writes, perhaps prompted by his  
 ‘ own feelings. In mentioning the work he says, ‘ The  
 ‘ place of its publication, was in several respects, dis-  
 ‘ advantageous. There is a certain distance at which  
 ‘ writings, as well as men, should be placed, in order  
 ‘ to command our attention and respect. We do  
 ‘ not easily allow a title to instruct or to amuse  
 ‘ the public, in our neighbour, with whom we  
 ‘ have been accustomed to compare our own abi-  
 ‘ lities. Hence the fastidiousness with which, in  
 ‘ a place so narrow as Edinburgh, home produc-  
 ‘ tions are commonly received; which, if they are  
 ‘ grave, they are pronounced dull; if pathetic, are  
 ‘ entitled unnatural; if ludicrous, are termed low\*.’  
 So just is this last observation, that I cannot forbear  
 noticing,

\* *Metastasio* says, vol. i. p. 181.—“ I am more and more con-  
 ‘ vinced every day, that prophets and poets are seldom honoured  
 ‘ in their own country.”——This has been an evil felt, we ob-  
 ‘ serve, by every man of genius placed in a provincial town. It  
 ‘ was so even among the ancients. See *Martial’s* complaint.  
 ‘ *Pliny* observes on *Protogenes* the Rhodian painter, that his  
 ‘ countrymen would not take any notice of his works till *Apelles*,  
 ‘ visiting him at Rhodes, esteemed his pictures at a high rate.

noticing, that when Rousseau published at Neuchatel some little compositions, they were not relished by his good provincial friends: a few years afterwards, they contributed to the literary pleasures of Paris. Not the qualities of his writings, but those of his readers, were altered.

If these anecdotal observations are relished, another specimen will not displease.

Dr. Joseph Warton, who has employed anecdotes with such pleasing effect in his Essay on the Genius of Pope, has given the following one of a celebrated poet.

‘ So little sensible are we of our own imperfections, that the very last time I saw Dr. Young, he was severely censuring and ridiculing the false pomp of fastidious writers, and the nauseousness of bombast.’

I pursue this speculation, interesting to literature.

Of Seneca, it is observed in the Perroniana, that he himself writes against pointed periods, and the epigrammatic style. Lipsius was extravagantly fond of a certain concise style; his epistles offend by a continued affectation of this kind; yet he not only censures brevity, and declares it to produce a dry jejune mode of writing, but minutely enters into its numerous defects. Cicero very warmly reprehends that abuse, which the Greeks were accustomed to cast on their adversaries, frequently passing from the censure of the work, to satirizing the author himself. But Cicero has left posterity not a few specimens of the abusive style, and the grossest personalities. While Plato inveighs against poetry, he proves himself a great poet. Thus Malbranche declaims against the seductive charms of a

fine

fine imagination, while his own was most beautiful and deluding. Boccacini, as Bayle observes, makes Apollo give very judicious advice to an author, who was hanged for too freely satirizing some noble families; but our sage adviser himself lost his life for having written too freely concerning the Spanish court\*.

Burnet, in the 'History of his own Times,' is continually appealing to God and his conscience for the veracity of his work. These are some of his expressions: 'I solemnly say this to the world, and make my humble appeal upon it to the great God of truth, that I tell the truth on all occasions'— 'I reckon a lie in history to be as much a greater sin than a lie in common discourse, as the one is like to be more lasting and more generally known than the other.' Our bishop had warm prejudices, and  
a lively

\* I give the observation here alluded to. He says, that a judicious historian imitates the grape gatherer: he waits till time has matured the harvest; that is, from speaking of facts, till those who have committed dishonourable actions are no more, and their children have not the power of avenging them.

Marville gives the following account of the singular death of our satirist. He says, 'Boccacini was the author of *La Pietra di Parragone*, a satire against the Spaniards. Too much wit and passion, occasioned our author to be *sacchettato*; that is, he was so heartily beaten by the Spaniards, that he died a few hours afterwards. This is an invention of the Italians to murder a man, without spilling his blood, by beating him on the back with *bags of sand*. The wounds these give are incurable; a gangrene takes place, and death concludes this mode of assassination.'

This will serve as an instance of that inventive genius of assassination, which once characterized the Italians; and which has not entirely deserted their ordinary language, as well as their passions.

a lively imagination; indulging these to an excess, he left far behind him the sober truth of 'a faithful chronicler.' Mr. Lesly, who knew him familiarly, has described his character, by saying, 'He was 'zealous for the truth, but in telling it, he always 'turned it into a lie\*,' perhaps, Lesly too was unjust;

• The following advice to the reader of Burnet's History, forms an ingenious epigram. I give the Latin original, with its translation:

**Monitum lectori, quomodo legenda sit Burnettii Historia sui Temporis, et pro verâ admittenda.**

Leguntur Hebræo verso ordine Literæ,  
 Cancrique, serpunt in contrarium gradus;  
 Tenella virgo, si quem amat perditè  
 (Ea est profervitas) fugit, tanquam oderit;  
 Quemque odit Aulicus, (tanta est urbanitas)  
 Amore abundans quasi studiosus colit:  
 Ut Hebræa legi, cancos ut gradi vides,  
 Tenella ut odit virgo amat ut Aulicus,  
 Hâc lege Lucianus historiam suam,  
 Suamque Burnettus ipse veram dixerit.

Attempted in English.

**Advice to the reader of Burnet's History of his own Time, how it may be read, and admitted for truth.**

The Hebrew characters are backward read,  
 The crab-fish backward crawls with aukward tread;  
 The tender virgin scorched by Cupid's fires;  
 Will seem to hate the man she most desires;  
 The subtle courtier most obsequious waits,  
 And most pretends to love, whom most he hates.  
 As Hebrew books are read, as crab-fish move,  
 As virgins hate, and as sly courtiers love.  
 Just so may Lucian, nay, and Burnet too,  
 Each boldly vouch their histories are true.

Burnet

unjust; Burnet wrote many truths, and some falsehoods which he thought truths.

Cowley, in his Ode to Wit, has the following ingenious stanza; which, however, is but a splendid satire on his own witty poetry. He says, WIT is not

—To adorn, and gild each part;  
That shews more cost, than art.  
Jewels at nose and lips, but ill appear;  
Rather than all things wit, let not none be there.  
Several lights will not be seen,  
If there be nothing else between;  
Men doubt, because they stand so thick i' th' sky,  
If those be stars, which paint the galaxy.

It will not be denied, that the indiscreet muse of Cowley wore jewels both at her nose and lips.

Thus

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Burnet has been called the English Varillas: and the character of the latter writer, attacked by the learned of all nations, and particularly in this country by the ingenious Dr. King, may serve to illustrate that of Burnet.

Varillas has been accused of quoting memoirs which never existed, or in which the facts he relates are not to be found. It is, however, very true that Varillas had read an astonishing number of original memoirs. The life of this man was consumed in his study; and it was his boast, that for thirty years he had not dined from home. He had read so many manuscripts, that his sight failed him, and he lost the use of one eye. By candle-light he could not read; and it was his custom to close his windows at dusk, and then to write his Histories. But as he could not authenticate his anecdotes, by consulting the memoirs which had been furnished to him from the King's Library, in which there is a collection from 8 to 10,000 MSS. he trusted to his memory. This naturally produced

Thus also Dr. Johnson, in some admirable verses\*, censures those writers in whose plays,

—Crush'd by rules, and weaken'd as refin'd,  
For years the power of Tragedy declin'd ;  
From bard to bard the frigid caution crept ;  
Till *Declamation roar'd*, while *Passion slept*.

In the tragedy of Irene it must be acknowledged that ' declamation roars, while passion sleeps.'

Dr. Blair observes of Shaftesbury, ' what is most wonderful, he was a professed admirer of *simplicity* ; is always extolling it in the ancients, and abusing the moderns for the want of it; though he departs from it himself as far as any one modern whatever.'

Sir John Hawkins very liberally censures the style of Addison, which is pleasant enough !

In a word, to conclude this topic, I have observed a hundred French writers declaim against the abuse of what they so happily call *le bel esprit* ; while they are themselves employing it in every period— a hundred English authors abusing the French, while

produced his confusion in facts: what belonged to one kingdom was given to a neighbouring country; what related to one person was transferred to another.

It is possible to suppose that neither Varillas nor Burnet intended to impose on the world. But from these anecdotes we may enforce a very important maxim, that an Historian must not write as *facts* what he only collects from *memory*. If he does otherwise, he is not to be trusted; for however honest may be his intentions, it is certain that he will not only impose on his reader, but impose on himself. Let it also be remembered, that he who relies on his memory, is frequently the dupe of his imagination.

\* Prologue spoken at the opening of Drury-Lane Theatre in 1747.

while at the same time their work and their style are alike an imitation of them.

Were I to make the following observation, the following anecdotes should be attached to it.

A man of genius consumes one portion of his life in painful studies; another in addressing his labours to the public, and combating with rivals; in the last inconsiderable remnant of life, he perhaps begins to enjoy that public esteem for which he had sacrificed its solid consolations, his fortune, his tranquillity, in a word, his domestic Lares. Amidst the funereal cypress he sees the green leaves of the laurel. He resembles a veteran soldier, who, at the moment he is carried from the trenches in an expiring state, receives the honours of promotion. When once removed from the public and his rivals, they refuse him nothing.

Every little thing that belonged to this man of genius becomes an invaluable relic. The living Shakespeare experienced little of that adoration which has been repeatedly paid to him by posterity; nor imagined that the *Mulberry Tree* which he planted (supposing he really did plant it) would have been sought after with as much eagerness as a pious Catholic shews for a piece of the real cross. Thomson never conjectured that his *old chair*\* would

\* At a festival in honour of this Poet of the Seasons, the chair in which it is supposed he composed part of his Seasons, was produced, and communicated a poetic rapture to the admirers of the Muse, assembled on this occasion. Even honest Aubrey could admire the *chair* of a man of genius. Our antiquary says of Ben Jonson, in the curious manuscript which Mr.

Malone

would have been beheld with the eyes of adoration by his countrymen. Rabelais, among his drollest imaginations, could not have conceived that his *cloak* would have been preserved in the university of Montpellier, for future doctors to wear on the day they took their degree.

Such is the public! long misled by the malice of rivals, their decisions are capricious, irresolute, and unjust. Posterity, while it censures the past age, commits the same injustice to its cotemporaries. It exhausts its admiration on an old tree, an old chair, and an old cloak, while the modern Shakespeares, Thomsons, and Rabelais (if there should be any) would pass unobserved by its injudicious applause.

I shall add one more sketch of a literary topic.

Men of genius catch inspiration from that of others. Their mind is not always prepared to pour forth its burning ideas; it is kindled by the sparks struck by collision from the works of great writers. It was thus Cicero informs us that he animated his eloquence by a constant perusal of the Latin and Greek poetry. Poets awaken their imagination by the verses of other poets. Malherbe, Corneille, and Racine, before they applied themselves to composition, put their mind into its proper tone, by repeating the glowing passages of their

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Malone has given in his account of the English Stage, 'I have seen his studying chaire which was of strawe, such as old women used; and as Aulus Gellius is drawn in.' Aubrey should properly have had such 'a studying chaire,' for he was 'an old woman.'

their favourite masters. The most fervid verses of Homer, and the sweetest of Euripides, enriched the memory of Milton\*. It is related of Bossuet, that before he composed a funeral oration, he was accustomed to withdraw for four or five days into his study, and read Homer. When asked the reason of this practice, he expressed himself in these verses,

——Magnam mihi mentem, animumque,  
Delius inspirat vates——

Marville says, the famous orators in the pulpit and at the bar, of his time, used to read the finest passages of the poets, to swell out those feeds of eloquence which nature had scattered in their souls. Thus also, a celebrated preacher boldly copied Seneca, the tragedian; in the violent passions he assumed; and one less ardent, but more tender, interwove in his sermons pieces taken from Ovid. One pleader would only breathe the fury of Juvenal; another displayed the graceful turns which he had borrowed from Horace.

*Collections of Anecdotes serve as an excellent Substitute for the Conversations of eminent Writers.*

We now turn to the consideration of those literary collections, which give the anecdotes and conversations of celebrated men,

The conversations of scholars have been collected in ages of literature: But not having been formed with that care and selection they merited, has

\* 'Milton,' (says Richardson) 'had read and studied all the greatest Poets, and had made all his own; Homer he could almost repeat without book.'

has been the only cause of their falling into dispute. With such substitutes we are enabled, in no ordinary degree, to realize the society of those who no longer exist; and (if I may hazard the expression) to become more real cotemporaries with the great men of another age, than were even their cotemporaries themselves.

Are we not all desirous of joining the society of eminent men? It is the wish of even the illiterate. But the sensibility of genius shrinks tremblingly from the contact of the vulgar, and the arrogance of learning will not descend to their level. They prefer a contemplative silence, rather than incur the chance of being insulted by their admiration.

Few therefore can be admitted to their conversations. Yet when a man of genius displays conversible talents, his conversations are frequently more animated, more versatile, and, I must add, more genuine than his compositions. Such literary conversations may be compared to waters which flow from their source; but literary writings resemble more frequently an ornamented fountain, whose waters are forcibly elevated in artificial irregularities, and sparkling tortuosities.

These collections are productive of utility. We learn from a little conversation accidentally preserved; a fortuitous hint caught as it fell; and an observation which its author might never have occasion to insert in his works, numberless mysteries in the art of literary composition; and those minute circumstances which familiarize us to the genius of  
one

one whom we admire, and whom sometimes we may aspire to imitate.

*Observations on the delight of Literary History.*

Literary history has indeed been pursued with a passionate fondness by the first scholars. I will not wander from home on this occasion, though our neighbours far surpass us in this pleasing species of erudition. Dr. Johnson has said, 'It was what he most loved.' It is curious to observe, that he begins his Biography of our Poets, with a complaint of 'the penury of English biography.' It is the regret of one who felt all its charms, and who perhaps lamented that he could not much improve its miserable fund. Dr. Warburton has called literary history, 'the most agreeable subject in the world.' Dr. Warton, in his Essay on the Genius of Pope, has presented us with an admirable specimen in what manner literary anecdote may be introduced for the illustration of an author, and delight of the reader. Pelisson, in his history of the French Academy, has made an observation on literary history, which will be echoed from the bosom of every man of letters. He writes, 'Had we the particulars recorded of what passed between Augustus, Mæcenas, and the celebrated wits of their age, I know not whether we should read such an history with less curiosity and delight than that of the wars, and affairs of the government of those times. Perhaps (to go still further) we should not read it with less utility and instruction: we, I say, to whom Fortune has given, neither armies to con-  
' duct,

'duct, nor politics to govern; but only study, 'conversatation, and the domestic virtues.' Literary anecdotes carry with them so powerful an attraction, that we consult with pleasure such works as the *Athenæ Oxonienses* of Anthony Wood, though composed in a hard, dry, and repulsive style; and Hawkins's *Life of Johnson*, whose genius revived that of the four Wood. Mr. Boswell, in his *Life of Johnson*, has exquisitely gratified the amateur of literary anecdotes; a work almost as singular in its nature, as its merit.

*Literary Biography cannot be accomplished without a copious Use of Anecdote.*

Without the use of literary anecdote, it is in vain to attempt literary biography.

A biographer should be more solicitous of displaying the genius of the man whose history he writes, than his own. He should not obtrude his own talents on the eye, so much as those of the person whose life he records. Some have written the life of another, merely to shew that they were themselves fine writers.

When Richardson, the father, gave the *Life of Milton*, he did not compose it in the ordinary style of biographers. If we take away some of his eccentricities, his manner is admirable. It is very possible to write the life of a poet, a lord chancellor, and a general, almost in a similar style\*. What is the consequence

\* It was said of Mallet, after he had given the life of Bacon, and who pretended to be employed on that of Marlborough,

sequence of such idle biography? With much trouble we find, at length, that the genius of either remains yet to be known. One poet is made to resemble another; and, what is worse, a poet resembles a lord chancellor. Richardson, a Miltonic enthusiast, was best qualified to give the biography of Milton an enthusiast. He did not remain satisfied with collecting the information which industrious enquiry produced, but he studied to give the character of Milton from his own descriptions. He connected, with an ardour of research, for which posterity should be grateful, from all his works, in verse and in prose, the minute circumstances, and peculiar sentiments, which our sublime poet had recorded of himself.

In reading this sketch of the manners, and the genius, of Milton, we seem to live with him; we participate in the momentary griefs which afflicted him, and the momentary triumphs in which he exulted. We join the old blind bard at the door  
of

borough, that as he had forgotten that Verulam had been a philosopher, he would probably forget that Marlborough had been a general. He did better. He took £.500 for his Life, and never wrote a page of it. By the way, this has been no uncommon practice among authors. Some have published a variety of titles of works, as if they were ready for the press; but of which the titles only had been written. Paschal, who was historiographer to Francis I. forged such titles, that the pension which he received for occupying himself on the French history might be continued. When he died, all his historical performances did not exceed six pages!

of his house, near Bunhill-fields\*; we see him sit there in a grey coarse cloth coat, in the warm sunny weather, breathing the fresh air. His house is, indeed, small, (and what true poet ever possessed a large one?) It has but one room on a floor. Up one pair of stairs, hung in rusty green, sits John Milton, in an elbow chair, in black clothes, yet neat enough. Pale, but not cadaverous; his hands gouty.

And what does Milton say on his blindness, when his enemies reproach him with it as a crime? These are his words, taken from his second defence of the English nation: ‘ I prefer my blindness to ‘ yours,’ (he addresses his adversaries) ‘ yours is sunk ‘ into your deepest senses, blinding your minds, so ‘ that you can see nothing that is sound and solid. ‘ Mine takes from me only the colour and surface ‘ of things, but does not take away from the mind’s ‘ contemplation, what is in those things of true and ‘ constant. Moreover, how many things are there ‘ which I would not see! How many which I can be ‘ debarred the sight without repining! How few ‘ left which I much desire to see! Vile men! who ‘ mock us! The blind have a protection from the in- ‘ juries of men, and we are rendered almost sacred. ‘ To this I impute, that my friends are more ready ‘ and officious to serve me than before, and more ‘ frequently visit me. They do not think that ‘ the only worth of an honest man is placed in his ‘ eyes.’

Richardson

\* Most of the following particulars are given in the lively expressions of Richardson.

Richardson would have considered himself as fortunate, had he been enabled to add another lively scene to the domestic life of Milton. This has been obtained by the late laureat, who, in his second edition of his juvenile poems, has given the nuncupative will of our poet. I gather from a mass of the barren superfluities of legal information, those interesting strokes with which every man of sensibility and taste will sympathize. We must recollect, that at the period to which they relate, Milton was no more the secretary of the commonwealth, and his friends were destroyed or dispersed. These little facts describe more forcibly than the most eloquent declamation, those secret miseries which preyed on the heart of Milton, and which must not only have disturbed his sublime contemplations, but impeded the vigour of his fancy, and the corrections of his criticism.

It is here we learn that his children combined to cheat and to rob him; to embitter his hours with scorn and disaffection; and far from solacing the age of their venerable, their sublime parent, they became impatient for his death. He had

‘ No fond companion of his’ helpless years.’

GOLDSMITH.

The name of Milton must be added to the melancholy catalogue of the unhappy learned. Behold the great Milton, blind, decrepid, poor, and solitary (for solitary he must then have been amidst those who surrounded him) seated by a little fire in  
his

his kitchen, crying to his wife, with a voice of patient grief, ' Make much of me as long as I live.'—When his meat is brought to him, because it is made agreeable to his taste (for he was delicate though temperate) he exclaims with grateful pleasure to his wife, ' God have mercy, Betty, I see ' thou wilt perform according to thy promise, in providing me such dishes as I think fit, whilst I live.'—Such is our own domestic language, and such was the domestic language of the sublimest genius. Genius is not above the little consolations of humanity.

Let me reflect a moment on the scene that occupies my imagination. Men of genius! the reflection is addressed to you. Milton had perhaps wandered in the fields of fancy, and consoled his blindness with listening to the voice of his nation, that was to have resounded with his name. To Virgil, and Tasso, and Ariosto, not his masters but his rivals, their country had not been ungrateful. One had basked in the sunshine of a court; the other had seen the laurel wreath prepared for him at Rome; and the last lived to hear his name repeated in the streets, and saluted as the poet of his nation. Milton had enriched his national poetry with two epics—what were his rewards? Milton considered himself as fortunate in having one female who did not entirely abandon him; and one obscure fanatic, who was pleased with his poems because they were religious. What laurels! What felicities!

Je lis les noms des poètes fameux ;

Où sont les noms des poètes heureux ?

GRESSET.

*Anecdotes considered as a Source of literary Amusement superior to Romances.*

On anecdotes, judiciously arranged, another observation is to be made.

Men of letters, to unbend from their severer studies, have frequently had recourse to the works of mere imagination. Romances have been admitted into their libraries; they fly,

— — from serious Antonine

To Rabelais' ravings, and from prose to verse.

ARMSTRONG.

To solace mental fatigue by the amusements of fancy, is no loss of time. Students know how often the eye is busied in wandering over the page, while the mind lies in torpid inactivity; they therefore compute their time, not by the hours consumed in study, but by the real acquisitions they obtain; they do not number the voyages they make, but the gold and the diamonds they bring home. A man of letters best feels the truth of the maxim of Hesiod when applied to Time, that, 'Half is better than the whole.' But it is a complaint of ingenious minds, that when they deviate into the gardens of Armida, they want the fortitude of Rinaldo to exile themselves from their enchantments. Yet works of amusement must relieve those of learning. If a student values his hours, it is therefore as dangerous for him to read romances, as it would be not to read them.

It is perhaps more desirable to have such literary collections at hand. Anecdotes gratify the ease of indolence by their conciseness, and the love  
of

of novelty by that infinite variety which they present to the mind. Perhaps the interest they excite is superior to that we feel in a work of imagination. It must be felt so at least by the enthusiastic votary, who approaches his masters with anxiety, with curiosity, with admiration.

What painter but must receive an exquisite gratification in this anecdote of Poussin? ‘ I saw ‘ Poussin (says Marville) during my residence at ‘ Rome. I have frequently admired the excessive ‘ love this excellent painter had for the perfection ‘ of his art. Old as he then was, I have met him ‘ among the ruins of ancient Rome, and sometimes ‘ in the country, and on the borders of the Tiber, ‘ sketching whatever he remarked the most to his ‘ taste. I have seen him frequently return with his ‘ handkerchief full of stones, moss, flowers, and ‘ similar objects, which he was desirous of painting ‘ exactly after nature. I asked him one day by ‘ what means he had attained that high excellence ‘ which had placed him so eminently among the ‘ Italian painters; he answered modestly, *I have ‘ neglected nothing.*’

And what poet is not interested in this literary anecdote of a kindred nature, which Johnson has recorded of Pope? I do not venture to change his expressions: ‘ From his attention to poetry he was ‘ never diverted. If conversation offered any thing ‘ that could be improved, he committed it to ‘ paper. If a thought, or perhaps an expression ‘ more happy than was common, rose to his mind, ‘ he was careful to write it; an independant dis-

‘ tich was preserved, for an opportunity of insertion ; and some little fragments have been found containing lines, or parts of lines, to be wrought upon at some other time.’

While such anecdotes form a source of literary amusement, they convey at the same time some of it's most valuable instructions. We learn from these anecdotes of Poussin and of Pope, that a painter must bring home moss and flowers, and a poet sentiments and images. There is nothing so minute, that should be neglected ; nothing so vast but which may escape ; we must therefore habituate our mind to studious attention, as much out of our cabinet as in it. The painter does not always require his easel to paint, nor the poet his poem to compose ; their genius accompanies them in their walks, and in their conversations.

Another reflection offers itself to my mind :

*The Instructions which an Artist may derive from Anecdotes.*

The studies of artists have a great uniformity. They have all the same difficulties to encounter, though they do not all meet the same glory. It is also certain, that several men of genius have seen their labours neglected for their deficiency in that art of finishing, which is the excellence of art. An artist has many artifices to employ, of which, if he is ignorant, he will never attain that rank which he otherwise would merit. It is not probable that the zeal of his friends, nor even the malice of his critics, will be capable of discovering to

him

him those mysteries of which he is ignorant, or those failings which render his attempts fruitless. Such arts of composition are alone to be attained by patient meditation on his own, and on the labours of others. It will be impossible for him to turn over a series of anecdotes, skilfully arranged, and enlightened by reflections, but he will gain some valuable intelligence which relates to his own studies. From one, he learns in what manner he corrected and planned; from another, in what manner he overcame those obstacles, which perhaps at that very moment obstructed his progress, and made him rise in despair from his own unfinished labour. What perhaps he had in vain desired for half his life, is revealed to him by an anecdote. It is thus that the recreations of indolence may impart the vigour of study; as we find sometimes in the fruit we took for pleasure, the medicine that restores our health.

*Anecdotes of various Use to Writers.*

It is necessary that the mind of a writer should be richly stored with anecdotes of all kinds. The most unconnected anecdote may be advantageously employed. Anecdotes will serve to enliven his writings by a pleasing diversity; to strengthen his opinions by a happy illustration; and they will afford him a fund of ingenious allusions. I have given sufficient examples of the first kinds; I add one of the latter. In No. 172 of the Rambler, the great Moralist thus expresses himself: ‘ A Virginian king,

‘ was so delighted to find his subjects admitted or excluded with such facility, that it was from morning to evening his whole employment to turn the key. We, among whom locks and keys have been longer in use, are inclined to laugh at this American amusement; yet I doubt whether this paper will have a single reader that may not apply this story to himself, and recollect some hours of his life, in which he has been equally overpowered by the transitory charms of trifling novelty.’ By this anecdote of the Virginian king, we may perceive in what manner the ingenuity of a writer may employ, for the happiest application, the most trifling and unconnected anecdote.

To return to the subject of anecdotes relating to literary men. There are some who appear born with an antipathy to anecdotes. They exclaim, ‘ Give me no anecdotes of an author, but give me his works.’ This contempt is erroneous, and prejudicial to literature.

*Anecdotes of an Author serve as Comments on his Works.*

One likes to know the history and the occasion of a work; and above all the character of an author. It is certain that these little circumstances serve greatly to lead us into his genius, and the proper understanding of many passages. This is very necessary in political writings, in memoirs, and such as are entitled, ‘ histories of our own time.’ We, of all other nations, abound with party writers; and it is sometimes even necessary not only to know the

character

*character* of an *author*, but the very *date* of his *publications*. Every true Briton is doubtless a disinterested patriot, yet he rarely appears insensible to the offer, or the refusal of a pension. Our politics are as various as our atmosphere; and are divided into as many sects as our religion. The bigotry of toryism is seen sometimes to terminate in the atheism of whiggism. An Englishman is for saving his soul and the nation in the way that he likes best.

*Anecdotes of historical Writers very necessary for the Reader of their Works.*

It is therefore very useful to have anecdotes of such writers. When we read Parker's History of his own Time, we cease to be surpris'd at seeing the celebrated Marvell treated as an outcast of society; an infamous libeller; and one whose talents were as despicable as his person. We know that this description was dictated not only by the hatred of party, but by that of personal rancour. When we read Froissart, we must not be misled by his apparent simplicity and captivating naivete; we must remember, that he lived in our country, an adulator of Queen Philippa and the English court. When we read Comines, it will not be improper to recollect this anecdote\*. This writer had been born a subject, and had been long a favourite of the Duke of Burgundy. Returning from the chace, he one day sat down before his prince, and jocosely ordered him to pull off his boots. It is not less improper than dangerous, to amuse one's self with a prince.

The

\* It is to be found in Amelot de la Houssaie's *Mémoires Politiques*, but I have forgot the volume.

The duke pulled off his boots, and dashed them in Comines' face, which bled freely. From that time he was mortified at the court of Burgundy by the nick-name of *the booted head*. Comines felt the wound in his mind. He soon afterwards went over to the king of France. It was at that court he composed his Memoirs, in which his old patron, the Duke of Burgundy, is represented as a monster of pride, of tyranny and cruelty. I am afraid that if we closely examine into the anecdotes of the writers of memoirs, we shall find that many, like Comines, have had the boot dashed in their face.

I cannot dismiss this topic, without disclosing to the public an anecdote which should not have been hitherto concealed from it. When some historians meet with any information in favour of those personages whom they have chosen to execrate as it were systematically, they employ forgeries, interpolations, or, still more effectual villainies. Mrs. Macaulay consulted MSS. at the British Museum, and in her historical researches, I believe, *destroyed the page* of the MS! These dilapidations were at length perceived, and she was watched. The Harleian MS. 7379, will go down to posterity as an eternal testimony of her historical impartiality. It is a collection of state letters. This MS. has three pages entirely torn out; and it has a note, signed by the principal librarian, that on such a day the MS. was delivered to her, and the same day the pages were found to be *destroyed*.\*

*Addison's*

\* When I gave this anecdote I considered it as my duty. It has been the occasion of bringing on me more enmity and calumny,

*Addison's Observation on Anecdotes illustrated.*

There is not less serious truth than exquisite humour, in the well-known observation with which Addison opens his Spectators. He says, 'I have observed that a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure, until he knows whether the writer of it be a black or a fair man, of a mild or choleric disposition, with other particulars of the like nature, that conduce very much to the right understanding of an author.'

I confess I shall read the works of the three great Italian writers, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccacio, with more delight, since I have become acquainted with their portraits, elaborately drawn by Tiraboschi.† From this useful writer I am informed that Dante was much given to musing, and inclined to melancholy; that he had something like pride in his nature; silent in ordinary company, but when he spoke every word was deeply thought. His conversation was as satirical concerning those he did not esteem, as it was grateful to his friends and patrons,

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calumny, from the partizans of Mrs. Macaulay, than I once imagined I should through all my life have suffered. It has been sifted to the bottom. The late Dr. Morton, who was the writer of the memorandum, when called on, would not give a satisfactory answer; but an artful evasion. In the Monthly Review for 1794—the correspondence on this subject has been preserved.—I do not feel myself authorized to expunge the anecdote; and I leave the reader to form his own opinion.

† See his copious History of Italian Literature.

patrons. Such was the poet of the fombrous and satiric Inferno !

He who is the model of tender sonnets, and the poet of the Loves and the Graces, was beautiful in his person, enchanting in his conversation, while his eloquence enraptured his delighted auditors. He knew to vary his employments ; to fly from the court into the depth of solitude \* ; and it was thus that this amiable genius became as learned as he was accomplished.

The licentious writer of the most agreeable prose in Italian literature, had neither the sublime melancholy of Dante, nor the enchanting politeness of Petrarch. In the travels which, in his youthful years, he made in the character of a merchant, he had acquired his variety of knowledge of human nature, and a decided taste for that freedom of gaiety, which does not always spare the blushes of the modest, and the tremors of the pious. Love,  
good

\* Zimmerman gives another turn to this continual change of place. He says, in his Solitude, ' Petrarch possessed a restless and unquiet mind ; displeas'd because he was not where he could not go ; because he could not attain every thing he wished ; because he looked in vain for something it was impossible he should find. Petrarch, in short, possessed all those defects which generally accompany men of genius.'

When we consider that he propos'd to reside at Venice, and made even a present of his library to the republic, yet could not remain there above two years, with other similar resolutions, which were broken almost as soon as formed, one must prefer this opinion of Zimmerman to Tiraboschi ; so difficult is it, however, to fix on the truth !

good eating, and polite literature, were his divinities. He was large and corpulent, an able drinker, an excellent companion, and an adorer of the ladies. The priests, at length, frightened poor Boccacio, as they afterwards did his happy disciple La Fontaine. Boccacio suddenly became reserved, solitary, and melancholy; his studies partook of his dispositions, for, after his conversion, (Tiraboschi says) he produced nothing that we can read. One is inclined to lament that he became religious.

It is not amiss, when we read the misanthropic works of Hobbes, to recollect, that the philosopher of Malmesbury wrote many of them in a manner which, perhaps, has rendered them so rugged. We are told, that soon after dinner he would retire into his study, and have his candle, with ten or twelve pipes, placed by him; then shutting the door, he began smoking, thinking, and writing. From a man who would smoke ten pipes at his studies, it was but natural that his writings should retain something of the effluvia of the tobacco. Such a one might be a philosophic politician, but not a poetic philanthropist.

*A Writer of Talents sees Connexions in Anecdotes not perceived by others.*

Yet let it not be considered, that, however sensible I may appear to the charms of striking anecdotes, I do not perceive that frequently they are frivolous, insipid, and inconsequential. Many collectors of anecdotes have shewn, by their inability, that some talents are requisite, to render them

valuable ; some taste in their selection, some judgment in their arrangement, and some elegance in their style. A man of penetration sees connexions in anecdotes, which are not immediately perceived by others ; in his hands anecdotes (even should they be familiar to us) are susceptible of a thousand novel turns. We have only to examine the Eloges of the French academicians, composed by Fontenelle and D'Alembert, to perceive in what manner literary anecdotes should be presented, and to most of our writers to see how they should not be given.

*A Model of Anecdotal Composition.*

As the design of this Essay is to shew in what manner any topic may be enforced, or illustrated, by anecdotes, (rather than the manner in which a single anecdote may be given) I prefer to offer, as a model of this species of anecdotal composition, some parts of the Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting, by Du Bos. When this ingenious reflector would establish his observation, 'that the impulse of genius determines those who were born with it, to become a painter or poet,' he shews, by a series of connected anecdotes, that most of the celebrated artists were never born the sons of painters\*. As for poets, they are still a more striking testimony of this impulse of genius. No father ever yet designed his son to assume the profession of a poet. We cannot doubt the truth of these observations, when we read that variety of anecdotes which he has united with such taste, and  
which

\* Raphael, observes Du Bos, is the only exception.

which establish the great principle of the impulse of genius. There are other sections in this agreeable work, which instruct us by the happy manner in which he has interwoven among his reflections, a series of interesting anecdotes.

### *Of Frivolous Anecdotes.*

I hasten now to conclude this Essay, by noticing, when anecdotes become frivolous and impertinent, given by writers destitute of talents.

Dr. Johnson, who has devoted one of his periodical papers to a defence of anecdotes, expresses himself thus on certain collectors of anecdotes: 'They are not always so happy as to select the most important. I know not well what advantage posterity can receive from the only circumstance by which Tickell has distinguished *Addison* from the rest of mankind, the *irregularity of his pulse*; nor can I think myself overpaid for the time spent in reading the life of *Malherbe*, by being enabled to relate, after the learned biographer, that *Malherbe* had two predominant opinions; one, that the looseness of a single woman might destroy all her boast of ancient descent; the other, that the French beggars made use, very improperly and barbarously, of the phrase *noble gentleman*, because either word included the sense of both.'

These just observations may, perhaps, be further illustrated by the following notices. Dr. J. Warton has informed the world, that *many of our poets have been handsome*. This, certainly, neither concerns the  
world

world nor their poetry. It is trifling to tell us, that Dr. Johnson was accustomed 'to cut his nails to the quick.' I am not much gratified by being informed, that Menage wore a greater number of stockings than any other person, excepting one, whose name I have really forgotten. The biographer of Cujas, a celebrated lawyer, says, that *two things* were remarkable of this scholar. The *first*, that he studied on the floor, lying prostrate on a carpet, with his books about him; and, *secondly*, that his perspiration exhaled an agreeable smell, which he used to inform his friends he had in common with Alexander the Great! This admirable biographer should have told us, whether he frequently turned from his very uneasy attitude. Somebody informs us, that Guy Patin resembled Cicero, whose statue is preserved at Rome; on which he enters into a comparison of Patin with Cicero. He should have recollected, that he might have resembled the *statue* of Cicero, but not Cicero himself. Baillet loads his life of Descartes with a thousand minutiae, which less disgrace the philosopher than the biographer. Was it worth informing the public, that Descartes was very particular about his wigs; that he had them manufactured at Paris; and that he always kept four? That he wore green taffety in France; but that, in Holland, he quitted taffety for cloth; and that he was fond of omelets of eggs? There are writers who cannot distinguish between such frivolous particulars, and those anecdotes which convey some striking sentiment, characteristic of a sublime genius.

It

It must also be confessed, that there are readers, who, when they meet with interesting anecdotes of illustrious men, rank them with such frivolous particulars.

*Trifling Anecdotes sometimes to be excused.*

Yet of anecdotes which appear trifling, something may be alledged in their defence. It is certainly safer for *some* writers, to give us all they know, than to permit themselves the power of rejection; because, for this, there is required a certain degree of taste and discernment, which many biographers are not so fortunate as to possess. Let us sometimes recollect, that the page over which we toil, will probably furnish materials for authors of happier talents. I would rather have a Birch, or a Hawkins, appear heavy, cold, and prolix, than that any thing material which concerns a Tillotson or a Johnson should be lost. It must also be confessed, that an anecdote, or a circumstance, which may appear inconsequential to a reader, may bear some remote or latent connexion, which a mature reflection often discovers. It is certain, that a biographer, who has long contemplated the character he records, sees many noble connexions which escape an ordinary reader. On this subject I shall quote the judicious observation of Dr. Kippis. Our biographer, in closing the life of Dr. Birch, has formed an apology for that minute research, which, it is said, this writer has carried to a blamable excess. He writes, 'It may be alledged in  
' our

‘ our author’s favour, that a man who has a deep  
 ‘ and extensive acquaintance with a subject, often  
 ‘ sees a connexion and importance in some smaller  
 ‘ circumstances, which may not immediately be  
 ‘ discerned by others; and, on that account, may  
 ‘ have reasons for inserting them that will escape  
 ‘ the notice of superficial minds \*.’

*Character of a Writer of Anecdotes.*

I shall now close this Dissertation, by attempting to sketch the character of a writer of anecdotes.

To collect anecdotes, is the humble labour of industry; but not to present them with reflection, with acumen, and with taste.

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\* Abbé d’Olivet has been censured for dwelling, in his Continuation of the History of the French Academy, on minute circumstances, unworthy of the dignity of the historian. Perhaps it was unfortunate for our Abbé, that his predecessor Fontenelle so eminently distinguished himself in the same career. In a letter which he wrote some time after his work was published, he gives his opinion on these minutæ of literary history. He says, ‘ For my part, I should  
 ‘ be charmed if we had a good life of Homer, of Plato, of  
 ‘ Horace, of Virgil, and their equals. It is in these cases  
 ‘ the minutest details would not fail to interest me; but I  
 ‘ would not give a straw to know the year of Rome in which  
 ‘ Bavius was born, who were his father, his mother, his  
 ‘ nurse, and his preceptor; the number of his brothers and  
 ‘ sisters, nor the year and the day in which he died.’ I must confess, in closing this note, that a warm admirer of any great man never finds any thing uninteresting which relates to him; but some biographers do not recollect, that the lives they record are not always those which enjoy this privilege.

It is a task, not unworthy of genius, to arrange these minute notices of human nature, and of human learning. A writer might yet delight us, by a collection of topics which should illustrate manners, history, and literature: his talents must be versatile, yet powerful. A writer of anecdotes has difficulties to encounter, from which the biographer is exempt. A biographer has but the peculiarities of an individual to seize; he has only to assimilate his genius to that of another person. He plays but with one ball, and practice will teach his hand to grasp it with adroitness: a writer of anecdotes throws with several. It becomes necessary for such an one to render himself familiar with the multiform shapes of nature herself. Is such a writer to give anecdotes of a Gray, a Milton, or a Sterne? his soul must be softened with the querulous melancholy of Gray; austere with the republican fierceness of Milton; and varied with the gaiety and the pathos of Sterne. Anecdotes are but squalid skeletons, unless they are full of the blood and flesh of reflection. If our writer does not feel with the sensibility of taste, his reflections may be just, but trivial; his style must be diversified by the variety of passion; he must know to mourn and to rejoice. Does he present the anecdotes of war, of persecution, of superstition---his periods must assume a higher tone; his sentiments must overflow his facts; and his heart must be more occupied than his memory. Does he give the anecdotes of conviviality, of wit, and of criticism---his style must be sharp with epigrammatic pungency,

gency, or embellished with a thousand graces\*. He is no inferior artist who must occasionally alarm with the terrifying sublimity of an Angelo, or enchant with the softened beauty of an Albano.

A writer of anecdotes should write of eminent characters, as they would themselves have written of others. He must therefore possess a portion of that genius which he records, if he means to afford us perpetual delight; it is by sympathy that he will add new gratifications to a refined taste.

I have already mentioned, as models in the art of anecdotal composition, the illustrious names of Fontenelle, D'Alembert, and Du Bos. I have been compelled, on this occasion, to cite the literature of a rival nation. Yet, if our writers of anecdotes could unite the various learning of Dr. Warton, the taste of Lord Orford, and the faithfulness of Boswell to their exquisite art of introducing anecdote, we perhaps might have writers who were worthy of being classed in the rank of the Fontenelles.

\* This art is what has been so justly admired in Fontenelle's *Eloges* of the Academicians. Every one is treated in a style conformable to the object in which he excelled. The genius of Fontenelle discloses that of an astronomer, a physician, a moralist, a geometrician, and a poet, as if either of these professions had formed the studies of his life.

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ON

## MISCELLANIES.

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**I** GIVE some observations on Miscellanies, which, like their subject, may perhaps require an apology for their unconnected state. The Miscellanists satirise the Pedants; and the Pedants abuse the Miscellanists; but little has hitherto been gained by this inglorious contest; since Pedants will always be read by Pedants, and the Miscellanists by the tasteful, the volatile, and the amiable.

Literary essays are classed under philological studies; but philology formerly consisted rather of the labours of arid grammarians, and conjectural critics, than of that more elegant philosophy which has been lately introduced into literature, and which by its graces and investigation, can augment the beauties of original genius, by beauties of its own. This delightful science has been termed in Germany the *ÆSTHETIC*, from a Greek term, signifying *feeling*. It is something more than the perfect theoretical knowledge of polite literature, and the fine arts, for while it embraces not only their

their common principles, and the particular precepts of every kind of literature, and of every art, it decides on the beautiful by TASTE, and not by *Logic*; by the acuteness of the senses it instantly FEELS what pleases or displeases. Longinus and Addison were æsthetic critics. Aristotle and Bossu, depend on accuracy of judgment, and logical definitions, and *know*, though they may not *feel* what ought to please. Imagination, sensibility, and congeniality of mind are required in an æsthetic critic, who however has often been contemptuously appreciated by the critics of the adverse school. Warburton has called Addison an empty superficial writer; nor let it be forgotten how the *logical* critic has been little sensible to the character of genius; and that without sympathy, taste, and imagination, it is possible to form very elaborate criticisms. But one must *feel*, to *decide* in the school of Longinus and Addison.

It has been observed that philological pursuits inflate the mind with vanity, and have carried some men of learning to a curious and ridiculous extravagance. Perhaps this literary orgasm may arise from two causes. Philologists are apt to form too exalted an opinion of the nature of their studies, while they often make their peculiar taste, a standard by which they judge of the sentiments of others. It is not thus with the scientific and the moral writer; Science is modest and cautious, Morality is humble and exhortative, while Philology alone is arrogant and positive. *An experiment* in science is found with infinite labour, and may be overturned

overturned by a new discovery; and an *action* in morality may be so mingled with human passions, that we hesitate to pronounce it perfect, and analyse it with tranquillity. But it is not difficult with some to persuade themselves that Virgil is an immaculate author, and that they are men of exquisite taste. The Pedants of the last age exercised a vanity and ferocity revived by those critics, who have been called Warburtonians. They employed similar language in their decisions to that of Du Moulin, a great lawyer of those days, who always prefixed to his consultations this defiance, "I who yield to no person, and whom no person can teach any thing."

By one of these was Montaigne, the venerable father of modern Miscellanies, called "a bold ignorant fellow." To thinking readers, this critical summary will appear mysterious; for Montaigne had imbibed the spirit of all the moral writers of antiquity; and although he has made a capricious complaint of a defective memory, we cannot but wish the complaint had been more real; for we discover in his works nearly as much complement, as reflection, and he is one of those authors who should quote rarely, but who deserves to be often quoted. Montaigne was censured by Scaliger, as Addison was censured by Warburton; because both, like Socrates, smiled at that mere crudition, which consists of knowing the thoughts of others, and having no thoughts of our own. To weigh syllables, and to arrange dates, to adjust texts, and to heap annotations, has generally proved the  
absence

absence of the higher faculties. When a more adventurous spirit, of this herd, attempted some novel discovery, often men of taste beheld, with indignation, the perversions of their understanding; and a Bentley in his Milton, or a Warburton on a Virgil, had either a singular imbecillity concealed under the arrogance of the Scholar, or they did not believe what they told the Public; the one in his extraordinary invention of an interpolating editor, and the other in his more extraordinary explanation of the Eleusinian mysteries. But what was still worse, the froth of the head became venom, when it reached the heart.

Montaigne has also been censured for an apparent vanity, in making himself the idol of his lucubrations. If he had not done this, he had not performed the promise he makes at the commencement of his preface. An engaging tenderness prevails in these *naive* expressions which shall not be injured by a version. “ Je l’ay voué à la commo-  
 “ dité particuliere de mes Parens et Amis; à ce  
 “ que m’ayans perdu (ce qu’ils ont à faire bientost)  
 “ ils y puissent retrouver quelques traicts de mes  
 “ humeurs, et que par ce moyen ils nourrissent  
 “ plus entiere et plus vifue la conoissance qu’ils ont  
 “ eu de moi.”

Those authors who appear sometimes to forget they are writers, and remember they are men, will be our favourites. He who writes from the heart, will write to the heart; every one is enabled to decide on his merits, and they will not be referred to learned heads, or a distant day. We  
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are I think little interested if an author displays sublimity; but we should be much concerned to know whether he has sincerity.

Should not this author assume a fantastic air of novelty, I will still trust to every sentiment, I will assimilate his sensations with my own, and I will look into his works, as into my own heart. Why, says Boileau, are my verses read by all? it is only because they speak truths, and that I am convinced of the truths I write.

Why have some of our fine writers interested more than others, who have not displayed inferior talents? because they have raised no artificial emotions, but poured forth the vigorous expressions of a heart, which seemed relieved from an oppression of sensibility, as it's ardent sentiments animated every period. Montaigne therefore preferred those of the ancients, who appear to write under a conviction of what they said; the eloquent Cicero declaims but coldly on liberty, while in the impetuous Brutus may be perceived a man, who is resolved to purchase it with his life. We know little of Plutarch; yet a spirit of honesty and persuasion in his works, expresses a philosophical character, capable of imitating as well as admiring the virtues he records. Why is Addison still the first of our essayists? he has sometimes been excelled in criticisms more philosophical, in topics more interesting, and in diction more coloured. But there is a personal charm in the character he has assumed, in his periodical Miscellanies, which is felt with such a gentle force, that we scarce advert to it. He has painted  
forth

forth his little humours, his individual feelings, and eternised himself to his readers. Johnson and Hawkeſworth we receive with reſpect, and we diſmiſs with awe; we come from their writings as from public lectures, and from Addiſon's as from private converſations.

Sterne perhaps derives a portion of his celebrity from the ſame influence; he intereſts us in his minuteſt motions, for he tells us all he feels.—Richardſon was ſenſible of the power with which theſe minute ſtrokes of deſcription enter the heart, and which are ſo many faſtenings to which the imagination clings. He ſays “ If I give ſpeeches and converſations I ought to give them juſtly; for the humours and characters of perſons cannot be known, unleſs I repeat *what* they ſay, and their *manner* of ſay'n g.” I confeſs I am infinitely pleaſed when Sir William Temple acquaints us with the ſize of his orange trees, and with the flavour of his peaches and grapes, confeſſed by Frenchmen to equal thoſe of France; with his having had the honour to naturalize in this country four kinds of grapes, with his liberal diſtribution of them becauſe “ he ever thought all things of this kind the commoner they are the better.” In a word with his paſſionate attachment to his garden, of his deſire to eſcape from great employments, and having paſt five years without going to town, where, by the way, “ he had a large houſe always ready to receive him.” Dryden has interſperſed many of theſe little particulars in his proſaic compositions, and I think, that his character and diſpoſitions, may be more correctly

rectly acquired by uniting these scattered notices; than by any biographical account which can now be given of this man of genius.

But we must now reject this pleasing egotism; that often relates to us all; this vanity, that has often so much simplicity; this self-flattery, that has often so much modesty. As refinement prevails, we seek to conceal ourselves from too familiar an inspection; simplicity of manners passes away with simplicity of style. When we write with sparkling antithesis, and solemn cadences, with elaborate elegancies and studied graces, an author is little-desirous of painting himself in domestic negligence. Our writings resemble our fashions, various in their manner, but never simple; and our authors, like their fellow-citizens, are vying with each other in pomp and dignity. Hence, the personal acquaintance of a modern author, is always to his disadvantage; he has published himself a superior being; we approach and discover the imposture. The readers of Montaigne, had they met with him, would have felt differently; they would have found a friend complaining like themselves of his infirmities, and smiling with them, at the folly of his complaints.

From this agreeable mode of composition, a species of Miscellanies may be discriminated, which, above all others, becomes precious in the collections of a reader of taste. To the composition of these little works, which are often discovered in a fugitive state, their authors are prompted by the fine impulses of genius, derived from the peculiarity of their situation, or the enthusiasm of their prevailing passion.

passion. Dictated by the heart, or polished with the fondness of delight, these productions are impressed by the seductive eloquence of genius, or attach us by the sensibility of taste. The object thus selected, is no task, imposed on the mind of the writer, for the mere ambition of literature; but is generally a voluntary effusion, warm with all the sensations of a pathetic writer. In a word, they are the compositions of genius, on a subject in which it is most deeply interested; which it revolves on all its sides, which it paints in all its tints, and which it finishes with the same ardour it began. Among such works may be placed the exiled Bolingbroke's "Reflections upon Exile," The retired Petrarch and Zimmerman's Essays on "Solitude." The imprisoned Boethius's "Consolations of Philosophy." The oppressed Pierius Valerianus's Catalogue of "Literary Calamities." The deformed Hay's Essay on "Deformity." The projecting De Foe's "Essays on Projects." The liberal Shenstone's Poem on "Economy."

We may respect the profound genius of voluminous writers; they are a kind of painters who occupy great room, and fill up, as a satirist expresses it, "an acre of canvass." But we must prefer those delicate pieces which the Graces lay on the altar of taste. A groupe of Cupids; a Venus emerging from the waves; a Psyche or an Aglaia, embellish the cabinet of the man of taste, who connects these little pieces by wreaths of roses. Pliny mentions an artist who took great delight in painting

ing small pictures, but was ridiculed at Rome for the confined space he employed; it is not however clear whether the defect arose from the futility of his pencil, or the affected gravity of the Romans. A Miscellanist should imitate two painters; the modern Albano, celebrated for painting the smallest and the most beautiful figures; and the ancient Parrhasius, who was ever in such good humour with himself as to sing at his labours, which happy circumstance, it is supposed, imparted so much gaiety to his compositions.

These little productions are not designed to be finished pieces; and in some respects resemble the modest idea that the ancient painters had of their own works. They marked them by imperfect inscriptions, and half designations; as thus—Appelles was *doing* this picture; Polycletus was *sculpturing* this image, as if they were but begun, and never could be finished by their hands. They rarely said *FECIT*, but only *FACIEBAT*.

But however exquisitely these little pieces may be formed, there is a race of students who fail not to condemn elegance as frivolity, and instructive knowledge as superficial erudition. The ponderous scholars have facetiously expressed their contempt by calling the agreeable writers “empty bottles.” Libek, the Persian of Montefquieu, is one of the profoundest philosophers; his letters are however but concise pages. Rochefoucault and La Bruyere are not superficial observers of human nature, although they have only written sentences. Of Tacitus it has been finely remarked by Montefquieu;

that " he abridged every thing because he saw every thing," and I have ever admired the character of Timanthes, the painter, of whom it is recorded, that he expressed more than he painted by an instructive and comprehensive reservedness.

It should, indeed, be the characteristic of good Miscellanies, to be multifarious and concise. Montaigne approves of Plutarch and Seneca, because their loose papers were suited to his dispositions, and where knowledge is acquired without a tedious study. It is, says he, no great attempt to take one in hand, and I give over at pleasure, for they have no sequel or connection. La Fontaine agreeably applauds short compositions :

Les longs ouvrages me font peur ;  
Loin d'épuiser une matière.  
On n'en doit prendre que la fleur ;

and old Francis Osborne has a coarse and ludicrous image in favour of such opuscula; he says, " Huge volumes, like the ox roasted whole at Bartholomew fair, may proclaim plenty of labour and invention, but afford less of what is delicate, savory, and well concocted, than *smaller pieces*." To quote so light a genius as the enchanting La Fontaine, and so solid a mind as the sensible Osborne, is taking in all the climates of the human mind; it is touching at the equator, and pushing on to the pole.

There are writers, as well as readers, who only consult books for their amusement; and they alike are sensible, that four things are written and read with greater pleasure than one, though that

one

one should be shorter than the four. If literature is only with some a mere amusement, I think it will not diminish it's importance in the affairs of human life; and Dryden confesses, though he is pleased to add to his shame, that he never read any thing but for his pleasure.

Montaigne's works have been called by a Cardinal "the Breviary of Idlers." It is therefore the book of man; for all men are idlers; we have hours which we pass with lamentation, and which we know are always returning. At those moments miscellanists are conformable to all our humours. We dart along their airy and concise page, and their lively anecdote, or their profound observation are so many interstitial pleasures in our listless hours.

We find, in these literary miniatures, qualities incompatible with more voluminous performances. Sometimes a bolder, and sometimes a firmer touch; for they are allowed but a few strokes; and should not always trace an elegant phrase, but grave a forcible sentiment. They are permitted every kind of ornament, for how can the diminutive please, unless it charms by it's finished decorations, it's elaborate niceties, and it's exquisite polish? A concise work preserves a common subject from insipidity, and an uncommon one from error. An essayist expresses himself with a more real enthusiasm, than the writer of a volume; for I have observed that the most fervid genius is apt to cool in a quarto. Race-horses appear only to display their agile rapidity

pidity in the course, while on the road they soon become spiritless and tame.

The ancients were great admirers of Miscellanies; and this with some profound students, who affect to contemn these light and beautiful compositions, might be a solid argument to evince their bad taste.

Aulus Gellius has preserved a copious list of titles of such works. These titles are so numerous, and include such gay and pleasing descriptions, that we may infer by their number that they were greatly admired by the public, and by their titles that they prove the great delight their authors experienced in their composition. Among the titles are a basket of flowers; an embroidered mantle; and a variegated meadow. Such a miscellanist as was the admirable Erasmus, deserves the happy description which Plutarch with an elegant enthusiasm bestows on Menander: he calls him the delight of philosophers fatigued with study; that they have recourse to his works as to a meadow enamelled with flowers, where the sense is delighted by a purer air; and very elegantly adds, that Menander has a salt peculiar to himself, drawn from the same waters that gave birth to Venus.

The Troubadours, Conteurs, and Jongleurs, practised what is yet called in the southern parts of France, *Le guay Saber*, or the gay science. I consider these as the Miscellanists of their day; they had their grave moralities, their tragical histories, and their sportive tales; their verse and their prose. The village was in motion at their approach; the castle was opened to the ambulatory poets,

poets, and the feudal hypochondriac listened to their solemn instruction and their airy fancy. I would call miscellaneous composition **LE GUAY SABER**, and I would have every miscellaneous writer as solemn and as gay, as various and as pleasing, as these lively artists of versatility.

Nature herself is most delightful in her miscellaneous scenes. When I hold a volume of Miscellanies, and run over with avidity the titles of its contents, my mind is enchanted, as if it were placed among the landscapes of Valais, which Rousseau has described with such picturesque beauty. I fancy myself seated in a cottage amid those mountains, those valleys, those rocks, encircled by the enchantments of optical illusion. I look, and behold at once the united seasons. "All climates in one place, all seasons in one instant." I gaze at once on a hundred rainbows, and trace the romantic figures of the shifting clouds. I seem to be in a temple dedicated to the service of the Goddess **VARIETY**.

## OF PROFESSORS OF ART.

IT has been often said, that a Poet alone should decide on a Poem, and a Painter on a Picture; but this must not be accepted as an incontrovertible maxim. It may be observed with great truth, that the Professors of an Art, are frequently the most incompetent judges of a new performance; and that the truth of criticism exists no where, but among those Men of Taste, who, without aspiring to the dangerous glory of being Artists, have devoted themselves to a liberal and comprehensive affection for Art.

Many are the prejudices which vitiate the decision of an Artist. The fever of envy will disorder the finest vision, and the chillness of personal dislike will freeze the faculties into a fatal torpor. There are local, and there are national prejudices; but alluding to none of these obvious causes, we will consider an excelling Artist, as an honest man, and that he comes to the examination of a new production, with that candour which pardons human imperfections, and with that disposition to be pleased, without which no man can receive pleasure; with these favourable propensities, his decision may notwithstanding be unjust.

This defect in the criticisms of Artists, has not escaped the animadversion of reflecting minds; but is still susceptible of investigation, and forms an important detection in the critical Art. We encounter

counter in the history of literature and taste, perplexities which embarrass, but which examined will disappear. Artists are often arraigned for envy or vanity, when innocent of the passions; and Men of Taste often vacillate in their own just notions; among the opposing sentiments of great Artists.

Every superior Artist addicts himself to some peculiar Manner\*; long loved, long pursued, and at length obtained, this enamoured object of his passion, excludes by it's constancy every deviation from the established excellence; to dissimilar beauty, he often becomes insensible, and he forms his comparative merit, on any performance, from it's alliance, or it's foreignness, to his favourite manner. Without recurring to the degrading passions, we may thus account for the very opposite and erroneous opinions of great Artists, on their different labours. It is not probable that Milton envied the genius of Dryden, when he contemptuously called him a Rhimer; but it is more evident that Milton's ideas of poetry were not congenial to the manner of Dryden. I shall place here some instances which I have remarked. The witty Cowley despised the natural Chaucer; the classical Boileau the rough sublimity of Crebillon; the forcible Corneille the tender Racine; the refined Marivaux the familiar Moliere; the artificial Gray the simple Shenstone; and the plain and unadorned Montaigne the rich and eloquent Cicero. Each enslaved to his peculiar manner, was incapable of

\* Some parts of this paragraph have been inserted in an Essay on the Literary Character, p. 116.

viewing the diversifications of beauty, but attached himself to a partial and endeared portion.

Whenever an uncommon species of composition appears, which displays a new mode of excellence, and places a new model in the school of taste, the slowest and the last, to chaunt their peans to that Artist, will be Artists themselves. To Envy, this cannot always be attributed, but will be generally derived from a want of the proper taste for that manner, which taste can only be gradually formed. One reason, perhaps, why Artists sometimes are inimical to a foreign excellence, may be attributed to what the French denominate *la jalousie de metier*, the jealousy of trade; because every novel manner is a kind of hostility against those already established. But some Artists are not always influenced by this prejudice, and yet are equally inimical to the new production.

Of our own times, we may refer to two poets, who, it cannot be denied, have created an original manner, and at their first appearance in public, appear to have met a similar fate among Artists. When Gray's Odes were published, they delighted two men of poetical taste\*, while they were ridiculed by two men of poetical genius†. At a still later period, Churchill animadverted with severity on the poetry of Gray; and Goldsmith and Johnson were as inimical to that manner as Churchill himself, though by no means admirers of the genius of Churchill. That manner has now become fixed, and is justly appreciated by men of taste. In neither  
of

\* Warburton and Garrick. . † Colman and Lloyd.

of these instances can the critics be justly censured; but it may confirm the judicious observation of Johnson, that after all the refinements of criticism, the final decision must be left to common readers unperverted by literary prejudices.

The same error frequently induces an Artist, when he contrasts his labours with another, to consider himself as the superior, and of course to be stigmatized with the most unreasonable vanity. I shall exemplify the observation by the character of Goldsmith; and it may then appear that that pleasing writer might have contrasted his powers with those of Johnson, and without any perversion of intellect, or inflation of vanity, might, according to his own ideas, have considered himself as not inferior to his more celebrated and learned rival.

Goldsmith might have preferred the felicity of his own genius, which like a native stream flowed from a natural source, to the elaborate powers of Johnson, which in some respect may be compared to those artificial waters which throw their sparkling currents in the air, to fall into marble basins. He might have considered that he had embellished philosophy with poetical elegance, and have preferred the paintings of his descriptions, to the terse versification and the pointed sentences of Johnson. He might have been more pleased with the faithful representations of English manners in his *Vicar of Wakefield*, than with the borrowed grandeur and the exotic fancy of the oriental *Rasselas*. He might have believed, what many excellent critics have believed, that in this age comedy requires more

genius than tragedy, and with his audience he might have infinitely more esteemed his own original humour, than Johnson's rhetorical declamation. He might have thought, that with inferior literature he displayed superior genius, and with less profundity, more gaiety. He might have considered, that the facility and vivacity of his pleasing compositions were preferable to that Art, that habitual pomp, and that ostentatious eloquence, which prevail in the operose labours of Johnson. No one might be more sensible than himself, that he, according to the happy expression of Johnson (when his rival was in the grave) "tetigit et ornavit." Goldsmith therefore, without any singular vanity, might have concluded from his own reasonings, that he was not an inferior writer to Johnson; all this not having been considered, he has come down to posterity as the vainest and the most jealous of writers; he whose dispositions were the most inoffensive, whose benevolence was the most extensive, and whose amiableness of heart has been concealed by it's artlessness, and passed over in the sarcasms and sneers of a more eloquent rival, and his submissive partizans. This character of Goldsmith may explain that species of critical comparison, which one great writer makes of his manner with that of a rival.

We can hardly censure Artists for this attachment to their favourite excellence. Who, but an Artist, can value the ceaseless inquietudes of arduous perfection; can trace the remote possibilities combined in a close union; the happy arrange-

ment and the novel variation? he not only is affected by the performance like the man of taste, but is influenced by a peculiar sensation, for while he contemplates the apparent beauties, he often traces in his own mind those invisible corrections, by which the final beauty was accomplished; it is the practical hand alone that is versed in, and the eye of genius alone that can discriminate many daring felicities, many concealments of art, and many difficulties overcome. Hence, it is observed, that Artists do not always prefer those effects which influence an unprejudiced and uncorrupted taste; but rather those refinements which form the secret exaltation of Art; and the minuter excellencies which consist in the mechanical (as a critic of taste terms it) are often preferred to those more elevated ones which arise from the ideal. It is this indulgence for the refinements, which at length terminates in corrupting Art.

But a partiality for selecting one branch of Art in preference to another, is perhaps the only ascent to it's summit. We must not therefore calumniate Artists, if they neglect the various schools of beauty. It is not difficult for a man of taste, whose hand reposes, while his head ever thinks; whose creative powers are quiescent, but whose perceptive faculties are habitually invigorated; and who in the tranquillity of his cabinet, has only to gaze at pictures, but not to blend colours, and to meditate on poems, but not to compose verses; it is not difficult for this elegant idler to form the most various views of beauty in Art; to trace with the  
fame

same lively gratification it's diversities; and to feel no displeasure from the most incongruous manners. Such an one, may be supposed to hover with ecstasy round the ideal of a Raphael, and a Pope, or to mix with the grotesque caricatures of a Hogarth or a Butler. This versatility of taste is generally denied to the man of genius; and while men of taste are often unanimous in their opinions, we shall frequently observe, that the greatest artists give the most discordant decisions. Johnson said that his notions on MSS. proved generally erroneous; and this circumstance has happened to many eminent writers.

It would therefore seem that the most unfit person to decide on a performance is an artist himself; and that the genuine merits of a work are candidly adjusted and correctly appreciated by men of taste, and rarely by men of genius\*.

\* An opinion opposite to the present one, has been maintained by several artists. That opinion appears in the following note by Dr. Burney, in his *Letters of Metastasio*, vol. II. p. 325.—“ It is possible for a man of learning, study, and natural acumen, to be a good critic of the works of others, without genius for producing original works themselves, similar to those which they are able to censure; as was the case with Longinus, Bentley, Bossu, and others; yet still, *cæteris paribus*, the opinion of practical poets and practical artists of every kind will have more weight in the scale of criticism than those of mere theorists.”

## ON STYLE.

THE History of English Style, since its first elegance may, perhaps, be traced in the following concise manner.

When the national literature has attained to a certain point, there arises a simple elegance of Style, which in its progress displays richer ornaments, and often becomes refined to a vicious excess. It may be traced through four schools.

The first writers who attempt elegance, and polish the asperities of a language, excel in a natural sweetness and amiable simplicity. But the Style is not yet castigated, for it still retains many colloquial terms and many negligent expressions, which either were not such in their day, or their ear, not being yet accustomed to a continued elegance, received no pain from familiar and unstudied expressions. In time these defects become sensible; yet, as these writers are placed among the first classics of their nation, they are regarded with veneration, and often pointed out as the model for young writers. Among such authors we may place Tillotson, Swift, and Addison.

The second school introduces a more diffuse and verbose manner; these writers solicit the ear by a numerous prose, and expand their ideas on a glittering surface. As elegance can only be obtained by diffusion, its concomitant is feebleness, and an elegant writer enervates his sentiments. Beauty is inconsistent with Force. Elevated emotions these writers

writers rarely awaken, but a graceful manner in composition is their peculiar charm. Genius may be supposed at this period, to be somewhat impaired by the excursions of their predecessors, and they attempt to supply by the charms of amenity, and a copious diffusion of beautiful expression, the demand for novelty, as well as that taste for elegance of diction, which the public now possess. Among these pleasing writers may be ranked Sir William Temple, Usher, Melmoth, &c.

Satiated with the nerveless beauty and the protracted period, a third school appears, the votaries of artificial embellishment and elaborate diction. At once, magisterially pompous, and familiarly pointed; concise and swelling; sparkling and solid; massy and light. Sometimes they condense ideas, by throwing into one vast thought, several intermediate ones; sometimes their rotundity of period is so arranged that the mind, with the ear, seems to rise on a regular ascent. The glare of art betrays itself; while sometimes the thoughts are more subtle than substantial, more airy than penetrating; the expressions new, and the ideas old. This school abounds with mannerists; such are Johnson, Hawkesworth, Robertson, and Gibbon.

When this taste for ornamented prose prevails, a fourth school arises, composed of inferior writers. As it is less difficult to collect words, than to create ideas, this race becomes versed in all the mysteries of diction; trivial thoughts are ridiculously invested by magnificent expressions, and they consider that

that blending the most glaring colours, without harmony or design, is an evidence of higher art. They colour like the distracted painter in Bedlam, who delighted in landscapes of golden earths, and vermillion skies. They tell us that their colours are vivid, and we reply that their figures are chimeras. These fantastic novelties flourish in the warmth of a fashionable circle, but once placed in the open air, are killed by the popular gale. Writers of this class are not to be mentioned, as they are all dead authors who are yet living.

We may here observe that every period of literature has it's peculiar Style, derived from some author of reputation; and the history of a language, as an object of taste, might be traced through a collection of ample quotations, from the most celebrated authors of each period. We should as rarely find an original Style, as an original Genius; and we should be enabled to perceive the almost insensible variations which at length produce an original Style.

We must advert to the opinions of the public, during this progress of Style. Those who have long been attached to the first school of natural elegance, with all it's imperfections, revolt from the ostentatious opulence of the third; and are more inclined to favour the second\*. The third school is

\* Olivet has observed, that Cicero complains that he was reproached by his contemporaries for too florid a style, yet afterwards in Quintilian's time the style of Cicero is censured for acidity and deficiency of ornament. Such is the usual progress

is however the most popular, for the public has greater refinement than in the preceding periods.

Some distinguish between taste and refinement; this distinction is not very obvious. Refinement is only a superior taste, according to those who are fond of an embellished diction; but it is considered as a vicious taste, by the advocates for simplicity of language. They differ in their acceptance of the term, and the former therefore smile, when the latter censure refinement of diction.

Refinement in Style, is of no remote date. The prose of Pope is nearly as refined as his verse; and this taste he appears to have borrowed from some of the French writers, particularly from Fontenelle, whose reputation was then very high, and who has carried the *bel esprit* to it's finest excess. By the *bel esprit*, I mean, a manner of writing, which displays unexpected turns of thought; the art of half concealing a sentiment, that the reader may have the pleasure of guessing it; brilliant allusions, epigrammatic points, and delicate strokes. A mode of writing as dangerous, as it is pleasing; yet adapted to concise compositions. No prosaic writer, in Pope's day, approached his refinement; the best writers then, and for some time after, composed with colloquial barbarisms and feeble expressions. Steele, Tillotson, and others,

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progress of style in every literary nation; and if we insert in this place the name of Addison instead of Cicero, and Johnson instead of Quintilian, it becomes our own.

others, have written with carelessness and laxity; Addison and Dryden delight by an agreeableness of manner. When Addison describes the powers of beauty, the suavity, the grace and the mellifluence give a new idea of our language; and Dryden has a mellow richness, an enchanting negligence, and a facility of ideas. They alike threw into their style a gaiety of fancy, which is equivalent to all the charms of refined expressions; and yet are they by no means free from impurities of style. To Johnson may be attributed the establishment of our present refinement; and it is with truth he observes of his Rambler, "that he had laboured to refine our language to grammatical purity, and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations, and that he has added to the elegance of it's construction and to the harmony of it's cadence\*." This refinement in Style; Johnson appears

\* Great inelegance of diction disgraced our language even so late as in 1736, when the enquiry into the Life of Homer was published. That author was certainly desirous of all the graces of composition, and his volume by it's singular sculptures evinces his inordinate affection for his work. This fanciful writer had a taste for polished writing; yet he abounds in expressions which now would be considered as criminal in literary composition. Such vulgarisms are common—the Greeks *fell to their old trade* of one tribe's expelling another—the scene is always at Athens, and all the *pothor* is some little jilting story—the haughty Roman *snuffed* at the supplems. If such diction had not been usual with good writers at that period, I should not have quoted Blackwall. Middleton,

appears partly to have borrowed from the most elegant French writers, whose beauties he has sometimes transposed and frequently imitated, as Gibbon and Hume have more apparently done. All the refinements of Style exist among that refining people, and the Lectures of Blair are often judicious repetitions of what may be found in their critics, or happy examples which are drawn from their writers.

Refinement in Style, with many, includes in the very expression, a censurable quality in composition. But this criticism is unjust; refinement may indeed be vicious, as simplicity may itself be; refinement is not less offensive to a reader of taste, when it rises into affectation, than simplicity sinking into insipidity. But we must not confound refinement of Style, with it's puerile excess; nor is it just to censure refinement because it differs from simplicity.

Amidst these complications of taste some argue in favour of a natural Style, and reiterate the opinion of many great critics, that proper ideas will be accompanied by proper words. But this observation, though supported by the first authorities, is not perhaps sufficiently clear. Writers may think justly, and  
write

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Middleton, in his life of Cicero, though a man of classical taste, and an historian of a classical æra, could not preserve himself from the grossest inelegance; the greatest characters are levelled by the poverty of his style. Warburton, and his imitator Hurd, and other living critics of that school, are loaded with familiar idioms, which at present would debase even the style of conversation.

write offensively; and a pleasing Style may convey a vacuity of thought. Does not this evident fact prove that Style and Thinking have not that inseparable connection which many great writers have pronounced? Milton perhaps imagined that beautiful thoughts produce beautiful expression.—He says,

“Then feed on thoughts that voluntary move  
 “Harmonious numbers.”

But are there not beautiful conceptions which may not voluntary move beautiful expressions? Writing is justly called an Art; and Rousseau says, it is not an art easily acquired. Thinking may be the foundation of Style; but it is not the superstructure; it is not the ornaments. The art of presenting our thoughts to another, is often a process of considerable time and labour; and the delicate task of correction, reserved only for writers of fine taste, proves, that there are several modes of presenting an idea; vulgar readers are only susceptible of the rough and palpable stroke; but there are many shades of sentiment, which to seize on and to paint, is the pride and the labour of a fine writer.

In the third school, we observe a race of writers who are called MANNERISTS in Style. It must be confessed that such writers, however great their powers, rather excite the admiration, than the affection of a man of taste; because their habitual art dissipates that illusion of sincerity, which we love to believe is the impulse which places the pen in the hand of an author. Two eminent literary Mannerists are Cicero and Johnson. We know these great men considered

considered their eloquence as a deceptive art \* ; of any subject it had been indifferent to them which side to adopt ; and in reading their elaborate works, our ear is more frequently gratified by the ambitious magnificence of their diction, than our heart penetrated by the 'pathetic' enthusiasm of their sentiments. : Writers who are not Mannerists, but who seize the appropriate tone of their subject, appear to feel a conviction of what they attempt to persuade their reader. It is observable, that it is impossible to imitate with uniform felicity the noble simplicity of a pathetic writer ; while the peculiarities of a Mannerist, are so far from being difficult, that they are displayed with nice exactness by middling writers, who, although their own natural manner had nothing interesting, have attracted notice by such imitations. We may apply to some monotonous Mannerists these verses of Boileau :

Voulés vous du public meriter les amours ?  
 Sans cesse en ecrivant varier vos discours.  
 On lit peu ces auteurs nés pour nous ennuer,  
 Qui toujours sur un ton semblent psalmodier.

Would you the public's envied favours gain?  
 Ceaseless in writing, variegate the strain ;  
 The heavy author who the fancy calms,  
 Seems in one tone to chaunt his nasal psalms.

It may, perhaps, surprize some, that among the literary refinements of the present age, may be counted

\* The sophistry of Johnson in conversation appears to have been his favourite amusement ; but Cicero is more censurable, since in the most solemn acts of life, and before the tribunal of justice, he confesses to have protected and saved the life

counted above forty different Styles, as appear by a Rhetorical Dictionary. The facility of acquiring a Style produces our numerous authors; and hence we abound with writers, but have few thinkers. A Style deficient in thinking cannot form a perfect composition; for we may compare STYLE to the MECHANIC, or executive part of painting; while THINKING is the FINÉ IDEAL or inventive. And this distinction, if just, will settle a question long agitated, whether there is any distinction between Style and Thinking. Raphael, who excelled in the ideal, was not so perfect in some part of the mechanic, as Titian; and we might venture to say, that Johnson, who excelled in the mechanic, did not equal the ideal of Addison.

Mr. Webb, an advocate for simplicity, has two lines on the Style of Hooker, the last of which has great felicity of conception :

“ Thy language is chaste, without aims or pretence ;  
 “ ’Tis a sweetness of breath, from a soundness of sense.”

He accompanies them by a note, in which he censures refinement, as a studied advantage in the manner, independant on an adequate motive in the thought. Mr. Allison would consider every composition as faulty and defective, in which the expression  
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life of many a criminal, by the power of his eloquence. This indeed will be considered as no crime at Westminster-Hall, where, without his eloquence, they share his guilt. Plutarch gives one anecdote relative to the orator's exultation. He said to Munatius—“ Dost thou think thou wast acquitted for thy own sake, and not because I threw a veil over thy manifold crimes, so that the court could not perceive thy guilt ?”

of the art is more striking than the expression of the subject, or in which the beauty of design prevails over the beauty of character or expression. I shall add the observation of a friend, who has often delighted the public, that he would not have the Style withdraw the attention from the Thought.

I mean not to oppose the opinions of the warm admirers of simplicity. A beautiful simplicity itself is a species of refinement; and no writer more solicitously corrected his works than Hume, who excels in this mode of composition. But is it not an evident error in men of taste to form a predilection for any peculiar Style; since all the intermediate species of diction between simplicity and refinement are equally beautiful, when they form the appropriate tone of the subject? We often enquire if an author's Style is beautiful or sublime; we should rather desire to know whether it is proper. These varieties of diction, which the advocates for simplicity consider as so many aberrations from rectitude of thinking, form on the contrary the very existence of just thought. Simplicity, however pure, can never cause the strong emotions of an ornamented diction; an ornamented diction can never give the rapid and lively graces of gaiety; nor can a rapid Style embellish flowery and brilliant conceptions. Every Style is excellent, if it be proper, and that Style is most proper which can best convey the intentions of the author to his reader.

There appears in every Style, a certain point, beyond which, or which not attained, it is defective. The simplicity of the first school degenerates into  
frigidity

frigidity and vapidness; the beauty of the second protracts into languor and tediousness; and the grandeur of the third swells into turgidity and vacuity. But though this point may be difficult to describe, a fine *tact* long practised, instantaneously discovers it. We soon decide on the Style of an author, but not on his thoughts; and we often find, that the one may be excellent, while the other has nothing uncommon.

Hume, who has all the refinement of simplicity, highly approves of Addison's definition of fine writing, who says, that it consists of sentiments which are natural, without being obvious. This is surely no definition of fine writing, but of fine thinking. The elegant author has omitted the magical graces of diction; the modulation of harmonious cadences; the art of expressing, with delicacy, delicate ideas, and painting sublime conceptions in the magnificence of language. In my opinion Shenstone has ascertained the truth; for fine writing he defines to be generally the effect of spontaneous thoughts and a laboured Style. Addison was not insensible to these charms, and he felt the seductive art of Cicero when he said, that "there is as much difference in apprehending a thought clothed in Cicero's language, and that of a common author, as in seeing an object by the light of a taper, or by the light of the sun." This is not less true, than finely expressed; and what shews Style to be independent of thinking, is, that even common thoughts are found to give pleasure when adorned by expression.

I must therefore dissent from the admired definition of Addison, because it does not define its  
 E object.

object. In this age of taste or refinement, if you please, a composition which should alone consist of natural, yet not obvious, sentiments, would fail to attract, unadorned by the felicities of diction. Simplicity may be too obvious, and refinement too obtrusive; whatever is obvious disgusts; whatever is obtrusive offends. We may apply to Style in general, the beautiful description which Milton gives of Eve presenting herself to Adam,

“ Not OBVIOUS, not OBTRUSIVE she.”

It appears that the advocates for simplicity of Style, are not sufficiently sensible to the varieties of diction. What, would they think, if we should venture to say, that Style may have a marvellous influence over the human mind? Longinus makes a musical arrangement of words a part of the sublime, and he adds, that many have acquired the reputation of fine writers, whose chief merit consisted in the charm of their periods. This observation every man of taste knows to be just. We have writers, who, without exhibiting much vigour of conception, or energy of genius, delight by a magical delicacy; such a writer is Melmoth, whose Style in the Fitzosborne's Letters, has peculiar suavity and amenity, without either depth of thinking or vigour of expression; and their merits were, therefore, entirely lost on the athletic powers, and the artificial taste for Style, of Johnson, who spoke with contempt of those beautiful compositions. An eloquent Style has a pathetic influence on the mind. Men of taste, who are unbiassed by any particular

Style,

Style, can alone be sensible to its finest strokes, and are often in raptures, when others are insensible. The practised eye in painting sees pictures the uninitiated can never behold. An ancient artist, contemplating the famous Helen of Zeuxis, felt all the enthusiasm of extreme sensibility; when another wondered at his raptures, he said, "could you take my eyes, you would be as much delighted."

After all, it is **STYLE** alone by which posterity will judge of a great work, for an author can have nothing truly his own but his Style; facts, scientific discoveries, and every kind of information, may be seized by all, but an author's diction cannot be taken from him. Hence very learned writers have been neglected, while their learning has not been lost to the world, by having been given by finer writers. It is, therefore, the duty of an author, to learn to write as well as to learn to think; and this art can alone be obtained by familiarising himself to those felicitous expressions which paint and embellish his sensations; which give a tone congruous to the subject; and which invest our thoughts with all the illusion, the beauty, and motion, of lively perception or pathetic eloquence.

HISTORICAL CHARACTERS ARE FALSE REPRESENTATIONS *of* NATURE.

WE accustom ourselves to pay too liberal an admiration to the great Characters recorded in modern, to say nothing of ancient, history. It seems often necessary to be reminded, that the most interesting history is generally the most elegantly written, and that whatever is adorned by elegance, is the composition of art. Charmed and seduced by the variegated tints of imagination, the scene is heightened, and the objects move into life; but while we yield ourselves to the captivating talent of the artist, we forget that the whole representation is but a picture, and that painters like poets, are indulged with a certain agreeable licentiousness. Hence we form false estimates of the human character, and while we exhaust our sensations in artificial sympathies, amidst characters and circumstances almost fictitious, for the natural events and the natural calamities of life, we suppress those warmer emotions we otherwise should indulge. The human character appears diminutive when compared with those we meet with in history; yet, am I persuaded, that domestic sorrows are not less poignant, and many of our associates are characters not inferior to the elaborate delineations which so much interest in the deceptive page of history. The historian is a sculptor, who, though he displays a correct semblance of nature, is not less solicitous of displaying the miracles of his art, and therefore enlarges his figures to a colossal dimension.

dimension. Let us also reflect, how often a shâmméful partiality dictates to the historians who possess the best information. Procopius, in his secret Anecdotes, pourtrays Justinian and Theodora as the vilest, and in his history as the most virtuous personages. Eginhard is a perpetual flatterer of Charles the Great; Eusebius of Constantine; Paulus Jovius of Cosmode Medicis; Sandoval of Charles V; and Hume of the Stuarts.

The ancient historians compiled prodigies, to gratify the credulous curiosity of their readers; but since prodigies have ceased, while the same avidity for the marvellous exists, modern historians have transferred the miraculous to their personages. Children read fables as histories, but the philosopher reads histories as fables. Fabulous narratives may however convey much instruction.

It is the pleasing labour of genius to amplify into vastness, to colour into beauty, and to arrange the objects which occupy his meditations, with a secret artifice of disposition. Voltaire tells us, that no writers, but those who have composed tragedies, can throw any interest into a history; that we must know to paint and excite the passions; and that a history, like a dramatic piece, must have situation, intrigue, and catastrophe: an observation which has great truth, but which shews that there can be but little truth in such agreeable narratives; Every historian communicates his character to his history; if he is profound and politic, his statesmen resemble political deities, whose least motion is a stratagem, and whose plot contains the seeds of

many plots. If he is a writer, more elegant than profound, he delights in descriptive grandeur; in the touching narratives of suffering beauty, and persecuted virtue. If he possesses a romantic turn, his heroes are so many Arthurs, and the actions he records, put a modest adventurer into despair. No writers more than the historian, and the professed Romancer, so sedulously practice the artifice of awakening curiosity, and feeding that appetency of the mind, which turns from simple truth, to spirited fiction. We scarce glance at the glittering of a star, but we gaze with delight on the coruscations of a meteor. We therefore suffer ourselves to become interested with those objects which should interest us least.

The historian seizing this inclination of the mind, delights it with that imaginary force, and fantastic grandeur, of which, while pleased with the emotions, we perceive not the extravagance. Popular prejudice assists the illusion, and because we are accustomed to behold public characters occupy a situation in life, that few can experience, we are induced to believe that their capacities are more enlarged, their passions more refined, and in a word, that nature has bestowed on them faculties, denied to obscurer men. But who, acquainted with human nature, hesitates to acknowledge, that most of the characters in history were persons whom accident had seated upon a throne, or placed with less favour around it? Had Alfred been a private person, like the Man of Ross, his various virtues might only accidentally have reached us; and had

Richard

Richard III. been a citizen of London, he had been led unnotic'd to the gibbet.

This pernicious prejudice, which peoples the mind with artificial beings, and enfeebles the sympathies of domestic life, will disappear when we come to those few facts in history, which the art of the historian can no longer disguise; and which, refusing the decorations of his fancy, present the sublime personages of history, in the nudity of truth. Let the monarch lose his crown, and the minister his place; let the casque fall from the hero, and the cap from the cardinal; it is then, these important personages speak in the voice of distress, are actuated by passions like our own, and come to us with no other claim on our feelings, than that common sensibility, which we owe to humanity. Here, indeed, the lessons of history, become instructive, because they teach that every other portion of history has received the romantic gilding of the pencil; that the sagacity of the statesman is not so adroit, as not to be entangled in it's own nets; that the ardour of the hero is often temerity which escaped, and sometimes temerity chastis'd; and that in general great characters, owe much more to Fortune, than to Nature; that singular coincidencies have formed singular events; but, that whenever the delusion of the historian ceases, these illustrious persons appear to have been actuated by passions similar to our own, and that their talents are not superior to those whose obscure actions languish in a confined sphere. It is observed, by Montesquieu, that "most legislators

“ have been men of limited capacities, whom  
 “ chance placed at the head of others, and who  
 “ have generally consulted merely their prejudices  
 “ and their fancies.”

It is, indeed, useful to pause over those passages which give the very feelings of the illustrious persons to whom they relate, and if to some, these may seem to humble the great, they will also elevate us; or, rather, they will reinstate human nature in that just equality in which we are all placed. The phantom of history will vanish, but the human form will remain palpable and true.

Few circumstances are more curious in history than the unadorned recitals of some memoirs. Thomas Heywood, in his “*England’s Elizabeth*,” has noticed an instance that one of the most celebrated characters felt the same agitation, and expressed the same language, which an inferior prisoner would have experienced. This writer gives her meditations in the garden during her imprisonment, in which the natural passions are not entirely lost in the distortion of the language. During her confinement at Woodstock, hourly dreading assassination, she used to sit at the grate of her prison window, morning and evening, listening and shedding tears at the light carolling of the passing milkmaids. Among other insults she received in travelling, the high winds having discomposed her dress, she desired to retire to some house to adjust herself; but this she was refused, and was compelled to make her toilette under a hedge! A kindred anecdote is mentioned by Sir  
 Walter

Walter Rawleigh, of Charles V. who just after his resignation, having a private interview with some ambassador, and having prolonged it to a late hour after midnight, called for a servant to light the ambassador on the stairs; but they had all retired to rest; and the emperor, yet the terror of Europe, was compelled to snatch a candle and conduct the ambassador to the door. It is thus that majesty, unrobed of factitious powers, convinces even the slow apprehension of the vulgar, that the breast of grandeur only conceals passions like their own; and that Elizabeth dressing under a hedge, and Charles lighting the ambassador on the stairs, felt the same bitter indignity, which they are doomed to feel much oftener.

If it were possible to read the histories of those who are doomed to have no historian, and to glance into domestic journals, as well as into national archives, we should then perceive the unjust prodigality of our sympathy to those few names, which eloquence has adorned with all the seduction of her graces. We should then acknowledge, that superior talents are not sufficient to obtain superiority, and that the full tide of opportunity, which often carries away the unworthy in triumph, leaves the worthy among the shoals. It is a curious speculation for observing men, to trace great characters in little situations, and to detect real genius passing through life incognito. How many mothers of great characters, may address their sons in the words of the Mother of Bradas; he was indeed a great and virtuous

commander, but she observed that *Sparta had many greater Brasidas's*. Some obscure men, whom the world will never notice, had they occupied the situation of great personages, would have been perhaps even more illustrious. There are never wanting among a polished people, men of superior talents or superior virtues; every great revolution evinces this truth; indeed, at that perilous moment, they shew themselves in too great numbers, and become fatal to each other, by their rival abilities.

Robertson, who is so pleasing an historian, and therefore, whose veracity becomes very suspicious, confesses, however, that "in judging of the conduct of princes, we are apt to ascribe too much to political motives, and too little to the passions which they feel in common with the rest of mankind. In order to account for Elizabeth's present, as well as her subsequent conduct towards Mary, we must not always consider her as a queen, we must sometimes regard her merely as a woman." This is precisely what the refining ingenuity of this writer does as rarely as any historian; and Robertson appears to have been more adapted for a minister of state, than the principal of a Scotch college. He explains projects that were unknown, and details stratagems which never took place. We often admire the fertile conceptions of the queen regent; of Elizabeth; and of Bothwell; when in truth, we are defrauding Robertson of whatever praise may be due to political invention.

But we, who, however charmed with historic beauty, revere truth and humanity, must learn to reduce the aggravated magnitude of the illustrious dead, that we may perform an act of justice to the obscure living. The sympathy we give to a princess, ravished from her throne, and dragged by traitors, to wet with tears, the iron grates of her dungeon, we may with no less propriety bestow on that unfortunate female, whom unfeeling creditors have snatched from maternal duties, or social labours, to perish by the hour, in some loathsome prison. If we feel for the decapitation of a virtuous and long persecuted statesman, we are not to feel less for that more common object, a man of genius, condemned to languish in obscurity, and perish in despair. A great general dies in the embrace of victory, and his character reaches posterity in immortal language; but he probably conducted hundreds whom nature intended for generals, but whom fortune made foot soldiers: what heroes may be found in hospitals! Katharine, the queen of Henry VIII. is an object of our tenderest sympathy, but why should our sensibility be diminished, when we look on those numerous females, not less gentle, nor less cruelly misused, who, without the consolations of sovereignty, are united to despots, not less arbitrary and brutal than Henry? The sorrows of the Scottish Mary, the refined insults of a rival sister, the grin of scorn, and the implication of infamy, may penetrate our hearts; but we forget that there are families, where scenes not less terrible, and sisters not less unrelenting,

are hourly discovered ; and that there are beauties, who without being confined to the melancholy magnificence of a castle, or led to the dismal honour of an axe, equally fall victims, or to fatal indiscretion, or to fatal persecution.

The fascination which thus takes possession of us in historical narratives, is therefore the artifice of the historian, assisted by those early prejudices of that superiority which we attach to great characters. He who possesses the talent of fine writing, is indeed in possession of a deceptive art ; and I have often been tempted to think, that men of genius, who have ever appeared, by the energy of their complaints, to be endowed with a peculiar sensibility of sorrow, and who excel in the description of the passions, do not always feel more poignantly than others, who without the power of expressing their sensations, expanding their sentiments, and perpetuating their anguish, are doomed to silent sorrow ; to be crazed in love without venting effusions in verse, and to perish in despair without leaving one memorial of their exquisite torture.

But I will not close this essay without observing, that it is not to every illustrious character, recorded in history, that we can pay too prodigal a tribute of admiration. There are men, who throw a new lustre on humanity, and hold a torch of instruction which brightens through the clouds of time. It has been boldly said, by old Montaigne, that man differs more from man, than man from beast. But speculations on human nature must not be  
formed

formed on such rare instances. Besides, even of characters like these, their equals may be found among obscure individuals, and some of the noblest actions have been performed by unknown persons; as that Miner, who in some Italian war, animated by patriotic fervour, to direct the explosion, rushed into the mine he had formed. This action is the summit of heroism.

Familiar objects of distress, and familiar characters of merit, want only to form a spectacle as interesting, as the pompous inflation of history can display, those powers of seducing eloquence, which disguise the simplicity of truth, with the romantic grandeur of fiction. Nations have abounded with heroes and sages; but because they wanted historians, they are scarce known to us by name; and individuals have been heroes and sages in domestic life, whose talents and whose virtues are embellished in no historical record, but traced, in transient characters, on the feeble gratitude of the human heart.

## ON PREFACES.

I DECLARE myself infinitely delighted by a Preface. Is it exquisitely written? no literary morsel is more delicious. Is the author inveterately dull? it is a kind of preparatory information, which may be very useful. It argues a deficiency in taste to turn over an elaborate Preface unread; for it is the odour of the author's roses; every drop distilled at an immense cost. It is the reason of the reasoning, and the folly of the foolish. I agree with the Italians, who call these little pieces *La falsa del Libro*; the fauce of the book.

I do not wish, however, to conceal, that several writers, as well as readers, have spoken very disrespectfully of this species of literature. That fine writer, Montesquieu, in closing the Preface to his *Persian Letters*, says, "I do not praise my Persians; because it would be a very tedious thing, put in a place already very tedious of itself; I mean a Preface." Spence, in the Preface to his *Polymetis*, informs us, that "there is not any sort of writing which he sits down to, with so much unwillingness, as that of Prefaces; and as he believes most people are not much sonder of reading them, than he is of writing them, he shall get over this as fast as he can." Pellison warmly protested against prefatory composition; but when he published the works of Sarrasin, was wise enough to compose a very pleasing one. He indeed endeavoured to justify himself for acting against his own opinions, by this  
ingenious

ingenious excuse, that like funeral honours, it is proper to shew the utmost regard for them when given to others, but to be inattentive to them for ourselves.

Notwithstanding all this evidence, I have some good reasons for admiring Prefaces; and barren as the investigation may appear, some literary amusement can be gathered.

In the first place I observe, that a Prefacer is generally a most accomplished liar. Is an author to be introduced to the public? the Preface is as genuine a panegyric, and nearly as long an one, as that of Pliny's on the Emperor Trajan. Such a Preface is ringing an alarm bell for an author. If we look closer into the characters of these masters of ceremony, who thus sport with and defy the judgment of their reader, and who, by their extravagant panegyric, do considerable injury to the cause of taste, we discover that some accidental occurrence has occasioned this vehement affection for the author, and which, like that of another kind of love, makes one commit so many extravagancies.

Prefaces are indeed rarely sincere. It is justly observed by Shenstone in his prefatory Essay to the Elegies, that, "discourses prefixed to poetry, inculcate such tenets as may exhibit the performance to the greatest advantage. The fabric is first raised, and the measures by which we are to judge of it, are afterwards adjusted." This observation might be exemplified by more instances than some readers might chuse to read. It will be sufficient to observe, with what art, both Pope and Fontenelle, have

have drawn up their Essays on the nature of Pastoral Poetry, that the rules they wished to establish might be adapted to their own pastorals. Has accident made some ingenious student apply himself to a subordinate branch of literature, or to some science which is not highly esteemed?—look in the Preface for its sublime panegyric. Collectors of coins, dresses, and butterflies, have astonished the world with eulogiums which would raise their particular studies into the first ranks of philosophy.

It would appear that there is no lie, to which a Prefacer is not tempted. I pass over the com-  
 modious Prefaces of Dryden, which were ever adapted to the poem, and not to poetry, to the author, and not to literature. The boldest Preface-liar was Aldus Manutius, who having printed an edition of Aristophanes, first published in the Preface, that Saint Chryostom was accustomed to place this comic poet under his pillow, that he might always have his works at hand. As in that age, a saint was supposed to possess every human talent, good taste not excepted, Aristophanes thus recommended became a general favourite. The anecdote lasted for near two centuries; and what was of greater consequence to Aldus, quickened the sale of his Aristophanes. This ingenious invention of the Prefacer of Aristophanes, at length was detected by Menage.

The insincerity of Prefaces arises whenever an author would disguise his solicitude for his work, by appearing negligent and even undesirous of its success. A writer will rarely conclude such a Preface without betraying himself. I think, that even Dr.

JOHNSON,

Johnson, forgot his sound dialectic in the admirable Preface to his Dictionary. In one part he says, having laboured this work with so much application, "I cannot but have some degree of parental fondness." But in his conclusion, he tells us, "I dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise." I deny the Doctor's "frigidity." This polished period exhibits an affected stoicism, which no writer ever felt for the anxious labour of a great portion of life, addressed not merely to a class of readers, but to literary Europe.

But if Prefaces are rarely sincere, or just, they are notwithstanding literary opuscula, in which the author is materially concerned. A work with a poor Preface, like a person who comes with an indifferent recommendation, must display uncommon merit to master our prejudices, and to please us, as it were, in spite of ourselves. Works ornamented by a finished Preface, such as Johnson not infrequently presented to his friends or his booksellers, inspire us with awe; we observe a veteran guard placed in the porch, and we are induced to conclude from this appearance, that some person of eminence resides in the place itself.

In Prefaces an affected haughtiness and an affected humility are alike despicable. The first is called by the French, *La morgue litteraire*, the surly pomposity of literature. This has been frequently practised by writers, who have succeeded in one or two works, while the failure of their other productions appears to have given them a literary hypochondriasm.

pochondriacism. Such a Prefacer, first informs us, that he is above the reach of censure: and censure therefore redoubles its vigilance. Secondly, that he has already received the approbation of the discerning; that is to say, five or six gentleman, whom he admits to his manuscript recitatives. And thirdly, that he cares very little for the mob; which is a kind expression for those who exchange sterling money for counterfeit genius. To such we may answer, that no writer can ever be placed above censure; that after all his self-eulogies and self-consolations, his readers, and not the five or six gentlemen, can alone give him a solid reputation. I shall notice as a model of this "*morgue litteraire*" Dr. Armstrong. His "*Art of preserving Health*" is one of the most terse, and classical compositions in the language; but most of his other verse, evinces nothing but barren labour. In his lively "*Sketches*," he acquaints us in the Preface, that "he could give them much bolder strokes, as well as more delicate touches, but that he dreads the danger of writing too well, and feels the value of his own labour too sensibly, to bestow it upon the mobility." This is pure milk compared to the gall, in the Preface to his Poems. There he very modestly tells us, that "he has at last taken the trouble to collect them. What he has destroyed, would, probably enough, have been better received by the great majority of readers. But he has always most heartily despised their opinion." The truth is, he is only shewing an undue resentment for some unfortunate productions. St. Jerome entitled the

the Preface to his version of the Scriptures, *Prologi galeati*, Prefaces that wear a casque. These *armed* Prefaces were long necessary in times of literary controversy: an author then either replied to, or anticipated a reply to the attacks of his opponent.

The public are treated with another kind of contempt, when an author, instead of "destroying" like Dr. Armstrong; professes to publish his puerilities. This Warburton did, in his pompous edition of Shakespeare. In the preface he informed the public, that his notes "were among his *younger amusements*, when he turned over these *sort of writers*." This ungracious compliment to Shakespeare and the public, merited that perfect scourging which our haughty commentator received from the sarcastic canons of criticism. Scudery was a writer of some genius, and great variety. His Prefaces are remarkable for their gasconades. In his Epic Poem of Alarie, he says, "I have such a facility in writing verses, and also in my invention, that a poem of double its length would have cost me little trouble. Although it contains only eleven thousand lines, I believe that longer epics do not exhibit more embellishments than mine." And to conclude with one more student of this class, Amelot de la Houssaie, in the Preface to his translation of the Prince of Machiavel, instructs us, that "he considers his copy as superior to the original, because it is every where intelligible, and Machiavel is frequently obscure." I have seen in the  
play

play bills of frollers, a very pompous description of the triumphant entry of Alexander into Babylon; had they said nothing about the triumph, it might have passed without exciting ridicule; and one might not so maliciously have perceived how ill the four candle-snuffers crawled as elephants, and the triumphal car discovered it's want of a lid. But having pre-excited attention, we had full leisure to sharpen our eye. To these imprudent authors, and actors, we may apply a Spanish proverb, which has the peculiar quaintness of that people; *Aviendoregonado vino, venden vinagre*; having cried up their wine, they sell us vinegar.

A ridiculous humility in a preface, is not less despicable. Many idle apologies were formerly in vogue for publication, and formed a literary cant, of which, now the meanest writers perceive the futility. A literary anecdote of the Romans has been preserved, which is sufficiently curious. One Albinus, in the Preface to his Roman History, intercedes for pardon for his numerous blunders of phraseology; observing that they were the more excuseable, as he had composed his history in the Greek language, with which he was not so familiar as his maternal tongue. Cato severely rallies him on this; and justly observes, that our Albinus had merited the pardon he solicits, if a decree of the senate had compelled him thus to have composed it, and provided he could not have obtained a dispensation. The confession of the ignorance of the language we employ, is like that excuse which some writers form for *composing on topics,*  
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of which they acknowledge their inability. A reader's heart is not so easily mollified; and it is a melancholy truth for literary men, that the pleasure of abusing an author is generally superior to that of admiring him. One appears to display more critical acumen than the other, by shewing, that though we do not chuse to take the trouble of writing, we have infinitely more genius than the author. These suppliant Prefacers are described by Boileau.

Un auteur a genoux dans une humble Preface  
 Au lecteur qu'il ennuie a beau demander grace;  
 Il ne gagnera rien sur ce juge irrité,  
 Qui lui fait son procès de pleine autorité.

Low in a humble Preface authors kneel;  
 In vain, the wearied reader's heart steel.  
 Callous, that irritated judge with awe,  
 Inflicts the penalties and arms the Law.

The most entertaining Prefaces in our language, are those of Dryden; and though it is ill-naturally said, by Swift, that they were merely formed,

“ To raise the volume's price a shilling,”

yet these were the earliest commencements of English criticism, and the first attempt to restrain the capriciousness of readers, and to form a national taste. Dryden has had the candour to acquaint us with his secret of prefatory composition; for in that one to his Tales, he says, “ the nature of preface-writing is rambling; never wholly  
 “ out,

“out of the way, nor in it. This I have learnt  
 “from the practice of honest Montaigne.” There  
 is no great risk in establishing this observation as  
 an axiom in literature; for should a Prefacer  
 loiter, it is never difficult to get rid of lame per-  
 sons, by escaping from them; and the reader may  
 make a Preface as concise as he chuses.

It is possible for an author to paint himself in  
 amiable colours, in this useful page, without in-  
 curring the contempt of egotism. After a writer  
 has rendered himself conspicuous by his industry  
 or his genius, his admirers are not displeased to  
 hear something relative to him, from himself.  
 Mr. Hayley, in the Preface to his Poems, has  
 conveyed an amiable feature in his personal cha-  
 racter, by giving the cause of his devotion to  
 literature, as the only mode by which he could  
 render himself of some utility to his country. The  
 animation of the whole passage is a testimony of  
 the zeal of it's writer; and who, recollecting  
 the perseverance of his studies, the justness of his  
 taste, and the elegance of his verse, can refuse the  
 wreath of poetical honour? There is a modesty  
 in the Prefaces of Pope, even when this great  
 poet collected his immortal works; and in several  
 other writers of the most elevated genius, in a  
 Hume and a Robertson, which becomes their  
 happy successors to imitate, and inferior writers to  
 contemplate with awe.

I conclude by observing, that there is in Pre-  
 faces a due respect to be shewn to the public, and  
 to ourselves. He that has no sense of self-dignity,  
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will not inspire any reverence in others; and the ebriety of vanity will be sobered by the alacrity we all feel in disturbing the dreams of self-love. If we dare not attempt the rambling Prefaces of a Dryden, we may still entertain the reader, and soothe him into good humour, for our own interest. This, perhaps, will be best obtained, by making the Preface (like a symphony to an opera) to contain something analogous to the work itself. The mind thus attuned into a proper harmony of tone, will respond to the emotions we are preparing to excite, and feel the want of our work, as a desire not elsewhere to be gratified.

**SOME OBSERVATIONS ON DIARIES, SELF-BIOGRAPHY, AND SELF-CHARACTERS.**

THE study of Biography is a recent taste in Britain. The art of writing lives has been but lately known; and it was, therefore, an usual complaint with the meagre Biographers of the last century, when their subject was a man of letters, that his life could not be deemed very interesting, since he, who had only been illustrious in his closet, could not be supposed to afford any materials for the historian. The life of a prime minister, or the memoirs of a general, as they contained the detail of political intrigues and political opposition; battles or stratagems; were considered to afford happier opportunities for a writer to display the ability of his literary powers, the subtilty of his discernment, and the colouring of his descriptions.

But as the human mind became the great object of our inquiry, and to detect and separate the shades of the passions the great aim of the Biographer; reflecting men perceived, that the philosopher, like other men, had his distinct characteristics. And it has now become the labour of criticism, to compose the life of an author; no writer can now successfully accomplish his Biographic attempts, unless he possesses a flexibility of taste, which, like the cameleon, takes the colour of that object on which it rests.

Every man, in whatever department he moves, has passions, which will vary even from those who  
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are acting the same part as himself. Our souls, like our faces, bear the general resemblance of the species, but retain the particular form which is peculiar to the individual. He who studies his own mind, and has the industry to note down the fluctuations of his opinions, the fallacies of his passions, and the vacillations of his resolutions, will form a journal to himself peculiarly interesting, and, probably, not undeserving the meditations of others. Nothing which presents a faithful relation of humanity, is inconsiderable to a human being.

There once prevailed the custom of a man's journalising his own life. Many of these journals yet remain in their MS. state, and some, unfortunately for journal-writing, have been published. We are not, however, to decide on the nature of a work by the ineptitude of its performance. The writers of these Diaries were not philosophers, for the age was not philosophic. Too often they were alchemists, and sometimes considered themselves as magicians. Some only registered the minutest events of domestic life. Dates of birth, and settlements of marriage, may be pardoned to the individual; but to give the importance of history to the progress of a purge, and to return divine thanks for the cutting of a corn, (and the edited journal of Elias Ashmole contains few other facts,) is giving importance to objects which can only be observable in the history of any other animal but Man. I am acquainted with a worthy gentleman, who, for this half century, is performing

ing the same labours. He can tell where he dined fifty years past, and accompany the information with no concise critique. When he takes one of these little volumes down, he applies to himself the observation of Martial, and says, he has learnt the art of living life twice over. The pleasures of memory are delicious; its objects must, however, be proportionate to the powers of vision, and a meagre or a smart dinner, is an object sufficiently delightful, or terrible, to give play to the recordatory organs of this Diarist. I have remarked, however, one thing from his contemptible narrative. He resolved to distinguish the happy circumstances of his life in red ink. In looking over his Diaries, notwithstanding the obscurity of his situation, and the humility of his desires, I cannot find that his pen was often dipped in the crimson ink of felicity.

An observation may be made on the diurnal page. He who can, without reserve or hesitation, form such a journal, may be safely pronounced an honest man. Could a Clive, or a Cromwell, have composed a Diary? Neither of these men could suffer solitude and darkness; at the scattered thoughts of casual reflection they started; what would they have done, had memory marshaled their crimes, and arranged them in the terrors of chronology? These Diaries form that other Self, which Shaftesbury has described every thinking being to possess; and which, to converse with, he justly accounts the highest wisdom. When Cato wishes that the breast of every man were diaphanous,

nous, it is only a metaphorical expression for such a Diary.

There are two species of minor Biography which may be discriminated; detailing our own life, and portraying our own character. The writing our own life has been practised with various success; it is a delicate operation; a stroke too much may destroy the effect of the whole. If once we detect an author deceiving or deceived, it is a livid spot which infects the entire body. To publish one's own life has sometimes been a poor artifice to bring obscurity into notice; it is the ebriety of vanity, and the delirium of egotism. When a great man leaves some memorial of his days, his death-bed sanctions the truth, and the grave consecrates the motive. There are certain things which relate to ourselves, which no one can know so well; a great genius obliges posterity when he records them. But they must be composed with calmness, with simplicity, and with sincerity; the Biographic Sketch of Hume, written by himself, is a model of attic simplicity. The life of Lord Herbert is a biographical curiosity. The Memoirs of Sheffield Duke of Buckingham is very interesting; and those of Colley Cibber is a fine picture of the self-painter. We have some other pieces of self-biography, precious to the philosopher.

Biography should not be written with eloquence; with Rousseau, perhaps, eloquence was only a natural harmony from the voice of truth; but it may also be the artificial tones of deceit.

What in Rousseau was nature, may in others be artifice. Self-biographers; like Hume, who state facts with an attic simplicity, appear to speak unreservedly to the reader, and as if they proposed only to supply facts, for others to explain and embellish.

There is another species of minor Biography, which, I am willing to believe, could only have been invented by the most refined and the vainest nation. A literary fashion formerly prevailed with French authors, to present the public with their own Character, and this fashion seems to have passed over to our country; Farquhar has drawn his character in a letter to a lady, and others of our writers I believe have given us their own miniatures. The French long cherished this darling egotism; and there is a collection of these literary portraits in two bulky volumes. The brilliant Flechier, and the refined St. Evremond, have framed and glazed their portraits. Every writer then considered his Character as necessary as his Preface. I confess myself much delighted with these self-descriptions of "persons whom no one knows." I have formed a considerable collection of these portraits, and have placed them in my cabinet of curiosities, under the title of strong likenesses of unknown persons. Their vanity is too prominent to doubt their accuracy.

I shall not excite the reader's curiosity, without attempting it's gratification; and if he chuses to see what now passes in the minds of many obscure writers, whom he never will know, let him attend

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to the following Character, which may not be so singular as it appears.

There was, as a book in my possession will testify, a certain verse-maker, of the name of Cantenac, who, in 1662, published in the city of Paris, the above-mentioned volume, containing some thousands of verses, which were, as his countrymen express it, *de sa facon*, after his own way. He fell so suddenly into the darkest and deepest pit of oblivion, that not a trace of his memory would have remained, had he not condescended to give ample information of every particular relative to himself. He has acquainted us with his size, and tells us "that it is rare to see a man smaller than himself. I have that in common with all dwarfs, that if my head only were seen, I should be thought a large man." This atom in creation then describes his oval and full face; his fiery and eloquent eyes; his vermilion lips; his robust constitution, and his effervescent passions. He appears to have been a most petulant, honest, and diminutive being.

The description of his intellect, is the object of our curiosity, and I select the most striking traits in his own words. "I am as ambitious as any person can be; but I would not sacrifice my honour to my ambition. I am so sensible to contempt, that I bear a mortal and implacable hatred against those who contemn me, and I know I could never reconcile myself with them, but I spare no attentions for those I love; I would give them my fortune and my life. I

“ sometimes lie ; but generally in affairs of gallan-  
 “ try, where I voluntarily confirm falsehoods by  
 “ oaths, without reflection, for swearing with me  
 “ is a habit. I am told that my mind is brilliant,  
 “ and that I have a certain manner in turning a  
 “ thought, which is quite my own. I am agree-  
 “ able in conversation ; though I confess I am  
 “ often troublesome ; for I maintain paradoxes to  
 “ display my genius, which favour too much of  
 “ scholastic subtleties. I speak too often and  
 “ too long ; and as I have some reading, and a  
 “ copious memory, I am fond of shewing what-  
 “ ever I know. My judgement is not so solid, as  
 “ my wit is lively. I am often melancholy and  
 “ unhappy ; and this sombrous disposition proceeds  
 “ from my numerous disappointments in life. My  
 “ verse is preferred to my prose ; and it has been  
 “ of some use to me, in pleasing the fair sex ; poe-  
 “ try is most adapted to persuade women ; but  
 “ otherwise it has been of no service to me, and  
 “ has, I fear, rendered me unfit for many ad-  
 “ vantageous occupations, in which I might have  
 “ drudged. The esteem of the fair has, however,  
 “ charmed away my complaints. This good for-  
 “ tune has been obtained by me, at the cost of  
 “ many cares, and an un subdued patience ; for I  
 “ am one of those, who, in affairs of love, will suf-  
 “ fer an entire year, to taste the pleasures of  
 “ one day.”

This Character of Cantenac has some local fea-  
 tures ; for an English poet would hardly console  
 himself with so much gaiety. The Frenchman's  
 attachment

attachment to the ladies, seems to be equivalent to the advantageous occupations he had lost. But as the miseries of a literary man, without conspicuous talents, are always the same at Paris, as in London, there are some parts of this Character of Cantenac, which appear to describe them with truth. Cantenac was a man of honour; as warm in his resentment as his gratitude; but deluded by literary vanity, he became a writer in prose and verse, and while he saw the prospects of life closing on him, probably considered that the age was unjust. A melancholy example for certain volatile, and fervent spirits, who, by becoming authors, either submit their felicity to the caprices of others, or annihilate the obscure comforts of life, and, like him, having "been told that their mind is brilliant, and that they have a certain manner in turning a thought," become writers, and complain that they are "often melancholy, owing to their numerous disappointments." Happy, however, if the obscure, yet too sensible writer, can suffer an entire year, for the enjoyment of a single day! But for this, a man must have been born in France.

ON THE CHARACTER OF DENNIS THE  
CRITIC.

IT is an observation frequently made, by men of letters in conversation, whenever some renowned critic is mentioned, that "he was a very ill-natured man." An observation which is fully verified by facts; so that sometimes we are nearly tempted to suppose, that ill-nature is the spirit of criticism, The verbal or minor critics, are persons of the slenderest faculties, and the most irascible dispositions. What can we hope from men who have consumed thirty pages in quarto, on the signification of one little word, and after this insane discussion, have left the unhappy syllable to the mercy of future literary frenzy?

But there is a species of critics, who rather attach themselves to modern, than to ancient writers; and who pursue and settle on a great genius, as summer flies attack the tails of the best fed horses, The more fervid the season, and the plumper the horse, the livelier is the attack. They are born for the torment of the ingenious, and the gratification of the malicious of their age. It has too often happened, that a superior writer has been mortified during his whole life, by such a painful shadow. The ancestors of these critics appear to have flourished in the days of Terence, and this poet has distinguished them by the honourable title of the *Malevoli*. Zoilus, who has left them

them his name, the patriarch of "true criticism," as Swift calls their talent, fell a martyr to their cause; for this great man was either burnt, or crucified, or stoned.

In the person of Dennis, we may contemplate the character of these disturbers of literary repose. The mind of this Critic was endowed, not with refinement, but with subtlety; not with correctness, but with minuteness; not with quick sensibility, but with critical erudition. A prominent feature in his character, was that intellectual quality, called common sense, which would have rendered him an useful citizen. A virtue in a sadder, but a vice in a critic. In literature, common sense is a penurious faculty, of which all the acquisitions are mean, and of little value. If we allow him these qualities, we must utterly deny him that sensibility of taste which feels the charms of an author, by a congeniality of spirit; that quick apprehension, which may occasionally point out the wanderings of genius, but which oftener confirms the pleasures we feel, by proving their propriety; nor had he that flexibility of intellect, which yields to the touch of the object before him; before he ventured to be pleased, he was compelled to consult Aristotle.

His learning was the bigotry of literature. It was ever Aristotle explained by Dennis. But in the explanation of the obscure text of his master, he was led into such frivolous distinctions, and tasteless propositions, that his works deserve inspection, as examples of the manners of a true

mechanical critic; the genius of Homer would sink, blended with the dullness of Dennis.

Several singular coincidences alone gave the ephemeron critic his temporary existence. Criticism was a novelty at that period of our literature. He flattered some great men, and he abused three of the greatest; this was one mode of securing popularity; because, by this contrivance, he divided the town into two parties; and the irascibility and satire of Pope and Swift, were not less serviceable to him, than the partial panegyrics of Dryden and Congreve. If insulted genius had not noticed Dennis, Dennis in vain would have insulted genius. Sometimes his strictures, though virulent, were just; even Zoilus, doubtless, detected many defects in Homer. But such criticisms are only a kind of plate-powder, very useful to repolish the works of genius. The performances of our critic appear never to have been popular; and this fact is recorded by himself. Of the favourable opinion he entertained of his own powers, and the public neglect they received, when not supported by the malignant aid of satire, the following passages will sufficiently prove. He observes in his Tracts, "if I had writ only the first treatise, I believe, that upon reading it, you will be of opinion, and far be presumption from that belief, that I had deserved better of the commonwealth of learning, than the authors of so many sonorous trifles, who have been *too much encouraged*, while *I have been too much neglected*. The position, which is the subject of it, viz. That religion

religion is that which gives principally to great poetry it's spirit, it's sublimity, it's vehemence, and it's strongest enthusiasm, is *very clearly proved.*"

One more specimen may be necessary. He adds, "that though criticism has flourished for 2000 years, descending from antient Greece and Rome, to modern France and Italy, yet that neither Greece, nor Rome, nor France, nor modern Italy, has treated of this important point; but that it was *left for a person who has the honour of being your lordship's countryman*, to assert it, and demonstrate it. If what I have said may seem to some persons, into whose hands these sheets may happen to fall, to have too great a tincture of vanity in it, your lordship knows very well, that *persons so much and so long oppressed as I have been*, have been always allowed to say things concerning themselves, which in *others* might be *offensive.*"

There is a degree of vanity and vexation in these extracts; of which the former is only excuseable for the latter. His vanity we know was excessive, and this oppression, of which he complains, might not be less imaginary than his alarm of being delivered over to the French, for the composition of a tragedy that could never be read. Dennis undoubtedly had laboured with zeal, which could never meet a reward; and perhaps, amidst his critical labours, he turned often, with an aching heart, from their barren contemplation, to that

of the social comforts he might have derived from his paternal saddles.

His occasional strictures on popular works had certainly a transient season. Such criticisms were assisted by the activity of envy, and by the supineness of indolence. These also were his best productions, but I must still affirm that they were the best productions of a dull writer. A beautiful tragedy may be composed, which may serve the purposes of the Dennises; and its errors may fill their voluminous pamphlet; but also, it is very possible to construct a tragedy which would furnish the Dennises, and at the same time be destitute of whatever can impart delight to the lover of poetry,

Dennis aspired also to original composition. His verse is the verse of one who has learnt poetry, as the blind we know may practice the art; a mechanical operation performed by substantives and adjectives. His sentiments are wild, and his lines irregular; turgid expressions in rumbling verse; the painful throes of a muse, who is made to produce monsters against the designs of nature. Such versifiers are well described by Denham in this line; their works are

“ Not the effect of poetry, but pains.”

Yet Dryden, with the usual partiality of friendship, deludes Dennis by eulogies on his poetry, and, in one of his Letters, published by our author, advises him to apply himself to the pindaric. After this, I believe, Dennis produced his long rambling Ode

Ode in praise of Dryden, which, perhaps, equals the worst of Cowley's.

His prose has at times animation, particularly when he warms into abuse. His conceptions, indeed, were never delicate; but sometimes their grossness is striking; as what he says of Puns, in one of his Letters, "there is as much difference between the silly satisfaction which we have from a quibble, and the ravishing pleasure which we receive from a beautiful thought, as there is betwixt a faint salute, and fruition."

His criticisms are often so many castles in the air, for almost in every work he is proposing and explaining some fantastical system. In his long treatise on modern poetry, he labours to shew, that the strong interest which the ancients felt in their poetry, was derived from that use of religion which their poets employed; and therefore, he concludes, that if religion is introduced into our poems, modern poetry will rival the ancient. But how false this system is, criticism and experience have now positively decided. Polytheism indeed was a religion well adapted to poetical fancies; since nothing can be more poetical than an endless train of beings, diversified in their characters, and distinguished by their emblems. The brilliancy of imagination, the gaieties of description, and the conflict of the passions, alike formed a human interest in the deities of the ancients. But the unity of our religion teaches only the lesson of obedience, and throwing a veil over the mysterious deity, would consider description as impiety,

impiety, and silence as the only expression of the human passions.

Having concluded what I had to observe, on the literary character of Dennis, I shall now consider his moral one. The lesson may not prove uninteresting, for we shall have an opportunity of contemplating how an ill-natured critic, is an ill-natured man, and that the perversions of the head, are often so many particles of venom which fly from the heart.

The magisterial decisions of criticism, communicated a personal importance to this author. Accustomed to suspend the scourge over the heads of the first writers of the age, it appears, that Dennis could not sit at a table, or walk down a street, without exerting the despotic rudeness of a literary dictator. The brutal violence of his mind, was discoverable in his manners; an odd mixture of frantic enthusiasm, and gross dullness. Pride now elevated, and vaunting, now depressed and fore. How could the mind that devoted itself to the contemplation of master-pieces, only to reward it's industry, by detailing to the public their human frailties, experience one hour of amenity, one idea of grace, one generous expression of sensibility? Pope's celebrated description of the personal manners of our critic, is an exact representation:

Lo! Appius reddens at each word you speak;  
And stares tremendous with a threatening eye,  
Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry.

It is recorded of Dennis, that when he read this passage at a bookseller's, he involuntarily exclaimed—By G— he means me!

Dennis had so accustomed himself to asperity, and felt with such facility and force, the irritation he gave and he received, that without having left on record but the suspicion of one immoral action, (for it is said he stabbed a man at college) we suspect the improbity of his heart, when we recollect the licentiousness of his pen. But this has ever been the characteristic of this race of critics. They attach to the writer they attack, an inveteracy, which is not permitted by common humanity. From their darkened closet, they suppose, that the affairs of civil life are suspended, in an awful pause, for their decisions; and they think, when they have discovered the want of unity in a tragedy, that, in consequence, the same want is immediately to take place among the public.

A critic resembling Dennis, was Gaçon, in France. This Zoilus reproached La Motte with his blindness, and Dennis cruelly censured the feeble frame of Pope. Young, in his second Epistle to Pope, sarcastically alluded to Dennis, in these words,

“ My narrow-minded satire can't extend  
To Codrus' form, I'm not so much his friend;  
Himself should publish that (the world agree)  
Before his works, or in the pillory.”

Gaçon wrote “ satyrical discourses on all kinds of subjects,” and compiled a volume of calumnies  
against

against the poet Rousseau, which he entitled an *Anti-Rousseau*; *Anti* was long a favourite title to the works of such critics. Whenever there appeared a great genius, he immediately found an antipode.

An anecdote, little known, relative to Dennis, will close his character. It appears, that the *Provoked Husband* was acted for his benefit, which procured him about a hundred pounds. Thomson and Pope generously supported the old critic, and Savage, who had nothing but a verse to give, returned them poetical thanks, in the name of Dennis. When Dennis heard these lines repeated (for he was then blind) his critical severity, and his natural brutality, overcame that grateful sense he should have expressed, of their kindness and their elegance. He swore "by G— they could be no one's but that *fool* Savage's." This, perhaps, was the last peevish snuff from the dismal torch of criticism, for two days after was the redoubted Dennis numbered with "the mighty dead."

Criticism has thus been often only the natural effect of bad dispositions; when severe, if founded on truth, it is not blamed; but this truth includes the idea of a critic convincing his reader, that he has a just taste, for the beauties of a composition; for that censure which only takes a partial review of a work, must be defective. There is a duty we owe to the public, when we defend the cause of taste, but at the same time, there is a duty we owe to the author. A skilful censor will perform his task by a happy combination of humanity and criticism;

criticism ; and it is elegantly said of Boileau, by Voltaire, that the honey which this bee extracted from the flowers, softened the sharpness of the wound he inflicted.

A critic is only the footman of a man of genius ; he should respect his master, and not suffer the torch of criticism, which he carries before him, to scorch, but only to illuminate.

## ON ERUDITION AND PHILOSOPHY.

IT is necessary to discriminate between Men of Erudition, and Men of Philosophy. We must employ the French word *Erudit*, for want of a synonymous appellative,

A numerous class of students devote their days to researches in almost every species of knowledge; and without any profundity of observation, or impulse of genius, collect bodies of facts, which may serve as materials for literary speculation. But of these, few have invigorated their reason, enlarged their mind, or seized on those graces which delight in elegant composition. We are at once astonished and disgusted at their vast reading; they seem to know every thing that requires not to be known.

With them, persevering study stands in lieu of extensive genius, and a long memory in place of a bright fancy. It is not who has greater talents, but who has read most. Philosophy consists of reflection; Erudition of reading. As one man cannot read much more than another, in the same given time, the Erudits, at a certain period of life, are, therefore, all nearly equal, in point of ability. It is not so in Philosophy; there one man in a year may reach farther, than another in all his life; Time, therefore, may make an Erudit, but it is Genius only which can form a Philosopher.

When the elaborate labours of an Erudit, are at length

length published, it is discovered, that he has no skill in the art of composition. This numerous race of literati, have no conception of that delight in composition, without which, the writer is in vain learned. Some consider the pleasures of literature as not only superfluous, but criminal, and that the delight arising from the perusal of exquisite composition is derived from an effeminate and corrupt state of mind; while others imagine that a reflection, they might happen to make, would only insult their reader's understanding. An annalist is therefore preferred to an historian; Hume is censured, for intermingling with his lucid narrative, his acute reflections; and they affirm that they are capable of reflecting for themselves. But this is neither modesty nor truth.

Among reasoning men, such students have occasioned a great odium to literature; and if, as it cannot be denied, the pursuits of letters have been often satirised, it has been owing to their laborious trifling, and impertinent information. Montaigne has declaimed against them, in various parts of his works. Frequently they fix on some fantastic topic, and fill their frivolous volume with the most laborious Erudition. Among these I have discovered the following extraordinary works. The history of Beards—and another of Wigs—of learned dirty men—of learned men married to Shrews—on literary Bastards—on learned Misanthropes—on paper Cloaths—and on terms of abuse in the Hebrew, Latin, and Greek languages—There are likewise the history of Cats, and another of Rats,

Rats, both supposed to be written as a satire on these inept researches. It is not, indeed, sufficient to write about, but to reason on antiquity; and a student hardly merits the honours of learning, whose science consists in an arid knowledge of words, or customs, and who renders some of the most pleasing investigations repulsive to men of taste.

Do we not abuse too often the word learning? He is honoured with the title, who has only retained by rote, obsolete customs, extinct characters, and whatever relates to past ages. But he who is more solicitous of familiarising himself to his own times, and is conversant with whatever relates to his own century, who has little by rote, and a great deal by thinking, him we degrade to a lower department, and we call him a man of reading. He who hazards not a word in his latinity, but which is authorized by the use of Cicero, is saluted as a scholar; yet should another not be quite so lexicographic in his composition, but as eloquent as Cicero, we should consider him as of inferior learning to his pedantic rival. If a classical scholar, versifies in Greek an English poem, which, in the most favourable view, is only acting well the school-boy in the maturity of life, we dignify him with eulogies, which the true poet, he versifies, could not more have merited. For my part, I only consider as learning that which a man knows by reflection. It is of no consequence to *remember*, that such a word is to be found in Cicero; that the name of one barbarian, succeeded

and the name of another barbarian; that such fashions prevailed in the reign of such a monarch; and all that multifarious minute trifling which constitutes what most term *learning*. To *reason* on such particulars may enlighten, but to *remember* them is nothing. There is more ingenuity in unriddling charades, and in writing acrostics, than some, who are considered as eminent scholars, exert in their literary labours. It is as rare to find among men of genius, an Erudit, as among Erudits to discover a man of genius.

Such are they who study fourteen hours a day, and indefatigably push on their heavy systems throughout life. Schioppius detected 500 blunders in 120 pages of Scaliger; and Holstenius discovered 8000 in Baronius! Madame Dacier affirmed she had read Aristophanes 200 times; and one Berlugerius was so insane a reader of Homer, that he was excommunicated for reading him at church. He at last, with restless impatience, undertook an excursion to the fields of Troy, but is supposed to have lost his way. One cannot but smile at the manner with which one of this venerable fraternity closes his History of the World; "in my second book" (says he) "the world may judge by my reflections and remarks, whether I have discernment and genius." The school of low commentators is admirably depicted, by the terse and lively taste of Armstrong:

"The strong-built pedant, who both night and day  
Feeds on the coarsest fare the schools bestow,  
And crudely fattens at gross Burman's stall."

Many

Many are familiar with the Latin and the Grecian compositions, whom the Latins and the Greeks, full of taste and sensibility, would never have admitted into their society.

Men of an elevated fancy, have ever treated these industrious students with great contempt. Hobbes said, that had he read as much as some learned men, he had been as ignorant as they. Le Clerc observes, in his *Ars Critica*, that had two authors whom he mentions, read less and digested better, they had produced more useful works: Malebranche asserts, that the proper study of man is truth, considered as it relates to himself; that this can only be found in Philosophy, and that history only presents us with trivial or imperfect copies. They conceived more truth to be contained in a moral precept, than in an historical fact; and they, therefore, preferred the cultivation of the understanding, to that of the memory.

This erroneous system has, indeed, been opposed; and Bolingbroke observes from an ancient, that "History is Philosophy teaching by Example." The censure of Malebranche will, however, be justly pointed at all histories composed by the *mere Erudits*. A mass of minute facts may prove the author to be a profound antiquary, but a shallow philosopher; and it may be observed of historical composition, that the philosopher generally begins at those periods where the antiquary concludes.

These Erudits are characterized by an enormous passion for collecting books. They were once called

called *Helluones Librorum*. But this book glut, tony is without digestion or taste.\* An indulgence for the bibliomania, the taste for classing books, and the judgment shewn in their various editions, are doubtless innocent objects, till they render a man ridiculous. The owner becomes so deeply read in titles and indexes, that often he who had sufficient talent to form a catalogue, has conceived

\* The following notices of these collectors are curious; the first I find in the Pithæana, in an explanatory note by Maisieux. "BIBLIOTAPHE, on appelle Bibliotaphe, ou Tombeau des Livres, celui qui ayant quelque Livre rare et curieux ne le communique à personne; mais le garde sous la clef, et l'enterre, pour ainsi dire, dans son Cabinet."

Dr. Wendeborn very judiciously observes, that "the price given in public sales, for what are called *Editiones principas*, have often astonished him, and are not consistent with reason, which, however, with those who are called Dilettanti, may be out of the question." Such literary imbecilities are transmitted from possessor to possessor, and are often exhibited at Book-sales, when the hammer of the bookseller has more than once fallen from his hand, in astonishment at the prices he received. Koecherus has written a Treatise on Literary Idolatry. To conclude this note by a characteristic anecdote, I shall give one of Tom Hearne, which the late Mr. Warton has inserted in his Essay on Spenser. When this laborious antiquary published the Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, he entered into a warm defence of the *old black letter*, and says, it is a reproach to us, that the B. L. which was so much in use in our grandfather's days, should be now, as it were, disused; and (he adds) "though I have taken so much pleasure in perusing the English Bible of the year 1541, yet 'tis nothing equal to that I should take in turning over that of the year 1539!" Indeed, such is the propensity of these students, that some great commentators on

conceived himself capable of adding a volume to it of his own. To these dull possessors of rich libraries, we cannot but observe, that the acquisition of the finest musical instruments, imparts not the art of the musician.

Such an one will, probably, be a man of mean talents, and slender judgment. He will collect every thing, till he embarrasses his feeble faculties; and amidst all the information possible, will stand irresolute and ignorant. Discordant opinions  
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on Shakespeare, it is said, are not allowed to visit the library at Cambridge without a guard, as it has been discovered, that these amateurs are not the most honest men, amidst a **black letter** collection. A number of anecdotes prove this to have been an old habit. Pinelli furnished his famous *Bibliotheca* chiefly by his skill in an art which lies much more in the dexterity of his hands, than his head. Bishop Moore, Sir Thomas Bodley, Mr. Umfreville, Dr. Rawlinson, and a long et cetera, were all of them the most celebrated collectors in the country, and every one a bibliothecal thief. Sir Robert Saville, writing to Sir Robert Cotton, appointing an interview with Sir Thomas Bodley (the great founder of the Bodleian Library) cautions Sir Robert that "If he held anie boke so deare as thatt hee would bee loathe to lose it, he should *not let Sir Thomas out of his sight*, but set the boke aside beforehand." A similar anecdote is told of Bishop Moore—A gentleman calling on a friend who possessed a very choice library, found him busy in *biding his best books*, and locking up as many as he could. On enquiring the reason of this odd occupation the Bibliopolist replied—Don't you know the Bishop of Ely dines with me to day?—At Exeter, a collection of Medals was left lately at the death of the Donor, with a paper, purporting that when such a person (who was a brother collector) should desire to examine them, he should be closely watched by two persons on each side of him!

he perceives; but to elicit truth from their confusion, demands that skill and energy which few Erudits have possessed. When one is exercised in collecting facts, but a slight attention is required, and while the higher faculties are quiescent, the infatuated compiler considers them as active; but, in truth, it is only the hand that transcribes, not the head that thinks. The common-place book is crowded with facts, while the mind makes not the acquisition of one solitary idea. This Erudition is a gross lust of the mind; it seizes on every thing indiscriminately, yet produces nothing; it is passion without fruition.

A philosopher having the same topics, will select the leading circumstances only as his chief authorities. The art of rejecting, is not less important than the art of accumulating; half, says Hesiod, is more than the whole. He who wears all, without wearying himself, smothers the sparks of his fire, by the heaps of his fuel; but a philosopher lights a little wood with the clear and durable flame of genius. It is, perhaps, not too bold to affirm, that the discoveries of meditation are more numerous than those of reading; for meditation can penetrate into those ages where facts are unrecorded. It has been sometimes found, that a philosopher, without any other data than his own meditations, has accounted for circumstances, which have been confirmed by facts, long afterwards discovered by the tardy dullness of the torpid antiquary. Meditation anticipates evidence, or educes from evidence novel truths.

Let us contemplate these Erudits, as the critics of a classical author. Such critics are more delighted by an obscure expression in a fine sentence, than with the sentence itself; as oculists are not displeased when their friends have infirm eyes. But even the humble province of annotation, by a philosophic genius, becomes no contemptible labour; and Johnson's notes, which are not the most esteemed by his unworthy fraternity, frequently appear like an accidental wave rolling with vehemence down a stagnant stream.

Those violent panegyrics with which they idolise an author, are as insincere as they are disgusting. When a pedant throws an offering of flowers, on the altar of the Graces, he acts not with the ardour, but the hypocrisy of devotion. We have seen these Erudits bring forward some forgotten writer, and who deserved to be so, with a pomp of eulogium that the greatest cannot merit; and even the legitimate applause due to celebrated authors, they render ridiculous. These ponderous minds have been well described by Voltaire, when he observes of Dacier, *Qu'il connoissoit tout des anciens hors la grace et la finesse*. Sensibility of taste rarely directs their choice of an author; but merely the accidental collection of a number of notes, and often a more trivial circumstance. We have had new editions of obsolete writers, because their commentator was born in the same town, or in the same kingdom. Authors have been more frequently given for the notes, than what should be, the notes for the author. Thus Duchat published editions

tions of several obscure writers, because, having directed his researches to the middle ages, he was desirous to discharge his adversaria on the public. Scaliger preferred Virgil to Homer, because Virgil was his fellow-countryman, and Dacier preferred Homer to all past and future poets, because he was the most ancient.

He who has grown hoary in Erudition, becomes untractable by his vanity. He regards his hourly discoveries with a spirit of self-exultation, which places him far above the attainments of the philosopher. He who is directed by reason, and relies more on his thinking, than his Erudition, makes few, and often late, discoveries; he who cultivates taste, often turns, with displeasure, from unimportant topics; but he who collects and arranges facts, felicitates himself with new and facile acquirements, and as he explores the interminable desert of Erudition, amasses a vast and mingled treasure, and exults in an apparent splendour. Milton describes the Erudit, who, he says,

“ Uncertain and unsettled still remains;  
 Deep vers'd in books, and shallow in himself;  
 Crude, or intoxicate, collecting toys,  
 As children gathering pebbles on the shore.

*Paradise Regain'd.*”

Whenever learning is made to consist in words or facts, it is amusing to observe it's effects, operating on it's votarists. The insolence of an antiquary has no parallel, whenever a subject congenial to his studies is agitated; because having,

with much commendable pains, and many patient years, traced the object through all its possible connections, he knows what facts can be related, and is conscious that the speaker cannot have acquired more than himself. This gives birth to many extravagancies of lettered vanity; and I have observed two recondite antiquaries, kindling in dispute, while one had, perhaps, only a month's, or a day's more reading than his adversary. No class of students have more exalted notions of their talents, than good linguists; for having perfected themselves in the verbal science, they consider that words are science itself, and do not recollect that they are but the keys of the gates.

Such is the character of those who would place a convenient limit to the human faculties, and satisfied with digging out from the graves of time, some dead fact, consider knowledge to be obtainable by the pertinacity of mechanical labour. But as a linguist may combine and know every word in a language, and yet never attain to any skill in composition, so the Erudit may heap fact upon fact, and, notwithstanding, never enlighten. Philosophy alone can throw the creative beam of light over the dark chaos of Erudition, and awaken into order and beauty the surrounding mass.

But even Philosophy will not be sufficient to render learning attractive; we must also employ the elegancies of composition, and cover the aridity of research with the freshest roses of taste. Most of the French academicians, in their learned memoirs, have claims on our applause and imitation;

tion; they instruct us to give the bloom of youth to the wrinkles of learning, and while we form an accurate and lucid recital of facts, to interweave reflections which interest, and to embellish with a style which enchants. We must have learning to collect facts; judgment to scife on those which converge to one point, and a brilliant taste to animate and adorn.

## ON POETICAL OPUSCULA.

PLINY, in an Epistle to Tuscus, advises him to intermix among his severer studies, the softening charms of poetry; and notices a species of poetical composition, which merits critical animadversion. I shall quote Pliny, in the language of his elegant translator. He says, "these pieces commonly go under the title of Poetical Amusements; but these amusements have sometimes gained as much reputation to their authors, as works of a more serious nature. It is surprising how much the mind is entertained and enlivened by these little poetical compositions, as they turn upon subjects of gallantry, satire, tenderness, politeness, and every thing, in short, that concerns life, and the affairs of the world."

This species of poetry can only exist in an age when refinement is introduced into literature, as well as into every thing else. We must, therefore, look for it, in the present day, among a people the most refined among it's neighbours; and we observe, that it has been carried to it's utmost perfection by the French. It has been discriminated by them, from the mass of poetry, under the apt title of "*La Poesie legere*," and sometimes it has been significantly called "*Vers de Societé*." The French writers have formed a body of this fugitive poetry, which no European nation can rival; and to which both the language and genius, of that  
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Once gay and polished people, appear to be greatly favourable.

The "*Poesies legeres*" are not, as their title would appear to import, merely compositions of a light and gay turn, but are equally employed as a vehicle for tender and pathetic sentiment. They are never long, for they are consecrated to the amusement and delight of society. Their subjects are illimitable; but it is required, that since the author is indulged to sport in small extent, and on a variety of topics, that the undefinable power of originality, give a value to every little production. The author appears to have composed them for his pleasure, not for his glory; and he charms his readers, because he seems careless of their approbation.

The versification cannot be too refined, melodious and glowing, it should display all the graces of poetry. Every delicacy of sentiment, must find it's delicacy of style, and every tenderness of thought, must be softened by the tenderest tones. Nothing trite or trivial, either in the expression or the thought, must enfeeble and chill the imagination; nor must the ear be denied it's gratification, by a rough or careless verse. In these works nothing is pardoned; a word may disturb, a line may destroy the charm.

The passions of the poet, may form the subjects of his verse. It is in these writings he delineates himself; he reflects his tastes, his desires, his humours, his amours, and even his defects. In other poems, the poet disappears under the feigned character

racter he assumes; here alone he speaks, here he acts. He makes a confident of the reader, interests him in his hopes, and his sorrows; we admire the poet, and conclude with esteeming the man. In these effusions the lover may not unsuccessfully urge his complaints. They may form a compliment for a patron, or a congratulation for an artist; a vow of friendship, or a hymn of gratitude.

These poems have often, with great success, displayed pictures of Manners; domestic descriptions are ever pleasing; and it is here that the poet colours the objects with all the hues of life, and the variations of nature. Reflections must, however, be artfully interwoven, in a compressed and rapid manner. Moral instruction must not be amplified; these are pieces devoted to the fancy; and while reflection is indulged, the imagination feels itself defrauded; a scene may be painted throughout the poem; a sentiment must be conveyed in a verse. In the Grongar Hill of Dyer, we discover some strokes which may serve to exemplify this criticism. The poet, contemplating the distant landscape, observes,

“ A step methinks may pass the stream,  
So little, distant dangers seem;  
So we mistake the future's face,  
Ey'd thro' Hope's deluding glass.”

Moral reflections, which are usually obvious and tedious, if thus rapidly struck off, contrast with great beauty the lighter and more airy parts.

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It must not be supposed, that because these productions are concise, they have, therefore, the more facility; we must not consider the genius of a poet, diminutive, because his pieces are so; nor must we call them, as a fine sonnet has been called, a difficult trifle. A circle may be very small, yet it may be as mathematically beautiful and perfect as a larger one. To such compositions we may apply the observation of an ancient critic, that though a little thing gives perfection, yet perfection is not a little thing.

The poet, to succeed in these hazardous pieces, must be an amiable voluptuary; alike polished by an intercourse with the world, as with the studies of taste; to whom labour is negligence; refinement a science, and art a nature. Genius will not always be sufficient to impart that grace of amenity which seems peculiar to those who are accustomed to elegant society. Many of the French nobility, who cultivated poetry, have, therefore, oftener excelled in these poetical amusements, than more professed poets. France once delighted in the amiable and ennobled names of Nivernois, Boufflers, and St. Aignan; they have not been considered as unworthy rivals of Chaulieu and Bernard, of Voltaire and Gresset. But these productions are more the effusions of taste than genius; and it is not sufficient that the poet is inspired by the muse, but he must also suffer his concise page to be polished by the hand of the Graces.

All the minor odes of Horace, and the entire Anacreon, are compositions of this kind; effusions of the heart, and pictures of the imagination, which were produced in the convivial, the amatory, and the pensive hour. Our nation has not always been successful in these performances; they have not been kindred to it's genius. With Charles II. something of a gayer and more airy taste was communicated to our poetry; but it was desultory, incorrect, and wild. Waller, both by his habits, and his genius, was well adapted to excel in this lighter poetry; and he has often attained the perfection which the state of the language then permitted. Prior has a variety of sallies; but his humour is sometimes gross, and his versification is sometimes embarrassed. He knew the value of these charming pieces; and he had drank of this burgundy in the vineyard itself. He has some translations, and some plagiarisms; but some of his verses to Chloe are eminently airy and pleasing. A diligent selection from our fugitive poetry, might perhaps present us with many of these minor poems; but the *Vers de Societé* form a species of poetical composition which may still be employed with great success.

ON "THE ENLIGHTENED PUBLIC," AND  
"THE AGE OF REASON."

RICHARDSON makes a pleasing comparison of national virtues, which, says he, are first like the seed, which produces the blade, then the green ear, and lastly the ripe corn. A progressive state is observable in the moral, like that in the natural world, and may also be traced in the character of an individual, as well as in that of a people.

But it is not with the human head, as with the human heart. The perfection of any virtue is obtainable, but perhaps never that, of knowledge; the actions of a hero are perfect, but the works of a scholar may in time be found erroneous; Alexander is still our hero, but Aristotle has ceased to be our preceptor. Virtue is similar and permanent, for an action of benevolence, or heroism, can never change in its nature; but a system of philosophy, or a school of taste, must be annihilated by new philosophies and new tastes.

Some speculative moderns have formed extravagant notions of that almost unimaginable perfection, to which human knowledge is rapidly conducting us. Hartley, in one of his sublime and incomprehensible reveries, leaves it to the knowledge of the next age to trace and comprehend. Some living philosophers, who are only adding the English density of thinking to the French subtilty of fancy, conjecture that we may so improve our  
organisation,

organisation, as to extend our duration; that the mind may attain an infinite perfectibility; and that the Intellectual faculties are transmissible from the parent to the son, as sometimes are the features and the habits. Philosophical conjecture rolling with this oscillatory motion, is merely an inebriation of poetry.

We are, however, incessantly reminded of the *enlightened* state of the public; but the testimony of authors becomes suspicious, for in persuading us that we are thus illuminated, they infer by implication that they are singularly so, since they give us very useful instruction. The expression, was, I think, first the happy coinage of Voltaire, made current by his numerous disciples; Voltaire adored the public and himself; and this artful expression is at once imprinted with adulation and egotism.

It is certain that in former periods the human mind shot from a radical vigour, and flourished in the richest luxuriance. Among the ancients, the fine and mechanical arts have been considered to have exceeded our happiest efforts; and as for the intellectual powers and the moral duties, though most of the compositions of these ancients have been lost, yet enough have remained to serve as models for our greatest poets; to instruct our orators in the arts of eloquence; our historians in the composition of history, and to leave nothing for our moralists, but an amplification of the observations of Seneca and Epictetus.

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Had one of our modern philosophers lived in those ages, would he not, in the enthusiasm of his meditations, have expressed the flattering sentiment now so prevalent; and throwing his glance into remote futurity, have prognosticated a saturdayan age, when every citizen should be a philosopher, and the universe one entire Rome? But it is the error of men, who, presuming to describe at so vast an interval, imagine circumstances and connexions which have no existence; as it is often found that lands, which appeared united when observed remotely, are in reality eternally separated by the ocean.

Among the most sanguine, and the most singular of modern philosophers, is the worthy Abbè de Saint Pierre. The honesty of his heart exceeded the rectitude of his understanding. His project of "An Universal Peace," by the infelicity of his style, could find no readers; a philanthropist as singular, but more eloquent, the celebrated Rousseau, embellished the neglected labour, enabled us to read the performance, and perceive it's humane imbecility. It was no dull conception of a Dutch trader, who having inscribed on his sign the words "Perpetual Peace," had painted under it, a church-yard. Our good Abbè had a notion that an age was not distant, when such would be the progress of that mass of light, which was daily gathering, that it would influence every species of knowledge, and penetrate to the lowest orders of society. This future generation is to be remarkable for the force of it's reason, and the severity of

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it's truth. It is therefore only to permit works of utility; to condemn the ornaments of eloquence, and the charms of poetry; but it may be necessary to observe, that our prophet was neither an orator nor a poet. He was once present at the recitation of one of those works which are only valued for the graces of their composition, and the felicity of their manner. A performance of such taste would not therefore be read by the more reasonable beings of his metaphysical age. He appeared frigid and unmoved, while the audience was enraptured. His opinion was asked; he smiled, and said—"It is a thing which is YET thought to be fine!"

Another of these chimerical, yet grand speculators, appears to me to have been the celebrated Leibnitz, who conceived the extravagant notion of forming one nation of all Europe; for he proposed to reduce Europe under one temporal power, in the Emperor, and under one spiritual, in the Pope; and to construct an universal philosophical language. This great scholar is an example of the fatal attachment which a superior mind may experience for a system of which it is blindly enamoured, and to which it sacrifices it's own sensations, and it's own convictions. Leibnitz was a genuine philosopher, and a friend to humanity; his project of an universal language evinces this; but having once fixed on a system, he yielded up that dearest interest to a philosopher, the prosperity of the human mind; for what tyrant could have forged more permanent chains for intellectual freedom,

freedom, than placing man under two such powers? If this project had been possible to effect, the other of the philosophical language had been useless; philosophy then would not have been allowed a language.

He who thinks, will perceive in every enlightened nation, three kinds of people; an inconsiderable number instructed by reason, and glowing with humanity; a countless multitude, barbarous and ignorant, intolerant and inhospitable; and a vacillating people with some reason and humanity, but with great prejudices, at once the half-echoes of philosophy, and the adherents of popular opinion. Can the *public* be denominated *enlightened*? Take an extensive view among the various orders of society, and observe how folly still wantons in the vigour of youth, and prejudice still stalks in the stubbornness of age.

To trace the human mind as it exists in a people, would be the only method to detect this fallacious expression. The unenlightened numbers, who are totally uninfluenced by the few, live in a foul world of their own creation. The moral arithmetician, as he looks for the sum total of the unenlightened public, must resemble the algebraist, who riots in incalculable quantities, and who smiles at the simple savage, whose arithmetic extends not further than the number of three.

In a metropolis, we contemplate the human mind in all it's inflections. If we were to judge of men by the condition of their *minds*, (which perhaps is the most impartial manner of judging) we should

should not consult the year of their birth, to date their ages; and an intellectual register might be drawn up, on a totally different plan from our parochial ones. A person may, according to the vulgar era, be in the maturity of life, when by our philosophical epocha he is born in the tenth century. That degree of mind which regulated the bigotry of a monk in the middle ages, may be discovered in a modern rector. An adventurous spirit in a red coat, who is almost as desirous (to use the wit of South) to receive a kiss from the mouth of a cannon, as from that of his mistress, belongs to the age of chivalry, and if he should compose verses, and be magnificently prodigal, he is a gay and noble troubadour. A sarcastic philosopher, who instructs his fellow citizens, and retires from their society, is a contemporary with Diogenes; and he who reforming the world, graces instruction with amenity, may be placed in the days of Plato. Our vulgar politicians must be arranged among the Roundheads and Olivers, and Tom Paine himself is so very ancient as to be a contemporary of Shimei. The result of our calculations would be, that the enlightened public form an inconsiderable number.

It must however be confessed, that what knowledge has been accumulated by modern philosophy, cannot easily perish; the art of printing has imparted stability to our intellectual structures, in what depends on the mechanical preservation. A singular spectacle has, therefore, been exhibited; and it is sometimes urged by those who contemplate,

plate, with pleasing astonishment, the actual progress of the human mind, as a proof of the immutability of truth, that in the present day, every enlightened individual, whether he resides at Paris, at Madrid, or at London, now thinks alike; no variation of climate, no remoteness of place, not even national prejudices, more variable and more remote than either, destroy that unanimity of opinion, which they feel on certain topics essential to human welfare.

This appears to be a specious argument in favour of the enlightened public. But we should recollect, that this unanimity of opinion, which so frequently excites surprise, proceeds from their deriving their ideas from the same sources; at Paris, at Madrid, and at London, the same authors are read, and, therefore, the same opinions are formed.

Thus we account for this unanimity of opinion; and we may now reasonably enquire whether *unanimity of opinion*, always indicates *permanent truth*? It is certain that very extravagant opinions were once universally received; does any one deny that some of our modern opinions are marvellously extravagant? May we not say to the greatest genius, look at what your equals have done, and observe how frequently they have erred. Reflect, that whenever an Aristotle, a Descartes, and a Newton appeared, they formed a new epocha in the annals of human knowledge, it is not unreasonable to add one, among your thousand conjectures, and say, that their future rivals may trace

trace new connections, and collect new facts, which may tend to annihilate the systems of their predecessors. Is not opinion often local, and ever disguised by custom? is not what we call truth often error? and are not the passions and ideas of men of so very temporary a nature, that they scarcely endure with their century? This enlightened public may discover that their notions become obsolete, and that with new systems of knowledge, and new modes of existence, their books may be closed for their successors, and only consulted by the curious of a future generation, as we now examine Aristotle and Descartes, Aristophanes and Chaucer. Our learning may no more be their learning, than our fashions will be their fashions. Every thing in this world is fashion.

It may also be conjectured, that amidst the multitude of future discoveries, the original authors of our own age, the Newtons and the Lockes, may have their conceptions become so long familiarised, as to be incorporated with the novel discoveries, as truths so incontestible, that very few shall even be acquainted with their first discoverers. It would therefore appear, that the justness, as well as the extravagance of our authors, are alike inimical to their future celebrity.

But this instability never attends the noble exertions of virtue. Whoever immortalises his name, by an action of patriotism, or of philanthropy, will meet the certain admiration of posterity. To render a service to another is in the power of the meanest individual; but to aggrandise

raise the gentle affections into sublime passions, to rise from the social circle to the public weal, to extend our ordinary life through years of glory, is performing that which once raised men into demi-gods.

## OF LICENSERS OF THE PRESS.

IN the history of literary oppression, a prominent event will be that of the employing of a vigilant centinel on the thoughts, as well as on the bodies of authors. The institution of Licensers of the Press, or Censors of Books, was the last hope of despairing bigotry; and not only, for a considerable time, retarded the acceleration of philosophy, but may be said to have effected a temporary annihilation; for what author has so little vanity as to write what must be refused the honours of publication?

Had not several accidental circumstances established the freedom of the press, it might be difficult, by a retrograde calculation, to fix on that low degree, at which, to the present moment, popular opinion, with a somniferous stability, had rested. Europe had now been more barbarous than in her cloudiest ages; for the press had become an instrument, not to restrain, but to extend; not to undermine, but to prop; not to wrestle with, but to cherish those inhuman prejudices, which were once dignified by the holy titles of Religion and Politics. A Locke and a Montesquieu had never existed for the world, and at this day we should have admired, like our predecessors, the subtilties of an Aquinas, and the doctrines of a Filmer. Our ideas had been fabricated in an inquisitorial forge, and though they would not have  
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consisted of a variety of forms, they would not have wanted that heat which might have given durability.

The Inquisitors having long examined and deprecated a vast multitude of publications, which the freedom of foreign presses allowed, and their critical occupations after the revolution of Luther, becoming greater and more important at every hour, they were desirous of assisting those of their numerous adherents, who were fearful of employing their own eyes, and trusting to their own sensations, by preserving them in their antiquated cecity. It was now they invented the scheme of printing catalogues of prohibited books, which they called **EXPURGATORY INDEXES**. Almost every new work augmented these voluminous catalogues; and, perhaps, in some respect, they invited readers to publications which might not otherwise have attracted notice. It is curious to reflect on the use which the two parties made of them; for while the pious Catholic crossed himself at every title, and frequently breathed an orison for the eternal damnation of the authors, the Heretics on the contrary would purchase no book which had not been inserted in these indexes. The Heretic had certainly a finer taste, and a more lively entertainment in reading, than the pious Catholic; for the most animated and the most valuable authors, have found their way into these indexes. Nothing then, but orthodox dullness, was exempt from censure. Among the cruel absurdities of that day, is an edict from the French King, to forbid the  
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unfortunate professor Ramus the reading of his own works, and which, so very frequently, is the only real pleasure some writers receive from their labours.

The venerable authors of these indexes, long indeed, had reason to suppose, that a submissive credulity was attached to the human character; and, therefore, they considered that the publications of their adversaries required no other answer, than an insertion in their indexes. Literary controversy was threatened to be eternally annihilated, by this concise and commodious mode. They multiplied editions throughout Europe; but the Heretics as industriously reprinted them with ample prefaces, and useful annotations. In our country, Dr. James, of Oxford, republished an index, with proper animadversions. One of their portions included, a list of those Heretics whose heads were condemned as well as their works. It is curious to observe, that as these indexes were formed in different countries, the opinions were diametrically opposite to each other; the examiners in Italy, under the title of the Council of Trent, prohibited what those in the Netherlands admitted; and some inquisitors, who complained of the partial conduct of these catalogues, were, in their turn, placed by the confraternity in their indexes; retaliation succeeded retaliation. To the present moment such indexes are formed.

When these insertions were found of no other use, than to disperse the criminal volumes, the ecclesiastical arm was employed in burning them in public

public places; and among several anecdotes of sending authors to the flames before their time, Monnoie discovered in one of these sepulchral fires, that an edition of Josephus had been burnt, not, says he, because the ancient author was a jew, but that the translator was a jansenist. These literary conflagrations served the purposes of book-sellers; and the publisher of Erasmus's Colloquies intrigued for the burning of the work, on purpose to raise the sale; and he sold 24,000. The curiosity of man is raised by difficulties, and it is with the freedom of the mind, as with that herb, which the more it is trodden on, grows the more vigorously.

The fancy of the poet, and the veracity of the historian, were alike amputated, by censors of books; a simile, or even an epithet, might send the immortal bard to the galleys, and as for the discernment and freedom to be expected in an historian, whose genius was first to be closeted with such an examiner, we may form an idea, by quoting the usual expression in the privileges. In Nani's History of Venice, it is allowed to be printed, because it contained *nothing against princes*. This mode of approbation shews either that princes were immaculate, or historians were ignorant or false. The history of Guicciardini is still scarred with the merciless wound of the Papistic Censor; for Le Clerc informs us that a curious account of the origin and increase of Papal Power is wanting in the third and fourth book of his History. Velli's history of France would have  
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been an admirable work, had it not been printed at Paris. A book in Spain passes through six courts before it can be published; and in Portugal, it is said, through seven. A book in those countries is supposed to recommend itself to the reader, by the information that it is published with *all* the necessary privileges.

Our literary history has been so little perpetuated, either by tradition, or by record, that there are but few individual topics which can be pursued through a concatenation of events. Our authors have groaned under the leaden arm of Licensors of the Press, and no doubt many interesting facts have perished, which would have instructed the present generation. The Poems of Lord Brooke, if they cannot delight, accidentally instruct posterity in the value of freedom of thinking. In this book one is surpris'd at finding twenty of it's first pages deficient. Mr. Malone has discovered, that these pages contained a poem on religion, which was cancelled by the order of Archbishop Laud, who probably considered that religion could not be secure in the hands of any one but an Archbishop.

The ignorance and stupidity of these censors, became as remarkable as their exterminating spirit. The noble simile of Milton, of Satan with the rising-sun, in the first book of the Paradise Lost, had almost occasioned the suppression of that immortal epic: it was supposed to contain treason. The tragedy of Arminius, by one Paterson, who was an amanuensis of the poet Thomson, was intended

intended for representation, but the Dramatic Cenfor refused a licence: As Edward and Eleanora was not permitted to be performed, being considered a party work, our sagacious State-Critic, imagined that Paterfon's *own* play was in the same predicament, by being in the same hand writing! The French have retained many curious facts of the singular ineptitude of these censfors. Mallebranche said, that he could never obtain an approbation for his *Research after Truth*, because it was unintelligible to his censfors; and at length Mezeray, the historian, approved of it as a book of geometry. Latterly in France, it is said, that the greatest geniuses were obliged to submit their works to the critical understanding of persons who had formerly been low dependants on some man of quality, and who appear to have brought the same fervility of mind to the examination of works of genius. There is something, which, on the principles of incongruity and contrast, becomes exquisitely ludicrous, in observing the works of such writers as Voltaire, d'Alembert, Marmontel, and Raynal, allowed to be printed, and even commended, by certain persons, who had never printed any thing themselves but their names. One of these gentlemen suppressed a work because it contained principles of government, which appeared to him not conformable to the laws of Moses. Another said to a geometrician, "I cannot permit the publication of your book; you dare to say, that between two given points, the shortest line is the straight line. Do you think me such an idiot as not to perceive

ceive your allusion? If your work appeared, I should make enemies of all those who find, by crooked ways, an easier admittance into court, than by a straight line. Consider their number!" I have heard, that one of these censors erased from a comedy of Beaumarchais, the *asseveration ma foi*, and instituted in it's place, *morbleu*; because, observed the profound critic, religion is less offended by this word than by the other. These appear trifling minutiae; and yet, like a hair in a watch, that utterly destroys it's progress, these little ineptiae obliged writers to have recourse to foreign presses; compelled a Montesquieu to write with a concealed ambiguity of phrase, and Helvetius to sign a retractation of his principles.

At the revolution, ceased, in England, the licences for the press; but it's liberty did not commence till 1694, when every restraint was taken off, by the firm and decisive tone of the commons. It was granted, says our philosophic Hume, "to the great displeasure of the King and his Ministers, who, seeing no where, in any government during present or past ages, any example of such unlimited freedom, doubted much of it's salutary effects, and probably thought, that no books or writings would ever so much improve the general understanding of men, as to render it safe to entrust them with an indulgence to easily abused."

And the present moment verifies the prescient conjecture of the philosopher. Such, indeed, is the existing licentiousness of our press, that some, not perhaps the most hostile to the cause of freedom,

dom, would not be averse to manacle authors once more with an IMPRIMATUR. For it will not be denied, that Erasmus was a friend to the freedom of the press; yet he was so shocked at the licentiousness of Luther's pen, that there was a time when he considered it as necessary to restrain the liberty of the press. He had indeed been miserably calumniated, and expected future libels. I am glad, however, to observe that he afterwards, on a more impartial investigation, confessed that such a remedy was much more dangerous than the disease. To restrain the liberty of the press, can only be the interest of the individual, never that of the public. It may be honestly urged, that the worst abuse of the press is more tolerable than would be such a violation of national liberty; but this is certain, that it is not any more in the power of a despotic Minister to annihilate this freedom; because if the great instructors of mankind could find no other redress against the capricious tyranny of an Imprimatur, they would fly to foreign presses, and it would then happen, that England, which first diffused a spirit of true freedom in Europe, would be necessitated to receive it from those very nations on whom she had bestowed it. The profound Hume has declared, that "THE LIBERTY OF BRITAIN IS GONE FOR EVER when such attempts shall succeed."

A virtuous monarch, will consider the freedom of the press as the organ of his people's felicity; for by that organ alone can the voice of truth resound to his throne. He will respect the language

of the philosopher; and he will leave calumniators to the fate of all calumny; a fate similar to those, who having overcharged their arms, with the feeblest intentions, find, that the death they intended for others, only in bursting, annihilates themselves.

\* \* \* The work of Dr. James, keeper of the public library of Oxford, mentioned in this Essay, is entitled, "A Treatise of the Corruption of Scripture, Councils, and Fathers, by the Church of Rome, for the Maintenance of Popery and Irreligion." London, Quarto, 1612.—He has inserted in this work a history of the origin, the arts, and the abuses of the *Indices Expurgatorii*. He has given a catalogue of 323 of their forbidden books, with notices of those parts which the Inquisition thought necessary to be purged away.

## ON READING.

SINCE writing is justly denominated an art, I think that reading claims the same distinction. To adorn ideas with elegance, is an act of the mind, superior to that of receiving them, and is the province of genius; but to receive them with a happy discrimination, is a task not less useful, and can only be the effect of a just taste.

Yet it will be found that a just taste is not sufficient to obtain the proper end of reading. Two persons of equal taste rise from the perusal of the same book with very different notions; the one will not only have the ideas of the author at command, and strongly imbibe his manner, but will have enriched his own mind by a new accession of matter, and find a new train of sentiment awakened and in action. The other quits his author in a pleasing distraction, but of the pleasures of reading, nothing remains but a tumultuous sensation. He has only delighted himself with the brilliant colouring, and the mingled shadows of a variety of objects, while the other receives the impression not only of the colours and the shades, but the distinct grace, and the accurate forms of the objects.

To account for these different effects, we must have recourse to a logical distinction, which appears to reveal one of the great mysteries in the art of reading. Logicians distinguish between perceptions and ideas. Perception is that faculty

of the mind which notices the simple impression of objects: but when these objects exist in the mind, and are there treasured and arranged as materials for reflection, then they are called ideas. A perception is like a transient sun-beam, which just shews the object, but leaves neither light nor warmth; while an idea is like the fervid beam of noon, which throws a settled and powerful light.

Many ingenious readers complain that their memory is defective, and their studies unfruitful. This defect, however, arises from their indulging the facile pleasures of perceptions, in preference to the laborious habit of forming them into ideas. We must not deceive ourselves. Perceptions require only the sensibility of taste, and their pleasures are continuous, easy, and exquisite. Ideas not only require the same power of taste, but an art of combination, and an exertion of the reasoning powers, which form no mean operation of the mind. Ideas are therefore labours; and for those who will not undergo the fatigue of labour, it is unjust to complain, if they come from the harvest with scarcely a sheaf in their hands.

The numerous class of readers of taste, who only prefer a book to the odd trick at whist, have, therefore, no reason to murmur, if that which is only taken up as an amusement, should terminate like all amusements, in temporary pleasure. To be wiser and better, is rarely the intention of the gay and the frivolous; the complaints of the gay and the frivolous, are nothing but a new manner  
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of displaying gaiety and frivolity; they are lamentations full of mirth.

There are secrets in the art of reading, which tend to facilitate it's purposes, by assisting the memory, and augmenting intellectual opulence. Some, our own ingenuity must form, and perhaps every student, has an artificial manner of recollection, and a peculiar arrangement; as, in short hand, almost every writer has a system of his own. There are, however, some regulations which appear of general utility, and the few, my own observations have produced, I shall venture to communicate.

It is an observation of the elder Pliny, (who, having been a voluminous compiler, must have had great experience in the art of reading) that there was no book so bad, but which contained something good. It is necessary, however, to observe, that just and obvious as this reading axiom may appear, it requires a commentary to be understood. To read every book would be fatal to the interest of most readers; Men of taste who read variously know that the pains exceed the pleasures; to Men of curiosity the pleasures exceed the pains. The reader of erudition who searches for facts and avoids opinions, may therefore read every book. He must pick his few flowers from rugged rocks, and pass many days bewildered in wild deserts. But he who only desires to gratify a more delicate sensation, the reader of taste, must be contented to range in more contracted limits, and to restrict himself to the paths of cultured pleasure grounds.

Without this distinction in reading, study becomes a labour painful and interminable; and hence readers of taste complain that there is no term to reading, and readers of erudition that books contain nothing but phrases. When the former confine themselves to works of taste, their complaints cease, and when the latter keep to books of facts, they fix on the proper aliment for their insatiable curiosity.

Nor is it always necessary, in the pursuits of learning, to read every book entire. Perhaps this task has now become an impossibility, notwithstanding those ostentatious erudits, who, by their infinite and exact quotations, appear to have read and digested every thing; readers, artless and honest, have conceived from such writers, an illusive idea of the power and extensiveness of the human faculties. Of many books it is sufficient to seize the plan, and to examine some of their portions. The quackery of the learned, has been often exposed; and the art of quoting fifty books in a morning, is a task neither difficult nor tedious. Of the little supplement at the close of a volume, few readers conceive the utility; but some of the most eminent writers in Europe, have been great adepts in the art of index-reading. An index-reader is, indeed, more let into the secrets of an author, than the other who attends him with all the tedious forms of ceremony; as those Courtiers who pay their public devoirs at court, are less familiar with the Minister, than the few who merely enter the chamber of audience, and who generally

generally steal up the back stairs. I, for my part, venerate the inventor of indexes; and I know not to whom to yield the preference, either to Hippocrates, who was the first great anatomiser of the human body, or to that unknown labourer in literature, who first laid open the nerves and arteries of a book.\*

It may be unnecessary also, to read all the works of an author, but only to attach ourselves to those which have received the approbation of posterity. By this scheme we become acquainted with the finest compositions in half the time those employ, who, attempting to read every thing, are often little acquainted with, and even ignorant of the most interesting performances. Thus of Machiavel, it may be sufficient to read his Prince and his History of Florence; of Milton nearly all his Poetry, little of his Prose, and nothing of his History; of Fielding's twelve volumes, six may be sufficient; and of Voltaire's ninety, perhaps thirty may satisfy. Of Lord Chesterfield's Letters, the third

• Watts advises the perusal of the *Prefaces* and the *Index* of a Book, as they both give light on its contents.—Gibbons has a new idea in the Art of Reading; he says “we ought not to attend to the order of our Books, so much as of our Thoughts.” The perusal of a particular Work gives birth perhaps to ideas unconnected with the subject it treats; I pursue these ideas and quit my proposed plan of Reading. Thus in the midst of Homer he read Longinus; a chapter of Longinus lead to an Epistle of Pliny; and having finished Longinus, he followed the train of his ideas of the sublime and beautiful in the Enquiry of Burke, and concluded by comparing the ancient with the modern Longinus.

third volume is the essential one, and concentrates the whole system. A reader is too often a prisoner attached to the triumphal car of an author of great celebrity, and when he ventures not to judge for himself, conceives, while he is reading the indifferent works of great authors, that the langour which he experiences, arises from his own defective taste. But the best writers, when they are voluminous, have a great deal of mediocrity; for whenever an author attains to a facility in composition, the success of his preceding labours, not only stimulates him to new performances, but prejudices the public in their favour; and it is often no short period before the public, or the author, are sensible of the mediocrity of the performances.

On the other side, readers must not imagine that all the pleasures of composition depend on the author; for there is something which a reader himself must bring to the book, that the book may please. There is a literary appetite which the author can no more impart, than the most skilful cook can give an appetency to the guests. When Cardinal Richelieu said to Godeau, that he did not understand his verses, the honest poet replied, that it was not his fault. It would indeed be very unreasonable, when a painter exhibits his pictures in public, to expect that he should provide spectacles for the use of the short-sighted. Every man must come prepared as well as he can. Simoïdes confessed himself incapable of deceiving stupid persons; and Balaac remarked of the girls of his vil-  
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lage, that they were too silly to be duped by a man of wit. Dullness is impenetrable; and there are hours when the liveliest taste loses it's sensibility. The temporary tone of the mind may be unfavourable to taste a work properly; and we have had many erroneous criticisms from great men, which may often be attributed to this circumstance. The mind communicates it's infirm dispositions to the book, and an author has not only his own defects to account for, but also those of his reader. There is something in composition, like the game of shuttlecock, where, if the reader does not quickly rebound the feathered cork, to the author, the game is destroyed, and the whole spirit of the work falls extinct.

A frequent impediment in reading, is a disinclination in the mind to settle on the subject; agitated by incongruous and dissimilar ideas, it is with pain that we admit those of the author. But on applying ourselves, with a gentle violence, to the perusal of an interesting work, the mind soon assimilates the subject; the disinclination is no more, and like Homer's chariot wheels, we kindle as we roll. The ancient Rabbins, advised their young students to apply themselves to their readings, whether they felt an inclination or not; because, as they proceeded, they would find their disposition restored, and their curiosity awakened. Philosophy can easily account for this fact; it is so certain, and acts with such power, that even indifferent works are frequently finished, merely to gratify that curiosity which their early pages have communicated.

communicated. The ravenous appetite of Johnson for reading, is expressed in a strong metaphor, by Mrs. Knowles, who said, " he knows how to read better than any one ; he gets at the substance of a book directly ; he tears out the heart of it."

We should hesitate to pronounce on a work of some merit, on the first perusal, for that is rarely attended by a proper relish. It is with reading, as with wine ; for connoisseurs have observed, that the first glass is insufficient to decide on it's quality ; it is necessary to imbue the palate, to give it that raciness of relish, which communicates every latent quality, and enables us to judge as keenly as the two uncles of Sancho.

There are some mechanical aids in reading, which may prove of great utility, and form a kind of rejuvenescence of our early studies. Montaigne placed at the end of a book which he intended not to re-peruse, the time he had read it, with a concise decision on it's merits ; that, says he, it may thus represent to me, the air and general idea I had conceived of the author, in reading the work. He has obliged his admirers with giving several of these annotations. Of Young the poet, it is noticed, that whenever he came to a striking passage, he folded the leaf ; and that at his death, books have been found in his library, which had long resisted the power of closing. A mode more easy than useful ; for after a length of time, they must be again read to know why they were folded. This difficulty is obviated by those, who note in a blank leaf, the pages to be referred to, with a word of criticism.

ticifin. Nor let us consider these minute directions as unworthy the most enlarged minds; by these petty exertions at the most distant periods, may learning obtain it's authorities, and fancy combine it's ideas. Seneca, in sending some volumes to his friend Lucilius, accompanies them with notes of particular passages that, he observes, you who only aim at the useful, may be spared the trouble of examining them entire. I have seen books noted by Voltaire with a word of censure or approbation on the page itself, which was his usual practice; and these volumes are precious to every man of taste. Formey complained that the books he lent Voltaire were returned always disfigured by his remarks; but he was a true German writer of the old class.

A professional student should divide his readings into an *uniform* reading which is useful, and into a *diversified* reading which is pleasant. Guy Patin, an eminent physician and man of letters, had a just notion of this manner; and I shall quote his words. He says, "I daily read Hippocrates, Galen, Fernel, and other illustrious masters of my profession; this I call my profitable readings. I frequently read Ovid, Juvenal, Horace, Seneca, Tacitus, and others, and these are my recreations." We must observe these distinctions, for it frequently happens that a lawyer or a physician, with great industry and love of study, by giving too much into his diversified readings, may utterly neglect what should be his uniform studies.

An author is often cruelly mortified to find his work reposing on a harpsichord or a table, with it's virgin pages. It was among the mortifications of the elegant Mickle, that the lord to whom he had dedicated his version of the Lusiad, had long the epic in his possession, in the state he had received it! How often also are authors mortified to perceive, that generally the first volume of their work is ever fouler than it's brother! It is, therefore, an advantage to compose in single volumes; for then they flatter themselves, a second would be acceptable; but most books are more read for curiosity, than for pleasure; and are often looked into, but rarely resumed. Authors are vain, but readers are capricious.

Readers may be classed into an infinite number of divisions; but an author is a solitary being, who, for the same reason he pleases one, must consequently displease another. To have too exalted a genius; is more prejudicial for his celebrity, than to have a moderate one; for we shall find that the most popular works, are not of the highest value, but of the greatest usefulness. I could mention some esteemed writers, whose works have attained to a great number of editions, but whose minds were never yet inflamed by an accidental fervour of original genius. They instruct those who require instruction, and they please those, who are yet sufficiently ignorant to discover a novelty in their strictures; in a word they form taste, rather than impart genius. A Carlo Marat, is a Raphael to those who have not studied a Raphael. They may  
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apply to themselves the same observation Lucilius, the satirist, has made; that he did not write for Persius, for Scipio, and for Rutilius, persons eminent for their science; but for the Tarentines, the Consentines, and the Sicilians. Montaigne has complained that he found his readers too learned; or too ignorant, and that he could only please a middle class, who have just learning enough to comprehend him. Congreve says, "there is in true beauty, something which vulgar souls cannot admire." Balzac complains bitterly of Readers---a period, he cries, shall have cost us the labour of a day; we shall have distilled into an Essay the essence of our mind; it may be a finished piece of art; and they think they are indulgent when they pronounce it to contain some pretty things, and that the style is not bad!—There is something in exquisite composition which ordinary readers can never understand.

Some will only read old books, as if there were no valuable truths to be discovered in modern publications, while others will only read new books, as if some valuable truths are not among the old. Some will not read a book, because they are acquainted with the author; by which the reader may be more injured than the author; others not only read the book, but would also read the man; by which the most ingenious author may be injured by the most impertinent reader.

An Author would write with refinement and delicacy, the reader has neither; if the author does not succeed he may be an intelligible, but still an indifferent

indifferent writer ; if he succeeds that reader will reject him as an obscure writer, yet the author will then be a highly-finished writer. Some readers complain of the obscurity of an author, and often they are right ; but there are some eyes to which almost every thing appears misty ; for a picture may be hung in it's proper light, though for some it may be raised too high. One ought not to see every thing distinctly, but only certain parts ; the imagination properly supplies the intermediate connections. Hence are derived what some consider to be the obscurities of genius, which indeed are only the *obvious parts* which it wishes to *conceal*.

## ON POETICAL EXPRESSION.

ONE of the grand distinctions of poetry consists in a peculiarity of phrase, and novelty of expression; for no mechanical arrangements, not even sentiment or imagery, (for prose can retain all these qualities) can form the essential distinction between verse and prose. The genuine diction of poetry is totally distinct from prosaic composition, and the charm arises from it's being removed from familiar language. From this established and acknowledged principle may be deduced the following facts:

Hence may be accounted the extreme delight found in the ancient classics, which, with some, has arisen to such an extravagance. A judicious critic will allow, that a passage in Pope, may rival one in Virgil; and it might happen, that the modern excelled the ancient parallel. But the pleasure may not be equal in the modern as in the ancient; nor is this the mere effect of an artificial sensation acquired at the university, but on the contrary it is a natural emotion. The ancient enjoys the peculiar felicity of employing a diction, which to us must be immaculate; a magnificence of sound, and a novelty of combination; we are offended by no feebleness of terms, and no familiarity of expression. A turn of diction, which might have been but common, and in the possession of an ordinary versifier in the days of Virgil, may to

us be very graceful; and thus ideas which would excite no attention in a modern, may charm in an ancient. Hence too, modern poets, who write English verse, without genius or taste, have often composed in Latin with some powers. We no doubt discover a hundred beauties in Horace and Virgil, which could not have been such to their contemporaries, because the language was not sufficiently remote from them. I shall give two very poetical expressions in Virgil, which I now recollect, and he has many similar ones. These felicitous expressions, full of the true spirit of poetry, were probably no novelties when he wrote them. The poet says, "*Dum trepidant ALÆ*" and "*SONIPES*," where, in the first, *wings* are understood for *birds*, and in the second, *sounding-feet* for *horses*. The effect for the cause. Milton is fond of Metonymy; the Efficient for the Effect. He has

"The sounding alchemy"

P. L. b. ii. v. 516.

The general for the particular :

"So spake the grisly terror."

b. ii. v. 704.

All this is highly poetical expression. Dryden in versifying the celebrated simile of Virgil's Nightingale, has happily called the young, "the unfeathered innocence:" how superior to "the young birds!"

Virgil

Virgil has also, in his Georgics, an expression, so truly inimitable, that our language appears not to afford a correspondent delicacy. When the poet describes Eurydice, at the moment before she is wounded by the snake concealed in the grass, as if animated by a prescient fervour, he exclaims—*“moritura puella.”* The reader of taste feels an emotion of surprise and curiosity. Translate this happy word literally into prose, and the grace must be as fugitive as Eurydice herself, “the maid about to die.” The charm arises, if I may so express myself, from the concise amplitude of idea the single word conveys. All our translators have failed in catching the evanescent beauty :

“The dying bride.”

*Dryden.*

“She doomed to death.”

*Trapp.*

“The fated maid.”

*Warton.*

In none of these is a similar emotion raised in the mind of the reader, which he receives from the *“Moritura.”* Dryden’s, indeed, is singularly exceptionable, and Warton’s the happiest; yet, “fated” is a general idea, and loses that delicate shade of appropriation, of the “about to die.”

In an inferior degree, we may extend our principle to modern languages; for, to me, it has often appeared, that a passage from Tasso, has given to an English reader a pleasure which a native cannot experience; the pleasure arising from a language whose graces have not become familiar by ordinary recurrence.

I conceive

I conceive that the effect of the same principle may be traced in our own earlier writers. One of their peculiar charms is their ancient style; and certain phrases, which are generally understood, delight, like a painting which is just embrowned and mellowed by the hand of time. If we contrast a fine passage in Shakespeare, with a rival one in a modern poet, allowing them an equal force, we should not hesitate to give the preference to the elder bard. The lively pleasure with which some men of taste read Chaucer, may be ascribed to their sensibility of a language, which displays many graces, invested with that novelty of poetical expression, which would cease to strike were they familiar. The venerable dignity of the Scriptures is greatly derived from their ancient style, and their simplicity, delightful in the old English, would evaporate, transfused into modern language.

Hence we may deduce a curious fact; that one of the most difficult branches in modern poetry, or in the poetical art, in all ages of refinement, is, the formation of a new style, or poetical diction. This demands not only a superior genius, but a suspicion may arise that our language in this respect is nearly exhausted. And this will appear, if we examine the finest compositions published within the last thirty years; where one eminent defect will often be prevalent; that the general cast of the language has little variations; expressions are interwoven, which the poet nicely picked out of the performances of his predecessors, to embroider his own; and though, sometimes, a new combination

of

of ideas, or a felicity of subject, render a poem interesting, yet the poetical treasury of diction receives but few accessions.

That this has been an effect felt by poets, who are not apt to investigate causes, appears by the following observations and facts :

Milton, whose notions of poetry were of the most exalted nature, when he proposed composing an epic, perceived the necessity of constructing a new diction, or, as himself expresses it,

“ To build the lofty rime.”

In his smaller productions he was satisfied to employ the language of his contemporaries, because in a short composition he might form new combinations of style, without pursuing any particular system. What therefore, has this great poet attempted? An introduction of all the happiest idioms of every language with which his extensive learning was acquainted. Hebraisms and Grecisms, Latinisms and Italianisms, poured themselves to his copious mind ; and what Johnson has termed “ the pedantry of his style,” true taste will, perhaps, acknowledge as an attempt to seize on those felicitous expressions which more nicely reveal our sensations. Dryden adorned his language also with many Latinisms ; and Pope is acknowledged to have formed a diction, which in his day had all the attractions of novelty. Of all our poets, Gray had the liveliest sensibility for this beauty, which he has expressed by “ words that burn.” A poet of his ability who studied so much,

and

and produced so little, seems to shew that he could not satisfy his own delicacy of taste, in the creation of a new poetical diction; and this, I think, appears by those few exquisite performances he has left, for almost every expression in the poetry of Gray appears to have been imitated from his predecessors. He justly observes that "the language of the age is never the language of poetry." What he has given evinces his aim; and we may conclude that it is one of the grand characteristics of modern poetry, and one of the greatest obstacles in that pleasing art.

Another observation may confirm this principle. Whenever, in the progress of refinement, the poetical language becomes thus difficult, it is observable that true genius, often weary with imitatively echoing the established diction, at once falls back into the manner of the earlier poets. Some expressions of our elder writers have a marvellous effect in modern verse. The poet Rousseau has in many of his compositions essayed to seize on the naiveté of Marot, by copying his style, but his strained affectation produces a disagreeable effect. Churchill rejected an artificial diction, and too often versifies like Oldham; for an editor of this poet's works has contrasted passages from the modern satirist, which equal the discordance of Oldham's verse. When Churchill introduces a poetical expression from our elder poets, it has often a very pleasing effect. Mr. Cooper, and his imitators, can only be considered as having assumed the diction and the manner of our old poets; a criti-

cal feeling perceives, in their blank verse, the tones of Shakespeare.

It has been considered as a poetical beauty to aggrandise the minute by the pomp of expression. When objects, or circumstances, by their exility or meanness, would occasion no agreeable sensation, some have thought it an evidence of higher art, to dignify them by grandeur of style; in a word, as I heard a man of genius say of a painter, "he knew to give dignity to a dunghill." But this has often been carried to excess, by a fastidious refinement. Boileau has been applauded (because he first applauded himself, which is a certain way of securing the approbation of many) for having raised into poetical language, the simple idea of his wearing a wig at the age of fifty-eight. The lines are thus :

" Mais aujourd'hui, qu'enfin la vielleſſe eſt venue,  
 Sous mes faux cheveux blonds déjà toute chenue,  
 A jetté ſur ma tête, avec ſes doigts peſans,  
 Onze luſtres complets, ſurchargés de trois ans."

To me there appears a puerility in theſe celebrated lines; the deſcription is exact, and the expreſſion beautiful; but does not the poet debase his art? When the reader recollects the *wig*, muſt he not ſmile at this mock ſublime? I will give an inſtance where, on the contrary, the idea is great, and the expreſſion mean. Pope has been parodied and ridiculed for the following lines on Lord Mansfield :

" Grac'd as thou art, with all the pow'r of words,  
 So known, ſo honour'd at *the Houſe of Lords*."

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The pathos is here in the expression, not in the idea ; for if we employ here the word *Senate*, there will be nothing ridiculous ; the familiarity of the expression is the only cause of this unfortunate passage. When words are not familiar they take away from the offence which some ideas may give, in common terms. Homer has been ridiculed by certain critics, for having so minutely described the dog Argus, lying on a dunghill, nearly devoured by vermin.—The annotator then observes, “ It is certain that the *vermin* which Homer mentions, would debase our poetry ; but in the Greek, that very word is noble and sonorous, *Κυνοφαίεων*.” —Here then is a word which can give dignity to a circumstance very offensive in itself ; but we cannot at present, I think, decide whether this word, which appears to us so noble and sonorous, affected an ancient Greek in the same manner. All that appears certain, is, that the *Κυνοφαίεων* of Homer, is a noble and sonorous term to our ear, and abates from the familiarity of expression.

As another proof to shew the effect of expressions that are not familiar, I shall quote Kaimes, who has a curious observation, which seems to relate to this subject, though by him applied to a different purpose. He writes, “ A sea-prospect is charming, but we soon tire of an unbounded prospect. It would not give satisfaction to say, that it is too extensive ; for why should not a prospect be relished, however extensive ?” But employ a *foreign term*, and say that it is *trop vaste*, we enquire no farther ; *a term that is not familiar, makes*

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an impression, and captivates weak reason. This observation accounts for a mode of writing formerly in common use, that of stuffing our language with Latin words and phrases.

To prosaic composition we may also extend our principle. Purity of language is not a characteristic of style, in an age of refinement.\* The great writers will solicitously domiciliate the most elegant foreign idioms, and hence the Latinisms of Johnson, and the Gallicisms of Gibbon. The more exquisite our taste, the more desirous are we of expressing it's exquisiteness; no writer complains of paucity of expression in the first progress of taste; for it is long before we are aware of the difficulty of giving the delicacies of conception, and communicating the precise quantity of our feelings. A refined writer is willing to lose something of idiomatic language, to gain something of expressive language. Some of our finest idioms become common; and a writer then attempts to give an equivalent in sense, that may not offend by it's commonness; and this attempt, perhaps, may arise into affectation. The more polished a language becomes, certain significant expressions become obsolete;

\* Gibbons has observed, (this Essay was published before his Memoirs,) vol. ii, p. 77.—“ In a polite age, in which a language is thoroughly cultivated, every writer who is a man of education, of letters, and of taste, speaks nearly the same language; and very often *genius* and *eloquence*, instead of being companions to *purity* are enemies to it, by diverting the attention to nobler aims. Bouhours is much purer than either Corneille or Bayle.”—This observation is very important; the truly fine writers will now not write the purest English.

solete; a complaint made by some writers who were more solicitous of forcible, than of elegant expression. We are not to be censured too severely for an occasional adoption of a foreign turn of phrase, though this permission may degenerate into licentiousness with unskilful writers.

From these observations on **POETICAL EXPRESSION**, we may deduce that the diction of poetry is an unsurmountable difficulty. It is a misfortune attending the progress of Art. It is our opulence that produces this poverty; for we may say with the ancient Romans, alluding to their numerous conquests, "we perish, because of our abundance."

ON HABITUATING OURSELVES TO AN  
INDIVIDUAL PURSUIT.

TWO things in human life are at continual variance; and if we cannot escape from the one, we must be separated from the other; ennui and pleasure. Ennui is an afflicting sensation, if we may thus express it, from a want of sensation; and pleasure is more pleasure according to the quantity of sensation. Let us invent a scheme, by which at once we repel ennui, and acquire and augment pleasure. Sensation is received according to the capability of our organs; our organs may be almost incredibly improved by practice; \* intense devotion to an object, must therefore present means of deriving more numerous and keener pleasures from that object.

Hence the poet, long employed on a poem, has received a quantity of pleasure, which no reader can ever feel; and hence one reader receives a quantity of pleasure unfelt by another. In the progress of any particular pursuit, there are a hundred delicious sensations, which are too intellectual, to be embodied into language. Every artist knows what uncommon combinations his meditations produce; and though some too imperfect, or  
too

\* As in the instances of the blind who have a finer tact, and the jeweller who has a finer sight, than other men, who are not so much interested in refining their vision and their feeling.

too subtle, resist his powers of displaying them to the world, yet between the thought that first gave rise to his design, and each one which appears in it, there are innumerable intermediate evanescencies of sensation (so to express myself) which no man felt but himself. These pleasures, are in number, according to the intenseness of his faculties, and the quantity of his labour.

Although the above remark alludes to works of art, I would not confine it to these pursuits only; for any particular pursuit, from the manufacturing of pins, to the construction of philosophical systems, appears susceptible of similar pleasures. We shall see that every individual can exert that quantity of mind necessary to his wants, and adapted to his situation; and that the quality of pleasure is nothing in the present question. For I think that we are mistaken concerning the gradations of human felicity. It does at first appear, that an astronomer rapt in abstraction, while he gazes on a star, must feel a more exquisite delight than a farmer who is conducting his team; or a poet must experience a higher gratification in modulating verses, than a trader in arranging sums. To this we may reply, that the happiness of the ploughman and the trader, may be as satisfactory as that of the astronomer and the poet. Our mind can only be conversant with those sensations which surround us, and possessing the skill of managing them, we can form an artificial felicity; it is certain, that what the soul does not feel, no more affects it, than what the eye does not see. It is thus that the mean trader, habituated to low

pursuits,

pursuits, can never be unhappy, because he is not the general of an army; for this idea of felicity he has never received. The philosopher who gives his entire years to the elevated pursuits of mind, is never unhappy because he is not in possession of an Indian opulence, for the idea of accumulating this exotic splendour has never entered the range of his desires. Nature, an impartial mother, renders felicity as perfect in the school-boy who scourges his top, as in the astronomer who regulates his star. The thing contained can only be equal to the container; a full glass is as full as a full bottle; and a human soul may be as much satisfied, in the lowest of human beings, as in the highest.

In this devotion to a particular object, what philosophers call the ASSOCIATING IDEA, exists in all its activity and energy; and it may be rendered productive of the sensations we desire; for, when attached to one particular pursuit, this idea will generally point and conduct our thoughts to it. The associating power is a sovereign seated on his throne, while all our other ideas bend towards it, and obey its mandates. Hence the following persons experience their completest happiness: A student in the midst of his books; an artist among his productions; a farmer amidst his lands; a merchant in his trade; a horseman in his menagerie; a captain in his ship, &c. These are all persons who respectively enjoy more real felicity at those hours than in any other portion of their lives.

Many peculiar advantages attend the cultivation of one master passion, or occupation. In

superior minds it is a sovereign that exiles others, and in inferior minds it enfeebles pernicious propensities. It may render us useful to our fellow citizens, and, what is of great consequence, it imparts the most perfect independence to the individual. The more also the sovereign passion is composed of intellectual gratifications, the more exalted and perfect is it's independence. It is observed, by a great mathematician, that a geometer might not be unhappy in a desert.

We might therefore recommend the same unity in life, which gives such a value when found in a picture or a poem. This unity of design, with a centripetal force, draws all the rays of our existence, and the more forcibly it draws, the more perfect is human felicity. But if, regardless of this, we yield ourselves to the distracting variety of opposite pursuits with an equal passion, our soul is placed amidst a continual shock of ideas, and happiness is lost by mistakes. How often, when accident has turned the mind firmly to one object, has it been discovered that it's occupation is another name for happiness; for this occupation is a mean of escaping from incongruous sensations. It secures us from the dreadful and dark vacuity of soul, as well as from the terrible whirlwind of ideas; reason itself is a passion, but a passion full of serenity.

It is observable of those, who have devoted themselves to an individual object, that it's importance is incredibly enlarged to their sensations. Intense attention magnifies like a microscope: but  
it

it is possible to apologize for their apparent extravagance from the consideration, that they really observe excellencies not perceived by others of inferior application. I confess this passion has been carried to a curious violence of affection; literary history affords numerous instances. I shall just observe, that in reading Dr. Burney's Musical Travels, it would seem that music was the prime object of human life; that Richardson the painter, in his Treatise on his beloved Art, closes all by affirming, that "*Raphael* is not only equal, but superior to a *Virgil*, or a *Livy*, or a *Thucydides*, or a *Homer*!" And he proceeds, by acquainting the world, how painting can reform our manners, increase our opulence, honour, and power.\* *Denina*, in his *Revolutions of Literature*, tells us, that to excel in historical composition requires more ability than is exercised by the excelling masters of any other art; because it requires not only the same erudition, genius, imagination, taste, &c. necessary for a poet, a painter, or a philosopher, but the historian must also have some peculiar qualifications. I think it was after this publication he became an historian.† *Helvetius*, an enthusiast

\* Our lively enthusiast says, elsewhere, "Painting is the utmost limit of human power, in the communication of ideas. History begins, poetry raises higher, sculpture goes yet farther; but painting compleats and perfects."

† What would this writer have said, if he had heard, one of the literary paradoxes of the present day, that no extraordinary abilities are required to form a good historian.

enthusiaſt in the fine arts and polite literature, has composed a Poem on Happineſs; and imagines that it conſiſts in an excluſive love of the cultivation of letters and the arts. All this, perhaps, may ſhew that the more intenſely we attach ourſelves to an individual object, our ſenſations are more numerous, and more fervidly alive than thoſe who break the force of their feelings in attempting to ſtrike on a variety of objects; and if this is true, we may conclude that it is one great ſource of human happineſs.

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torian? Johnson ſaid, “ great abilities are not requiſite in an hiſtorian; for in hiſtorical compoſition all the greateſt powers of the human mind are quietſcent.” See farther in Boswell, vol. 1. p. 390.

## ON LITERARY GENIUS.

WHEN the philosophy of an age is rude, whatever excellence is produced, is immediately ascribed to an occult power; when men, after a lapse of ages, become minuter enquirers, and calmer reasoners, it is discovered how much Art has entered into every great composition; and at length, among artists themselves, it becomes a dubious point, whether *art* is not sufficient to produce *similar effects* to *genius*; or, in other words, whether certain combinations of art, form not genius itself.

We still have a few writers who exult in some mystical power in their faculties: who hint at the solicitude of nature at their birth, and to employ the language of Milton, derived from the superstitious credulity of his age, who dissert with fluency on

“The Stellar Virtue.”

which Boileau has made the first position in the *art* of poetry. Frail females formerly denounced their stars as the cause of their incontinence; and we have idlers who apologize for their defects from no lower an influence; a resolute love of virtue would have preserved the female chaste, and a resolute love of labour would have rendered the idler active.

While some have rejected this occult influence of the stars, others enjoy equal extravagancies;

genius has been regulated by the degree of longitude and latitude; it has been derived from the subtilty of the blood, and even from the refinements of cookery; others suppose that a writer of imagination is incapable of learned research, and that for every particular study a peculiar construction of the intellectual powers becomes necessary; that the solidity of judgment impedes the vigour of fancy, and that the poet cannot investigate nature with the eye of philosophic science.\*

With chilling fancies like these, have the minds of the most adventurous geniuses been rendered pusillanimous; and grand designs, conceived with ardent felicity, have suddenly expired, because their affrighted parents refused to foster them with the vitality of industry. In an accomplished genius,

\* Genius has been divided, and subdivided. There is a genius for oratory, consisting of the art of moving the passions, united with the art of applying our arguments; a genius for physics and geometry, when occupied in calculating the motions and action of the globes of the universe, and the whole phenomena of nature; a genius for painting and sculpture, when the pencil and chissel trace on the marble or canvass the actions or the features of a hero; and the genius for poetry is, said to consist in the power which nature imparts by physical sensibility, and a happy conformation of the organs to certain persons, in conceiving boldly, and delivering easily; in painting what is strongly felt, and it is, in a word, what Horace calls *Splendida bilis*, which we are further informed is a kind of central fire, which elevates the mind, warms the imagination, which makes one think with force, and describe with liveliness. See on this subject the *Principes pour la Lecture des Poetes* by the Abbé Mallet.

But

nus, Horace, one of the most philosophical poets, allows that art must be united with nature; but we probably attach different ideas to this power of nature, than the philosophy of the age of Horace allowed him to acquire. Since his time, and even in the present day, some regard genius as nothing short of inspiration, and employ, in the sober disquisitions of philosophy, the fanciful expressions of poetry. We are told, that to attain to a superiority in any art, we must be *born* with a certain *susceptibility*, or *aptitude*; we must be *born* a poet, or a painter; or, as one painter complimented another, by saying, that he was a painter in his mother's womb. A happy genius depends on the influence of the stars say the Astrologers---on the organs of the body assert the Naturalists---on the favour of Heaven exclaim the Divines.--Every one  
feems

But what is gained by all these mystical distinctions, this *splendida bilis* and *central fire*? Are we always to take words for things? Do such critics say any thing more, than that genius, is genius? I lament that even Pope extends this system to criticism; for he says of poets and critics:

“ Both must alike from *heaven* derive their light;  
These *born to judge*, as well as those to *write*.”

Which is certainly contrary to experience; *taste*, the characteristic of criticism, is now acknowledged to be obtainable by a constant attachment to the most finished performances of art. And when he adds:

“ Let such teach others who themselves excel;  
And censure freely who have written well.”

The maxim is not less erroneous; for the best poets are not always the surest critics, as in the case of Goldsmith and others; and most of the best critics have not been poets.

seems willing to do honour to his own profession. But such mystic reveries indulged by the artist, only shew that he is interested in exciting the wonder of the ignorant; this is not less injurious to art, than visionary fanaticism to religion.

Dryden traces the whole history of genius in a couplet:

“ What in nature’s dawn the child *admired*,  
The youth *endeavour’d* and the man *ACQUIRED*.”

Yet is it not always *necessary* that this admiration should be felt in childhood, or in youth, since accidental causes have frequently directed the pursuits of genius.\* Caresses and coercion also, have *made* many a youth a bright genius; patronage and poverty have *stimulated* men to become illustrious artists. Metastasio affirmed that *necessity* frequently augmented our powers, and forced us to perform in a better manner, though with more expedition than the operations of our choice and leisure. Two of his best Operas were produced in a short time, being commanded by a particular occasion. Bernocchi’s voice was never *naturally* good, (says Dr. Burney) and at first was so much disliked, that he was peremptorily told by his friends to quit  
the

\* Some instances are collected in *Curiosities of Literature*, fourth edition, vol. 1. I add an observation of Johnson: “ To a particular species of excellence men are directed, not by an ascendant planet, or predominating humour, but by the first book which they read; some early conversation which they heard; or some accident which excited ardour and emulation.”

the profession; but his situation as a *Castrato* had left him without strength or spirits for any other. By severe study he *acquired* a style and manner which became the standard of perfection in that art. Nature had not designed Mather for a Poet, but he overcame Nature in his struggles, observes Boileau.

In the history of genius we are presented with wider prospects, by the late attentions bestowed on the studies of biography. In tracing the history of philosophers and poets, we have traced the genius of philosophy and poetry; we have observed that certain events produced certain consequences, and why men, with an equal aptitude for genius, have not always become men of genius. Illustrious characters are rare; owing to the rarity of those human coincidences which produce illustrious characters. Man is so influenced by moral causes, that the perfection of his genius is ever proportioned to their effects. When men of letters reflected on the manner of their own attainments, and on those events of literary history which related to others, they discovered that the faculties of the mind are not *gifts* from nature, but effects from human causes, or *acquisitions* of art.

Every man of common organisation has the power of becoming a man of genius, if to this be added a solitary devotion to art, and a vehement passion for glory. It is the capacity of long attention, which, in the present day, must make one man superior to another. Physical sensibility may vary, and defective organs cannot be supplied by any artificial

tificial mode. But in general, Nature has more impartiality than some of her children will allow; and it would be very difficult to find men, who have been so cruelly neglected by our common mother, as not to be endowed with sufficient powers to excel in some particular department, when, by examining their mental stores, they have the art of discovering the kind of study for which they are best adapted, and when, having made this important discovery, moral and physical causes are not inimical to their progress. An idiot is more rare than a man of genius.

The man of genius should ever examine his physical and moral state; for to ameliorate their advantages, and supply their deficiencies, are of the greatest consequence to his success. A defect in physical sensibility, will disorder some portion of genius; and the purblind eye of Johnson, which denied him the taste for picturesque beauty, occasioned much erroneous criticism, without, however, diminishing his *acquired* faculties on topics where this sensibility was not requisite. Defects in the moral state are innumerable; they contract, or they enfeeble, or they annihilate genius. Shennstone, who devoted his days to poetry, equally with Pope, could never reach his powers. But was his life not a series of discontent and listlessness? Without the vigour of hope, and without the exhilaration of enjoyment? Pope, on the contrary, was fortunate throughout life. In other circumstances Dryden might have proved superior to Pope, and Otway had equalled Shakespeare. Helvetius

vetius observes that it is not sufficient to possess genius to obtain it's title. One discovers, another improves, a third accomplishes; and this last is faluted as the genius, although he has really not advanced the art *in a greater proportion* than his less fortunaté predecessors. The elder Pliny observes, it is certain that *the time* in which a man lives is not an indifferent circumstance for his abilities.

All that the finest organisation can impart in the present day, will never form one work of genius. The mere natural produce of the most fertile individual will now be only a pitiable indigence; for the opulence of the mind can now only be formed by storing it with acquired knowledge; and the most valuable productions will be those in which the industry of the mind has been most vigilantly exercised. Natural abilities produce nothing but the haws and berries of our ancient Britons; the richness of our orchards has been borrowed from all the varieties of climate. Pertinacity of meditation, becomes a commerce of the mind; it assembles and combines the ideas of others, but the sensations it experiences are it's own. We *learn* to think, by being conversant with the thoughts of others; but this is denied, since it is asserted that the thoughts of others encumber our own. He, however, who is not familiarised with the finest thoughts of the finest writers, will one day be mortified to observe, that his best thoughts are their indifferent ones. Nature respects a certain progression; she expands by a gradual

gradual amplification; she makes no leaps. But he who fondly dotes on what he terms his *natural powers*, audaciously imagines, that alone he can arrive at that point of knowledge, attained by the fraternal labours of the most eminent geniuses. To think with thinking men, is to run with agile racers. But as this is not always attended to, we abound with writers who are far removed from an excellence they *could* have acquired; as he who, accustomed to run in a solitary course, felicitated himself as being one of the first racers, but received the public derision when he presented himself at the Olympic games.

In meditating on the characters, the modes of life, the slow formation, and the painful vigilance of some great writers, I have been of opinion, that their conspicuous labours were the gradual acquisitions of *art*. Of these writers many have acknowledged that they could produce nothing valuable till a flame, caught by contact, had lighted up their minds; they resemble certain trees, which, though they could produce no valuable fruit of themselves, are excellent for grafting on. The minds of such writers are like a globe of glass, which, when rapidly revolved, and the hand applied to it's surface, will grow warm, emit light, and attract bodies. Among this class of writers we might place Boileau and Racine; Pope and Gray; Akenfide and Armstrong; Montesquieu and Johnson. When Boileau asked Chappelle, a facile, natural writer, for an opinion of his poetry, Chappelle made this sarcastic comparison:—You are a  
great

great ox, who, labouring slowly and painfully, make a deep furrow.

There are certain writers, such as Adam Smith, Locke, and Bayle, whose works require analytical and minute investigations. This calmness of the intellect arises from constitutional causes; and so far it may be said, that a man is *born* to be a philosopher or a poet. The warmth and temperature of the constitution may influence his modes of life, and the arrangement of his ideas.

The French appear to have formed a distinction between great writers. They call Corneille *un homme de Genie*, and Racine *un homme d'Esprit*. The latter kind of writers are the more agreeable; for though they never surpass the former, yet they are more equable, and can more happily adapt themselves to a variety of topics. Men of genius have stronger but more confined faculties.\*

The natural facility which some writers appear to possess, forms no difficulty to this system. Such authors as a Fielding and a Goldsmith, a Sheridan and

\* This distinction, is observed by Mrs. Piozzi, in her last work. "Whoever lives in the happy possession of great mental qualities may, by turning every faculty of his mind to one set purpose, form, by degrees, that which we call a TALENT for some particular science, art, or study; and I doubt not but Mr. Pope might have been as good an Astronomer or Chemist as ever he was a Poet; so might Metastasio, probably, had they concentrated their powers, and fastened them on ~~that~~ branch of knowledge instead of the bough they chose; while Shakespeare, Ariosto, Handel, Ferguson, must have been what they were, and that of necessity; their GENIUS was too powerful for them to stop."

and a Wolcot, are not supposed to have overwhelmed their minds by extraneous studies; and such writers are often even very illiterate. They address themselves to the heart, and not to the head. But still from *industry*, and pertinacity of attention, is their rapidity of combination derived; and not from what marvelling ignorance sometimes regards as inspiration or organisation. They have given a strong direction to their mind, in the great system of human life; they therefore excel in that point, though they may be, and generally are, deficient in other literary qualities; for we shall always find that no man can know what he has not learnt, or know that suddenly which requires an habitual attention. He who would imitate the works of Nature must first accurately observe them, and accurate observation is to be expected from those only who take *great pleasure* in it. It is the observation of Beattie on Poetical Genius. Pope declared he could not pursue any subject without *pleasure*; he could not perform the tasks set by his stupid Pedagogues. Here are the opinions of two Poets, and not a word of inspiration. None but mad Bards dream of inspiration. Metastasio laughs at all poetic inspiration, and made a poem as mechanically as others make a watch. When Du Fresnoy exclaims, in the ordinary language, of

That majesty, that grace so rarely given  
To mortal man, *not taught by Art—but Heaven*

Reynolds asserts, in a note—"This excellence, however expressed, whether by Genius, Taste, or the gift of Heaven, *I am confident may be acquired.*"

And

And indeed, if we attend to the precious observations of those who have excelled in art or science, we shall hear of no romance of original powers, no inspirations from nature, no divine impulse that creates a world at a word. The painter discovers that it is long before the pencil accomplishes those beauties which he has long meditated, and the poet that he consumes many years in verse before a great poem is even attempted. The following facts trace the progressive powers of genius: Reynolds painted many hours every day during the long space of thirty years; Goldsmith composed his poems by slow and laborious efforts, and they are the finished productions of several years. Churchill was a versifier at fifteen, but was not known as a poet till after thirty. Sterne, who read at least as much as he thought, was not known till a late period of life. Addison, before he commenced his Spectators, had amassed materials with the assiduity of a student.\* The immortal work of Montequieu was the beloved occupation of twenty years; the wit of Butler was not extemporaneous, but painfully elaborated from notes which he incessantly accumulated. Rawley, the confidential friend of Bacon, has recorded, that he had twelve copies of his Instauration every year incessantly revised, and augmented,

\* Young, in his poetical Epistle to Tickle, alluding to Addison's Spectators, says,

*"A chance amusement polish'd half an age."*

But it has been since discovered, that the reverse is the fact; for Addison had collected his materials to the amount of *three folio volumes!*

augmented, till at length it became, as he terms it, "a pyramid of learning." Gesner the poet, I am assured, wrote with great labour and severe revisions, yet all his pieces have the air of unpremeditated composition. The familiar verses of Berni, the burlesque Poet, Tiraboschi says, (by the manuscripts of his work, still existing) were produced by incessant retouches. And, to close our testimonies, the Emilius of Rousseau was the fruit, to employ the writer's own energetic language, of twenty years meditation, and of three years composition.

Among the advocates of our present system we rank the first geniuses of the age. Johnson, Helvetius, and Reynolds, have ceaselessly enforced it's principles. Authorities from periods more remote are not wanting; Quintilian and Locke consider men to have an equal aptitude to mental capacity, and Pascal says, that what is called nature, is only our first habit; and Buffon affirmed that "*Genius is only a greater aptitude to Patience,*" applied to every thing which contributes to form Genius. *Invention* itself depends on Patience; contemplate your subject long, till a sort of electric spark convulses for a moment the brain, and spreads down to the very heart a glow of irritation.—This description is remarkable.

In the Discourses of Reynolds, this principle is laid down as the foundation of all excellence in art. "Not to enter into metaphysical discussions on the nature and essence of genius, I will venture to assert, that *assiduity*, unabated by difficulty, and a *disposition* eagerly directed to the object of it's pursuit,

suit, will produce effects similar to those which some call the result of *natural powers*." Johnson has touched on this topic in the twenty-fifth and forty-third *Rambles*, and, in the person of Imalach, we are instructed, that when he *resolved to make himself a poet*, he tells us that "he saw every thing with a new purpose." The entire work of Helvetius inculcates the same principles.

Rousseau is the adversary of this system; he adopts the popular notion that the aptitude of men for the understanding merely depends on their respective organisation. The French Plato, it is well known, contradicts himself throughout his works; and on no subject so much as on the present. Helvetius has collected his contradictions; the surest and the most modest mode of confuting a writer of the finest genius. He has also thrown out an observation, which discloses the source of the errors of Rousseau. He says, "The contradictions of this celebrated writer are not to be wondered at. His *observations* are almost always *just*, and his *principles* almost always *false and trite*. From hence his errors. Little scrupulous in examining opinions generally received, the number of those he adopts impose on him."

We see the opinion of Reynolds, on the genius for painting; we shall contrast it with that of Rousseau; and we may then inquire, if, on this subject, the opinion of a philosopher and a painter is not to be preferred to him who only was a philosopher.

Rousseau,

Rouffeau, in his *Emilius*, book iii. p. 100, amuses his readers with an anecdote. He tells us, he was acquainted with a fervant who, having frequently observed his master paint and design, felt a furious paffion to become a painter and designer. He paffed three years, nailed to his chair, in painting and designing; and nothing but *attendance on his master* could take him away from his pleafing occupations. At length, favoured by his master, and affifted by the instructions of an artist, he quitted his livery, and lived by the produce of his pencil.— I fhall now quote the very expreffions our author employs: “Till a certain point, perfeverance fuffices in lieu of genius; he has reached this point, and will never pafs it. The conftancy and emulation of this honeft man are laudable; but he will never paint but for fign-pofts.”

With facts like thefe, the fyftem I have adopted is ever combated; but I could never fee in one of thefe facts any thing which would fuffer an investigation. Here is a young man, who has already attained a certain age, who is in the daily fervice of his master, and who, without preparatory instructions, or various models, feels “the eager difpofition,” and the neceffary “affiduity.” But both the difpofition and the affiduity are very imperfect. An artist who is inceffantly performing domeftic bufinefs, muft be claffed among thofe whose moral fituation infallibly enfeeble, and almoft annihilates, genius. This young man, had he known no other fervice, but his art, and no other master but a Reynolds, it is not improbable, with his

his disposition and assiduity, might have become a great artist. All this only tends to prove, that the great difficulty of becoming a man of genius consists, among others, in his moral situation; and that no footman has any chance of becoming a great artist.

On this delicate topic I shall hazard the following rapid glance: In the rude periods of society, when a writer can have but few predecessors, he will pour forth, what Milton elegantly and sweetly terms "Virgin Fancies." He must then meditate on the great original Nature; the impressions must be vivid, though rude, and the combinations novel, though wild. Some, whose physical sensibility, improved by imperceptible habit, may receive sensations more lively than others, will exercise a facility and celerity of conception apparently supernatural to the vulgar and the ignorant. In the latter class even the highest minds must then be ranked; and it is not improbable that the artist himself is not less persuaded than his admirers, that he is agitated by a certain impulse, and that his performances could not be produced by human means. *Est Deus in Nobis*, exclaims the self wondering Ovid, at a later period indeed, but when the philosophy of the mind had made but little progress. Hence the origin of that fanciful interposition of nature in the case of men of genius; and it is then that poets are regarded as prophets, and philosophers as magicians.

The Monkish ages blended many of the absurdities of polytheism with their peculiar ones; and it

was

was in this period, Erasmus informs us, that that Gothic adage was formed, worthy of Monkish taste and Monkish credulity; *poeta nascitur, non fit*; which an excellent judge of poetry (Ben Jonson) contradicts, by affirming, that a poet may be *made*, as well as *born*.\* But a great revolution appears in the world of taste; the flame of investigation rises gradually in the most secret retirements of nature. She comes, in all her simplicity, and all her solitary majesty, unaccompanied by the adventitious splendours of fancy, the grotesque chimeras of astonishment, and the terrific forms of superstition, When we understand nature, what becomes of apparitions, of witchery, of prophecy, and the inspiration of genius?

Genius may now be divided into an enthusiasm caught from nature, and an enthusiasm received from art.

The enthusiasm from nature is distinguished by its facility, celerity, and vividness; sufficient to form an ardent effusion in the early periods of society. Such are the relics of all ancient poetry. But as the sphere of poetical invention must then be very circumscribed, we observe, in such compositions, a recurrence of the same objects and the same

\* Goldsmith says of Nero, he was desirous of becoming a Poet, but unwilling to undergo the pains of study, which a proficiency in that art requires; he was desirous of being a *Poet ready made* " Goldsmith was a judge by experience; his poems are really *made*, but were not readily *made*; taken up at different times, and pursued through long intervals; the poetry of a philosophical age, the union of *reason* and *taste*; but *inspiration* never, certainly, entered into his thoughts.

same ideas. Man *creates* by *imitation*; but he creates little in the infancy of society, because he has scarcely any thing to imitate. When we examine the effusions of the Bards, the wild poetry of the Indians, and even Ossian, who probably has received many modern embellishments, we perceive that paucity of ideas which must be natural at this period of society.\*

This enthusiasm from nature diminishes in the progress of refinement. Artists not infrequently complain that nature is nearly exhausted, and not without reason; for it would, perhaps, astonish some, if they were shown how very few *original* notions form the great treasury of human invention. Nature is regular in her grand characteristics. She is ever the same universal power; but in the progress of society a great variation obtains in the human passions. We all think alike on certain objects in their general conception, but most think differently in their individual examination; hence criticism has observed, that the beauties of art are sometimes local, and sometimes universal. Pure nature at length disgusts by its obviousness and its facility; elegance, the characteristic of refinement, means a selection, and at this period the offensive rudeness

\* Homer must not be quoted as an example of the enthusiasm from nature: nor can he be considered as the most original, because he is the most ancient of our classic poets. We are told that scarcely any species of learning was unknown to him; and it is probable that the Mæonian was not more original than his imitator the Mantuan, and that his immortal labours were composed with an enthusiasm from art as well as from nature.

rudeness of truth is disguised by the attractive graces of verisimilitude. A noble sentiment occupies the soul of the artist, and he toils after an ideal perfection. The richest combinations throw their dazzling light on his imagination; emulation rivals and surpasses; in this glorious strife individual is opposed to individual and people to people. Our galleries are filled with pictures, and our libraries with poems.

A diversity of genius becomes more distinguishable as taste becomes more exquisite. One kind is peculiar to this age; the genius of several can now be made to produce an original one. A student, to borrow an expression from chemistry, amalgamates the characteristics of preceding masters. The history of the orders in architecture is the history of genius. We have first the rude Tuscan, then the chaste Doric, and the elegant Ionic, and the light Corinthian; till at length appears the Composite, uniting these varieties.

Models are now proposed by critics; for Art is now suspended on a point; if by our dexterity we preserve not the equilibrium, if we pass or decline from the point, we slide into barbarism. In vain some daring spirits scorn the mandates of taste; Time is the avenger of neglected Criticism.

At this period some, enamoured of the illusive idea of *original powers*, pretend to draw merely from the fountains of nature. Uneducated artists occasionally appear among the lower occupations of life, who are immediately received as original geniuses. But it is at length perceived, that the  
genuine

genuine requisites of poetry, at this period of refinement, are not only beyond their reach, but often beyond their comprehension. These *inspired* geniuses have never survived the transient season of popular wonder, and generally derive their mediocrity from the facility of consulting the finished compositions of true genius. I know of no exception to this observation.

Nor must we conceive that that vein of imitation which runs through the works of great artists, is a mechanical process. By an intense study of preceding masters they are taught the enchantments of art; marvellous and exquisite strokes which only glimmer in Nature. A fine copy of nature affects their organs more than a real scene. On examination, it will be found that the most capital productions of our first artists, are really composed in this manner. Raphael borrowed as freely from other painters as Milton from other poets.

It may now be enquired, that, since we acknowledge there are causes which may disable a genuine student from *acquiring genius*, what is gained by this new system? We reply, an useful knowledge of truth, and a contempt for that popular prejudice, which ever echoes the pernicious notion, that an *artist* must be *born* with a *peculiar genius* or intellectual construction.

An ardent youth is soon dismayed at the first difficulties of art, because he easily imagines that a maxim which has been so long received as incontrovertible is therefore incontrovertable. I believe

that the success of an artist oftener depends on *good luck* than on *organisation*. Aristotle has said, that to become eminent in any profession three things are requisite; nature, study, and practice. How often does it become necessary to erase the word *nature*, and supply it's place by *good fortune*? We often lose much when we inform a young artist, that he must have been *born* a poet, or a painter; since it is impossible to decide whether he is born such unless he practises the arts; and it is certain that no excellence in art can be acquired without long and unwearied industry. Artists who have evinced nothing of this *birth-right* in their early attempts have sometimes concluded by being great artists. Industry, whether it consist in an incessant exercise of the faculties; by meditating on the labours of others, or in observations on what passes around us, is the surest path of Fame; but such intervening obstacles as may oppose our progress, are in the power, not of philosophy, but of fortune.

There is a remarkable observation made by Socrates on this interesting subject, which, while it allows much to a certain *predisposition* in some minds over others, includes the necessity of industry. He says: "As we see some bodies more robust than others, so there are also souls more or less vigorous in comparison to each other. But there is no disposition which does not improve greatly by culture; the most happy dispositions, as well as the less favoured, have need of instruction and study in order to EXCEL in any thing whatever." If therefore

fore "the less favoured dispositions," by labour vigorously continued, at length acquire *excellence*, the great point in the Helvetic System (if we are to call it thus) is confirmed. Lavater has, with his accustomed enthusiasm, adopted the popular idea of Genius. He strenuously asserts that "A man can only do what he is capable of doing, or be but what he is. He can rise to a certain degree; but farther he cannot go were his life at stake.—By dint of application you may equal a man of talents who is careless; and, with considerable talents, it is possible to come near genius which has never had the opportunity or the means of unfolding itself; or rather *application* seems to rise to the level of *talents*, and *talents* to the level of *genius*. Every one must remain what he is; only it is possible for him, to a certain degree, to perfect, to extend, and to unfold himself. Every individual is a master within the circle of his own domain, be it great or small. He may cultivate his own estate in such a manner that its revenue may equal that of a territory twice as large, whose cultivation is neglected."

This literary controversy, which has lately been so frequently renewed, turns entirely on a misconstruction of terms. That which the moderns call *an aptitude to patience* is only another term for what the vulgar call *genius*. This certainly depends on ORGANISATION.—Industry can do every thing but create this power. It is with *genius* as with *singing*: a finger may acquire taste, art, and every refinement; but a VOICE must be the GIFT OF NATURE.

## ON LITERARY INDUSTRY.

WHEN youthful genius meditates on a great composition, he does not usually reflect on the mode of it's performance ; his despair is equal to his admiration ; and there is danger that he may resemble the young arithmetician, who resigned his art, because in the first lessons he had observed the total amount of an immense series, which he could not suppose he was *born* to comprehend.

If a Savage wandering in his woods, accustomed to no other habitation than his dark cave, or ill-constructed hovel, should discover an edifice considerable in it's magnitude and regular in it's arrangement, he would immediately conclude that it was the residence of a divine being, constructed by divine power: he would consider that no human hand could raise the columns, and no human design could invent so beautiful an order. If the Savage, however, becomes instructed, he discovers that it's author was a being of his own species, that the hand which erected was superior in skill, but not in strength, to his own; and that, if he would submit to the same directions which conducted the other, he might himself be capable of producing a similar composition. This Savage is the unreflecting reader, or that simple youth whose admiration closes with despair.

Few works of magnitude presented themselves at once, in full extent to their authors; patiently  
were

were they examined, and insensibly were they formed. We often observe this circumstance noticed in their prefaces. Writers have proposed to themselves a little piece of two acts, and the farce has become a comedy of five; an essay swells into a treatise, and a treatise into volumes!

Let us trace the progress of the mind in the formation of it's speculations. At the first glance a man of genius throws around a subject he perceives not more than one or two striking circumstances unobserved by another. As he revolves the subject, the whole mind is gradually agitated; acquiring force by exertion, he discovers talents that he knew not he possessed. At first he saw (except the few leading objects which invited his contemplation) every thing dimly; to the studious eye of genius every thing becomes orderly and distinct; the twilight gradually disperses, and every form shines in the brilliant light of imagination. Like viewing a landscape at an early hour in a summer morning, the rising sun perhaps only rests on a particular object, and the scene is wrapt in mist; as the light and warmth increase the mists fade, and the scene assumes it's varied charms. Gibbon tells us, of his Roman History, "At the outset all was dark and doubtful; even the title of the Work, the true æra of the Decline and Fall of the Empire; the limits of the introduction, the divisions of the chapters, and the order of the narration; and I was often tempted to cast away the labour of seven years." Winckelmann was long lost in composing his capital work, *The History of Art*; a hundred

fruitless attempts were made before he could seize the leading idea. Akenfide exquisitely describes the progress of genius in it's delightful reveries.

In the preceding essay we have observed that the greatest works have been insensibly formed; that the slightest conceptions may serve for the leading circumstances of even works of magnitude, three modern compositions of great and kindred merit may prove. That exquisite poem *Les Jardins*, of the Abbé de Lille, derives it's existence from the simple circumstance of a lady asking for a few verses on rural topics. His specimens pleased, and the poet, animated by a smile, heaped sketches on sketches, till he found himself enabled to weave them into a concordant whole, which forms one of the finest didactic poems in the language. "The Botanic Garden" was at first only a few loose descriptions of flowers, which casually excited the poet's philosophical curiosity; and we have only to lament that the English bard wanted the address or the industry of the French poet: A deficiency of interesting order is the radical defect of that composition. "The Pleasures of Memory" was the slow and perfect production of ten years; the poet at first proposed a simple description in a few lines; but, imperceptibly conducted by his meditations, from these few verses was at length composed a poem, important alike for it's extent, it's investigation, and it's beauty. Similar circumstances gave the origin of the *Lutrin*; and the *Dunciad* is an amplification of the *Mac Fleenoe* of Dryden. The *Henriade* of Voltaire was at first  
only

only intended for a poem on the League, and its want of unity of design, as an epic, arose from this circumstance.

MEDITATION may be defined the *industry of the mind*. On its habitual exertion depend all our great efforts; for literary industry to obtain its purpose must become habitual. It is then, wherever we go, whatever we see, from what we read, and what we hear, some acquisitions are brought to adorn our favourite topics. Like that ancient general, who, in the profoundest peace, practised stratagems of war, and when walking with his friends, and arriving at some remarkable spot, was accustomed to consult with them on a mode of defence or attack. Hence he derived the rare talent of ever being accompanied by his genius, and to this general the victories of war were obtained by the labours of peace. The great poet and the great painter are alike intent on their respective objects; and do, no less than this general, pass their remarkable spots without bringing home sentiments and images, forms and colours.

The greatest works have been derived from petty commencements, and always formed by slow and gradual renovations of industry. Industry, indeed, is but a mean word, and appears more appropriate to mechanical labours than to the operations of genius. If genius is to be considered as inspiration, the philosophers of this literary age will acknowledge that we have produced no works of genius; and that even the liveliest conceptions of our poets are rarely formed with that celerity and

fury which some are yet so credulous and so ignorant as to suppose.\* Whenever the manuscripts of a great genius have been discovered, this truth has ever been confirmed. The industry which we are now to understand resembles but little mechanical assiduity; it is a continued exercise of the noblest faculties, which expand as they are used; a resolute intellectual labour, a combination of many means to obtain one end. It is study invigorated by meditation; it is criticism, which, if we may so express ourselves, is a continuation or supplement of the spirit of the original author.

**This**

• **Fresnoy says, in his Art of Painting,**

By tedious toil no passions are express'd,  
His hand who feels them strongest paints them best.

Reynolds explains this popular prejudice in this manner: "A Painter, whatever he may feel, will not be able to express it on canvass without having recourse to a recollection of those principles by which that passion is expressed; the mind thus occupied is not likely at the same time to be possessed with the passion which he is representing, an image may be ludicrous, and in it's first conception make the Painter laugh as well as the Spectator; but the difficulty of his art makes the Painter, in the course of his work, equally grave and serious, whether he is employed on the most ludicrous or the most solemn subject."

It is exactly the same with literary composition. When Butler or Cervantes were composing their Quixote or Hudibras, they were as grave, and as laborously applied to their page as Homer or Milton. But how many imagine, that the ludicrous compositions of the first were written as ludicrously and as easily as they appear to the world! A modern comic writer was one day very seriously thoughtful; being asked by a friend why he was so, replied, "I am making a joke for Mrs. Jordan."

This industry is that art, which seizes, as if it were by the rapidity of inspiration, whatever it discovers in the works of others which may enrich its own stores ; which knows by a quick apprehension what to examine and what to imbibe ; and which receives an atom of intelligence from the minds of others on its own mind, as an accidental spark, falling on a heap of nitre, is sufficient to raise a powerful blaze.

If we look into literary biography, we perceive that every illustrious writer, in one mode or another, was an indefatigable student. Tillotson observes, that whenever the ancient historians describe an eminent character, they ever employ these expressions: that he was *incredibili industrya, diligentia singulari*. Cicero and Pliny, to habituate themselves to the graces of the Grecian writers, even at a remote period of life, practised the labours of translation, and there was no mode or art they omitted proper for correction. They read their work to a few friends, they recited it to an audience, and even sent it to their literary correspondents for emendation. This unwearied zeal has rendered their works immortal, and capable of equaling whatever the ambition of the moderns can oppose. Voltaire, lively as he may appear, was an indefatigable student, and never read, even at the close of life, without a pen in his hand. The immortal and voluminous labours of the philosophic Buffon are derived from the simple circumstance of early rising ; he long strove against a natural indulgence of ease, and used severe precautions. Perhaps no

student was more laborious than Milton, and his industry was even equal to his genius. Observe the modest and remarkable expression he employs, in one of his prose works, alluding to his intention of composing an epic. After mentioning Tasso, he adds: "It haply would be no rashness, from an *equal diligence and inclination*, to present the like." Such was the vigilant industry of Pope, that he appears to have derived his genius from this characteristic.

It is a truth of some importance in literature to be known, that the farther progress we make in knowledge renders study more necessary; that as taste is more refined labour becomes more essential; and that however modern writers must lose something of originality, they have, even if their subject is preoccupied, more difficulties to overcome, more art to display, more labour to exercise, more novelty to court, than their ancestors, who wrote with the licentious spirit of their age; and who, though not superior in point of courage, handled their pen with a ferocity not permitted to their more polished descendants.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE ON  
THE HUMAN MIND.

AMONG the follies of the wise, may be ranked that system which circumscribes the energies of the human mind by the influence of climate. It has been confuted, and is still believed, for there are some whom no confutations can confute; we shall form an enquiry into it's origin, with some notices of that fanciful chain it has thrown over the intellects of the most vigorous geniuses, and we shall inculcate the independence of the intellectual powers. Denina in a recent work (1790) enquires why polite literature has made so slow a progress in Germany. Do stoves render the mind heavier than coal-fires? or the beer of England occasion more vivacity than the beer of Germany? Is the atmosphere more dense in Germany than in Great Britain?—This is a specimen of that critical system which has been carried to such excess.

It derives it's modern rejuvenescence from the brilliant Montesquieu, who, ever vigilant in striking the mind by novelties, discovered, in the writings of some of the ancients, a few fanciful conjectures on the influence of climate on the human mind, and these he also extended to manners. Curious absurdities, not less eccentric, remain yet for some future Montesquieu to adopt. These slight conjectures he seized with avidity, amplified with ingenuity, decorated by the graces of fancy, and divulged

divulged with the triumphant air of a modern discovery.

Baillet, who wrote at the close of the last century, without a solitary charm of Montesquieu's fancy, was well acquainted with this extravagant notion. Hence, perhaps, did Montesquieu, with some kindred geniuses, derive the hint. In his volume on National Prejudices, he adverts to this system, and quotes Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, and others, who had conceived that the temperature of the air contributes something to the natural dispositions of the mind. Long anterior to Montesquieu, our own Milton expressed this prejudice;\* and as Filangieri observes, Chardin, Fontenelle,

\* It is curious to observe, that Spenser, that child of fancy, had on this subject, a sounder philosophy than Milton. I allude to his View of the State of Ireland; it is composed in the dialogue manner, and one of the speakers conceives that the barbarity of that country proceeds from the very *genius* of the *soil*, or *influence* of the *stars*. But he is justly reprimanded by the other, in expressions so philosophical and pleasing, that I shall transcribe them: "Surely, I suppose this but a vain conceit of *simple men*, which *judge things* by their *effects*, and not by their *causes*; for I would rather think the cause of this evil, which hangeth upon that country, to proceed rather of the unsoundness of the counsels, and plots which you say have been oftentimes laid for the reformation, or of faintness in following and affecting the same, than of any such fatal course appointed of God, as you misdeem; but *it is the manner of men*, that *when they are fallen in any absurdity*, or *their actions succeed not as they would*, they are *always ready to impute the blame thereof unto the heavens*, so to excuse their own *follies and imperfections*." The admirable Spenser is another instance

tenelle, Du Bos, and others, had explained and adopted the notion. But what the reasoning of Chardin, the wit of Fontenelle, and the ingenuity of Du Bos failed to establish, was fixed by the seductive eloquence of Montesquieu. His brilliant strokes dazzled the eyes of Europe, and iced with an additional frost, the heart of many a literary Russian and Dane. It is thus follies are hereditary among writers, and one generation perpetuates or revives the extinct follies of another.

It was the talent of exquisite composition that gave to Montesquieu the power of disguising an exploded theory. Who can resist such poignant epigrams as these, allowing that every lively epigram is a conclusive argument?—"The empire of climate is the first of all empires."—"As we distinguish climates by degrees of latitude, we might distinguish them, thus to express myself, by degrees of sensibility."—"In those countries, instead of precepts, we must have padlocks."—Such is the witty system of the president Montesquieu, which perhaps was first conceived with a smile, but conducted with ingenious gravity. We suffer our follies to become agreeable, when we suffer them to become familiar.

When the "Spirit of laws" was first published, every literary centinel did not silently admit the  
enemy

instance to prove that an exquisite imagination may be combined with the soundest intellect; and it is now, perhaps, the first time that Spenser the poet has been quoted as Spenser the philosopher.

lenient of intellectual freedom, nor was every genius rendered somniferous by the corruptions of wit. The alarm was given. This paradox kindled the philosophic indignation of Gray, and inspired his exquisite muse to commence a poem of considerable magnitude, designed to combat a position so fatal to intellectual exertion. Churchill revolted from the degrading notion; a line on genius conveys his idea, that it is not circumscribed by local situation; for says he,

“ It may, hereafter, e'en in Holland rise.”

Armstrong found it necessary to inveigh with sarcastic acerbity against this system; but it was the philosophic Hume who, with solid arguments, crushed the brilliant epigrams of Montesquieu.

Filangieri, who had all the advantage of posterior knowledge united to an investigating genius, has marched between these systematisers and their adversaries, by attempting to shew that Climate influences the mind as a relative, not as an absolute cause, and that the difference is not perceptible in temperate climates. But one of his political reveries is that of drying marshes and felling woods to change the character of a people. I much fear that the Italian (for his nation are most politic refiners) has only mistaken the national humour of Addison, who tells us, that “ a famous university in this land was formerly very much infested with *quans*; but whether or no this might not arise from the *fens*, and *marshes* in which it was situated, and which

which are now *drained*, I must leave to the determination of more skilful naturalists."

As France is a very extensive country, and has great variation of climate, it offered an ample circuit for these systematizers to verify their favourite positions, by tracing the effects of climate through that diversified country. The inhabitants of cold Picardy were imagined to be eminent for their indefatigable labour, and their writers students of great erudition. But here, as almost in every instance, where facts are produced to confirm this fanciful theory, we shall find that moral are often taken for physical effects. Baillet remarks on this observation concerning Picardy, that the industry of it's writers is owing to those devastations of war, which, having injured the fortunes of the natives, induced them rather to apply to useful than to agreeable compositions, as a means of ameliorating their fortune. Normandy having great inequality of climate was supposed to occasion a similar inequality in the literary productions of it's authors; and Auvergne having high mountains and deep vallies, was conjectured to produce both men of great genius and great dullness; for those born on the mountains were said to have more delicate organs, and a more ætherial spirit than the gross and stupid students of the vallies. Such are the materials, which, with many others, might be employed in a history of the follies of philosophy.

But if an Englishman is amused by these airy fancies, he will come at length to resent, with a due spirit of indignation, the national attacks which these

these fantastic systematizers have constantly levelled at our country. Britain has been considered by them as a Beotia. Profound disquisitions, and sarcastic exultations have been made concerning our foggy island; but the same fogs remain, while the finest compositions now enrich our language. The classics of England exhibit models of the purest taste to literary Europe; but moral causes long impeded the progress of taste in our country. We may resound our triumphs to the manes of Du Bos,\* of Montesquieu, and Winckelman, who have affirmed that we could have no genius for the fine arts, because they informed the world that the sensibility of taste was obstructed by an obnoxious clime. Such are the sentiments which have been echoed from one writer to another, till even some of our own have been pleased to calumniate themselves.

Among many curious criticisms of foreigners, I must not pass silently Winckelman's notion concerning Milton. He tells us, that all the descriptions in the Paradise Lost, excepting the amorous and delicate scenes of the primeval pair, are like well-painted gorgons, which resemble each other, but are always frightful; and this he attributes to the climate. But what is here attempted to be depreciated, every critic of taste will conceive to be the terrible beauties of a sublime poetry. As the subject is peculiar, and of the most elevated nature, so it  
found

\* This writer conceives that a difference of talents in the same people, in different ages, is to be ascribed to some *variation of their climate*!

found in Milton a genius as peculiar and faculties the most elevated. If the English Muse has surpassed her sisters in loftiness, she yields not in the more delicate and sweeter portions of her art. Of late we have excelled in picturesque description; the most pleasing paintings of nature variegate the verse of Thomson, who, as a shrewd observer remarks, was born more northerly than Milton. Goldsmith has cultivated the same powers, and they have proved so attractive to the public taste, that English verse can now exhibit some of the most enchanting and the most vivid scenery in poetry. The Muse was considered to be under "a skiey influence;" but whenever a national impediment is removed, (and time, in every polished nation, subverts such causes) that people will not fail of equalling the efforts of those who have been placed in happier circumstances.

Writers have yielded up their sensations and their reflections to this favourite theory. Spence has accounted for the turgidity of Lucan on the principles of this system. He says, "The swellings in his poem may be partly accounted for, perhaps, from his being *born in Spain*, and in that part of it which was *farthest removed* from Greece and Rome." But the following instance will parallel any literary extravagance: When Dyer gave the "Fleece," he acquainted the world, to apologize for the defects of the poem, that "It was published under some *disadvantages*; for many of its *faults* must be imputed to the *air of a fenny country*, where I have been for the most part above these  
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five years." Warburton, in his anonymous "Critical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Prodigies, &c. of Historians," alluding to the eminent success of the French in translations of the ancients, imagines that our little emulation in this department of literature may be attributed to the *coldness* of our *climate*. I transcribe his words: "The Frenchman, vigorous and enterprising, is ambitious of possession; while we, with a false *modesty* and *coldness*, natural from our *climate*, content ourselves with a distant admiration."

From this it would appear, that *our climate* has of late become *much warmer*, and therefore *we*, *less modest*; since we have enriched our language with some versions of the classics, which vie with the beauty of the originals. Such criticisms remind me of a couplet of De Foe, whose good sense appears also to have wandered wildly into these fancies. In one of his political poems, he says of his hero William:

"Batavian climates nourished him awhile,  
Too great a *genius* for so *damp* a soil."

Even Milton credited this prejudice. He tells us, in one of his prose works, that he intends to write an epic "out of our own ancient stories; if there be nothing *adverse* in our *climate*, or the fate of this age." At a more remote period, when he was near the conclusion of his immortal labour, he adorns these erroneous notions by the charms of his

his verse, and lays a peculiar stress on the word *cold*. These are the lines:

“————— higher argument  
Remains, sufficient of itself to raise  
That name, unless an age too late, or *cold*  
*Climate*, or years, damp my intended wing.”

Even Young, in “The Merchant,” complains, that “his poetic vein *runs slow* in this cold climate.”

The notion of this influence of the climate was indeed so universal in those days, that Descartes feared that the warmth of the climate in France would too much exalt his imagination, and disturb that temperate state of the mind necessary for philosophical discoveries. He therefore took refuge from the sun in Holland. All the frost of the northern climates could never render his burning imagination tepid; the visionary would have dreamt on a pillow of snow.

On such foundations rest the brilliant edifice which the hand of Montesquieu did not construct, but only adorned. Every error of this kind long links an additional fetter on the human mind, and half the wisdom of man now consists in destroying the chains of his own fabrication.

Let us view this topic in a more instructive manner. Aristotle, in his Politics, observes, that the northern nations, and generally all Europe, are naturally courageous and robust, but are improper for mental exertion, without powers for meditation, and

and without industry for the arts ; on the contrary, the Asiatics have great talents for works of genius, are inclined to reasoning and meditation, and skilful in the invention and perfection of arts. The reverse of all this, in the present age, is the truth. Aristotle drew this representation from the existing scene ; but had that acute mind reflected on the powers which the *customs* and the *government* of a people have over the human mind, he had then perceived that, not the frosts and snows of the northern realms made men addict themselves to war, but that predatory genius which must prevail in a people who were constantly distressed by poverty and famine. When a new civilization had taken place, and the severities of the climate were mitigated by the beneficial influence of art and science ; when the descendants of these men employed their armaments in commerce as well as in war ; when their iron was plunged into the reluctant bosom of earth ; when in their cities universities were erected, academies instituted, and the peaceful occupations of genius cherished ; then, while the same climate existed, the national characters became changed. Heroic and polished Greece and Rome are now barbarous and pusillanimous ; and the gravity and superstition of the Spaniard, the politic and assassinating spirit of the Italian, the diligence and suppleness of the Scotchman, and the suspiciousness and profundity of the Englishman, are derived from their manners and governments.

It was once enquired why Paris and Toulouse produced so many eminent lawyers. It was long attributed

attributed to the climate; till some reasonable being discovered, that the universities of those cities offered *opportunities* and *encouragements* for that *study* which others did not. The Germans have long been an injured literary nation. A taste for science and erudition having been diffused among that industrious people, they were constantly aspersed by their lively neighbours for inveterate dullness and sterile imaginations. The eminent success of the French in the Belles Lettres, placed the frightened genius of that nation in a voluntary seclusion; of late, awakened from their stupor, they have produced some spirited and affecting works of imagination, which can fear no rivals.

From this, and the two preceding essays, we may conclude, that it is with a people as with an individual, and with an individual, as with a people. The human mind is indeed influenced not by climate; but by government; not by soils, but by customs; not by heat and cold, but by servitude and freedom. A happy education, an elegant leisure, and a passion for glory, must form a great man; as an excellent government, an orderly liberty, and a popular felicity, must form a great people. But for these purposes numerous conjunctures must succeed each other, which, in the position of human affairs, can be but rare; and to the present moment no system of education for the individual, or system of government for the people has been discovered which can satisfy the philosophical mind; a great people, like a great man, must therefore become a singularity.

## ON NOVELTY IN LITERATURE.

“ALL is said,” exclaims the lively Bruyere; but at the same moment, by his own admirable reflections, confutes the dreary system he would establish. An opinion of the exhausted state of literature has been a popular prejudice of remote existence; and an unhappy idea of a wise ancient, who, even in his day, laments, that “of books there is no end,” has been transcribed by great authors, who, however, cannot be deemed great politicians.

This opinion serves for the apology of the idle and the consolation of the disappointed; but it is to be lamented that it extinguishes the ardour of the ingenious. Had not genius felt itself superior to this malicious *dictum* the world had wanted nearly all its valued compositions. He who has critically examined any branch of literature has discovered how little of original invention is to be found even in the most excellent works. To add a little to his predecessors satisfies the ambition of the first geniuses. The popular notion of literary novelty is an idea more fanciful than exact. Of these unreflecting censurers, many are yet to learn that their admired originals are not such as they mistake them to be either in the parts or the design of their works. We shall shew how the plaus of the most original performances have been borrowed; and of the thoughts of the most admired compositions

Compositions, some readers are yet to be instructed that they are not wonderful discoveries, but only truths, of which themselves felt the conviction before the ingenuity of the author had arranged the intermediate and accessory ideas, by unfolding that confused sentiment, which those experience who are not accustomed to think with depth or accuracy.

Novelty, in it's rigid acceptation, will not be found in any judicious production. I am not, therefore, surpris'd at a literary incident which happened to a friend. To relieve the tedium of a temporary retirement he took with him seven epic poems; he amus'd his solitude by comparing them with each other; and the result was, that he found how much each had been indebted to it's predecessors. The same incidents had been transplanted, and the same characters had assumed a different name; but every poet had his peculiar colouring and disposition, and had created while he imitated. Prior in his preface to "Solomon" with some exultation points out the imitations of the Epic Poets.

Voltaire, as a critic of taste, is of the greatest authority. He looked on every thing as imitation. He observes that the most original writers borrowed one from another, and says that the instruction we gather from books is like fire; we fetch it from our neighbours, kindle it at home, and communicate it to others, till it becomes the property of all. He has a curious passage, in which he traces some of the finest compositions to the

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fountain-head; and the reader smiles when he perceives that they have travelled in regular succession through China, India, Arabia, and Greece, to France and to England.

To the obscurity of time are the ancients indebted for that originality in which they are imagined to excel. We know how frequently they accuse each other; and to have borrowed copiously from preceding writers was not considered criminal by such illustrious authors as Plato and Cicero. It has been observed of the *Eneid* of Virgil, that not only little invention is displayed in the Incidents, for it unites the plan of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but even as to many of the particular lines, and certainly is very deficient in the variety of it's characters. But on writers so well known as the classical we shall not dwell.

Our own early writers have not more originality than modern genius may aspire to reach. To imitate and to rival the Italians and the French formed their devotion. Chaucer, Gower, and Gawin Douglas were all spirited imitators, and frequently only masterly translators. Spenser, the father of so many poets, is himself the child of the Ausonian Muse; in borrowing the fancy of the Italian poetry, he unhappily adopted it's form. Shakespeare has liberally honoured many writers by unsparing imitations; he has availed himself of their sentiments, their style, and their incidents. His *Oberon* was taken from a French Romance, and his *Fairies* are no more his own original invention, than the *Sylphs* are of Pope. Milton is incessantly

incessantly borrowing from the poetry of his day. In the beautiful *Mask of Comus* he preserved all the circumstances of the work he imitated. The *Paradise Lost* is believed to have been conceived from a mystery, and many of its most striking passages are taken from other poets. Tasso opened for him the Tartarean Gulph; the sublime description of the bridge may be found in Sadi, who borrowed it from the Turkish theology; the paradise of fools is a wild flower, transplanted from the wilderness of Ariosto. Jonson was the servile slave of his ancient masters; and the rich poetry of Gray, is a wonderful tissue, woven on the frames, and composed with the gold threads of others. To Cervantes we owe Butler; and the united abilities of three great wits, in their *Martinus Scriblerus*, could find no other mode of conveying their powers but by imitating at once *Don Quixote* and *Monfieur Oufle*. Pope, like Boileau, had all the ancients and moderns in his pay; the contributions he levied were not the pillages of a bandit, but the taxes of a monarch. Swift is much indebted for the plans of his two very original performances, *The Travels of Gulliver*, to the *Voyages of Cyrano de Bergerac to the Sun and Moon*; a writer, who, without the acuteness of Swift, has wilder flashes of fancy. Dr. Warton has observed many of his strokes in *Bishop Godwin's Man in the Moon*, who, in his turn, must have borrowed his work from *Cyrano*. The *Tale of a Tub* is an imitation of such various originals, that they are too numerous here to mention. Wotton observed justly, that

in many places, the author's wit is not his own. Dr. Feriari's Essay on the Imitations of Sterne might be considerably augmented. Such are the writers, however, who imitate, but are inimitable!

We will now, quitting Britain, make a short excursion round the rest of Europe, and visit some of our neighbours, that we may not imagine they enjoy a superiority over our own fellow citizens. Montaigne, with honest naiveté, compares his writings to a thread that binds the flowers of others; and that by incessantly pouring the waters of a few good old authors into his sieve, some drops fall upon his paper. The good old man, elsewhere, acquaints us with a certain stratagem of his own invention, consisting of his inserting whole sentences from the ancients, without acknowledgment, that the critics might blunder, by giving *Nazardes* to Seneca and Plutarch, while they imagined they tweaked his nose. Petrarch, who is not the inventor of that tender poetry of which he is the model, and Boccaccio, called the father of Italian novels, have alike profited by a studious perusal of writers, who are now only read by those who have more curiosity than taste; to the Tales of the Minstrels was the Italian Tale-teller indebted for many of his plots. Boiardo has imitated Pulci, and Ariosto Boiardo. The madness of Orlando Furioso, though it wears, by its extravagance, a very original air, is only imitated from Sir Launcelot in the old Romance of Mort Arthur, with which, the late Mr. Warton observes, it agrees in every leading circumstance; and what is the Cardenio of

Cervantes but the Orlando of Ariosto? Tasso has imitated the Iliad, and enriched his poem with episodes from the Eneid. It is curious to observe, that even Danté, wild and original as he appears, when he meets Virgil in the Inferno, warmly expresses his gratitude for the many fine passages for which he was indebted to his works, and on which he says he had "long meditated." Moliere and La Fontaine are considered to possess as much originality as any of the French writers; yet the learned Menage calls Moliere "un grand et habile picoreur;" and Boileau tells us, that La Fontaine borrowed his style and matter from Marot and Rabelais, and took his subjects from Boccaccio, Poggius, and Ariosto. Nor was the eccentric Rabelais the inventor of most of his burlesque narratives, and he is a very close imitator of Folengo, the inventor of the macaronic poetry, and not a little indebted to the old *Facezie* of the Italians. Indeed Marot, Villon, as well as those we have noticed, profited by the authors anterior to the age of Francis I. Bruyere incorporates whole passages of Publius Syrus in his work, as the translator of the latter abundantly shews. To the Turkish spy was Montefquieu beholden for his Persian Letters, and a numerous croud are indebted to Montefquieu. Corneille made a liberal use of Spanish literature; and the pure waters of Racine flowed from the fountains of Sophocles and Euripides.

Having thus traced that vein of imitation which runs through the productions of our greatest

authors,\* it remains to ascertain an accurate notion of literary novelty.

Denina's work on the *Revolutions of Literature*, is formed on this principle: that there being a great uniformity in nature, when the perfection of those arts which express the passions is at length acquired, nature becomes exhausted; and that at this period, to succeed in poetry or in eloquence, it would require either to extend nature, or to create new passions, which are alike impossible. If this were true, literary novelty might be, in the present refinement of the *Belles Lettres*, a hopeless project. We must, therefore, controvert this hypothesis, or burn our pens.

What is a new thought? The question has been resolved by Boileau. It is not, says he, what the ignorant imagine; that is, a thought which no one ever conceived, or could have possibly conceived. On the contrary, it is a thought that might have occurred to any one, but that somebody has first expressed: it is what every one *thinks*, but is said in a lively, fine, and new *manner*. Pope, no doubt, borrowed his definition of wit, or genius, from this remark. It is, as he says,

“What oft was *thought*, but ne'er so well *express'd*.”

It is, perhaps, with writing as with shooting; the art consists in the *aim* of the sportsman, but the  
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\* Marville compares some of the first writers to bankers, who are rich with the assembled fortunes of individuals, and would be often ruined, were they too hardly drawn on.

objects are always the same. Good sense has been so in all ages, says Pope elsewhere, who, perhaps, had more good sense than any poet. If we analyse the most striking passages of our most original writers, we shall find that the naked idea had nothing uncommon. The finest thoughts derive their beauty from the glow and colouring of imagination. A friend of great taste, in examining and comparing the natural sentiments of two dialogues of vulgar courtship, in the Exmoor dialect, with congenial and similar ideas in poetical language, has proved that the ground-work of the human mind is always the same; and that all men think alike, but express themselves very differently. This essay, probably, only intended as a literary amusement, may however, be made to elucidate a philosophical truth.

Hence the most forcible passages of Shakespeare, are only delightful or energetic expressions of our own feelings. Great writers must, therefore, bear an affinity with each other; and will eagerly adopt the images, the sentiments, and the very expressions of a kindred genius. We may account, on this principle, for those similar passages which we meet with in different works, although we are certain that no connection existed between the writers. Hence sometimes an Englishman finds in Corneille an expression which he exclaims is worthy of Shakespeare; and a Frenchman discovers in Shakespeare, a sentiment which he feels equals the eloquence of Corneille.

It would, therefore, appear, that there is a **MANNER IN EXPRESSION** which may impart novelty to literary composition; and I add also, that there is another **MANNER OF CHARACTER**, which every writer of genius exhibits.

The Italians describe a certain sensation by their *un non sò che*; the French by their *je ne sçai quoi*; and we frequently say "a certain something." The foreign writers have composed a great deal concerning this quality; and perhaps they have obscured what is not obscure in itself; for what is this occult sensation but **MANNER**? It accompanies every interesting object; it is the inexpressible charm which creates sympathy, or the unknown something which produces antipathy. Do we not observe the most essential truths on the most interesting topics, enshrouded, and even rendered repulsive? And do we not sometimes admire the most trivial objects when they are touched with all the felicity of manner? It arises from the absence or the use of this prominent quality, which bestows novelty on the most familiar and delight on the most arid topics. The French and Italians have a species of writing almost peculiar to themselves. It is called by the former, *Rajeunissement*, and by the latter *Refaccimento*. This is nothing but a rejuvenescence of their ancient authors, such as are the versions by Dryden and Pope of some of Chaucer's Tales. Every one is not equally successful in this employment; and writers who possess a happiness of manner, have displayed in these works  
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it's full force; they have given, by master-touches, all the pleasure the originals once gave. In the hands of inferior writers, the same thoughts have been as vigilantly preserved, but not as attractively. Several works of importance might be noticed, which could never be perused in the manner of their original authors; but since they have been re-written by men of genius every one peruses them. *Manner* is the first acquirement of genius; it renders a sonnet more precious than a long poem, and has made some authors more celebrated for ten pages, than others who in vain have written ten volumes.\* Observe in two of the most popular French writers; a great contrast of manner; Voltaire is a wit, and takes us by surprize; Rousseau is an orator, and insinuates his soul into our own; one points his polished epigrams, and the other steals on us by his pathetic sentiments; our mind is the aim of Voltaire, but we yield our heart to Rousseau. It is this manner which enchants in Addison, pleases in Melmoth, and soothes in Hawkesworth; which sparkles in the brilliant periods of Shaftesbury, rises into majesty in the grand

\* Lord Bacon in his *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, in section xviii. on Rhetoric or Oratory, has observed certain stings and goads of speech; he says there are many forms of speech, which, although of the same signification, affect men differently; as a sharp instrument penetrates more than a blunt one, supposing both of them urged with equal force. We are more affected by hearing this expression: *How your enemies will triumph in this!* than if it were simply said, *This will injure your affairs.*

grand tones of Bolingbroke, and awes in the solemn cadences of Johnson.\*

Another source of literary novelty may be derived from IMITATION. A servile imitation is inimical to the progress of art, but nothing is more necessary to preserve the refinement of art, than a frequent recurrence to it's models. To literary echoes we may apply the sensible observation of Philip of Macedon, made to one who prided himself with imitating the notes of the nightingale; "I prefer the nightingale herself." We must first learn

\* This *manner*, in every great writer, has not escaped observation. The quotations may gratify literary curiosity. The elegant author of Fitzosborne's Letters has a little Essay on Grace, in which, after confessing the difficulty of expressing an idea when language does not supply us with proper words, he closes by saying, that "Sir William Temple may be considered as the first prose author who introduced a graceful *manner* into our language."

Addison, in the 160th Spectator, says, "I believe we may observe, that very few writers make an extraordinary figure in the world who have not *something* in their way of *thinking* or *expressing* themselves that is peculiar to them and *entirely* *their own*."

Roulléau the poet, in his Epistle to Marot, observes of great writers,

"Chacun d'eux a SA BEAUTE PRECISE,

Qui le distingue, et forme sa devise."

It is singular that De Foe, in his Essay on Projects, notices a *manner in writing*. Perhaps he borrowed the notion from the French critics; for it would be difficult to conceive what idea he and the writers of the last century formed of it, since no one then appears to have had a peculiar characteristic, or employed any of those artifices of composition which constitute a *manner*.

learn to follow our predecessors that we may reach them, and, if we have the adroitness, we may then outstrip them; a vulgar mind can only copy, a superior mind in copying always becomes original. Among literary fashions there once prevailed the custom of imitating Cicero, it was carried to a laughable extravagance, and the correspondence of men of letters was often long interrupted, because some would require three or four months to write a letter of three or four pages.\* Servile imitation

\* These scholars were denominated *Ciceronians*, and as we have still remaining some of this class of pedants, I think the reader will not be displeas'd to have their character exhibited; it is said with nearly as much truth as ridicule:

“ It was laughable to observe those pale and melancholy visages deprive themselves of every pleasure, fly from the society of the living, as if they were themselves already dead, bury themselves in the bier of their study, and refrain from every kind of reading, except the works of Cicero, with as religious a care as Pythagoras abstained from the use of flesh. Their libraries were only diversified by the different editions of the works of Cicero. Their histories were only those of his life; and their epics only frigid narratives of his consulship; the paintings and drawings in their galleries were only his portraits and actions. They had his head engraven on their seals, as well as on their hearts. By day and by night Cicero was the only object of their enquiries and conversations. They preferred the honour of collecting certain words, and arranging a round and nicely cadenced period, to the performance of the most generous action. When, at length, their painful vigils had attenuated their bodies with illness, they died contented, since they had augmented the number of the martyrs of Cicero, and appeared in their last agony to be less pleas'd with the hope of the aspect

tation is censured by the very expression; that to which I now allude is of a very different kind, and I proceed to describe it.

This imitation is peculiar to an age of taste. It is an enthusiasm caught from the incessant study of the masters in composition; a sensibility and versatility of taste which receives the *manners* of every writer, and which reproduces their intermingled graces in its own compositions. A writer who possesses this magical power, combines the varieties of his predecessors, and without being one of them is all of them. He rarely finds a reader worthy of himself, for to relish such an author requires a delicacy and perception equal to his own; and it is less difficult to taste the mere mannerist, who has only one character, than the writer who combines several. A writer of this description is indefatigable in the arrangement of his composition. A cultured imagination heightens his natural feelings, and in every part he exhibits the lighter graces and glowing strokes of a brilliant art. He bestows a freshness and bloom on whatever has been frequently touched. No thought appears feeble or vulgar because it is invested with an elegant dress, and an easy air. The effects of such a composition are not immediately perceived, for much of the art of refinement consists in conceal-

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aspect of God than of the eternal presence of this demon of eloquence."

Such is the portrait Colletet has drawn of these false imitators of Cicero!

ing, and not in obtruding, It is a silent beauty that steals on insensibly, it is Venus gradually rising from the sea; wave falls upon wave, beauty succeeds to beauty, till the whole enchantment of the figure is revealed.

A writer of this class catches inspiration, in his solitary closet from the labours of others. He is the student who hastens to Rome to meditate at the feet of it's statues; he is the architect who combines in the edifices with which he adorns his native city those graces which his eye had appropriated in foreign countries. \*

The able vindicator of Milton against the infamous Lauder has this admirable observation on the present subject: "There may be such a thing as an original work without invention; and a writer may  
may

\* Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who has written with such attic sensibility or literary elegancies, compares the brilliant and flowery style, in which such writers often excel, to a living and limpid stream, which ever flows, and ever with the same facility; to a changeable silk, which exhibits at every glance all the delicacies of shades; and to a splendid painting, in which the colours so happily blend and sweetly melt into each other.

The polished ear of the ancients was so accustomed to whatever was finished, and perhaps the felicity of their language first gave them a taste for such exquisite refinements, that they would consume hours in turning and returning a period. Of Plato it is recorded, that he re-wrote twenty times the simple expression of "yesterday I descended into the Pyræus," before he could satisfy his delicacy. Cicero balanced the members of his periods like notes in music, and reserved for their closes that harmonious pomp of words, which, by the Greeks, was styled, "magnificence of sound."

may be an imitator of others without plagiarism." Among painters it is not only permitted, but even applauded, to insert a figure or groupe of figures, borrowed from another artist. Raphael, no more than Pope, passed over a happy hint, or hesitated to seize on whatever he found to be exquisite. I know of no reason why writers are to be less favoured than painters.

Literary novelty appears, therefore, possible to be imparted to works of taste, while there shall be preserved a *manner in expression*, a *manner in character*, and a *skilful imitation*. But two observations remain to be made; that there are a *false novelty*, and *exhausted turns of expression*.

The popular kind of novelty is gratified by irregular sallies of the imagination. To this incessant demand of the tasteless public, many ingenious and great writers have fallen the victims. We have too frequently, in our country, pardoned eccentricity and incorrectness for some irregular corruptions of genius. An affectation of novelty has often been calamitous to great minds. It has been a fertile source in science of pernicious paradoxes, and in literature of monstrous inventions. Pere Hardouin, known for his strange opinions, was used to say, to excuse them, that he did not rise at four every morning to repeat what others had said. He might have rose much later and still have been as ridiculous, for to follow the extravagancies of an idle imagination has great facility. Camoens, in his *Lusiad*, by a mixture of the fabulous deities with the Christian theology, and Davenant,

venant, in his *Gondibert*, by the invention of a plan, repugnant to Homer and nature, are eminent instances. The temporary taste of a vicious age has been fatal to genius, and we have lost a fine poet in Cowley. To surprize is the great aim of art; but it is to be remembered that surprize is alike excited by beauty and deformity. We are surprized at the softened graces of a Raphael; we are surprized at the fantastical strokes of a Chinese painter; but which insinuate themselves into our hearts, assume at every inspection new charms, and create an enchanting and eternal delusion!

That the *turns of expression* may be exhausted is felt most in an age of literary refinement. Some of our happiest modes of diction occur at length so frequently that their beauty is lost in their familiarity. At this period it is that the manners of a nation are luxurious and refined, and their defects are communicated to their style. To invent new thoughts is now most rare, and to invent new expressions is now most hazardous.

While we deviate not too widely from the models of art novelty may be communicated to our productions, and an originality be impressed on the most common objects. I give an instance: Equestrian statues are commonly raised on a polished mass of marble, and surrounded by allegorical figures. When Falconet was invited to Peterburgh, to form such a statue of Peter the Great, he represented the Emperor on a fiery courser. This idea an inferior sculptor might have seized: but it remained for this artist to throw over the performance

performance the lustre of genius. He has placed the horse in the act of leaping from a rude unhewn rock. Here we see expressed the sublime genius of Peter and the artist. While genius can give a *new attitude*, it will not want for *new expression*; and it is one source of that NOVELTY, which now seduces and captivates in the productions of art. The art of writing is the art of exciting powerful sensations.

## ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER IN POLITICS AND RELIGION.

AMONG the various arguments deduced in favour of an inequality in the intellectual faculties of the sexes, I know not if it has been remarked, that there are certain powers, which, to be more perfect, require that station in society occupied by Women. I shall add also, that any deficiency in other qualities has been often compensated by the seductions of their personal charms.

We shall perceive, upon investigation, that in religion and in politics their influence has been infinitely greater than appears in historical records; and it is one great objection to the verity of history, that the female character rarely makes any figure in scenes which, by some other means, we often discover to have been planned by females with inventive felicity, and conducted with peculiar address. We are apt to be surpris'd, when we contemplate some of the greatest revolutions, to discover that they derived their origin from women; that a government or a religion have been established by a female; and that, while an invasion takes place, a monarch is assassinated, or an inquisition erected, the motive-power of this vast machine is a little unperceived spring, touched and played upon by the dexterity of a woman.

That the female character may excel the masculine ability in what is termed a knowledge of the world,

world, and that there is a sexual distinction in this not contemptible science, is a fact which an observer may discover in his private circle. Bruyere is a character more extraordinary among men than it would be among women; for I am persuaded that there are many female Bruyeres not accustomed to write down their observations, and portray the characters of their acquaintance. Women of even a mediocrity of talent excel in the knowledge of their circle; and we may account for this curious circumstance on the principle of their stationary situation in society, where their opportunities for observation are more frequent, and where their perception becomes more exact, by an attention, which, though frequently interrupted by its vivacity, is never entirely suspended. I cannot affirm that they view distantly, or penetrate deeply. Their eye is a pleasing microscope, which detects the minutest stroke, if placed near, though incapable of tracing an object remotely. Many experience, and some acknowledge, what Rousseau relates of his Theresa. This woman, whom he describes otherwise as heavy and dull, afforded him excellent advice in the most trying occasions. "Often" (says he) "in Switzerland, in England, and in France, amidst the catastrophes I found myself, she saw what I did not see myself; she afforded me the best counsels to follow, and extricated me from dangers in which I blindly precipitated myself."

If, therefore, the female displays a superior acuteness, derivable from the peculiarity of her situation, those authoresses who appear jealous of certain

certain privileges attached to the wandering and active sex cannot be deemed as the able advocates of their own; because if woman (from the natural feebleness of whose organs is derived her beauty) were capable of exerting the same corporeal vigour as man, yet, by becoming his rival, she would not only lose that feminine sweetness, that amiable debility, and that retiring modesty which lend so much eloquent persuasion to her actions; but, what would not be compensated by this violent and unnatural change, she would lose her actual position in the social order which imparts her present superiority, by enabling her to detect the secret foibles of man. To this, her stationary situation, I would attribute her acknowledged superiority in conversation, and in epistolary composition. To both the female imparts a peculiar delicacy, and a charm of ease, which masters of style can neither imitate nor rival. These excellencies consist in a volubility of happy expression and a choice of sprightly ideas; on the bosom of society the female genius is first nurtured; the human scene becomes her school; and hence she derives this facility of language, and this liveliness and selection of ideas.

A more obvious advantage in the female character, is that susceptibility of feeling, or facility of imagination, which, without doubt, is peculiar to the irritable delicacy of their fibres. The heart is the great province of the female; if we would attract their regard we must learn to reach the heart; all their finer qualities are so many sensations of the heart; and it is the heart which im-

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bues with it's softness their every excellence. Their favourite amusements are works of imagination and taste, not of memory and reason; their logic consists not of arguments, but of sentiments; and I think that some ladies of extreme refinement, can put as much fancy, and exert as rich an imagination, in the ornaments of a favourite dress, as the poet employs in his most florid descriptions.

In every surrounding object they express their love of the beautiful; their most useful instruments have a character of delicacy; and in a word, women would effeminate even the roughness of steel and the solidity of wood; man is subjugated by these adventitious elegancies, and the fair love to see that beauty admired in inanimate objects which they know must be much more in themselves.

I am not surpris'd that in all nations, civilis'd or rude, whenever superstition prevailed, the female character has been regarded as an instrument of the Divinity. That peculiar animation which vivifies their lively perceptions has been considered as something supernatural, and we can easily conceive that the affluus of prophecy must ever have displayed a more touching illusion in the agitated and picturesque countenance of a woman than in the more hard and labouring visage of a prophet; I conceive that the Grecian Pythia, the Roman Sybil, and the Pythonissa of the Hebrews, must have communicated a more celestial inspiration with their copious tresses luxuriating on their palpitating bosom; their vivacious eyes, and their  
snowy

snawy arms, than even a passionate Iſaiah, or a weeping Jeremiah.

But to hiſtory, and not to declamation, I appeal. If we throw a philoſophical glance on it's inſtructive records, and have the diſcernment to read what often is not in hiſtory, we ſhall obſerve that the female character has ever had a ſingular influence on moſt of the great characters and great events of human life. One of the moſt favourite portions of the hiſtoric art, with hiſtorians, is an elaborate delineation of the characters of monarchs. We ſhould comprehend theſe much better if we were acquainted with thoſe of the Queens. Many important reſolutions of ſtate councils have been firſt made in the royal bed. It is an obſervation of the judicious Du Freſnoy, that a Queen has an influence on the King her huſband, and the King her ſon. And would it be difficult to ſhew, that if the whole affairs of government depend on a Miniſter, he would be impregnable againſt the attacks of a miſtreſs? A perſon muſt be very ignorant of ſecret hiſtory, whoſe memory cannot, at this moment, place in ridiculous and humiliating attitudes, ſome of the moſt illuſtrious ſtateſmen.\*

Saint

\* I ſhall notice two very eminent ſtateſmen: Cardinal Richelieu, to gain the affections of the Dutcheſs de Chevreuſe at their private interviews, viſited her in the moſt finical dreſs. Rejeſting his ſcarlet robes and ſacred pantouffles, his eminence wore a fashionable coat, an enormous plume, a long rapier, and tight pumps. The Dutcheſs hated and ridiculed the Cardinal, the Miniſter, and the Coxcomb; but at that moment through him ſhe conducted innumerable intrigues

Saint Evremond and Chesterfield, who excelled in the practical knowledge of life, forcibly express themselves on female influence at court. What epocha has not been governed by women? I confess that the female character has as seldom been heard on the public scene as the prompter of a theatre; or as rarely been visible as the scene-shifters. The female character, like some other objects, derives all its influence from concealment; in

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trigues within and without the kingdom. Read Plutarch's Life of Cicero, and you may observe that his wife Terentia was not less concerned than the orator and statesman in the most striking events of his public life. When Cicero was perplexed to know in what manner he should treat the conspirators of Catiline, Terentia incensed him against them, and invented an ingenious prodigy to fix the vacillation of his agitated mind and cause him to act with an energy he otherwise had wanted. The origin of the enmity between Cicero and Clodius was owing to the jealousy of Terentia, who knew that his sister Clodia was desirous of marrying Cicero. She therefore instigated him to attack Clodio. By the confession of Cicero himself it appears, that Terentia was ever more ready to interfere in his public transactions than to communicate her domestic affairs to him. Catherine of Medicis was the wife of one king and the mother of three, whom she alike conducted at pleasure. It was owing to the intercessions of women, says Bolingbroke, that Louis XIV. acknowledged the Pretender as King of England after the contrary resolution had passed in council. A great Vizier, the pillar of the Ottoman Empire, solicited suddenly for his dismissal, and thus spoke to his friend, who was surprised at his resignation of such power:—"By the God who created heaven and earth, the secret I now tell thee no one knows: for many years, Jemila Kandahari (the first lady of the bed-chamber to the Sultana,) has had the secret power of unloosing whatever I tied, and tying whatever I unloosed."

in politics; woman is terrible, not in the rash imbecillity of the storm, but in the sudden explosion of the mine.

Ancient and contemporary history will ever abound with multifarious instances of this kind; the celebrated confession of Themistocles remarkably confirms this observation: "That little boy" (said he, pointing to his son) "is the arbiter of Greece: for he governs his mother; his mother governs me; I govern the Athenians, and the Athenians govern the Grecians." Themistocles was a profound and honest philosopher.

A learned friend observes, that these observations tend to prove that women command men because men *love* women; but I take leave to add, that women command men frequently because men *fear* women. The excess of their sensibility is observable in all their great passions; and the ancients appear to instruct us, when they picture their furies, as well as their graces, in the forms of women.\* From the same enthusiasm is derived their excellent as well as their execrable qualities; their sensations admit of no cold mediocrity; they are at once more or less than human; they listen to the voice of adulation till they sink into idiotism; or they are animated by a fervour of glory till they are elevated into heroines.†

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\* It is an observation by Addison, that "the fair sex are always the best or the worst part of the world."

† Swift has caught this idea of female sensibility, and alludes to it in his Poem of Cadenus and Vanessa. The lines are the following ones:

"When Miss delights in her spinnet,  
A fidler may a fortune get;

A block-

When the love of glory warms the sensitive soul of a female, she is, perhaps, actuated by a stronger impulse than that which directs our less delicate feelings. A being agitated by a tumultuous and inflamed imagination, experiencing sensations, perhaps, unknown to us, half conscious of her debility, yet conducted by a daring pride; burning to reach that *beau idéal* which we so liberally bestow on her; to what height is such a being not capable of soaring? Even her deficiencies become so many tender graces, and her very failings extort our applause. Women, like some men of the greatest genius, have been remarkable for their extreme vanity, if we thus must term their love of glory; this glowing sentiment is derived from an amplitude of soul. To what, but this passion for glory, can we attribute their partiality for men of genius? Their remarkable attachment to officers has formed a severe

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A blockhead with melodious voice,  
 In boarding-schools can have his choice,  
 And oft the dancing-master's art  
 Climbs from the toe to touch the heart:  
 In learning let a nymph delight,  
 The pedant gets a mistress by't."

And Dryden, in his tale of Theodore and Honoria has seized a very lively stroke in the female character. Honoria, who had so long looked on Theodore with "four-eyed disdain"—resolved to marry him with all that rapidity of volition which characterises their inclinations. The lines are these:

"But she with such a zeal the cause embrac'd  
 (As women, when they will, are all in haste)  
 Resistless in her love as in her hate."

severe accusation against the sex; some have considered that it proceeded from their timid dispositions, which make them regard with fondness the protecting arm of a brave man; but a sensible female has lately censured it, because she supposes that as these triflers are remarkable for their frivolous accomplishments, and a deficiency in mental ability, they are therefore more on a level with women than any other class of men. The observation will oftener be true than false; yet we may sometimes attribute the female's passion for military men to her violent love of glory. The observation is Bayle's; but it is given by Fielding, who at the same time adduces the sentiment of the heroine of the *Odyssey*, who "assigns the glory of her husband as the only source of her affection towards him."

Women have been also frequently accused of an imprudent discovery of their concerns; but an important interest engages their silence. No great enterprise will suffer because a sensible female unites her aid, and stimulates by her vivacity the torpid prudence of men. We want not for examples to prove that some of the greatest conspiracies have been confided to women, fostered by their care, and accomplished by their zeal. The conspiracy of *Catiline* was discovered by a female to *Cicero*, and *Rome* was saved! That against the wretched *Caligula* was well known to *Quintilia*, who, however, bore extreme torture rather than discover the secret Cabal. *Du Fresnoy*, a very learned researcher of history, has shewn that several

great

great conspiracies have failed because they were not confided to females; and has adduced numerous evidences to prove, that whenever they were employed, they conferred success on the enterprise. I am persuaded that a female may not only have the faculty of preserving a secret, but also the dexterity of inventing what is worthy of being kept secret at the cost of life.

Such has been the influence of the female character in politics; nor has it been less apparent in religion.

The ladies have been more closely connected with religion than perhaps they are aware of. A new religion is congenial to their dispositions, and not merely for its novelty. There is a luxuriance of fancy and a progress to ideal perfection which every new religion displays; it is honourable to their finer sensibilities that they are ever the first to incline to what appears so theoretically beautiful. It is not quite so honourable to those who, pretending to superior sanctity, and even to inspiration, have, for the promotion of the system they wished to establish, artfully adopted the ideas most dangerous to the imaginations of women, and taught the love of God, according to the art of Ovid.

That the earliest propagators of new dogmas have had recourse to these invisible, yet powerful wheels, in the machine of human nature, I mean Women, is not to be controverted. Let the Fair Sex be inveigled, and the religion is established; a woman at least can bring her husband, a mistress the prime minister, a queen the sovereign.

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It is a curious observation made by some, who pretend to singular penetration in the science of human nature, that the Christian religion was greatly indebted to the patronage and the sensations of the sex. Voltaire, who is not so superficial as his adversaries would make us believe, says, that half of Europe owes its christianity to Women, and Gibbons, who certainly had vast erudition, in his Account of the Monastic Life, after having mentioned the several inducements for entering into this unnatural state, with more truth than politeness, adds, "that these religious motives acted more forcibly on the infirm minds of females." It is certain, that from the influence of the female character, we derive nearly all the prominent events of religious history. The first dominions of the Pope, and consequently the origin of the Papal power, are the gifts of a lady. Gregory VII. had so lively an interest in the heart of the Countess Mathilda, that she made a donation of all her states to the holy see. Instigated by the eloquence of St. Jerome, the illustrious Paula forsook Rome, retired to the sacred village of Bethlem, and founded several monasteries. Pope Damasus, who had found the chief part of the inhabitants of Rome adverse to his interests, prevailed by intriguing with the ladies; and was so skilful in the arts of female flattery that he obtained the nick-name of *Matronarum Auriscalpius*, the Ear-picker of the Ladies. To Torquemada, who had taken possession of the mind of Isabella of Spain (the best Spanish estate he could have seized on) the world is indebted for

the cruel inquisition. And, in a word; Christianity in England is derived from a French princess, who having married Ethelbert, first stipulated for the free exercise of her religion, and soon had such influence on her husband as to christianise his idolatrous Saxons. To conclude, in the words of the poet :

And Gospel light first beam'd from Bullen's eyes.

*Gry.*

It is thus that the female character has ever had an invisible influence on two of the most important branches of human events, politics and religion. A superiority of talent, in one respect, has produced this unvaried result. This talent consists in a great knowledge of man, a susceptibility of impression, and a peculiarity of situation. In the domestic circle, the female is incessantly occupied in disentangling or combining the passions she observes or she inflames. Her sedentary life and her quietness of mind are little interrupted by that variety of pursuits to which the busier sex are devoted. Her circle is her empire; her commands, says Rousseau, are her caresses; and her threats are her tears. Incapable, perhaps, of patient designs, her plans are rapidly conceived, and often fail, if they require a tedious process of elaborate events. They are not deeply laid, but are adapted for temporary effect. The female attends to those minute particulars, often unperceived; and generally carelessly considered as unworthy of an elevated mind, but which often, adroitly managed, give a new  
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and sudden turn to important objects ; and she appears to know much better than man that little passions can produce great effects. For surrounding objects her perceptions are vivid ; but she cannot, with the prescient eye of philosophy, distinctly trace objects at a remote period. Her intellectual arithmetic can calculate as far as days and months, but extends not to years. She excels man in obtaining a present purpose ; her invention is prompt, her boldness happy, and her execution facile ; manly perseverance proceeds with a cautious, firm, and gradual progression. Let us consider the sexual advantages. The female can excite by legitimate eulogiums, and can correct by severe panegyrics ; she makes man exult or blush ; she can allure by a smile, she can enchant by a touch, she can subdue by her endearments ! She overturns, or produces in an hour the labour of years. She has ever something reserved for the last effort ; something which has often degraded wisdom into folly, and elevated folly into wisdom, and which, while it can render activity torpid, imparts action to indolence.\*

\* The LITERARY CHARACTER of WOMEN, might exceed that of every Man who does not make study his profession. Their employments are not unfriendly to reading : occupied at their delicate works, their avocations are ever more agreeably pursued while the circle listens to a reader ; frequent readings of this nature, would render their taste more lively, and their meditations less interrupted than among those persons whose studies are casual, and whose employments are inimical to thoughtful habits.

## ON THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN LOVE AND RELIGION.

THERE is a frame of mind so constituted that it becomes naturally religious; as it is certain that there are some temperaments which are naturally amorous. Religion has kindled it's brightest fervours in those persons who unite these sensations, and the purity of devotion has been deplorably corrupted, by the admixture of a violent passion for the sex. He who loves religion, as religion should be loved, deprived of the adventitious politics of men, and unsoiled by those voluptuous imaginations which degrade the Divinity, will not censure this attempt to expose the danger which a feeling and feminine heart too frequently incurs, and which, while it appears to aspire to celestial perfection is only the more firmly entangled in terrestrial licentiousness.

Has religion been attacked in her sanctuary? Have the virtuous united with the criminal? Has the voice of nations sanctioned the declamations of the impious? It is because priests and religionists have undermined the edifice they were to guard and to inhabit. Among the terrible disorders which have polluted "the holy of holies," one of the most striking is this mixture of Love with Religion. This monstrous union, even in the present day, perverts psalms into philtres and conventicles into brothels; yet, as the same cause produces different effects on various minds, what inflames the

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the pious with a burning devotion only warms the wit into grave raillery, while it animates the instructive execration of the philosopher.

Poets are amorous, lovers are poetical, but saints are both. Religion, love, and poetry, are streams from the same fountain; they are alike characterised by a certain tender melancholy, which ever accompanies the quiet intervals of an enthusiastic fancy; while often there is a stage in these passions at which reason disappears, and a continued or a temporary insanity is prevalent; and among lunatics the greater part will frequently be discovered to be religious, poetical or amorous. The incurables unite the three passions. But, without further discussion, I shall arrange those facts, relative to the present subject, which I have collected with some care and some curiosity.

The passion the Deity inspires, is according to the conceptions we form of the Deity. The Christian religion, in the persons of Jesus and the Virgin, set afloat a new train of ideas; and the amatory passions have been kindled, and the amatory language has been adopted.

In the preceding Essay on the Influence of the Female Character in Religion and in Politics, some observations, and some historical evidence are introduced on the amatorial intimacy of the early propagators of religion with the ladies. The genius of those pious men survived in their modern descendants, and women, it is scarce necessary to add, are always women. Those handsome seraphs in France, who were called directors, and who had

nothing ghostly about them but their functions, retained the same extraordinary influence, and have performed miracles in the cause of religion and gallantry. The young devotees of our numerous sects are not less sensitive; and while they blend with an excess of devotion all the intemperance of love, soften the groans of religious affliction with the sighs of amorous pleasure.

The Catholic religion is an academy of love. The effusions of a Spaniard to the Virgin, and a repentant frail one addressing her prototype Mary Magdalen, with an "*ora pro nobis*," employ language which comports as little with piety as modesty. I have even heard a pretty Arian speak, with some conviction, of the Divinity of Jesus, after having read the beautiful description of his person in Josephus; and which was interpolated by some monk, who well knew that even the Son of God would come recommended to the ladies by the charms of his person. The illustrious pious are always represented as beautiful; from the oriental obscenities of Solomon, the Jewish Ovid, to the grossness of Zinzendorff, and the indecencies of Whitfield.

The union existing between Love and Religion nowhere appears clearer than by the confession, said to be made by Mahomet; that the pleasures of the sex rendered him more fervent in prayer. In love, as well as religion, he must have been an adequate judge, for he was a Turk, and a prophet; the first supposing a great experience in sensual pleasures, and the other in spiritual delights. He promised  
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for the reward of piety a bery of immortal beauties; every prophet, like every physician, has recommended that system to their patients which they found most agreeable to their own feelings. But I cannot perceive that the opinion of Mahomet at all differed from that of a Christian Saint, Catharine, who observed, "how unhappy must be the state of the damned, since they are no longer capable of *loving!*"

To pursue our speculation with something like historical regularity, we may observe, that David and his son are not less celebrated for the number of their Psalms and Proverbs, than for their Concubines. It is fortunate for them that we have no secret memoirs of those days; we know, however, sufficient; and indeed we could not expect great regularity of manners in men who were at once poets, lovers, and saints. Glancing into the early ages of Christianity, I pass over an anecdote of no less a person than the Author of the Christian Creed, who is said to have concealed himself, for a considerable time, in the embraces of a favourite devotee; but Saint Athanasius assures us, that during the whole time he lay hid in an empty jar. Proceeding to a later period, we discover the amatorial spirit to be so congenial to religion that public marriages were solemnised between some eminent characters and a favourite saint. Pope Pius V. was publicly united in matrimony to Saint Catharine; and the author of his Life assures us, that this ancient lady kissed him, and presented him with a ring of her own hair. Tanchelm of Antwerp pub-

licly espoused an image of the Virgin Mary, and with no inconsiderable portion; for having placed two boxes near her, to receive the voluntary contributions of the numerous spectators, the women were so fascinated with the idea of a nuptial ceremony, that, alike animated by love and religion, they tore their necklaces and ear-rings to present them to the Virgin and her Tanchelm.

Descending to a later period, we observe the same cause operating the same effects. The singular institutions of chivalry, illustrate the alliance between the two passions. The learned Saint Palaye has observed, that the first lessons of chivalry related to the love of God and the ladies; that is, religion and gallantry. "The ladies," he says, "taught them, at the same time, their Catechism and the art of love." It was in the genuine spirit of chivalry that Boccaccio returned thanks to God and the ladies for the success of his agreeable and licentious tales. Boccaccio at length became so voluptuous in his indulgence of love, poetry, and religion, that this unfortuate man of genius was seized by the terrors of the priests, and appears to have closed his days in the lunacy of Catholicism.

From the twelfth century to no remote period nothing pleased in devotion but what was combined with love. Romances were filled with religion as well as religion with romances. They hastened to confession to find lovers, and having found lovers, probably perceived it necessary to return to confession. The learned Lenglet du Fresnoy comes here to my assistance. Writing on the romances

romances of this period, he observes, that "Jesus Christ and Apollo, Cupid and the Holy Ghost, Venus and the Virgin, went hand in hand in the early productions of this kind." Of these works one only is printed, which is the celebrated Roman de la Rose.

The primers of the pious were at one period so many votive offerings to love. In the reign of Henry III. of France most great men had these religious manuals illuminated with subjects from the Sacred Writings, in which were introduced the portraits of their favourite minions and mistresses. Charles V. had a missal painted for his mistress of a similar description; it was ornamented by figures depicted by Albert Durer, and the subjects were not less extravagant than licentious. So possible is it to be fervent at once in love and religion, that the Queen of Navarre, in one of her novels, notices a Prince, who, going to his usual assignation with the lady of a counsellor, always stopped to pray in a church which he passed; her Majesty highly applauds his devotion, as well as his passion; and advises all true lovers not to neglect the duties of religion.

Several curious publications might be mentioned composed by pious persons. Of these modern works none is more singular than the Life of Marie à la Coque, not inelegantly written by an Archbishop of Sens. This woman was a visionary, who, having over-heated her brain by the perusal of religious works, and the rigours of penitential fasts, betrothed herself to Jesus. From her own narrative

Give the Archbishop composed this pious romance, in which the whole progress of her celestial amour is traced in the style of a circulating-library novel. We have a copy of amatory verses which Jesus wrote to his new spouse, and scenes are described with great lubricity of imagination. It is certain this ingenious Archbishop could not have believed the reveries he wrote; but he well knew that such fictions, delivered as truths, would have a great effect with the devotees, and it must be confessed, that the Parisian Belle was charmed to worship a deity, so much resembling *un homme du grand monde*. Similar publications abound in French and Spanish literature; and it has been observed by some of their casuists, that they always found the greatest sinners made the greatest saints; the reason is not difficult to discern, since such sanctity is in proportion to the criminal imaginations of the religionist.

Even the ceremonies of religion, both in ancient and in modern times, have exhibited the grossest indecencies. Priests, in all ages, have been the successful panders of the human heart, and have introduced in the solemn worship of the Divinity, incitements, gratifications, and representations, which the pen of the historian must refuse to describe. Often has the sensible Catholic blushed amidst his devotions; and I have seen chapels surrounded by pictures of lascivious attitudes, and the obsolete amours of saints revived by the pencil of some Aretine. At this moment there exists a considerable traffic of *certain* waxen figures, in some

parts of Calabria, which a royal edict in vain attempted to abolish; and it is urged in its favour, by the priests of the neighbourhood, that in no part of Italy are the young devotees so fervent in prayer, and so obsequious to the instructions of the priest.

In religious solitude, these confused notions of Love and Religion perplexed the wavering and debilitated heart of the pious Recluse. On the burning pillow of the Monk hovered phantoms of melancholy lust; his fancy was the scourge of the furies, and of the innumerable visions with which these men were disturbed, they were ever accompanied by the seducing form of a beautiful female, and the day was passed in contrition for the temptations of the nightly demon. Their homilies were manuals of love, and the more religious they became, the more depraved were their imaginations. In the nunnery the love of Jesus was the most abandoned of passions, and the ideal espousal was indulged at the cost of the feeble heart of many a solitary beauty. Several manuscript diaries have been preserved of these amiable fanatics, in which the embraces and sensations of spiritual love are not distinguishable from those of a material nature. An eternal meditation on the same object, terminated frequently in the horrors of delirium; and when the soul, by a ceaseless inquietude, had accustomed itself to be penetrated with the love of Jesus, while all other ideas faded and vanished from the mind, it sunk in the stupor of imbecility, and could alone occupy itself by this solitary idea. Tissot has given a case

a case of this nature; a young woman having yielded herself up to all the extravagance of love and religion, during six months that he attended her, she could only articulate at intervals, "my beloved Lamb, come to my arms!"

We must now turn our observations to a considerable portion of the religious world, who, known under various denominations, may be classed under the generic title of Mystics. The ancient Platonists appear to have resembled the modern Mystics; they carried these united passions to a great perfection; yet it is clear that the Platonists trembled to gather the celestial palms of religion, on the precipices of love. John Norris, a celebrated English Platonist, in his "Theory and Regulation of Love," considering all vices and virtues as the various modifications and irregularities of love, maintains this principle: that the love of God ought to be entire, and exclusive of all other loves. This singular distinction could never have entered into the imagination of any person, excepting that of a lover and religionist; but, without doubt, the author had found it among his female Platonists as a principle very necessary to inculcate.

The Mystics were enamoured of the sweet union. Of these, Antoinette Bourignon is among the most celebrated. She persuaded some; and, what is more strange, is supposed to have persuaded herself, that she received the visitations of the Divine Spirit! Her opinions became so fashionable that they were propagated in this country, and Lesley thought

thought proper to publish an elaborate refutation of her errors. We are told she was endowed with an extraordinary gift of chastity, and which, she informs us, had been frequently attempted; scandalous reports were on the wing, and she anticipated them. She, like other female saints, aspiring to be espoused to the Son of God, was desirous the public should know that she was not incapable of attracting several young men. The fascinating ardours of these Mystics prevailed over the gentle mind of the virtuous Fenelon, who once rendered a man of fine genius ridiculous to all Europe by his patronage of Madame Guyon. The sage author of *Telemachus* wandered in his retirement, studious of her "Spiritual Guide," her "Short Way," and her "Torrents." The imagination of this lady was not of the most chaste nor of the most beautiful kind, yet it was certainly imagination, and its wild fervours overpowered the susceptible soul of Fenelon. By the alchemy of his own fine genius he turned obscenity into purity, and incoherence into regularity. How are we otherwise to account for this singular fascination?

The same genius characterises our female Methodists, who hasten to their Chapel, as the fashionable to the front rows of the Theatre. An extraordinary neatness of dress distinguishes a devotee, and, while she sings a tender psalm, the warmest tears, and the most voluptuous sighs attest her sensibility. An intrigue too often commences in a pew: and I do not know why the magistrates, who are empowered to prosecute the venders of obscene publications,

publications, permit the hymns, the diaries, and other rapturous effusions of our fanatics. These are the Ovidian touches of the kitchen. Where are to be found, as among all similar sects, an equal number of lovers? If one part of Ascetic Christianity threatened, if universally adopted, to depopulate the world, the other, of Mystic Christianity, appears resolute in rectifying that political error; and perhaps no society so small as that of Methodism has produced to the State, so many additional members.

This close alliance between Love and Religion, many writers have noticed, without accounting for it; and the greater part have only ventured to express their astonishment, and to doubt the fact. A great observer of the human character enquires if the heart can conciliate such opposite passions, and admit such incompatibilities? But we see that the passions are not opposite or incompatible; since libertinism has been one instrument which the hand of priests has employed for the purposes of religion. It is acutely observed by Montesquieu, that a Mystic is only mad, devout, and licentious. But we may also add, that the delirium has often only consisted in the expressions which these persons adopt; and all the extatic visions they notice are sometimes only so many metaphors by which they conceal their libertinism of mind. The Methodists of the last century (for Methodism is an old folly with a new name) employed all this devotional cant. The father of our immortal dramatist, probably far gone in Love and Religion, thus expresses himself in his will, "I bequeath my soul to be entombed

tomb'd in the sweet and *amorous* coffin of the *side* of Jesus Christ!" Even elegant minds, adding to the orgasm of poetry that of religious extacy, employ the style of the most plaintive and tender lovers. Racine the son; in his Poem on Religion; has many such touches. He engraved under his crucifix the very expressions Tibullus has addressed to his mistress. The Latin poet says:

Te spectem, suprema mihi cum venerit hora,  
Te tentam moriens, deficiente manu.

Which Racine thus adopts, in addressing Jesus :

Que ta Croix dans mes mains soit à ma dernière heure,  
Et que, les yeux sur toi, je t'embrasse et je meure.

In an epistle, supposed to be written by the famous Abbé Rancé, of La Trappe, the alliance between Love and Religion is well marked in the following verse :

Je n'avois plus d'Amante, il me fallut un Dieu.

Our sublime Milton, who, as he was a great poet, and no inconsiderable fanatic, must have been, no doubt, a warm lover, appears also to have conceived that the rewards of a future state can only consist of amatorial pleasures. This curious passage is in the Paradise Lost, book v. verse 612. Adam is thus conversing with the Angel :

"To love thou blam'st me not, for love, thou say'st,  
Leads up to heaven, is both the way and guide ;  
Bear with me then, if lawful what I ask ;  
Love not the heavenly spirits; and how their love  
Express they, by looks only, or do they mix  
Irradiance, virtue or immediate love?"

I will

I will not fatigue the reader with additional confirmations of what I have advanced. I shall only observe, that the enthusiast Rousseau, who certainly was a poet, though he wrote in prose; a lover of exquisite sensibility, though he married his landress; and pious, though he wrote against the clergy, perceived the union which has passed under our examination. In one of his notes to his delicious Romance, he observes, "That the enthusiasm of devotion borrows the language of love; the enthusiasm of love borrows the language of devotion."

As some have blamed, while others have commended the subject of this paper, I shall now close with a short quotation from Bishop Lavington, who would not have hesitated to acknowledge the truth and justness of this satire. That pious writer says, "I am much mistaken, and so is History too, if some of the warmest and most *enthusiastic pretenders to the love of God*, have not entertained the same *violence of passion* (not quite so spiritual) for their *Neighbours*."---Enthusiasm of Papists and Methodists compared, vol. 1. p. 57.

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